

GOD IS A WOMAN

How God Uses This World To Entertain Herself

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God Is A Woman

How God Uses This World
To Entertain Herself

First Edition

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The facts don't depend on your beliefs.

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Preface

We live in a virtual reality created by an advanced humanoid civilisation to entertain one of its members, whom we might call God. But who is God? Just as you can have an avatar in a virtual world, God can play a role as an ordinary person over here. Several people who have had a profound impact on history were God in disguise.

Jesus knew God personally. According to the scriptures, he called God his Father, making him the Son of God. So, is the God of Jesus the same as Yahweh, the God of Abraham, that the Jews have imagined? Today, half the world believes that Yahweh, also known as the Father or Allah, is the all-powerful owner of this universe.

So far, this deity has been the veil behind which God hides. Jesus is not only the Son of God, but also the Bridegroom. Mary Magdalene made Jesus believe that She was Eve reincarnated, while he was Adam reincarnated, and that Eve did not come from Adam's rib, but that Adam was Eve's son. Adam and, therefore, Jesus were the Son of God.

God being a woman who married Jesus was alien to religious Jews. Others had no problem with that fact, so this confusion or controversy tore the early church apart. Early Christians resolved the issue by making the Christian God male, like Yahweh, and removing the evidence of Jesus' marriage to God.

God also married Muhammad, but he didn't know. The Jewish Bible is a collection of myths and accounts of events. The Song of Deborah is one of the oldest parts of the Jewish Bible. Deborah brought victory to a Jewish tribe and attributed it to Yahweh. In this way, Deborah founded the Jewish nation. She was God in disguise.

Historical reconstruction is an error-prone endeavour. This research involved reading books and Wikipedia pages to get a general picture of biblical history. Later on, I followed the subreddits [r/AcademicBiblical](#), [r/AskBibleScholars](#) and [r/AskTheologists](#). The discussions there helped me reduce the number of faults.

I could have used words like perhaps, might, could, and may more often, but that would have made the text bland. The text contains speculation, but it is all plausible, and the main argument holds firm. We exist as an amusement, and God made a joke out of us and our faiths. And so, we shouldn't take ourselves and our beliefs seriously.

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Contents

Preface.....	4
Contents.....	5
On the Origin of Religions.....	8
The Virtual Universe.....	12
Imagined Gods versus One True Faith.....	15
Religious Experiences and Miracles.....	18
Building a Nation with Religion.....	21
Israel emerging.....	21
Writing the Bible.....	23
Creating a nation.....	24
Historical analysis.....	24
Textual analysis.....	25
A closer look at Genesis 26.....	26
Theories from scholars.....	28
From Jesus to Christianity.....	29
Did Jesus exist at all?.....	29
What can we know?.....	29
Explaining the differences.....	32
As time passed by.....	33
The mystery remains.....	35
The Identity of God.....	38
Who was Mary Magdalene?.....	43
Genesis from Where?.....	46
Creation of the world.....	46
Men and women.....	46
The Great Flood.....	47
The Greek version.....	48
Mother Goddess Eve.....	50
Virgin Mary.....	56
Mother Goddess Mary.....	56
And Jesus became a carpenter.....	57
Mary as the New Eve.....	59
Cloak and dagger.....	59
Statue storm.....	60
The Last Adam.....	62
Sarah, Mother of the Jews.....	64
Weaving one tale inside another.....	64
Hiding it behind human motivations.....	65
Sarah and Abraham.....	65
Asenath and Joseph.....	66
Zipporah and Moses.....	67
Bathsheba and David.....	68
Deborah, the founder of the Jewish nation.....	68
Khadijah, Mother of the Believers.....	70

Bride of Muhammad.....	70
Quran origins.....	70
The Hidden Secret.....	72
Virgin birth.....	73
The New Eden.....	74
Born of God.....	76
God is Love.....	78
The Religion of Love.....	78
Patriarchy returning.....	80
Sacrifice for love.....	82
How Jesus Became God.....	84
Religion in the time of Jesus.....	84
Intentional obscurity.....	85
Clouding our understanding.....	85
Firstborn of all Creation.....	86
Jesus as God.....	87
The road to Trinity.....	87
Logical issues leading to an arcane theology.....	89
The Religion Paul Invented.....	90
Paul's reasoning.....	90
Lamb of God.....	91
Defining the faith.....	93
Spreading the good news.....	95
Contending versions of Christianity.....	96
The Gospel of John.....	98
Strikingly different.....	98
Platonic birth.....	99
The wedding.....	100
I and the Father are one.....	100
The Beloved Disciple.....	102
The validity of the Gospel.....	105
Figuratively speaking.....	106
Satan and Judgement Day.....	108
History Is Her Story I.....	111
Meeting Chief Inspector Clouseau.....	111
Nefertiti.....	111
Cassandane.....	111
Olympias, mother of Alexander the Great.....	112
Queen Dowager Zhao.....	113
Cleopatra.....	114
Empress Theodora.....	115
Empress Wu Zetian.....	117
Maria, daughter of Harald III of Norway.....	118
Hildegard von Bingen.....	119
Joan of Arc.....	120
History Is Her Story II.....	121
Isabella I of Castile.....	121
Katharina von Bora.....	122
Elizabeth I.....	123
Françoise d'Aubigné.....	124
Joséphine de Beauharnais.....	124
Lucretia Garfield.....	125
Eurocentrism.....	126
When Jesus Returns.....	127

High expectations.....	127
Political views.....	129
Harsh questions.....	130
Drug abuse.....	131
Eva Braun.....	132
The prophecy of the Holocaust.....	133
That ugly face in the mirror.....	134
The way forward.....	134
The End Is Near.....	136
Pop music, the unexpected medium.....	136
Hotel California.....	138
From Almelo via Enschede to Eurovision.....	138
The Great Escape.....	139
Slippery slope.....	141
My Guide Plausibility.....	144
Notes.....	145

On the Origin of Religions

We, humans, rule the Earth. We collaborate flexibly in large numbers. Social animals, such as monkeys and dolphins, work together flexibly but only in small groups. Ants and bees cooperate in large numbers but only in fixed ways. Language enables our large-scale, flexible collaboration. Some animals use signs and calls or give each other names, but we use far more words.¹ That allows us to cooperate in more ways and for a broader range of purposes. Language allows us to make and communicate agreements. And we can describe things in detail. We can write, 'Please read these safety instructions carefully before using model T92.' Then follow many pages of instructions. Butterflies don't observe a written list of safety instructions before leaving their cocoons like NASA does when launching a spacecraft. That is why butterflies have never landed on the Moon.

