



St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church

Heliopolis, Cairo - Egypt

How?

Father Daoud Lamei

Book's Name: How?

The Writer: Father Daoud Lamei

Publisher: St. Mark's Church, Heliopolis.

Edition: 1st Edition / March 2016

Printing House: Nubar Printing House.

Registration Number:

ISBN:



His Holiness Pope Tawdros the 2nd
Pope of Alexandria
& Patriarch of St. Mark's Diocese

Table of Contents

Subject	Page No.
Introduction	10
• How did Christians move from the Sabbath to Sunday despite the constant, clear and repeated command "(Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy (Ex 20: 8))?	12
• How can we believe that Moses is the author of the (Pentateuch, Torah, if it mentions incidents that happened after his death and there are passages that praise him and his personality?	20
• How can God forbid idolatry and the making of idols and then command the making of statues of cherubim and the bronze serpent?... ..	30
• How can Christians forbid homosexuality when it is an expression of one's freedom and natural choices?	33

Table of Contents

Subject	Page No.
• How do we calculate twelve tribes of Israel if Joseph was allocated two tribes for his sons?	39
• How can one distinguish between false prophets and true ones?	45
• How could God order the total annihilation of nations including innocent women and children as in Joshua 6?	57
• How could the children of some saintly people turn up to be ungodly as happened with Eli the priest; (David the prophet and king and others?	63
• How can we know God who is unlimited and unseen?	69
• How can we accept the orthodox interpretation of the bible when there are so many other equally credible interpretations?..	75

Table of Contents

Subject	Page No.
• How can we accept the infallibility of the bible when there seem to be many contradictions in some of its parts?	78
• How can you expect the bible to be authentic with no alterations with more than a thousand manuscripts and its translation to thousands of languages?	83
• How can we believe the bible stories when they are in contradiction with archaeology, natural history and the sciences?	88
• How can we calculate the age of mankind if according to the Old Testament man has been around for 5000 years B.C whereas science confirms that man has been on earth for longer than 10,000 years?.....	90
• How could we believe that at one time in history men lived to the age of over 900? ...	93

Table of Contents

Subject	Page No.
• How did Noah's ark contain all the animals and dinosaurs, if the story is real?	96
• How can we understand the judgment of God, the C over of Mankind, to destroy nations? In his judgment over the firstborns of the Egyptians (Ex 12: 29 - 30), wasn't (Pharaoh alone responsible for his stubbornness and rebellion?	98
• How can one bear sufferings and trials without doubting the love of God?	101

Introduction

"O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith.

Grace be with you. Amen." (1 Tim 6: 20-22)

Some may stumble into intellectual confrontations about some of the Christian dogmas, beliefs or Bible situations that non-believers or skeptics face us with.

And it may very well happen that some of us would not find satisfying answers to their queries ...

This booklet is an attempt to offer quick, specific and brief answers to some of the questions that start with the question word: How? And that may necessitate much more extended replies in different context ... It is addressing our youth who are on the go and often seek "fast food" rather than a fully nourishing meal.

We therefore suffice with providing main ideas and verses to verify the different replies...

May our Lord Jesus Christ always grant us the steadfastness and appropriate answers for all queries and all who are seeking His Truth. For He promised:

“... for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist.” (Luke 21: 15)

Through the intercessory prayers of H.H Pope Shenouda III whose teaching has enlightened us and H.H. Pope Tawadross II whose encouragement keeps us always indebted.

Pray for me ...

Fr. Daoud Lamei

How did Christians move from honoring the Sabbath to Sunday despite the clear and repeated commandment “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex 20: 8)?

This commandment dates back to the story of creation, where the Bible announced:

*And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.
(Gen 2: 2-3)*

The commandment of Torah then came to commit the Jews to this Godly image ...

Later on when Christ came to redeem man had destroyed and to renew his original creation, He declared the true meaning of keeping the Sabbath holy:

And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.” (Mark 2: 27 - 28)

Christ kept on explaining the idea of “the spirit of the commandment” and not its “letter”, i.e. literal meaning. He therefore carried on performing His miracles on the Sabbath, for example:

- Healing the man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15)
- Healing the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1-5)
- Allowing the disciples to pluck heads of grain on the Sabbath. (Matt 12:1-8)

Our Lord Jesus Christ mentioned the Ten Commandments in His teachings ... but made sure to add to them adding to them:

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” (Matt 5:17)

- ***In the commandment*** “You shall not murder” (Ex 20 :13) ***He added:***

You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca³ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool! shall be in danger of hell fire. (Matt 5: 21 - 22)

- ***In the commandment*** “You shall not commit adultery³³ (Ex 20 :14) ***He added:***

You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matt 5: 27 - 28)

- ***In the commandment***

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold

him guiltless who takes His name in vain. (Ex 20: 7)

He declared

Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, hut shall perform your oaths to the Lord. ' But / say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne. (Matt 5:33- 34)

It was quite clear that He who gave Moses the commandments in the Old Testament is the same One completing them in the New Testament, liberating them from the Pharisaical literalism and was imposed upon them ... What then would make it unacceptable that the Saturday Sabbath, which has become marred by the Fall, Sin and literal application is liberated and transformed to become a New Day at the beginning of the week ... as a symbol for a New Life.

It is to be noted also that Saturday (Sabbath) had been linked in the minds of the Jews to the idea of Salvation. We read in Deuteronomy:

And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand

and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day (Deut 5:15)

And since this kind of salvation ended by the end of the Old Testament, as the new concept of salvation of the whole world from the slavery of sin towards the glory of the children of God, it was therefore necessary to change the day being honored. St. Paul writes:

For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”; and again in this place: They shall not enter My rest.” Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, “Today,” after such a long time, as it has been said:

“Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.” For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. (Heb 4: 4-9)

The phrase: ***“a rest for the people of God”*** denotes that the Sabbath was completed upon the entry to Canaan; and a new day was needed for a new rest ... a spiritual rest and a new Eternal Life. That is why the prophecy foreshadows:

This is the day the LORD has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, / pray, O LORD; O LORD, / pray, send now prosperity.
(Psalm 118: 24 - 25)

Note also that St. Paul refers to the ritual of the Sabbath as a sign and symbol of the old order:

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. (Col2: 16-17)

To retain the ritual of Saturday as the Sabbath would mean keeping the Jewish feasts, the new moon and the special food allowed by the Law, forgetting that our Lord Jesus Christ declared to St. Peter:

And a voice came to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean. ” And a voice spoke to him again the second

time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” (Acts 10: 13 -15)

As for Sunday, its Status is very clear in the New Testament...

