

Tough Bible Questions: Part 2

By [Nathan Jones](#)

Have you ever found yourself faced with trying to come up with a good answer to a tough Bible question?

Dr. Ron Rhodes, is the founder and director of [Reasoning From the Scriptures Ministries](#). He is an expert on the Bible, and one of the things that he specializes in is answering tough questions about the Bible. The following are tough Bible questions Dr. Rhodes answered for our audience.

Q) Why did God command the Israelites to wipe out a whole nation like the Canaanites?

A) Well that is a tough question and there's all kinds of people arguing against Christianity based on questions like that. The way I'd like to answer it is this: if you have a human being who develops a cancer in the body, your physicians going to want to excise it. He's going to want to remove that cancer. The reason why he wants to remove the cancer is because if you don't remove it, it's going to grow, and it'll grow so that it takes over the entire body and ends up killing the entire body. Well the Canaanites were very much like a cancerous growth in human society. God does not take pleasure in any human being perishing, I mean, that's the backdrop here. But the Canaanites refused to repent. They refused to turn back to God and they became like a cancer in society. These were people who would take little babies and stick them on an open flame in worshipping false gods. And there's stuff that I can't even mention, so horrible that they were like a cancer. And I might mention to you that they had a forty year warning. They saw what happened to the Egyptians when God was delivering Israel from Egyptian bondage. They heard about the God of Israel and His miracles. They had forty years to repent but they refused to repent.

Here's something else to think about. Jeremiah 18 portrays God as saying if I promise judgment against a nation and that nation repents, I will withhold the judgment that I had promised. But if the nation does not repent then it will be judged. The Canaanites refused. They were hard-hearted. And so that all of humanity could be saved and not die from this cancerous growth called the Canaanites, the entire nation had to be wiped out.

Q) Is Jesus the only way to heaven?

A) I've been asked that question a lot of times and a lot of times people will say you're being narrow-minded in claiming that Jesus is the only way. I don't think that that's being narrow-minded. There are some things that are narrow that are good. Sometimes there's only one operation that will save your life. Sometimes there is only one road out of the forest. There's only one correct formula for some of the popular soft drinks. I want my wife Carrie to be faithful to her one-and-only

for her entire life. That's narrow, but it's good. You know when I fly from California to Texas I not only want the pilot to land in Dallas, but I want him to land on the right runway. That's narrow but it's good. And so, yes, God's way of salvation is narrow, but it's good, but here's the thing — God's heart is wide open! He offers this narrow gift to people who are rich or poor, doesn't matter what your skin color is, doesn't matter whether you're male or female. God's heart is wide open and offers that same wonderful gift to all people.

As for Jesus being the only way, it's ridiculous to say that all religions lead to God. They all have different concepts of every doctrine. If one is true, the others are necessarily false. The truth is that all religions are essentially different and only superficially the same. And it's real important to understand that while all the other religions basically try to take bad men and make them better by ethics, Christianity seeks to take dead men and make them alive. You see we are dead in sin and dead people can't help themselves. They need an external Savior to come in and rescue them. And that's exactly what Jesus has done.

Every other religion also emphasizes works as opposed to Christianity that says we're going to be saved by grace through faith. Christianity paints man's problem as worse than any other religion. You see, all the other religions say, "Well you've got some ethic problems, you need to do some good works." But Christianity says, "Listen, even your good works are like righteous rags compared to God. You're unholy. You're defiled in every way. So there's no way that you can work your way to salvation." But you see, even though Christianity paints man's picture real, real bad, we've also got a real, real good solution, because salvation becomes a gift that is received through faith and that gift is based upon Jesus.

Q) All Christians have the Holy Spirit inside us. But for some reason, the same Christians can come up with different interpretations of the same verse. How can that be?

A) You know the Holy Spirit does guide us into truth, 1 Corinthians 2:13 and following talks about that. The way I look at it is, you might compare the Holy Spirit to a radio station that sends out a perfect signal. It's a perfect signal that's always the same. It never varies in any way. Christians however are like radio receivers. Now some radios work really good and others don't work so good. Some radios have bad batteries, some radios have a busted antenna, some radios have a little bitty speaker you can hardly even hear. By analogy the point that I'm making is that different Christians have different things wrong. Some Christians are a little bit too close to the world. Some Christians may not have repented of all their sins. Some Christians may not read the Bible very often. And because of these different levels of problems among Christians, I believe they have different levels of receptivity to that perfect signal.

Q) What about the inerrancy of the Word of God? How do we know that the Bible really is from God as opposed to it being man's search for God and therefore full of myth legend of superstition?