We are also imaginative creatures. We imagine things into existence. We envision laws, money, property, corporations, social classes and states. We imagine that there is a law, and that is how the law works. In other words, we envision the law, and lo and behold, it exists. The same is true for money and corporations. We humans say, 'Let there be corporations.' And lo and behold, there are corporations. Only humans do that. No other species envisions money and corporations. I can't give a dog a debit card to go to the supermarket to buy dog food. A dog lacks the imagination for that. A dog can't think of money, laws and corporations. And so, you can't make dogs work together in a corporation to produce dog food by paying them money. Our fancifulness existed long before civilisations emerged. Archaeologists uncovered a 32,000-year-old sculpture of a lion's head upon a human body. These lion-men only existed in the imagination of humans.

And we are religious creatures. We cooperate using myths. People of the same religion can go on a holy war together. Faith can also motivate people to engage in charitable work and provide for the poor. Religions promote social stability by justifying the social order and promising rewards in the afterlife for those who support it. As societies grew more stratified, the elites, such as kings and priests, tried to justify their existence and lavish lifestyles, and why peasants had to toil. And so, creation myths emerged, explaining that the gods created humans to work the ground. Established religions were often schemes to exploit peasants. You can't let a dog submit to you by saying obedient hounds will go to heaven and enjoy everlasting bliss after they die, and unruly canines will be fried forever in a tormenting fire. A dog lacks the imagination to even think of it, let alone believe it. We have a religious nature. We make up stories and believe in them. We are social beings and need a group to survive. Beliefs hold groups of humans together, so it is a matter of survival to believe in our own imagination.

Small bands of people cooperate because their members know each other and see what everyone contributes. In larger groups, that becomes more difficult as people can cheat. That is where states, money, and religions come in. They facilitate collaboration between strangers, allowing us to operate on a larger scale. States do so by coercion, money by trade, and faith by inspiration. As there has always been a survival-of-the-fittest-like competition between societies, those who cooperated most effectively survived and subjugated others. Religions forge bonds and help maintain peace within a group, or

inspire group members to go to war. Religions played a crucial role in the survival of humans. If believing means surviving, it is rational to have faith, regardless of how curious the belief may be. It is in our nature to be religious, and usefulness rather than correctness is the essence of religion. And so, it is better to view a religion not as a set of lies, but as something people agree on to believe in, which helps them to cooperate and survive.

We make up stories and believe them. Hollywood films featured reptiles disguised as humans. Since then, some people have claimed that reptiles live among us disguised as humans. You can see how we can go collectively crazy in this way. When we retell stories, they change. We forget parts of a tale, add new elements or alter their meaning. And so beliefs and religions evolve. The evolution of religions has been a process in which ideas emerged and interacted. Early humans were hunter-gatherers who believed that places, animals, and plants possessed awareness, feelings, and emotions. They asked them for favours, like 'Please, river, give me some fish.' Hunter-gatherers felt they were more or less on an equal footing with the plants and animals around them.¹ *Animism* is the name for these beliefs. These beliefs were local and concerned visible objects like a tree or a mountain. Over time, people began to imagine invisible entities like fairies and spirits. A crucial step in the development of religions was *ancestor veneration*.

The first humans lived in small bands based on family ties. Their ancestors bound them together. And so, they began to venerate the dead. It was a small step to imagine that the spirits of the dead are still with us and that our actions require the approval of our late ancestors. Ancestor veneration made it possible to envision a larger-scale relatedness in the form of tribes. A tribe is much larger than a band. The belief that its members share common ancestors holds a tribe together. Tribes are too large to identify their common ancestors, so tribespeople imagined their ancestors, and the stories about them are myths. The Romans started as a tribe. They had a myth about their founders, Romulus and Remus. As the tale goes, a she-wolf raised them. Tribes are much larger and can muster more men for war. That is why tribes replaced bands. It helps when people attribute magical powers to their ancestors and fear the consequences of angering them. In this way, ancestor veneration turned into the worship of gods. The previous beliefs didn't disappear completely. Many people still believe in ghosts.

Hunter-gatherers can move on in the event of conflict, but farmers invest heavily in their fields, crops, and livestock. Losing their land, animals, or harvest meant starvation. With the arrival of agriculture, property and territorial defence became paramount. States defend their territory and can afford larger militaries. Kinship is an obstacle as states enlist the people within their realm, regardless of family ties. States thus needed a new source of authority, and the worship of gods replaced ancestor veneration. When humans subjugated plants and animals for their use, they needed to justify this new arrangement. Myths emerged in which the gods created this world and ordained that humans rule the plants and animals. In Genesis, God says, 'Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.' (Genesis 1:28) Most of the world's major religions originated in agricultural societies.

Religions emerged from ancestor worship. And so, gods could be like mothers and fathers. People gave devotion to several ancestors. Each ancestor had a specific admirable quality. Consequently, early religions featured multiple gods and goddesses, each with a distinct role. That is called *polytheism*, which is the belief in several gods. Henotheist religions emerged later when people became emotionally attached to one particular deity.