- **It is the day of our Lord’s Resurrection and our Resurrection as well,**

Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. (Matt 28:1)

- **Sunday is the day Our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to His disciples**

*And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, **Peace to you!**” (John 20: 26)*

- **Sunday is The day of Pentecost**

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. (Acts 2: 1)

- **Sunday is the Day of the Lord, according to St. John, in his Revelation** for it is the eighth day after the seventh (Saturday, the Sabbath), which makes of

it a clear sign to the Eternal Life (the life after the earthly one) ... a New and Glorious Day.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet.

(Rev 1:10)

We, therefore, assert once more that the Sabbath (Saturday) is part of the Jewish law that could not save man ... that we are no longer under that literal law ... as it is very clear from what St. Paul tells us in the following verses:

- For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (Ro 6:14)
- Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. (Gal 3: 24 - 25)

How can we believe that Moses is the author of the 'Torah', while it mentions incidents that happened after Moses' death? And also while it includes passages that praise him and his personality?!!

Moses is the author of the Torah ...

First:

Moses the Prophet is the most capable and the most suitable and the most qualified to having written the Torah ... Our Lord chose him to be His Prophet and His Tongue and His friend ... None of woman born was like him ... He was part and parcel of the History of the Torah (Pentateuch) (Genesis - Exodus - Leviticus - Numbers - Deuteronomy)

Second:

The Talmud ... Jewish teachers ... The first five books of the Torah are said to have been written by Moses and are referred to as the 'Books of Moses' or just 'Moses'.

Third:

The New Testament historians as Josephus and Filo refer to Moses as the author of the Torah with no reference to anyone else.

Fourth:

The Book of Exodus mentions geographical details of locations in Sinai that could only have been known by someone who lived there for many years like Moses, who actually lived there for 40 years before the exodus.

Fifth:

The Holy Scripture, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, mentions Moses as the author of the Torah.

- *And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the*

foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. (Ex 24: 4)

- *These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on this side of the Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain opposite Suph, between Paran, Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab (Deut 1: 1)*
- *Now this is the law which Moses set before the children of Israel. (Deut 4: 44)*
- *Now Moses wrote down the starting points of their journeys at the command of the LORD. And these are their journeys according to their starting points. (Num 33: 2)*
- *These are the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which lie made with them in Horeb. (Deut 29: 1)*

Sixth:

Joshua, Moses' disciple and successor, declared that Moses wrote the Torah.

Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law

which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Josh 1: 7-8)

Seventh:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, and later on His disciples, referred to the Torah as the books of Moses and as the writings of Moses.

- *For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.(Mark 7:10)*
- *saying: "Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife, and he dies without children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother." (Luke 20: 28)*

- *For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you.’ (Acts 3: 22)*

Eighth:

All the Old Testament prophets, without exception, referred to the Torah as being written by Moses.

- *And keep the charge of the LORD your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn. (1 Kings 2:3)*
- *But the children of the murderers he did not execute, according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, in which the LORD commanded, saying, “Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; but a person shall be put to death for his own sin. (2 Kings 14: 6)*

- *Now when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD siven by Moses. (2 Ch 34:14)*
- *Then Jeshua the son of Jozadakja] and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. (Ezra 3: 2)*
- *They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions, over the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses. (Ezra 6:18)*
- *We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses (Neh 1: 7)*
- *Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice; therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him. (Dan 9:11)*

- *Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. (Mai 4:4)*

Ninth:

St. Paul refers to Moses as the author of the Torah.

- *For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, “The man who does those things shall live by them.” (Ro 10: 5);*
- *But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: “I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.” (Ro 10: 19)*
- *For it is written in the law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” Is it oxen God is concerned about? (ICo 9: 9)*

Thus we see that our Lord Jesus Christ, His disciples and apostles, the prophets and history all refer to Moses as the author of the Torah/Pentateuch.

Moses Praising and honoring himself...

As for Moses praising and honoring himself in parts of the Torah, for example:

- *Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth. (Num 12:3)*
- *So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he would return to the camp, hut his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle. (Ex 33:11)*

Moses referred to himself as being “humble” not in way of praise for or being proud of himself ... but he was being led by the Holy Spirit and in order for history to record the work of God’s Grace in his life. We should never forget that he mentioned that he had killed an Egyptian (Ex 2:12), broken the two tablets of stone with the ten commandments (Ex 32:19) and hit the rock twice in anger (Num 20: 7 - 12). He did not turn a blind eye to his mistakes and weaknesses. Mentioning these facts in this respect is very important to clarify the great challenge Moses faced in leading that stubborn, difficult nation.

There is mention in the Book of Numbers of an incident that clearly refers to Moses' humility and his not claiming any privilege:

Then Moses said to him, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD'S people were prophets and that the LORD would put HIS Spirit upon them!" (Num 11: 29).

We also recall his stance with Aaron and Miriam (Num 12:1 - 3) as he refused to defend himself and kept silent.

The death of Moses ...

As for mentioning the incident of the death of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 34, it is certain that the Holy Spirit, who inspired Moses to document and write everything else, could have informed him of the secrets of his remaining days and guided him to document them as if it were an event in the past. Moses did that having absolute trust in the accuracy of the Holy Spirit ... Revealing/Foretelling the future with all its detail is neither strange nor impossible for the prophetic spirit with which the Holy Book is written (for example with the Book of Daniel 2,7,9)

Similarly, it is also quite acceptable for Joshua, very close disciple of Moses, to record the end of his life as well ... before he wrote his own Book (the Book of Joshua) ... also having been inspired by the Holy Spirit, thus completing the story of Moses and the Book of Torah.

How can God forbid idolatry and the making of idols and then command the making of statues of cherubim and the bronze serpent?

It is a fact that God forbid the making of any statues or idols.

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness [of anything] that [is] in heaven above, or that [is] in the earth beneath, or that [is] in the water under the earth;” (Ex 20: 4).

This is a consistent attitude throughout the Bible for ... Idolatry is actually considered the worst sin ... as it is a proclamation of the worship of a different “god”.

This clarifies the whole truth about this issue: For the forbidden statues are those which we worship them as gods, bowing to them.

... you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, [am] a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth [generations] of those who hate Me (Ex 20: 5),

And ...

