

HOW COULD THIS ALL HAPPEN?

How did the religious stories come to be the way they are?

We are surrounded by tales of dinosaurs, early man. We have artifacts, fossils from all over the world revealing what was long ago. Much of this seems to conflict with the accounts in the Bible: Creation, Adam and Eve, the Fall, the Flood. I know people who find no problem. They just believe what the Bible says. However, others want an explanation. How can the Bible be reconciled with the archaeologists? Many hold that God created through evolution. On the surface they may have no problem but they ignore many deep questions.

Looking from God's point of view: Why did the Divine put in Scriptures what they say? Imagine you are God and created universe and people. How do you communicate with people? God could set up a divine internet, multimedia, TV, newspaper to perfectly inform us. He could have done similar things in the earliest dawn of history. Everyone would have always known everything. We are full of questions. God is not full of the answers. God could be seated right now in Jerusalem, on television, with His own web and facebook page. We would not be asking for proof. The world might appear to be a nicer place, people acting better. I suspect underneath it would be just as evil, just more underhanded. We would not be changed, transformed.

God consistently hides all proof. "The God who hides himself" Isaiah 45:15. That is the first piece of data we have to consider. He must consider it wise to conceal Himself. He has arranged what we find so it cannot point to Him as creator. Everything has to have a natural "scientific" explanation. If we cannot explain something now, we will keep on searching. Rock layers and fossils are used to explain how the world came to have the shape and characteristics we find. Without them, we would know God made it. A fruitcake with nuts and fruit mixed up demonstrates it was made. The deposits of coal, oil, iron have logical scientific explanations. That makes it easy to find more and obscures God's hand. The speed of light is a measurement. There is a chain of measurements from nearby stars, to the entire Milky Way galaxy, to galaxies at the edge of the observable universe. There are some uncertainties, but the farthest is about 13 billion lightyears. Either they really are that far away or God created them more recently and made them appear to be that far away.

Imagine you are going to commit the "perfect crime" and leave no evidence that shows you did it. The police will not quit looking unless you take one more step. You must leave "evidence" that points to someone else. Evolution looks at data and explains how life forms appeared and changed. If that could not be done, we would know God did it. The fossil data has some interesting puzzles. My favorite is that all evolution moves forward into new forms. Why? To make something new is actually very difficult to do, since the DNA material made the old. It should be much easier to go back: salamander to fish than to do something new. The old DNA is still available in the new form. Returning to earlier forms never happens and there is no good reason it does not. Indeed it looks like evolution is guided, controlled. It does not look like the result of random mutations. You can either believe it evolved or believe it was created.

Multitudes of gods, all kinds of religions, all claim to be the right one. You believe in yours. I believe in mine. How did the religious stories come to be the way they are? Imagine you are the real

God who created this world and people and want to communicate your truth to them, while you remain concealed. Imagine you are God who wants people to return your love, for them to care for one another. Love is worship; care is service. What needs to be said to communicate the truth? How can God get His word to the twenty first century, past the earlier times? Early man, primitive tribes, ancient cultures, dark ages, renaissance, modern times each made their own difficulties.

We live after all the prior years. We have a well developed scientific practice and knowledge. There are many things we know that were beyond discovery in the past. Anything God wanted to communicate to us today has to go through those prior years and conditions. How to do that? It has to start with early men sitting around the fire talking. The accounts in the Bible: Creation, Adam and Eve, the Fall, the Flood were written down long, long after the events they report. There are other early legends. They come from widely separated parts of the world. Was there something common long before? Nothing can be proven but there are some interesting hints.

I am writing in English, using Western European thought patterns. Linguists study language and communication. I have a good friend, a deaf minister who knows ASL, American Sign Language. It has about 2500 words. Everything is said with those few words. Hebrew has less than 900 different words. Neither "thinks" like we do. You cannot say an English sentence in them perfectly accurately. It is impossible to express our doctrinal, religious teachings in Chinese, or in the wide variety of African languages. God claims to have created all the tribes and languages of the world. He knows them. While it is impossible to translate propositional truths, it is possible to communicate with stories. Stories translate.