A) I'll tell you what got my attention big time. I didn't become a Christian until I was 18. And what got my attention was Biblical prophecy. I had never heard of Bible prophecy. I had gone to a liberal church all my life. And as it happened I was out in Hollywood at the time and these Christians I ran into started talking to me about Bible prophecy and I said, "What's that?" And they showed me over a hundred prophecies that came literally true in the first coming of Christ. You know like he's going to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). You know he's going to be crucified (Zechariah 12:10) for our sins (Isaiah 53). I mean on and on all these prophecies came literally true. And then they talked to me about prophecies of the Second Coming and how things are starting to line up in our own day, that are laying the foundation for the fulfillment of those verses. And that led me to believe this Bible, that I've just been ignoring for the first eighteen years of my life, truly must be the Word of God. Because only God can declare the end from the beginning you know and so I became a Christian out of that.

And we're talking about very specific prophecies. And a lot of the stuff could not be controlled for example by Jesus. For example Jesus could not pick His birth place. Micah 5:2 is very clear that He would be born in Bethlehem. And when you look at all of those prophecies over a hundred prophecies converging on a single person, what are the odds? What are the odds of one person fulfilling well over a hundred prophecies from the Old Testament? You know the statisticians tell us it's astronomical!

I mean I had no concept that so much of the Bible was prophecy. As far as I knew, prophecy might just have been a little minor thing in the Bible. But prophecy virtually permeates this book from Genesis to Revelation. And I think that the whole reason why God put prophecy in the Bible is because there's a lot of false prophets and false apostles claiming to speak for God, but see they cannot tell the future from the beginning like the true prophets and apostles.

Q) What did Jesus say in the Bible that was so difficult?

A) Well, one would be, did Jesus advocate hating mother, father, spouse and children? You know Jesus said if you come to me and you do not hate your mother, your father, your spouse, and your children you cannot be my disciple. That's a hard saying. You know what you have to do is look at the context and what we have to do is to understand that there are other verses that clear things up. For us, for example, Jesus would never break one of the Ten Commandments. One of which is honor your mother and your father. As well Jesus taught elsewhere we're supposed to love even our enemies. So what does Jesus mean when he says that if you don't hate your mother and your father and

your children and your spouse? Well among the ancient Jews the word for hate according to ancient rabbinical writings could mean to love less.

Jesus was saying unless you love your spouse, and your parents, and your children less than Me you cannot be my disciples. Now the parallel verse in Matthew says, that if you love your mother or your father more than Me then you are not worthy of Me. So the key thing is to interpret words according to their proper context and their intended meaning.

Another example of a puzzling statement of Jesus in the New Testament is where Jesus was talking to a man to whom He was calling to enter into Christian service. And the man said, "*Well let me bury my father first.*" And then Jesus says, "*Let the dead bury the dead.*" Whoa, I mean what's that about? Let the dead bury the dead? Does that mean that the dead are going to come up out of the grave and bury somebody else that's dead? I mean how does that work? Well apparently you know as you look at the context everything gets a little bit more clear. Apparently, this man was the only Christian in the family, and this man now that he'd become a Christian was being invited into missionary work with Jesus. So Jesus tells him let the spiritually dead bury the physical dead.

A number of other scholars have pointed out that in this case it may well be that the father wasn't even dead yet. So the man might have been giving an excuse. You know, "Let me wait a couple years until my father dies and I'll bury him and then I'll serve you."

Another example has to do with the Phoenician woman. You know the one I'm talking about where Jesus said I've come to the Jews not to the Gentiles and she said well even the dogs get the crumbs off the table. And people said, "Man, this is supposed to be a man of love and He speaks like this?"

I looked at that verse and to me what's going on is an illustration of the sense of humor that Jesus probably had. You know the ancient Jews did have this idea that the Gentiles were like dogs. And that you're not supposed to throw food to the dogs you're supposed to give it to the children. So I can imagine Jesus having a little twinkle in His eye when he said to the woman, "Don't you know that I'm not supposed to give the dogs this?" And then Jesus goes on to tell the woman that your faith is great and your request has been granted, so it's really kind of doing a little play on the pharisaic teachings.

Another example is Matthew 5:17, where Jesus said "*do not think that I come to abolish the Law or the prophets, I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.*" And yet Hebrews indicated that when Jesus died on the cross that the Old Covenant was abolished and a New Covenant was instituted. When you look at some of the ancient rabbinic writings, one thing that you come very clear upon is that the word "abolish" can mean "one who disobeys or does not have proper respect for the authority." Now, here's the thing, the Pharisees didn't think that Jesus was

showing respect to the law. The Jews thought that Jesus was in fact disobeying the Law. After all, Jesus was hanging around with sinners. He was doing these miracles on the Sabbath and so forth, and so they thought that Jesus was disrespecting the Law. Jesus says I have not come to abolish the Law or disrespect the law, I have come to fulfill the Law. And Jesus not only fulfilled the Law externally like the Pharisees did, He fulfilled it internally. You know those Jews thought that as long as you did things externally you were okay. Jesus said the Law deals with the inner heart.