... with whom the LORD had made a covenant and charged them, saying: "You shall not fear other gods, nor bow down to them nor serve them nor sacrifice to them.;" (2 Kings 17: 35)

As for the two cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant: those were part of the paraphernalia for the worship rituals ... used to show the glory of this Holy Place. They were never intended to replace God ... or to be an idol. We also recall that the ark of the covenant was only seen by the high priest once a year, and it was kept locked in the holy of holies.

Neither matter nor art is forbidden; but the use of any material determines its value, whether it is for the worship of God or in rebellion against Him.

The bronze serpent was a clear symbol of the story of redemption. Christ Himself referred to it:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up. (John 3:14)

As a matter of fact, we note that when the Jews deviated from the truth and used the bronze serpent as an idol to worship, it was completely destroyed:

He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan., (2Kings 18: 4).

This is definitely neither God's fault nor the fault of Moses; but it is due to the abuse of people for what is holy. That was why King Hezekiah destroyed the bronze serpent when it lost its original meaning.

How can Christians forbid homosexuality when it is an expression of one's freedom and natural choice?

Homosexuality is forbidden in the Bible in many instances, for the following reasons:

- It is not natural (as some claim it to be), for the Bible says:

And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?" (Matt 19: 4 - 5).

Therefore, natural sex is between a husband and wife – a man and a woman. Moreover, Nature instructs us that even in the world of animals, this is the case. So we read that at the time of Noah’s Arc, he took a male and a female from every species, in order to keep the natural procreation.

- St. Paul refers to homosexuality as a sin ... a deviation from the natural way of things to the evil and corrupt inventions, saying:

... who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.”
(Ro 1: 25 - 28).

It is clear from this passage that as people deny God and turn away from Him, they worship the creation (the body) rather than the Creator ... and later reach this kind of corruption and deviation that is referred to as “the shameful ... vile passion”.

- St. Paul confirms that continuing without repentance leads to eternal death

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Co 6: 9 - 11)

- The Bible confirms that we have control over our bodies, desires and inclinations

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but / will not be brought under the power of any.

Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall / then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!” (1 Co 6:12 - 15)

- The Law in the Old Testament also forbade sexual deviation ***“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination”*** (Lev 18: 22), together with all other sexual immorality as adultery, bestiality and other deviations. (Lev 18: 6 - 24)

God’s wrath was on the people of the earth because of such sins.

And the LORD said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave.” (Gen 18 : 20)

And when God sent two angels in the form of men to Lot in Sodom, the people of Sodom wanted to rape

them (Gen 19:5) and the story ends with destruction. (Gen 19:28).

This sin has been mentioned also in the following Biblical passages:

- ***Knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine. (1Tim 1: 9-10)***
- ***As they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men, surrounded the house and beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man, saying, “Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally!
But the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, “No, my brethren! I beg you, do not act so wickedly! Seeing this man has come into my house, do not commit this outrage. (Judges 19: 22 - 23)***

- ***For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” (Ro 1:18)***
- ***As Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.” (Jude 1: 7)***

How do we calculate twelve tribes of Israel if Joseph was allocated two tribes for his sons?

There is no doubt about the fact that the Bible refers to the tribes of Israel being twelve. However there are various things to be observed about the names of those tribes since they have been mentioned several time with variations. For example, in (Rev 7), (Num 26), (Gen 26) there is mention sometimes of the name: ‘Joseph’, while at other times ‘Ephraim and Manasseh’ (Joseph’s sons), and on other occasions not mentioning Levi. This makes it appear as if there are 14 tribes although it constantly says 12.

- “Judah - Reuben - Gad - Asher – Naphthali – Manasseh – Simeon – Levi – Issachar – Zebulun – Joseph - Benjamin” (Rev 7: 4 - 8)

- "Reuben – Simeon – Gad – Judah – Issachar – Zebulun – Manasseh – Ephraim – Benjamin – Dan - Asher - Naphthali" (Num 26: 5 - 51)
- "Reuben – Simeon – Levi – Judah – Issachar – Zebulun – Gad – Asher – Joseph – Benjamin – Dan - Naphthali" (Gen: 46: 8-27)

	<i>Rev 7</i>	<i>Numbers 26</i>	<i>Genesis 46</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>Reuben</i>	<i>Reuben</i>	<i>Reuben</i>
<i>2</i>	<i>Simeon</i>	<i>Simeon</i>	<i>Simeon</i>
<i>3</i>	<i>Levi</i>		<i>Levi</i>
<i>4</i>	<i>Judah</i>	<i>Judah</i>	<i>Judah</i>
<i>5</i>	<i>Issachar</i>	<i>Issachar</i>	<i>Issachar</i>
<i>6</i>	<i>Zebulun</i>	<i>Zebulun</i>	<i>Zebulun</i>
<i>7</i>	<i>Joseph</i>		<i>Joseph</i>
<i>8</i>	<i>Manasseh</i>	<i>Manasseh</i>	
<i>9</i>		<i>Ephraim</i>	
<i>10</i>	<i>Benjamin</i>	<i>Benjamin</i>	<i>Benjamin</i>
<i>11</i>		<i>Dan</i>	<i>Dan</i>
<i>12</i>	<i>Gad</i>	<i>Gad</i>	<i>Gad</i>
<i>13</i>	<i>Asher</i>	<i>Asher</i>	<i>Asher</i>
<i>14</i>	<i>Naphthali</i>	<i>Naphthali</i>	<i>Naphthali</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>12</i>

The actual number of names is 14 ... However ... there are several points to be noted:

First:

Jacob's sons were 12. This is the number of tribes mentioned in Genesis 46 when Joseph was mentioned alone.

Second:

The order and names of the tribes was different during different situations ...

Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow. (Gen 48: 22).

Jacob allocates to Joseph a double portion in the land, making Joseph two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim, and he drops Levi from the distribution of land as the tribe would be consecrated for the priesthood and will be distributed in 48 cities in the land (Joshua 21: 41). Thus Manasseh and Ephraim fill the vacancy due to the absence of Levi in the distribution of land. (Numbers 26)

As for the Book of Revelation ... Joseph is mentioned instead of Ephraim which had more people and Manasseh is mentioned separately. As Moreover, since the Book of **Revelation** is the Book of the heaven, Ephraim, as a tribe linked to idolatry more than the other tribes, is dropped and the name of his beloved father, Joseph is mentioned instead ... Manasseh, on the other hand, is mentioned separately. The tribe of Dan is dropped completely from the **Revelation** account (Rev 7) since it was the first tribe to become idolatrous. They also went and occupied land that Joshua did not distribute to them in the furthest point in Canaan, making them far away from Jerusalem, the centre of worship.