Henotheism is the belief that multiple gods exist, but that we should worship only one of them. Even polytheists can believe there is a supreme being or principle. However, that supreme being is indifferent to our concerns, so it doesn't make sense to direct prayers to it in the hope of receiving help. The gods, being on a lower level, have desires, so we can befriend them by making offerings, polytheists believed.¹

The next step is *monotheism*, or believing there is only one God. Monotheists believe that there is only one God who rules the universe. Monotheistic religions were successful because monotheists, most notably Christians and Muslims, have missionary zeal. They believe that God craves our worship. Converting others is an act of mercy, as unbelievers will end up in hell. The worship of other deities is an offence to monotheists. After all, it contradicts their belief that there is only one God worthy of adoration. Failing to take action against the unbelievers could anger God. Polytheists are less likely to feel offended when some choose to worship just one of the many deities or invent a new one.

In the first centuries AD, Christianity replaced the worship of local deities. To help pagans accept Christianity, the Church replaced these deities with saints, who often had the same purpose, and took over existing holidays. Each saint had specific qualities, just like the previous deity. In Ireland, St. Brigid of Kildare replaced a Celtic goddess with the same name. Both occupy themselves with healing, poetry, and smithcraft, and their feast day, 1 February, is the same. And so, polytheism didn't disappear entirely as Christians continued to pray to saints. The Church also took over the Roman holiday commemorating the winter solstice, which was on 25 December. It turned pagan rites to celebrate the rebirth of the Sun into a Christian feast commemorating the birth of Christ.

Monotheism comes with a few logical difficulties. We hope that God cares for us and answers our prayers. However, prayers often remain unanswered, and bad things are happening. So, how can an almighty Creator allow this to happen? The obvious answer is that there is no god, or God doesn't care. That is not what we want to hear. And so people imagined Satan, God's evil adversary, who makes all these bad things happen.¹ And we hope that the people we hate receive punishment, if not now, then in the afterlife or a final reckoning on Judgement Day. Religions cater for our sentiments, a psychologist might say.

A religion need not be about gods. There are godless religions or moral philosophies. The most well-known are Confucianism and Buddhism. Confucianists and Buddhists may believe in gods, but their religions don't centre on them. They may think that the gods don't interfere with our lives, or they may worship them on the side. A Buddhist may bring offerings to a deity as well. What moral philosophies and religions have in common is that they tell us how to live. The sage Gautama Buddha claimed that craving makes us discontent and causes our suffering. Fulfilling our desires doesn't help, as new desires will replace them, and the suffering continues. The solution is not to have desires. Confucianism centres around family and good manners. It teaches respect for parents and elders, and social harmony through virtues like benevolence, propriety, and righteousness. It values loyalty, reciprocity, and the importance of education.

In modern times, Europeans developed ideologies, such as liberalism, socialism, and fascism, which, like moral philosophies, describe how we should live. These ideologies are much like religions. They have prophets, holy books, missionary zeal, and preachers. The prophets of communism were Marx and Lenin. They had theologians who explained their writings. The communists had public holidays, such as 1 May, and heresies like

Trotskyism. The Soviet army units had chaplains to oversee the faithfulness of the troops, although the Soviets named them as people's commissars. The communists further expected an end time, the proletarian revolution, after which they would enter Paradise, world communism. A fanatic missionary zeal further characterised Soviet communism.¹ The foundations of the ideologies of liberalism and socialism are the Christian values of freedom and equality. Fascism developed from nationalism, and the struggle for survival in nature inspired Nazism, which helped to make it especially cruel.

After the Middle Ages, educated Europeans began to doubt Christianity. The contradictions in the Scriptures began to attract attention. And then came the party pooper, Charles Darwin, who wrote *On The Origin Of Species*. Plant and animal species are the outcome of a struggle for survival. Despite the frantic efforts of religious people to fiddle with the facts, the evidence continued to mount. Religions exist because we invent stories to promote cooperation, and that contributes to our success, not because there is an invisible fellow in the sky. But human imagination reigns supreme. We may soon have the technology to become gods and create virtual reality universes for personal entertainment. That already happened. We live in a universe created by an advanced humanoid civilisation to entertain someone we call God.

The Virtual Universe

Some religions claim that God or gods have created this world. In the Bible, God created everything by saying, 'Be.' That God uttered 'Be' and poof, there are bees, is not a particularly compelling explanation for the existence of bees. So, how could the gods have the magical powers to do that? Until recently, we had no clue, but then Nick Bostrom, known for his dry and incomprehensible employment of words, delivered us the simulation hypothesis, the most profound breakthrough in theology in nearly 2,000 years. We might exist inside a computer simulation run by an advanced humanoid civilisation. Our creators can define a class bee and instruct the computer to create instances of this class. A class has properties, allowing individual instances to be unique.

And so, Genesis might be closer to the truth than the religion sceptics think. Bostrom didn't say whether or not that is indeed the case or how likely it is. He didn't speculate on that issue. Otherwise, his critics might have a field day, ridiculing him for opening a back door to the paranormal and religion. That could have been the end of his career. However, it is easy to find out if you venture into areas that scientists anxiously avoid, such as paranormal incidents, religious experiences, meaningful coincidences, people's memories of past lives, ghost phenomena, and UFO sightings.

Scientists dare not investigate these phenomena, as it could make them a laughing stock in front of their peers. That is groupthink and intellectual cowardice on a grandiose scale. On numerous occasions, multiple credible witnesses have observed events that science can't explain. Like nearly everyone else, scientists have been proficient at ignoring evidence that contradicts their beliefs, such as unscientific ravings about spirits relaying messages from the other side during seances. Bostrom speculated that this world might be a virtual reality, but didn't search for proof. As a philosopher, he had better things to do.

The book *The Virtual Universe* delves into the evidence. You can prove this universe is a virtual reality if you assume scientists have correctly established the laws of nature and that sciences like physics, chemistry and biology are correct. If events transpire that defy these laws of science, such as paranormal incidents, religious miracles, meaningful coincidences, memories of previous lives, ghost phenomena and UFO sightings, breaches in these laws occur. According to science, the Virgin Mary doing a miracle before a crowd of thousands, like in Fatima, is impossible. If science is correct, and it happens nonetheless, this world must be fake. The book 'The Virtual Universe' puts it like this:

1. We can't know that we live in a real universe when we do. Virtual reality can be realistic and come with authentic laws of reality.
2. This universe may have fake properties, but we can't notice that either because we don't know the properties of a genuine universe.
3. Breaching the laws of reality is unrealistic in any case. If it happens, we will have evidence that this universe is fake.