Now in terms of those verses that talk about the Old Covenant being passed away and the New Covenant coming into being that has to do with the Cross and after. The New Covenant was enacted and brought into being at the death of Christ. It's based upon the blood of Jesus. So at that point in fact the Law did pass away and we have a New Covenant which is based upon the forgiveness of sins provided in the death of Jesus.

Q) Are there angels among us, and if so what are they doing among us?

A) I think that there are angels among us. I see nothing in the New Testament that indicates that angels have stopped their activity back in the First Century. They are among us. In fact, in Hebrews 1:14 it says that angels are ministering spirits. And ministering means a servant. They're like these spirit servants that are involved in different ways.

The angels do many things. For example, did you know that at the moment that you die there are angels there who guide you into Heaven? That's Luke 16. We certainly know that the angels are involved in guarding us, for example Psalm 91 verses 9-11 says that if you make the Lord your God your dwelling place He will assign His angels to watch over you.

And we see that illustrated in 2 Kings 6 with Elijah and his servant. They were surrounded by a hostile army moving in and the servant was real scared. I picture him as kind of a Don Knott's type. You know and so Elijah says, "*Lord open his eyes so that he can see.*" And then, the eyes were opened and there were angels around them protecting them. Those are just a couple of the things that the angels are doing.

Q) Speaking of looks, do angels all have peroxide blonde curly hair and wings and white robes?

A) One thing that I think is real clear, today a lot of people portray very feminine angels. But every appearance we have in the Bible is in the male form. We have Michael and Gabriel.

Q) Did you know that probably the most intriguing verse in the Bible concerning angels is that we should show hospitality to strangers because some have entertained angels unaware?

A) That's right. I think that there's every possibility that once we get to Heaven we're going to actually discover that some person, some apparent human being, was actually an angel assigned by God to help us through some circumstance. And I also believe that even when they don't appear that they are also working behind the scenes. And we may be in Heaven one day and an angel walks up to us and says, "You remember that time that rescue came out of no where? That was me."

Q) What would be some of the fiction out there about angels?

A) Just to give you an example of the fiction, you know Hollywood keeps telling us when you die you become an angel. Have you heard that one? I mean that's just all over Hollywood.

You know the Scriptures indicate in Colossians 1:16 that Christ was the one who created all the angels. He created the principalities and the powers and the thrones and the dominions. Those were words that were used in the First Century of angels. And all throughout the Bible we find a distinction between humans and angels. For example, Psalm 8 says humans were created lower than the angels, but in 1 Corinthians 6:3 it says that in the afterlife we as human beings will rule over the angels. First Corinthians 13 draws a distinction between the languages of humans and angels. Revelation 5 portrays angels and redeemed humans surrounding the throne of Christ singing praises to His name. So any way you look at it, from beginning to end, angels and humans are portrayed as distinct beings.

Q) Will we know each other in heaven?

A) Very clearly I think we will. In fact, that was the hope of the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 4. A lot of them had questions about whether they'd see each other and Paul assures them that there's going to be a big family reunion and you'll recognize each other. You'll spend eternity with each other.

And you know the great thing about it all, is we're going to get a body upgrade. No more gray hairs, no more hairs falling out, no more cholesterol build up, no more kidney problems, no more heart problems. It's going to be a perfect body and the best of all you get to still eat. Jesus in His resurrection body ate four times and apparently if you eat in your resurrection body you don't gain weight.

Q) So many Christians are involved in masonry and they don't look upon it as a cult. They look upon it as a wonderful thing to be involved in. What would you say to a Mason?

A) Well, Masons do have a view of the Bible: God, Jesus, sin and salvation. They believe the Bible is one of many different holy books. They believe God is the great architect of the celestial lodge above. That he's not a trinity, but rather his name is Jabulon, which is a combination of the words Jehovah and Baal and Osiris — those are pagan gods. Jesus is just a good moral teacher. In terms of sin they don't believe in original sin. They just believe that men are imperfect and by following the recommendation of the Lodge you can get rid of those rough edges. And then, of course, Heaven is this idea of the celestial lodge above. It's a complete re-definition of Christianity from beginning to end.

It's a false version. They teach that all religions lead to God and they say that all the different names of God in the world religions are really the same God.

Thank you, Dr. Rhodes, for the answers to these tough Bible questions! Dr. Rhodes will answer more questions in Part 3.