- **In those days there was no king in Israel. And in those**

days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for itself to dwell in; for until that day their inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them.’ (Judges 18:1)

- **Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, and his sons**

were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.' (Judges 18: 30 -31)

Some of the fathers also thought that the anti-Christ will come from the tribe of Dan as prophesied by Jacob ...

Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider shall fall backward. (Gen 49: 16-17)

Therefore the tribe of Levi gets mentioned again in **Revelation** as they no longer have a priestly role with the end of the priesthood of the Old Testament, so they have a place in Heaven for those who have lived with the hope of salvation and redemption.

The Bible retains the number of 12 for the tribes representing the complete number like the twelve foundations and twelve gates of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21). It is the number equivalent to that of the 12 apostles – the pillars of the New Testament.

How can one distinguish between false prophets and true ones?

The bible warns us of false prophets:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves (Matt 7: 15)

And advises us to test the spirits

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. (1 John 4:1-3)

To differentiate between a false prophet and a true prophet is not difficult...

First:

A true prophet testifies to Jesus Christ as the Incarnate God, Redeemer and Savior; the false prophet denies the divinity of Jesus Christ, drawing people to philosophies and ideas far from the Truth that is found in Christ only ...

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. (Col 2: 8 - 9)

Second:

The false prophet could deny the Incarnation and the creed of the Christ having had as mentioned in 1 John 4: 1 - 2 and ...

For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as

coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.” (2 John 1: 7)

Third:

A false prophet could call for the worship of other false gods

- *“You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.” (Ex 20: 3 - 4)*
- *“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known—(and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” (Deut 13: 1 - 3)*

Fourth:

A false prophet accepts to work with mediums, demons and evil spirits.

There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer.” (Deut 18: 10)

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” (2 The 2: 9 -10)

Fifth:

The false prophet is drawn to strange teachings that may allow immorality and evil and denies godliness and virtue ...

- *“ Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience*

seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.” (1 Tim 4:1-3)

- *“ For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Jude 1: 4)*

Sixth:

The false prophet tells false prophecies that mislead people and which they keep waiting for but they are never fulfilled ...

But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which / have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. ’ And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken? ‘— when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which

the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him." (Dent 18: 20 - 22)

Seventh:

The false prophet seeks his own glory whereas a true prophet seeks nothing but the glory of God and endures all hardships for the sake of spreading the message of Truth.

- *“I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God? (John 5: 43 - 44)*
- *“Jesus answered them and said, (‘My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether / speak on My own authority. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.’” (John 7:16-18)*

Eighth:

The false prophet often behaves inappropriately and might have hidden sinful behavior.

You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?” (Matt 7:16)

Ninth:

The false prophet refuses the collective beliefs of the one Apostolic Orthodox Church with its regulations and sticks out with his own individualistic opinions that are not in accordance to the teachings of the Apostles and Early Church Fathers.

- *“Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “You must be circumcised and keep the law” - to whom we gave no such commandment.” (Acts 15: 24)*
- *“Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” (Acts 20: 30)*

- ***“We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” (1 John 4: 6)***
- ***“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.” (1 John 2: 18 - 22)***

Tenth:

The false prophet refuses to submit to the Church and is more interested in people following his teachings due to a spirit of pride and arrogance that leads him astray.

- *“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie.”* (2 The 2: 9 - 11)
- *“Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. But / will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power.”* (1 Co 4:18 - 19)
- *“Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets.”* (Luke 6: 26)

Eleven:

The false prophet may focus on particular dates, especially the Second Coming of Christ or even may claim that he is Christ.

- *“Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying:
Send to all those in captivity, saying, Thus says the LORD concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite:*

Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, and I have not sent him, and he has caused you to trust in a lie— therefore thus says the LORD: Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his family: he shall not have anyone to dwell among this people, nor shall he see the good that / will do for My people, says the LORD, because he has taught rebellion against the LORD.” (Jer 29: 30 - 33)

- *“Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?”*

And Jesus, answering them, began to say: “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He, ’ and will deceive many.” (Mark 13: 4 - 6)

“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, Lie is there!’ do not believe it.” (Mark 13: 21)

Twelve:

The false prophet may cast doubt on the Cross or the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, or the Second Coming and the Resurrection of the dead, for it is

through the Cross and Christ's Resurrection that we are saved.

- ***“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (1Co 15:12)***
- ***“Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.” (1 Co 15: 34)***

Thirteen:

The false prophet could claim for himself miracles or wonders or speaking in tongues to confuse and deceive those around him.

- ***“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matt 7: 22-23)***
- ***“If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.***

But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.” (1 Co 14: 37 - 38)

- ***“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” (Mark 13: 22)***

Also read (Matt 24: 3- 5; 11 - 12; 23 - 25). (Luke 21:7-8)

How could God order the annihilation of whole nations including innocent women and children as in Joshua 6 ?

First:

It is inappropriate to use the term ‘innocent’ for nations where evil and wickedness had become so much entrenched and embedded that they had no readiness whatsoever to regret or repent.

Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which / am casting out before you. For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells

among you (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled)” (Lev 18: 24-27)

Having spread like Cancer passing from one generation to the other, it has become mandatory to amputate the whole nation, in way of passing judgment and as an end to evil and wickedness from the area. Hence using the word “innocent” is totally inappropriate even for the women and children of these nations.

The Book of Deuteronomy mentions the end of the idolatrous nations:

There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the

LORD your God has not appointed such for you." (Deut 18: 10 - 14)

Second:

God granted those nations a lot of chances to repent and return from their wicked ways, but they did not ...

And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent." (Rev 2: 21)

Their chance amounted to 400 years as He had promised Abraham

But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." (Gen 15:16)

Third:

There have been many times when destruction engulfed children as well, as in the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, death of the firstborn son in Egypt and the last Judgment Day. It may be the case that God has mercy on these kids by giving them a chance to die young, rather than grow to be wicked. For if left to grow, they would surely be as their fathers and

forefathers offering sacrifices to the idols that their fathers worshipped.

Fourth:

God is omnipotent and omniscient; He has the right to end the life of a person or a nation, as He wills. This does not contradict man's free will within his natural limitations.

Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; nor is there any who can deliver from My hand.” (Dent 32:39); “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! (Ro 11:33)

Fifth:

The Israelites were just an instrument in the hands of God for the judgment of those nations, just as the Babylonians and Assyrians and others were used by God to bring His judgment on the people of Israel at a different time. Just as David and his army were instruments in God's hands to bring His judgment on

the Ammonites, Moabites and others, God's judgment has its best time and method which is in accordance to His Wisdom and Mercy.

Sixth:

The people of Jericho had to be completely destroyed to prevent their 'disease' from spreading to the people of God as had happened before many times, like the story of Balaam and the corruption of the Jews that happened during the last days of Moses (Numbers 22-25). Thus the total annihilation of such peoples becomes at times mandatory for their salvation and purity.

We have to remember that these nations' behavior has become so perverse that it became totally out of the human norms and has become degraded to the level of brutal beasts, the annihilation of which is definitely not considered evil.

- *But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption.” (2Pet 2:12)*

- *But he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet" (2 Pet 2:16)*
- *But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves." (Jude 1:10)*

Seven:

Likewise, but in spiritual terms, we deal with our enemies: the devils and all evils,

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. " (Eph 6:11 - 13)

How could the Children of some saintly people turn up to be ungodly as happened with ‘Ed the Priest, David, the Prophet and King and others?

Truly ... many saintly and godly men had children who were far from godly and very different from their parents. Why is that the case?

First:

Man has been created with free will, thus not every good father has a good son; likewise not every wicked father has a wicked son.

The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not hear the guilt of the father, nor the father hear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall he upon himself, and the

wickedness of the wicked shall he upon himself.” (Eze 18: 20)

Second:

Those righteous people and were neither faultless nor without sin for they are like us, human beings.

- Abraham feared for his life and lied. So did his son Isaac.
- Jacob (Israel) lived half his life in fraud: lying, cheating and greedy.
- Moses murdered a man in a fit of rage and in another angry outburst broke the two Tablets of Covenant.
- David committed adultery, was involved in a plot to murder a man and committed other sins.
- Solomon was a polygamist and worshipped idols for a period in his life.

Those prophets were justified by faith, hope and repentance, but their sins and mistakes testify to the generations that they needed salvation and redemption like all other human beings.

Third:

Like any father who was careless in bringing up his children, some of those righteous prophets might have not done what they should to make sure their children were brought up the way they should. This is clear in the story of Eli, the priest ...

Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the LORD (1 Sam 2: 12)

The same applies to the stories of Absalom and Amnon (2 Sam 13, 15) and Simeon and Levi, the sons of Jacob (Gen 34). Those children might have been neglected from childhood, not being brought up into a life of prayer and righteousness and accordingly as righteous as their fathers.

With this faulty attitude, the children of those pious people were not used to the life of prayer, godliness and continuous repentance ... and grew up quite different from their fathers.

Fourth:

Some prophets and fathers did not punish and discipline their children with appropriate level of

firmness at the right time, hoping that they repent. The wise says:

- *He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly. (Proverbs 13: 24)*
- *Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. (Proverbs 23: 13)*

Eli should have disciplined his sons according to the law ...

Now Eli was very old; and he heard everything his sons did to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. So he said to them, “Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the LORD’S people transgress. If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?” Nevertheless they did not heed the voice of their father, because the LORD desired to kill them.” (1 Sam 2: 22 - 25)

Likewise, David was weak with his sons and failed to discipline Absalom, which encouraged Absalom to deal with him in an impertinent way to the extent that he usurped the kingdom from his own father ...

So David said to all his servants who were with him at

Jerusalem, “Arise, and let us flee, or we shall not escape from Absalom. Make haste to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly and bring disaster upon us, and strike the city with the edge of the sword.” (2 Sam 15:14)

Fifth:

Righteousness and blessing are not transferred through the genetic route; rather, the ‘New Life’ is acquired through the Grace of the Holy Spirit ... through faith, repentance and the participation of the Sacraments, as the Bible teaches ...

... who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:13)

David was, therefore, not anointed king because of his being ‘the son of Saul’ ... Judah was not chosen

because of his being the eldest son of Jacob ... while Esau lost his birthright, Jacob was chosen ... All this is done so that each human being's role is clear in deciding his own eternity through his choices.

How can Man possibly know God ...while God is Unlimited & Unseen?

It is true that God is unseen and unlimited ... but He reveals Himself and allows man to know Him ... not His Nature ... but through His work, His Word and His Revelations.

Man knows God through His creation ...

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. (Psalm 19:1);

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are dearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse. (Ro 1:20)

Through contemplation, meditation and interaction with nature and the rest of creation Man gets to know God in His ultimate Perfection, Beauty, Wisdom and

Power ... Man gets to see God's Love for human beings.

Man also gets to know God through His Revelations by the prophets and Church Fathers ...

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds (Heb 1: 1-2).

Man learns everything by receiving knowledge from predecessors ... Man receives knowledge from his parents ... Man gets to know everything and everyone through discipleship and education. For the human knowledge of God is collective as is complemented along the experiences of the Prophets of the Old Testament, the Apostles of the New Testament and the lives of the Saints.

- ***“ By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. By faith***

Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going” (Heb 11: 7-8)

- *“By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.” (Heb 11: 27)*

The Bible thus confirms ...

... for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet 1: 21)

The Bible is therefore an alive, renewable source of knowledge about God. In way of complementation to the Holy Bible is ‘the Church Tradition’ which, has preserved and secured for us the proper interpretation of this Holy Revelation that reassures our knowledge of God throughout History.

Man also knows God through his personal conscience, for God speaks to man directly ... He indeed speaks to each and every man ...

- *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. (Rev 3: 20)*

- *Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. (Heb 3: 15)*
- *He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Matt 11:15)*

And in order for Truth about God be revealed in a much better way, our Lord Jesus Christ was Incarnated and came to us on earth in the flesh ...