It follows from (1) and (2) that we can't use the universe's properties, reflected in the laws of nature, to determine whether or not this universe is real. Science can establish the laws

of physics or the properties of this universe, but science can't tell whether they are real or fake. However, if breaches occur, we have evidence suggesting this universe is bogus. The book *The Virtual Universe* investigates the evidence, which includes stories about paranormal incidents, religious experiences, meaningful coincidences, reincarnation stories, ghost phenomena, and UFO sightings, often with multiple credible witnesses. So yes, aliens can beam you up into their UFO because they are as fake as you are.

Advanced humanoids, often dubbed post-humans, likely share motivations with us because they evolved from humans, likely after some engineering, genetic, or otherwise. These advanced humanoids may run simulations of human civilisations for research or entertainment. Research applications could be about running what-if scenarios. Possible entertainment applications include games or dream worlds where someone's imagination comes true. These simulations may not be realistic in some aspects, as they reflect the rules of a game or someone's personal fantasies. In a simulation, you can let Jesus walk over water and make him think that faith alone suffices to do that.

Meaningful coincidences suggest predestination or the existence of a script. Small changes can derail events that would otherwise occur. Just imagine another sperm had won the race to Adolf Hitler's mother's egg. There were millions of sperm in that race. Guaranteeing an outcome, such as letting World War I end on a date referred to by the licence plate number of the car that drove Archduke Franz Ferdinand to his appointment with destiny, requires control over everything that happens. That doesn't apply to games. Unpredictable developments make games more interesting. Considering how we utilise computing power, mainly for games, sexy pictures and cat videos, the number of simulations for entertainment likely vastly outstrips those run for research purposes. If we live inside a simulation, we should expect its purpose to be entertainment.

The owner or owners may use avatars to play roles in this world and appear like ordinary human beings to us. If you are familiar with computer games, you are familiar with avatars. Once you enter a game, you become a character inside that game, your avatar, and you have an existence apart from your regular life. Inside the game, you are your avatar, not yourself. Alternatively, you could start a virtual world where you are the Creator and bring your dreams to life. In this world, you also become someone else.

That is a lot of assumptions, and without evidence, they remain speculation. Even when there is evidence, it doesn't necessarily mean the explanation is correct. Suppose you hear the noise of a car starting. That is the evidence. You may think there is an automobile starting. Perhaps a vehicle is firing up its engine. But your husband might be watching his favourite television series, *Starting Engines*, so you can't be sure. Nothing you know contradicts your assumption, but you could be wrong. So, is God an individual from an advanced humanoid civilisation who uses us for amusement? It is credible, and perhaps nothing contradicts it. But who is to say it is correct?

Now comes the disagreeable part. We are instances of the class human. When the beings in the simulation think for themselves, that raises ethical questions like whether they have rights that the creators should respect. Considering how humans treat each other, it is not a given that these rights would be respected even when our creators acknowledge them. In the real world, bad things happen to people. In the case of control, the beings inside the simulation don't think, but are mindless bots following the script. We have no independent will and are toys to our creators. God kills people at will, and a few million casualties more

don't matter. On the bright side, if God wants us to enter Paradise, where there is peace and happiness, nothing can stop that as well. Those who try will surely find themselves on the losing side. So, if the Boss makes a joke, you can better laugh. Perhaps it isn't easy. But don't worry. It took me fifteen years to look at the bright side of it.

Imagined Gods versus One True Faith

Throughout history, humans have imagined thousands of gods and goddesses. Among them were Zeus of the Greeks, Venus of the Romans, and Thor of the Vikings. And there were countless others. Originally, God was one of the gods from Canaan, so Israel and Palestine, one of the sons of the deities El and Asherah, named Yahweh, thus a minor figure barely above the level of an angry spirit. Apart from Yahweh, the Canaanites worshipped several other local deities. Yet, due to some remarkable course of events, billions of people now believe that this former local nuisance is the all-powerful owner of the universe. And by some other remarkable incident, the Levant, thus Canaan and the surrounding area, is the cradle of civilisation, the birthplace of the Agricultural Revolution. Jericho is thousands of years older than the pyramids and the Sumerian civilisation. So, forget about Mesopotamia, Egypt and China. Our story begins there.

Humans are religious creatures. We are social animals who cooperate in groups. Sharing beliefs helps us do that. If we all believe in the magical powers of the forest spirit, we can establish rituals, such as special dances, to bond the group members and agree on what we must do. And when we expect the protection of the forest spirit when we go to war, we fight more confidently and have a better chance of winning. If your belief is strong enough, you may be able to overcome adversity and persevere. Whether there is a forest spirit or not doesn't matter. If the belief in the forest spirit helps the faithful survive, it is beneficial in the struggle for survival. It is survival of the fittest rather than survival of the most accurate. The religions we have now have been the fittest in the past.

There is, however, a piece of historical evidence that atheists prefer to ignore, perhaps because they consider it irrelevant even though it is not. Somehow, the worship of the Jewish deity in all its forms survived and grew, so by now, nearly half the people believe that Yahweh, also known as The Father or Allah, is the only true God who rules our world. No one worships Thor anymore, except a few eccentrics who think that choosing a religion is like going to a supermarket and picking a faith you like. You almost hear them think, 'Look how special I am. I worship Thor.' A coward like Blaise Pascal, the world-famous guy who invented Pascal's Wager, would never take up that bet. It is unlikely that Thor exists. And if he does, he must be weaker than the Christian God.

Otherwise, Thor could have prevented the Christian God from taking over his turf. Or better yet, Thor could have expanded his franchise into new regions by sending priests to convert the infidels. Pascal's Wager is that the risk of not believing in God is eternal damnation instead of eternal bliss, while the risk of believing in God is merely wasting time in church and having no spectacular sex life, without getting a reward for that discomfort. It is thus rational to believe in God and act accordingly because the sacrifice is small compared to the possible gain. That makes Satan worshippers appear silly. You almost hear them think, 'Look how naughty I am. I risk eternal damnation by worshipping Satan.'