What would be the God behind, older than the multitude of different gods and images? Early people seem to have believed in god or gods, spirits. What could a God do? Use your imagination. Nothing can be written down. Information, knowledge can only be passed down in stories. Somehow the God shares stories with early man. If there was no story from the real God they would make up and fit stories together. God consistently hides all "proof". That piece of "data" we have to consider. Somehow God shared stories with early man. The stories are passed on generation after generation. As they get mixed up, we mix up everything always, He has to correct them. The old stories would remain but obscured by the newer tales people made up.

Since there are many gods named with various images, it would seem that something without a unique name and actual image would have been first. It would be hard to come up with no name out of a collection of names and images. Standing stones without faces are ancient and all over. Long after, there is an account of Moses and a burning bush, he asks what is God's name. The answer is translated "I am". In English we do not notice what is obvious in the Hebrew and other languages. "I am", "to be", "being" are all very close. God really does not have a name. He is Being, Existence. The oldest artifacts that seem to imply some sort of religion are "standing stones" and grave goods. It was a long time before standing stones began to have faces. The theologian Paul Tillich described God as "**the ground of all being.**" He wrote that God permeates all of creation and is the foundation, the essence of all. That Biblical understanding is reflected in the Hindu concept. However a core difference between Biblical and Hindu is the Hindu divine is impersonal, our eternity is without personal existence. The Biblical God is a Person, eternity is personal. He has a real personality. In the rest of the religions gods come out of creation. They do not cause it. After the gods, man is comes. Only the Biblical God claims to be continually creating everything. He creates every blade of grass, and wills the death of every bird. He is not far off. He is intimately within. Some do not like His personality.

What stories have to be included? Everything has a beginning and end. There are many creation stories and stories of the end of the world. There are fewer stories about how evil, death, came into the world. Evil, death are always everywhere so most do not consider them a question. There are flood and ancient monster stories, stories about what the gods do and how they live. Stories about what happens after death. Stories how man can keep the gods, spirits, from being angry. Those are topics people want to know about.

All the different flood stories are claimed to prove Noah's flood. They do not "prove" Christianity. Ancient men wandering around would find sea shells and large bones in the rocks on top of the mountains. A story that would make sense is that flood waters were over the mountains and drowned the monsters. The only common "myth" I can think of without a possible natural source is flying serpents, dragons. There is a comment that the serpent was cursed to crawl on its belly.

Creation stories can be gathered into two groups. One group where the gods and everything else come out of the primal material. And one story where God comes first and creates everything. I think that demonstrates it is hard to imagine something coming out of nothing. Everything comes from something. Everything comes to an end. In the common stories, the primordial material, the stuff, is there. Out of that gods come. Usually they fight each other and monsters. Newer gods replace the early ones. Sometimes the gods create the world and people. Sometimes people happen on their own. In Aztec, Egyptian, Sumerian, Greek, and the major religions multiple gods play a prominent role in creation, and quarrels between gods determine the course of humanity. There are very long stories detailing the conflicts and actions of the gods. At the end the gods and all creation is destroyed. The Bible is astoundingly brief. The end in the Bible is different. God creates, judges, destroys, and recreates a perfect new heaven and perfect earth with transformed perfect people. All the stories in the Bible together express perfectly everything God wants to say, while He is hiding Himself in those same stories.

Stories were passed down and embroidered around the fire for many many generations. The real stories also had to pass through that gauntlet. Genesis recounts the history from creation to the immigration of the Children of Abraham into Egypt. The stories also had to be passed down many times orally or in short documents until they acquired their finished form. People do not remember and record information that they think is unbelievable or useless. A scientific account of creation would not have been remembered. What is useful is the history of their group and what they need to support their beliefs from outsiders with incorrect beliefs.

What are the critical things God needs to have us know about creation? The following Biblical ideas are totally different from what is presented in the other religions. God has always existed, beyond time, timeless. He created time. He created everything. He created all out of nothing. God created everything perfect. It was good, seven times over, good! He is perfectly good, righteous, almighty, wise. The creation was so perfect, lions ate grass and there were no weeds and mosquitos. He created man to rule, represent Him.