- *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us (1 John 1: 1-2)*
- *Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us. Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? (John 14: 8-9)*

Our Lord’s Incarnation, that happened at a distinct point in history as witnessed and testified to us by the Fathers of the Early Church, is still conveyed to us, with

all its Power and Authority, by means of the Holy Spirit Who works through the Teachings and the Holy Sacraments of the Church. For it is through Baptism that we come to know God and are united with Him ... It is through the Sacrament of the Holy Myron that God dwells in us by His Holy Spirit ... It is through the Sacrament of the Unction of the Sick that we are healed from our spiritual and physical illnesses ... It is through the Sacrament of Matrimony that we complete His Holy Will of uniting with our partners in Him ... It is through the Sacrament of Priesthood that priests partake in His Priestly Work ... It is through the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession that we taste God's mercy and forgiveness ... It is through the Sacrament of Holy Communion that we are united with Him ... It is in this manner that our Lord Jesus Christ remains with us as we learn more and more about Him, as He advised:

... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matt 28: 20)

However, Man's knowledge of God will always remain that of the knowledge of a limited creature for the Unlimited Being ...

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now / know in part, but then I shall know just as / also am known. (1Co 13: 12)

For no one can completely fathom God ... or acquire a complete knowledge of Him ... or perceive His Mind ... that is mainly because God is unlimited ...

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isa 55: 9)

But we grow in our knowledge of God through the Holy Spirit, so that we:

... may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:18 - 19)

Therefore, while the Bible confirms that it is totally impossible to totally perceive God in a complete manner, it still declares that it is paramount that people know Him for the sake of their own salvation, for He ...

“... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1Tim 2: 4)

How can we accept the orthodox interpretation of the Bible while there are so many other equally logical interpretations?

Some people object to the orthodox interpretation of the Bible, as if the case is that we interpret it just as we wish/like!!! And due to the differences in the creed of the many denominations, some people think that each one of those denominations interprets the Bible as they like. This kind of thinking actually coincides with the skeptics who claim that Truth is lost (and can never be reached) with the existence of so many sects and denominations.

However, this kind of argument ignores a number of facts that we need to always bear in mind ...

First:

During the first five centuries of Christianity, there was almost unanimous agreement all over the world about the Christian creed. There were no denominations. In other words, for nearly 450 years there was absolutely no disagreement about the interpretation of the Holy Books or about the meaning of each and every verse as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Second:

The simple, clear and straight forward meaning for most of the verses is the one accepted by the Orthodox Church. For the few obscure or difficult verses it is first understood by cross- referencing them against other verses in the Bible with reference to the agreed upon fact that there is no contradiction within the meanings inherent in the Bible and that God does not change in His dealings with people.

Third:

The Nicene Creed (as verbalized by St. Athanasius the Apostolic and completed by St. Cyril – fathers of the Alexandrian Church) remains/is the accepted statement of faith for almost all Christian denominations all over

the world. This creed is actually the cornerstone of the Christian faith and the basis for all accepted Bible interpretations.

Fourth:

The Orthodox interpretation of the Bible relies completely on the understanding of the early Church fathers – who have been given this position by all – in order to avoid any deviation or change in the intended meanings. The sayings and teachings of the fathers are well documented in manuscripts which fill all the museums and libraries of the world. They are accessible to all who desire the true interpretation of each and every verse of the Bible.

Fifth:

The problem with interpretation other than our Orthodox one relies in the fact that some people have twisted some of the meanings in the Bible as they interpreted them in accordance to personal opinions that they had been convinced of for purely personal reasons or due to unaccredited teachings that have not been received from the early Church or the Fathers of the Church.

How can we accept the infallibility of the Bible when there seem to be many contradictions in some of its parts?

This accusation, hurled by many that attack the Bible, has no basis whatsoever. Nevertheless it has to be addressed by means of lots of detailed studies that will lead to the truth that there is no contradiction at all among the different verses, events or meanings of the Bible.

First:

The Bible in its entirety is God inspired.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.
(2Tim 3:16)

And this inspiration is what led the prophets and apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, to write:

... for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1: 21).

Jesus said:

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. (Matt 24: 35)

Second:

The apparent contradiction that some perceive may be due to the following reasons:

1. The difference between incidents in accordance to the time it took place at, from one generation to the other, from one nation to the other and from one circumstance to the other. Just as the Laws and Rules put into consideration different circumstances and cultures, thus making different changes accordingly, it is all the more reason why the laws of God would respect differences and circumstances. For example, we see that whereas God didn't allow Adam to eat except out of the product of trees and plants, yet He

later on allowed Noah and the generations following him to eat animals as well. (Gen 2: 16), (Gen 9:3)

2. A story could be similar in some of its incidents but different in time or place from another that happened to a different person. Therefore there should be no contradiction between the two. For example, the story of the woman who poured the oil (Mark 14: 3 - 9), the woman in the Pharisee's house (Luke 7: 36 - 50) and Mary in the house in Bethany (Matt 26: 6-13, John 12: 1 - 11).
3. A verse could be mentioned in one passage that makes it appear contradictory to a similar verse mentioned in another passage. Therefore it is very important to always look at the whole passage and at the events happening around it in order to fully understand it. The context of the verse will clarify that there is no contradiction. For example, the two verses:

... not of works, lest anyone should boast (Eph 2:9),

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (James 2: 26)

The first verse talks about the work of the law being dead while the second is talking about good works and the Christian struggle.

4. The contradiction could actually be a way of completion of the events as when the gospel writers mention events at the Cross and another mentions other events so as to complete the story. When you put the verses related to the story next to each other you get a complete picture rather than a contradictory or conflicting one. This is specifically clear with the gospels' accounts of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. The same applies to some of the events in the historical books of the Old Testament.
5. Focusing on one angle of a subject does not mean that it is the only angle to view it from. When we read the Pauline and Catholic Epistles we find that each one focuses on particular theological or spiritual ideas that do not contradict or deny other thoughts or objectives in other Bible teachings.
6. Going back to the meanings of some of the words or ways of looking at things at the age of writing each Book facilitates the understanding of the meanings inherent in it more accurately. Some parameters

cannot be placed against twenty first century parameters. The same applies to the wide range of time between writing the Pentateuch in 1500 years B.C. and the time the New Testament completed in the year 100 A.D.

An example is the census used to count only men with no mention of women or children, or sometimes it would mention men over 20 years of age as if it is a census for those able to go to war.

How can you expect the Bible to be authentic with no distortion/falsification while it has been made into 1000s of copies and has been freely translated to thousands of languages?!!!

There is no other book in the history of mankind that has gained so much attention, respect, scrutiny in translation and printing like the Holy Bible!!!

First... Thousands of Old Manuscripts

If there was any falsification, it would have appeared in the old manuscripts that were found in different parts of the world at different times. Ever since the Second Century onwards, whole chunks of both Testaments were found in different parts of the world.