But then again, I gradually came to think there is no evidence for the existence of God and that the morality of religious people is not better or worse than that of non-believers. Even worse, people betting on God by believing something that makes no sense, only to get a

reward in the afterlife, are morally corrupt. And if insincerity would get you in heaven, I preferred to burn in hell with the sincere. That was indeed a careless thought. I didn't believe that God existed, but if He did, He would not appreciate those grovelling worms who merely hoped to cash in their reward. At the time, I still thought of God as a He. Things took an unexpected turn later on, so the latter part of my thought might be correct. In hindsight, I had severely underestimated the risks associated with inverting Pascal's Wager. Like Blaise Pascal, I am not a hero. If I had thought that believing something nonsensical could protect me from harm, I would have had faith.

To appreciate the long-term historical trend, you can go back 2,500 years, when the insignificant nation of Israel began to develop visions of grandeur and imagined that all the nations would receive blessings through Israel and its special relationship with that local nuisance called Yahweh. Nothing of that kind appeared to be in the making for over 500 years. But then came Paul, who turned the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, who might otherwise have remained an obscure prophet claiming to be the Son of God, into a religion with universal appeal. Everyone could join and receive salvation, and who doesn't want that? A suspicious mind might wonder why this unusual religion sprouted from Judaism and has gained over two billion followers 2,000 years later. But then again, God has advised us not to ask too many questions, while Christians think they already know the answer. And thanks to Muhammad, the worship of Israel's God spread even further.

That wrathful cloud that allegedly led the Israelites out of Egypt, which then went into hiding for over 1,000 years to supposedly father Jesus, then 600 years later sent an angel to whisper messages in Muhammad's ear, then waited for another 900 years to give us Martin Luther and even more confusion, and then left us in suspense for another 500 years so that we could develop computers and invent the simulation argument to find out that we live inside a virtual reality and merely exist as amusement, has been the veil behind which the owner of this universe is hiding. Perhaps you are unconvinced, but even if you believe in the theory of evolution and the survival of the fittest, you must admit that of all those imagined deities, this one has won the competition by a wide margin. Who knows what the future brings, but if we look at the past, there can be only One, or perhaps none. There are a few atheists who think they are smart, so when someone says 'God', they ask, 'Which one?' But that is a silly question.

Looking at the trail of confusion, you could also have realised your beliefs were incorrect. Christianity has 45,000 branches, all claiming to be the one true faith. Only they will go to heaven. You might call it Pascal's Nightmare. You are fuel for Satan's furnaces forever unless one of those 45,000 is correct, and you happen to have that belief. Place your bets, ladies and gentlemen. Rien ne va plus! Islam is a bit more inclusive and promises that faithful Jews and Christians can join the party in heaven. And the Jews believe they are the chosen people. Israel's history was one of setbacks, but Israel survived while nearly all the other nations disappeared. Israel had little military power, so the Israelites clung to hope. One day, a Messiah will come, liberate Israel, destroy its enemies, and restore its glory, which it is said it once had when David and Solomon were kings. Jesus was not good enough. He didn't rout the Romans. And so, they kept on waiting.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share an apocalyptic worldview featuring a final battle between good and evil in the Holy Land. Many Christians, adherents of the Religion of Love, support Zionism to make that happen, including the murder and displacement of Palestinians. That infuriates Muslims, followers of the Religion of Peace. They hardly care

how many Muslims are slain by other Muslims. To them, the suffering of the Palestinian people at the hands of the Jews is worse than any atrocity in the history of humankind, including the Crusades.

The Book of Revelation raves about 144,000 Jews protected from divine judgment who would convert the other Jews to Christianity and save them. It all has to happen in the Holy Land in the End Times, the Christian Zionists think, so the Jews must move back to Israel and kick out the Palestinians. Some religious Jews would like to blow up the mosque on the Temple Mount and replace it with a proper house of prayer. Perhaps that will kick off the End Times, they imagine.

So what about that final battle between good and evil? John's utterings reveal a precise location and suggest it will materialise at a place named Armageddon near the border between Israel and the West Bank, where the armies of the world will gather. Depending on which side you are on and the mushrooms you have consumed, you may see those forces gathering. There have been wars since time immemorial in the area, but since the inception of the state of Israel, the number and intensity of wars in the Holy Land have significantly increased. But why would it be now? If you are neutral, sober or not religious, you may see a bunch of religious crazies fighting for a small patch of land that is not particularly worthwhile. Is this the End Time? Only God knows.

Religious Experiences and Miracles

The Jewish people still exist after 2,500 years, while they have not had a homeland for most of the time. That is a remarkable feat. Then Christianity replaced the existing religions in the Roman Empire in one of history's strangest twists. Somehow, the message of personal salvation through Christ caught on. In the third century, Manichaeism emerged as a new religion. It taught that there was a struggle between the good spiritual world of light and the evil material world of darkness. The prophet Mani, who grew up in a Jewish-Christian Gnostic sect, claimed to have received revelations meant for the entire world, which were to replace all existing religions. It instantly became a spectacular success, spread everywhere in the known world, and could have overtaken Christianity, but it didn't. A pivotal, and possibly decisive, moment was the conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity in 312 AD. He made Christianity the favoured religion in the Roman Empire.

A few centuries later, a small band of Arab warriors established an empire that stretched from the Atlantic to India, spreading the new religion of Islam, in an even stranger and more rapid historical development. Is it a realistic scenario that the supposedly illiterate camel driver Muhammad became a crafty statesman after seeing an angel telling him he came to deliver messages from the God of the Christians and the Jews? After Muhammad's death, his followers went on to defeat the Byzantine and Persian empires. At the same time, Manichaeism made a one-way trip into the dustbin of history, while in the third century, it appeared to be on the verge of becoming the world's leading religion. So, why did Mani fail and why did Muhammad succeed? Historians can explain it, but it is an account of what happened rather than an explanation. The question remains, could it occur without someone pulling the strings?