There is an interesting detail, Adam's rib. Actually the Hebrew word is rare, hard to understand, translate. Human males miss one bone that all other male mammals have. Translators, scholars, are not butchers and would not encounter it. It is called "baculum". It is the stiffener in the penis. The story of the creation of woman is the lead into God's intention for man and woman. Life long monogamous relationship. I know of no other religion that holds marriage as divine purpose, "flesh of my

flesh, bone of my bone.” Humans in almost all cultures marry. It seems to be genetically coded. Exceptions, adultery, occur but the general statement holds true. We seem designed to marry.

Human sexuality is strange. Intercourse is prime disease vector. Promiscuity is the ticket to disease. Modern medicine has changed reality for us. We can now “get away with” what was strongly discouraged. One third of mental hospital patients were there for syphilis. Sterility and birth defects were common results. Promiscuous cultures had short lifespans, with damaged people. Humans sexually mature early with strong desires, contrary to Darwinian principles. Young humans grow up with desires they are urged not to fulfill. Perhaps the purpose was to train them in self control. It is a key to happy marriage, good family, prosperity. Self-control, patience are very human traits, keys for society.

There is another massive difference between humans and animals. We notice it in the changes in behavior and abilities during teenage years. Researchers say it is not finished until nearly 30. Adults do not think like children. The human brain is literally rewired, some connections broken and new connections created. We are future oriented, tomorrow is more important than today. It is fundamental to the difference between man and animals.

The creation story tells how evil and death came into creation and God’s reaction. It is plain God is not responsible for evil. The serpent and mankind are guilty. God curses the serpent so it would eat dust. Did the serpent have wings before and fly? There are images in many religions about flying serpents, dragons. Are they relics of forgotten tales? God is obscure about how and when, evil will be destroyed. God makes plain He will break the power of evil, death, at the judgment, end of time. In all other religions the gods are part of the problem, if anything more evil than the average person.

The flood stories explain the giant bones and seashells on the mountains. If the Bible did not have them, the accounts from other religions probably would have been added in over time. The account of Noah fills an empty hole. Very importantly it is used to demonstrate God’s condemnation of evil, the promise of total destruction by fire next time and the recreation of a perfect world as originally intended. From the very beginning God is righteous, patient, who will save and will destroy evil.

We have a vast accumulation of scientific knowledge. We understand what could not have been understood before, so we have questions about the early history of this world, universe and human kind. It is not possible to answer our questions in words given thousands of years ago in the Bible. How would you suggest God provide those answers, while He maintains His consistent practice of hiding all “proof”? The questions essentially challenge God to reveal Himself to us on our terms.

The Bible has a core idea that is offensive, even worse than that He hides Himself. The Bible makes plain only those He calls can come to Him, find Him, know Him. Jesus does say ask, seek, knock. That is one side of the encounter. The other side is just as real. “It is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast.” Along with hiding Himself, God refuses to allow Himself to be constrained by human logic. The real God transcends logic. If you were a logician, mathematician, you would know there are limits to logic. There also are limits to understanding physical reality, quantum mechanics.

Scholars, are aghast that there are matters beyond them. The “simple” people are not so troubled. Religious scholars know any idea can be proven if the right verses are selected. God refuses to allow His creature to control Him. He invites us to come to Him on His terms, to serve His purposes, His ways. He is the creator. He is the righteous Judge. God knows He is God.

How can such a God communicate with us, call us? In His divine wisdom, He has given us written words, the Bible. He sent Jesus. He gives His Spirit. Humankind is not so good at getting His message. He knows how treacherous our minds are and we are still under attack by evil. Everything good and true will be misunderstood and corrupted.

Is there hope for truth? Can ultimate reality be found? Those who ask, seek, knock may find, that they have been found. It is all very confusing. Is that because there is only confusion or does the confusion have purpose? Believe it or not, faith, hope, trust were and are all there is. Jesus explained, He taught in Parables so they would not understand. God made foolish the wisdom of the world so He could not be found by wisdom.