Some of those parts related to the Old Testament dates back to the age before Christ while the oldest for the New Testament dates back to the second century.

As far as the science of manuscripts is concerned, it is enough to have a few dispersed manuscripts to confirm the authenticity of a document. The same applies to the ancient literature manuscripts as ‘The Iliad’ and ‘The Odyssey’. The Bible has more than a thousand authenticated old original manuscripts, more than any other book in the world.

Second... The Old Translations

With translation and transcription (printing in the old times) there can be no alteration/falsification in any of the old documents, for the new translation acts as a watch over the old manuscripts. But in case there are several translations of the same, it becomes next to impossible to change/alter anything in the original since comparing translations will surely reveal this alteration/falsification. So if we learn that tens of translations of the Holy Bible took place since the third century – all of which are in complete agreement, all those translations having accredited manuscripts in museums all over the world, we rest assured of the

impossibility of alteration or falsification of any of the parts of the Holy Bible.

Third... The Interpretation of the Fathers

The Early Fathers were not as much preoccupied with anything as much as with the interpretation and confirmation of what is written in the Holy Books of the Bible. Ever since the generation of the Early Disciples – disciples of Apostles – since the end of the first century till the end of the fifth century, there has been thousands of manuscripts that interpret the Holy Bible for many Church Fathers who belong to different countries, ages, cultures and who speak different languages – all agreeing on the same authentic text of the Bible and the unity of the creed that stems from it.

Fourth...The warnings for transcribers and translators

Throughout history, many warnings have been put to those who were responsible for the transcribing of the Holy Books. The scribes memorized the holy books and transcribed them as they had received them, copying them accurately and teaching others to follow the same

level of accuracy. The translations started by the Septuagint (The translation of the Old Testament to Greek during the third century B.C.)

The special rules and regulations that were in place for scribes made it impossible to alter or change even one letter of the bible.

Fifth... God keeping His word unaltered.

Our faith confirms to us that God would not allow His word to be altered, falsified or changed, as He promised.

- *“For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” (Matt 5:18)*
- *“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” (Rev 22: 18 - 19)*

- ***“Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.” (Deut 12: 32)***
- ***“And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one title of the law to fail.” (Luke 16: 17)***

How can we believe the Bible stories when they clearly contradict Paleontology/Archaeology, Natural History and the Sciences?

Lately, Paleontology has been testifying to the accuracy of events of the Bible and confirming the existence of tens of the sites, cultures and nations mentioned in the Old Testament, as well as many recorded historical events.

For example ...

- Many thought that the story of Sodom and Gomorrah was just a legend retold from one generation to another but recent archaeological digs near the Dead Sea and at the Mount of Tell Mardikh confirm the story. Ruins of a road with a high level of sulphur have been found under layers in that area.

- The names of many of the kings are found engraved in stone tablets e.g. Cyrus, Nebuchadnezzar and others.
- Paleontological digs have confirmed that Jericho, which was destroyed by Joshua and the Israelites, (Joshua 6) existed at around 1400 B.C. – the time of Joshua – and that it was destroyed around the time of harvest (Joshua 2) and that its siege did not last for a long time (Joshua 6:18), and its walls were totally burned down (Joshua 6:24). All this has been confirmed by modern Sciences and is in complete accordance with the Biblical account of the Book of Joshua.

How can we calculate the age of mankind if according to the Old Testament man has been around for 5000 years B.C, whereas Science confirms that man has been on earth for longer than 10.000 years?

Calculations from Genesis 5 & 10 and Chronicles could show that man has been around for utmost 4000-5000 years. However, there is another important fact, namely that the Bible does not mention all the characters and all their ages and that there are gaps in history that are not mentioned in the Books.

For example ...

In Matt 1: 8, the genealogy mentions that “*Joram begot Uzziah*” whereas if we refer to (1 Chronicles 3:

11 – 14) we find that there are three generations that have been dropped from this genealogy ...

Joram his son, Ahaziah his son, Joash his son, Amaziah his son, Azariah his son, Jotham his son, Ahaz his son, Hezekiah his son, Manasseh his son, Amon his son, and Josiah his son.

<i>1 CHRONICLES 3</i>	<i>MATTHEW</i>
<i>JORAM</i>	<i>JORAM</i>
<i>AHAZIAH</i>	
<i>JOASH</i>	
<i>AMAZIAH</i>	
<i>AZARIAH (UZZIAH)</i>	<i>UZZIAH</i>

Another example is the genealogy of Christ in Luke 3: 36 *“the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lantech”* ... but referring back to Genesis 10: 24 we do not find the name of Cainan *“Arphaxad begot Salah, and Salah begot Eber.”*

We therefore do not use those genealogies as an absolute method for calculating all the ages and names. It merely mentions the known or relevant names. We therefore cannot just add up their ages to calculate the age of mankind.

**How could we believe that at one time
in history, men lived to the age of
900+?!!**

We are told in Genesis that Adam lived till the age of 930, Methuselah lived till 969. This seemed to have been the norm in those days. The Bible then informs us that the age of man was reduced to 70 or 80 years.

“The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.” (Psalm 90: 10)

This psalm was written by Moses (1400 B.C.) who lived till 120. Abraham also lived till 175. So we see that the reduced ages applied to the later generations in the Old Testament.

Some tried to explain this ‘discrepancy’ by claiming that the age of man in the old days was

calculated in months and not years; thus 900 months would not exceed 80 years, but this does not agree with the language of the Old Testament. Besides, this notion would contradict what is mentioned before: ***“Cainan lived seventy years, and begot Mahalalel”*** (Gen 5:12) or ***“Mahalalel lived sixty-five years, and begot Jared.”*** (Gen 5:15). For if we calculate this in accordance to months, it would mean that his age didn’t exceed six years, which would make his having children next to impossible.

Others claim that maybe those ages refer to a whole family before their extinction, which does not coincide with the language of the Old Testament, as we do not know that any families were totally extinct.

However, it can be noted that the age of man was reduced significantly after the flood...

This may be due to environmental changes and weather conditions in addition to the fact that Man was then onwards allowed to eat meat.