So much can happen, and what happens now has once been extremely improbable. Your reading this text here and now seems highly unlikely a few decades ago. Think of all the things you could have done instead. Or you could have been dead. Yet, you wouldn't consider your reading this text a miracle. Proselytising religions like Christianity and Islam have a built-in inclination to grow. That may not be the ultimate answer. Jews, Christians, and Muslims worship the same deity. Our universe could be a simulation, and someone could have planned it. But who is to say it couldn't have happened otherwise?

When Islam arrived on the scene, Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians in the area already believed in an all-powerful creator. Muhammad had met them on his travels, so he was familiar with these religions. Before that, Christianity had faced an uphill struggle. While the Roman state suppressed this religion, pagans left their gods behind and accepted the Christian God as the only true God. And they did so in large numbers.

That begs for an explanation, even though the conversion of Romans to Christianity was a gradual process that took centuries. The Romans occasionally half-heartedly persecuted Christians and executed a few thousand of them over the centuries, not for being a Christian but for not paying their respects to the Roman gods. Despite that, the number of Christians increased 2-3% per year between 30 AD and 400 AD. Each Christian may have

converted just one or two persons on average. Over time, exponential growth enabled Christianity to grow from about 100 followers in 30 AD to 30 million by 400 AD.

Such a gradual and steady growth over centuries was somewhat unique for a religion, and so was the blitz conquest of Islam later on. Most people in the Roman Empire, and everywhere else for that matter, lived miserable lives. The promise of an eternal blissful afterlife may have been too tempting for those poor, wretched souls to resist. However, the most often cited reason for conversions was stories about the miracles Christians performed.² Only in the Middle Ages did the sword become the most compelling Christian argument as Christianity spread further and became integral to European politics. That was not the case in the Roman Empire, so miracles and stories about them were crucial.

An early miracle was Jesus' appearance to a few followers after his crucifixion. The New Testament mentions miracles that the disciples allegedly performed. These accounts may be exaggerated, but the theme of miracles remains a consistent one in Christianity to this day. The Roman Catholic Church has a rich folklore surrounding relics that are believed to possess magical properties because they are said to have been touched by Jesus. The most famous relics are the Crown of Thorns in Paris, the mysterious Holy Grail, the chalice from which Jesus is said to have drunk, and the Shroud of Turin, a piece of linen cloth with a supposed image of Jesus' face.

Many of the miracles attributed to these relics are unverifiable or can have other causes, such as luck, but a few cannot be easily explained away. The Roman Catholic Church keeps a record of them. On message boards, people tell stories about prayers heard and miraculous healings. Many of these stories may result from chance or other causes, such as a misdiagnosis or someone seeking attention by lying, but that is not always the case.

A recurring theme is the appearance of the Virgin Mary and other miracles related to her. Thousands of people have seen her. She appeared several times in Venezuela. She revealed herself to Maria Esperanza Medrano de Bianchini in 1976, who received exceptional powers. She could tell the future, levitate, and heal the sick. In Egypt, Mary appeared at a Coptic Church between 1983 and 1986. Muslims have also seen her there. There have been many more Virgin Mary appearances. The most notable sequence occurred in Portugal at Fatima between 13 May and 13 October 1917.

The grand finale was on 13 October 1917, when the Sun reportedly spun wildly and tumbled down to Earth, radiating in indescribably beautiful colours, before stopping and returning to its normal position. Some 40,000 attendants witnessed Mary's performance. They had gathered because three shepherd children had prophesied that the Virgin Mary would perform a miracle on that date and location. Faking this was hard to do, considering the technology available in 1917. A lack of holographic equipment would have made the effort challenging, not to mention changing the location of the Sun, which is a large ball many times larger than Earth, thus making it difficult to move around. And somehow, the Sun only moved in Fatima, which can only happen in virtual reality.

Jesus also appeared a few times, but less frequently than the Virgin Mary. An intriguing account comes from Kenneth Logie, a preacher of the Pentecostal Holiness Church in Oakland, California, in the 1950s. In April 1954, Logie was preaching at an evening service. During the sermon, the church door opened. Jesus came walking in, smiling to the left and the right. He walked right through the pulpit. Then he placed his hand on Logie's

shoulder. Jesus spoke to him in a foreign tongue. Fifty people witnessed the event. Five years later, a woman in that same church suddenly disappeared. Jesus took her place. He wore sandals and a shiny white robe. He had nail marks on his hands, which were dripping with oil. After several minutes, Jesus disappeared, and the woman reappeared. Two hundred people have seen it. It was on film as Logie had installed film equipment, because strange things were happening.³ Such events can convince people that the message of Christianity, even though it may seem highly peculiar, is correct, as Zeus and Thor failed to show up and perform some tricks.

Mary and Christ are part of a folklore where genuine experiences mix with mental cases seeking attention or con artists profiting at the public's expense. Usually, there are no 40,000 witnesses, verifiable evidence, or camera footage of what occurred. The Vatican is troubled by the self-proclaimed seers, fortune tellers, prophets, and messengers who believe they have a special bond with the Virgin Mary or have weeping Madonna statues, which they may or may not have prepared to weep. These people could be delusional, crave attention or, like the televangelists in the United States, be after your money. That is not always the case. If you have a religious experience, don't suffer from mental conditions impairing your judgment, and can't think of naturalist explanations, you should believe what you see. To quote Shakespeare's Hamlet, 'There are more things on heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'

Building a Nation with Religion

Israel emerging

The Jews started as tribal people in Canaan, the area currently covered by Israel and Palestine. For a long time, the area was under Egyptian control. The earliest known reference to Israel is on an Egyptian stone engraving from around 1200 BC. It lists the enemies the Pharaoh Merneptah defeated during his campaigns. Among them was Israel, which had revolted against its Egyptian overlords. The engraving lacks detail. There was no state of Israel, so quite possibly the uprising was no more than a few skirmishes with local hill dwellers. But the Egyptians called the land Israel, named after the principal local deity, El, so the tribes living there already had their separate religious beliefs.