Realize, if God had to be found by human effort and wisdom the simple, the uneducated, the marginalized would have little hope. As it is the disadvantaged are not disadvantaged before God. That is as it should be, righteous. The powerful are not ahead of the weak. The "sinners" are not lower than those that appear admirable. Indeed from beginning of the Bible to the end, the powerful, even religious leaders are called to judgment. The first will be last and the last will be first.

Many will say God is unfair. If you really feel that way there is no reason you would want to spend eternity with Him. I expect He will not have malcontents with Him anyway. He says He is righteous, perfectly loving to all. Some know He "called" them and the Bible tells of calling. Is there only one way He calls? The Bible recounts dreams and visions given to outsiders. What purpose do dreams serve? There seems to be no good scientific reason for them. Many experience them as something from beyond. Ever have a dream come true? Today some are willing to admit that. I expect more would but do not want to risk ridicule.

In recent years there have been many accounts of people deep in Islamic countries, who knew nothing about Christianity, who say Jesus appeared to them personally before they knew anything about the Christian faith. Some spent years trying to make contact with Christians. Some have astounding coincidences - personal miracles.

I feel many have questions because their idea of God is too small. They have a Sunday School small town Jesus. Their little god is unable to create and rule the universe. Modern astronomy has shown how vast it is. Most cannot accept the documentation that there were more than two and a half million in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified.

How does God know the future and not control it? How can He blame, judge us? If He controls the future, it is all His fault. What good is prayer? Those are basic valid questions. Before Jesus' time, Jewish scholars noted there were two separate words, "eternal" and "forever". They said, since God created time, He must live outside of time. For in Him, there is no past, present or future. Later Christians used that to claim God's being in the future and also in the present does not limit our freedom of action, responsibility. His knowledge is not control. The concept is beyond us, but mathematics and physics developed solutions to puzzling experimental data by using more than three dimensions and more types of time. Science has proven the reality we know, is much less than the total reality there is. All our questions will not exist in the Divine presence. "With God all things are possible!" Matthew 19:26

How can we be led to freely love? Freedom of the Will is a major problem. God has to reveal enough so we might realize God is, but not too much, to dominate, control. Our limitations cause us to seek help, to think there is help. Strange things happen, we do not understand, we think they have

been caused. We come to think there are invisible agents unknown actors, spirits. Many seem to experience those who have died, ghosts. We have drives, ideas that distress us, temptations, from where? People are driven to look for God. "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." C.S.Lewis.

If there is an almighty, all wise God, it would not be possible for His record to us to express anything opposite to what He intends. His Word, the Holy Scriptures, is exactly in accord with His will. That does not mean He speaks in accord, in submission, to our ideas. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

We know we are flawed. We also know what righteous, pure and proper mean. We long for what we cannot reach. The gods people invented were flawed as they were. They did not care and cannot save. The Biblical God claims to be perfect, righteous. "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world might be saved through him." John 3:17.

The stories demonstrate His claim that He is savior, redeemer, judge, provider, on His terms, not the way we expect or even wanted. God loves us, His creation with everlasting love. The stories demonstrate how that love worked out in an evil world with flawed people. God makes plain He wants our love, freely given, not compelled. Moreover He wants, us, His creation to show that love by loving each other as He loves us. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Everyone knows they are going to die. Then what? Those who do not care, will have no cause to complain. Do you care? Then what to do now? **God wants to be found!** He gave you free will. He does not want to dominate you. He invites us to be great men, great women. Seek Him where He might be found. All is confusing. Keep knocking, seeking, asking for Him to guide you to Himself. If He made it easy, He would be treating you as a child. He challenges us to be strong, wise, caring, like He is.

God's Word says what He wants it to say or He is not all mighty or all wise. Just the same His Church is what He wants it to be or He is not all mighty or all wise. We all are damaged and cause damage, the church is full of human confusion and error. Those who have been given His Spirit, see His truth abiding, His guidance correcting, His power supporting. God allows flawed people in His Church, He will have no problem with welcoming us in also. He wants to be your healer, rescuer, savior, forever.

How can the Creator lead so people find the real God who loves them and not wander in error?

To God alone be Glory

He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves,
but for him who died and was raised for them. 2 Cor. 5:15

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