- Noah lived for 950 years ***“So all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died.”*** (Gen 9:29)

- Ages were reduced to 600 years ***“This is the genealogy of Shem: Shem was one hundred years old, and begot Arphaxad two years after the flood. After he begot Arphaxad, Shem lived five hundred years, and begot sons and daughters.”*** (Gen 11:10 -11)
- Further reduction to 400 years ***“Salah lived thirty years, and begot Eber. After he begot Eber, Salah lived four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters.”*** (Gen 11: 14 -15)
- Another reduction to 200 years ***“Reu lived thirty-two years, and begot Serug. After he begot Serug, Reu lived two hundred and seven years, and begot sons and daughters.”*** (Gen 11: 20 - 21)

History confirms that in the ancient civilizations many of the ancient Egyptians and Greeks lived for hundreds of years.

How could Noah's ark hold the 100s of animals and dinosaurs that it claims, if this story is real?!!

First:

the Genesis account mentions ‘species’ rather than ‘types’ of animals and any one species has many different types of animals.

Of the birds after their kind, of animals after their kind, and of every creeping thing of the earth after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive. (Gen 6:20)

Second:

Most of the living creatures can live in water or remain in the egg form, which would hatch much later on.

Third:

The measurements of the ark, mentioned in Genesis, are those of a very large vessel, similar to a floating city with three levels (Genesis 6:15 - 16) with a total area of 1,500,000 cubic feet.

Fourth:

It makes sense to expect that some animals entered the ark while still very young and small and got bigger during their stay in the ark until they were released afterwards.

Fifth:

Scientifically, most dinosaurs are small in size, contrary to their size as portrayed in movies. Many of them were even able to swim. The flood dates back to around 2500 B.C. and maybe later. There is no documentation of dinosaurs beyond that time.

**How can we understand God's
dealings with Man when He passes
judgment of destroying nations while
He is said to be 'The Lover of ankind'?
Like His judgment over the firstborns
of the Egyptians (Ex 12: 29 - 30)
Wasn't Pharaoh alone responsible for
this stubbornness and rebellion?!!**

It is wrong to assume that the Egyptians had no role to play in the long saga of the children of Israel and what went on between Pharaoh and Moses. We read:

A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds—a great deal of livestock. (Ex 12: 38)

The word “*multitude*” refers to the Egyptians who took the side of the Israelites, believing in their God after seeing the plagues. Those Egyptians did not lose their firstborn. The one and only guarantee for salvation from death was the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts ... so even if this was a house for Egyptians who believed in God and put that sign of blood, they were saved.

However, the majority of the Egyptians did not pursue their salvation and that of their children in spite of the obvious unyielding severity of Pharaoh while they should have rebelled against him, or at least made all effort to oblige him to let the Hebrews get out of Egypt before they got to the tenth plague, namely that of killing the firstborn. This tenth plague came as a final judgment as a result to Pharaoh’s cruelty and it was passed on all Egyptians as a result for their passive attitude and their surrender to Pharaoh’s stubbornness despite their having experienced all the previous plagues.

God’s justice demands judgment ... for in His mercy He allows people time to repent and believe ... but there must be a time when the end comes.

- In the Old Testament, judgment came in the form of the flood, fire and sulphur (Sodom and Gomorrah), annihilation in wars, or plagues. Those are all different pictures of the same truth, namely the Judgment of the wicked.

And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. (Rev 2: 21)

- In the New Testament we see that the same rule applies (God's justice and mercy)...

I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. (Luke 13: 5)

“Perishing”, in this context, is that which will occur on the Last Day, when Judgment will take place.

How can one bear sufferings and trials Without doubting the love of God?!!

Some of us ... when we experience pain ... expect God to interfere instantly. And if we don't get this God's interference, in the form of an instant solution to the problem or quick healing, we begin to doubt: Does God exist? Does He love me? Can He feel my pain? Is He punishing me for my many sins?!!!

In order to bear trials and tribulations without falling into such doubts, we need to do the following:

First... Contemplate and Focus on the Cross of Christ

- *For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (Heb 2:18)*

- *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit. (1 Peter 3:18)*
- *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Ro 5: 8)*

The Suffering Christ supports all those who are suffering ... And in case they could not get an answer to the question ‘**Why?**’ they will surely get a **healing answer** to the question: ‘**How can I bear it?**’

Second... Revisit the Promises of God

- *These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.’ (John 16: 33)*
- *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (Matt 5:4)*
- *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Ro 8:18)*

- *In all their affliction He was afflicted,
And the Angel of His Presence saved them;
In His love and in His pity He redeemed them;
And He bore them and carried them
All the days of old. (Isa 63: 9)*

Those and other promises establish and strengthen our faith and act as painkillers. In fact, they allow believers to smile and to be full of joy in the middle of the trials and tribulations.

Third... Reflect on the Suffering of Others

Who of the Fathers, Prophets and Saints did not experience pain?!!!

Actually, some have been martyred in their pains ... others suffered the loss of loved ones ... but most of them were exposed to lots of illnesses and unlimited afflictions.

- *Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. (Psalm 34:19)*
- *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:10)*

- *But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." (1 Peter 3:14)*
- *These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Rev 7:14)*

Fourth... Consider it 'Pure Joy'

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." (James 1: 2-5)

Considering trials as a test for patience lifts one up and raises him/her to a higher status, leads one through the narrow gate of troubles to Eternal Life and Heavenly Crowns;

By your patience possess your souls. (Luke 21:19).

The one in trials needs to pray and pray and pray ... until his pains are transformed – not into doubt, objection and grumbling – but into strong Faith, Thanksgiving and Surrender to God’s Holy Will....

That indeed is the work of Prayer...

Fifth... Repentance and Spiritual Growth

Afflictions and pain destroy or at least suspend a person’s earthly aspirations and/or greed. However, they push him towards a different kind of spiritual dreams and ambitions, namely earning lots of virtues like the purity of heart and the fellowship of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Repentance is the one and only door to this change in direction. Trials give us a chance to re-examine the self, to surrender and be humble which causes one to gain a lot of Grace.

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. (1 Peter 5: 6 - 7)

Trials are a school for Wisdom, Calmness, Hope and Patience.

Sixth... Partake of the Holy Sacraments

The altar is a place of comfort for those under trial; we see its place in the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It continues to keep its special place for all those who are strangers to this 'world' and who are seeking their Heavenly Abode and Heavenly Food. Continuous partaking of Holy Communion liberates from sadness, pain and doubt and grants Comfort, Strength and Discipleship to the father of Confession. By continuously exposing one's heart to be liberated from thoughts of despair, grumbling and jealousy causes the blessing of inner healing and True Victory over all trials.