Around 1150 BC, Egypt faced droughts, food shortages, civil unrest, corruption, and court intrigues. This period is known as the Late Bronze Age Collapse. Similar crises in neighbouring civilisations led societies to turn inwards and focus on local issues. Egypt retreated from Canaan. Setbacks at home were the reason the Egyptians gave up Canaan, which was an insignificant border province to them, filled with unruly hill dwellers who caused nothing but trouble. It was a footnote in Egyptian history, nothing more. The Egyptians, who had been there for centuries, suddenly went home,⁴ leaving the Israelites a victory they had not fought for. The locals may have viewed it as a miracle and came to suspect that their favourite deity, El, or perhaps Yahweh, had done some magic. Poof. The Egyptian army, which had been there for centuries, had suddenly vanished due to setbacks at home.

Stories retold grow more sensational over time, so the Bible now tells us that God sent seven devastating plagues to Egypt, and appointed a fellow named Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, under the guidance of an irate and fiery cloud, split the Red Sea, drowned the Egyptian army and let the Israelites escape. The Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1-18) could be the oldest text in the Bible, together with the Song of Deborah, and it mentions the drowning of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. The song seems much older than the rest of Exodus, and it doesn't mention Moses.

Scholars disagree on whether the account has a historical basis, and therefore, also the song. It could date back to the Babylonian captivity 600 years later. In that case, the author used archaic language in the Song of the Sea to make it appear older. That would require the author to have knowledge of ancient Hebrew, which seems a stretch. Likely, the song is ancient and predates the Egyptians' departure from Canaan. And so, the song originally may have been about another, earlier historical event, perhaps the Battle of Kadesh between the Egyptians and the Hittites in 1274 BC.⁵

It took several centuries for new civilisations to take over, creating room for small local polities in Canaan until that time. Several small kingdoms emerged, including Israel and Judah. These petty kingdoms existed for a few centuries until new imperial powers overran

the area. At first, the Israelites worshipped several gods and goddesses, among them was Yahweh. Archaeological finds indicate that El was the supreme deity in the Canaanite belief system. The goddess Asherah was his wife.⁶

They were the parents of the other Canaanite deities, Baal, Anat, Yahweh, and Yam. Asherah is Yahweh's mother and El his father. El was often depicted as a bull and was also known as Shor-El, the bull god. And so, we have the highly peculiar situation that half the world's population now worships one of the children of El and Asherah, two deities of an insignificant tribe living somewhere between the more advanced civilisations of Egypt and Mesopotamia 3,000 years ago, as the supreme God who rules the entire universe. That might have been a hilarious observation if people hadn't been murdering each other in the millions for their delusions.



Kingdoms of Canaan. Richard Prins.

Wikimedia Commons.

States and kings used religion to justify themselves. It matters whether a powerful entity like a god or a goddess supports the state and the king, for only the stupid and the suicidal defy the gods. The kings of Judah, and perhaps also those of Israel, promoted a national religion centred around Yahweh. Other kingdoms in the region also adopted national deities. Milcom was the deity of Ammon, while Moab had Chemosh to defeat its foes and supply the country with blessings (1 Kings 11:33).

Yahweh thus became the deity of the state religion in Judah and possibly Israel. Many in the area also worshipped other gods alongside Yahweh, as having multiple options is prudent. If Yahweh forsakes you, perhaps Baal or some other deity will still assist you. The

Bible testifies to tensions between those who still worshipped different gods and goddesses alongside Yahweh and those insisting on worshipping Yahweh alone. As Yahweh had become the favourite deity of the Israelites, El became the word for 'god', and Asherah became Yahweh's wife. And so, Yahweh married his former mother.

Writing the Bible

As time passed by, new empires arrived on the scene and set their eyes on Canaan. The Assyrians overran Israel in 720 BC. The Babylonians conquered Judah in 597 BC, following their takeover of the Assyrian Empire. The Babylonians deported many of the Judeans. Others fled to Egypt. It was the beginning of the diaspora. The Jewish communities in Egypt, Babylon, and Judah became dispersed. The authors of the Jewish Bible tried to reconnect them by showing that they belonged to a larger group, a nation with common ancestors. Judah already had religious writings. They became part of the Bible. The Jewish Bible became a compilation of tales from these communities and the royal archives of the former kingdom of Judah. The Jewish Bible presents the history of Israel and Judah from the perspective of the Kingdom of Judah.

After the Persians had conquered the Babylonian Empire, the Persian emperor Cyrus the Great allowed the Jewish people to return to Canaan. He commissioned the rebuilding of the Jewish temple. Those still living in the area were not keen on a group of religious zealots entering their country. They opposed the plan, and a political struggle unfolded. After seven decades, Ezra and Nehemiah succeeded in rebuilding the temple. Jewish society was on the brink of being wiped out. Israel and Judah no longer existed. The remaining Jews were mixing with the surrounding population. Jewish leaders had to find a way to keep their people together. Marrying outside the community became frowned upon, and the Jews became a seclusive group. That has caused them a lot of trouble in the centuries that followed.

The authors of the Jewish Bible sought to preserve Jewish identity through a shared religion, history, and cultural heritage. The Jewish religion gradually became monotheistic. At the time, Zoroastrianism, a dualistic religion, became the official religion in the Persian Empire. The prophet Zoroaster believed in a good creator and an opposing evil power. And it had considerable influence. It brought Judaism monotheism, messiahs, free will, heaven, hell, and, of course, that horned fellow named Satan. Zoroastrianism not only affected Judaism. Some Greek philosophers around 400 BC were also monotheists.

The polytheist origin of the Jewish religion may explain why God says in Genesis, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.' Later, the Jews became henotheists. They believed that other gods existed, but that they should worship only Yahweh. That is why the commandment says, 'You shall have no other gods before me' rather than 'You shall believe there is only one God.' Yahweh was jealous and didn't appreciate offerings to other gods, such as Baal. Several texts in the Jewish Bible have that henotheist perspective.

The Jews wrote most of their scriptures between 600 BC and 300 BC, but there are older parts that date back to the royal archives of Judah. The Ketef Hinnom amulets are the oldest surviving evidence of texts that are now part of the Jewish Bible. They date back to 600 BC. So, before the Jews went into exile to Babylon, they already had an established

religion with scriptures. And that later helped them maintain their Jewish identity. The Song of Deborah is one of the oldest texts in the Bible, dating back to the 12th to 10th century BC. Only, the Song of the Sea might be older. Little evidence supports the historical account in the Jewish Bible of the period before the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. However, that doesn't mean that all these stories are entirely fictional.

Scholars believe David may have been the king of Judah, rather than the king of a united kingdom, as the Jewish Bible states. Based on archaeological excavations, experts have estimated that Jerusalem had around 1,000 inhabitants at the time David supposedly lived, suggesting that Jerusalem was a minor regional centre rather than the capital of a larger kingdom. However, archaeologists have also uncovered a 9th-century BC stone engraving with the lettering BYTDWD in northern Israel, possibly referring to the House of David. Another engraving found in the former kingdom of Moab contains the same lettering. That could raise questions, such as whether a larger kingdom existed.

Creating a nation

Whether or not it was fiction, the authors of the Jewish Bible employed the concept of a united kingdom to foster unity among people originating from Israel and Judah. A shared history united the inhabitants of Israel and Judah, as well as their offspring, into one great nation. The purpose of the Jewish Bible was to establish the Jewish nation based on a shared history and religion. That can be a reason to imagine a united kingdom that once existed. If you go back in time to before the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the history of the Jews becomes murky. No written records exist from these times. The tales about Abraham, Isaac, and Moses may have originated from different communities, merged into a single narrative to promote a single Jewish identity.⁴ To make the proposition more attractive, the Jews believed they were the chosen people.

The survival of the Jewish people has been hanging by a thread for a long time. They were a small nation between great powers. They hoped for a Messiah who would save them from oppression, just as Moses had once done. Great powers came and went, but the Jewish people remained. After more than 2,500 years, the Jews are still around, so their nation-building project proved a successful long-term survival strategy. They managed to reclaim their original homeland. It is also remarkable that Judaism stood at the cradle of Christianity and Islam. The Jews have played a central role in world history, unmatched by any other nation. It is an impressive feat, considering their numbers. Today, Jews have an imposing power, and they slay their enemies at will. So, what do they need a Messiah for?

Historical analysis

How do historians and scholars look at the Jewish Bible? Apart from the lack of archaeological evidence, they find the early Jewish history in the Jewish Bible too neat to be correct. It presents an agreeable genealogical line extending from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob, who had twelve sons who, coincidentally, became the twelve tribes of the nation. The number twelve has religious significance, so the facts must have undergone some

religiously inspired processing. Jacob and his family went to Egypt during Joseph's days. Later, Egypt began to oppress the Israelites, and they escaped under the leadership of Moses. The Egyptians kept records, and they tell nothing about the Exodus. The reason is probably not that the Egyptian defeat was too embarrassing.

After Moses' death, the story goes, Joshua took over and led the Israelites into the Promised Land. Following the death of Joshua, a series of judges took over. They governed Israel and saved it from its enemies. Each judge came from a different tribe, which is also unbelievably neat. It smells like fiction. Then Saul, Israel's first king, was not up to his task, so David replaced him. The kingdom fell apart into two after the death of Solomon, David's successor. From then on, the descendants of David ruled only in the south, thus in Judah. The northern part, called Israel, had several dynasties.

Many of the people described in the Jewish Bible may have once lived. Probably, they had very little to do with each other. The authors of the Jewish Bible compiled them to create a unified history of Israel. Abraham was probably not Jacob's father, Moses was not Miriam's brother, and David was not Saul's successor. They may have figured in local tales from tribes and petty kingdoms that later became part of the Jewish nation. The stories in the Jewish Bible originate from several sources and have been revised and retold multiple times throughout the centuries. And the stories have undergone some religiously inspired processing. Think of God sending plagues to Egypt because the Pharaoh took Sarah as his wife. The Jewish Bible is a nation-building project rather than a historical account.⁴

Textual analysis

It might be interesting to see how scholars analyse the texts to understand biblical history and arrive at their conclusions. Professor Jacob Wright explained the basics using the example of Genesis 26 to illustrate how the authors of the Jewish Bible have woven the story of Isaac and Rebecca into the broader historical narrative of Israel.⁴ Biblical scholars attempt to uncover the construction process of the texts by examining various sources within biblical texts, including additions and other editing techniques. Genesis 26 tells the story of Isaac living in the Philistine land of Gerar, located west of Judah.

Isaac's wife, Rebecca, was a beautiful woman. When his neighbours asked Isaac about Rebecca, he claimed she was his sister, so Isaac followed Abraham's footsteps. Isaac feared the Philistine men in Gerar would kill him and take his beautiful wife. One day, Abimelech, the king of the Philistines, gazed out his window and spotted Isaac and Rebecca making out. He demanded an explanation. Abimelech feared one of his subjects might have slept with her, which could make his kingdom subject to divine retribution.

Abimelech then issued a decree stating that whoever touched Isaac or his wife would be put to death. Rebecca would become one of the matriarchs, a crucial figure in Israel's history. Isaac prospered among the Philistines and eventually became mightier than them. Everywhere Isaac went in the waterless environs of Abimelech's kingdom, he discovered water wells. His success aroused jealousy among local inhabitants. That amount of luck captures the imagination like Gladstone Gander's in a Donald Duck tale.

Instead of fighting for his territories, Isaac moved on and ended up in Beer-Sheba in the south. Abimelech visited Isaac there. The Philistine king blessed him. Isaac invited him to a feast. After eating and drinking all night long, they exchanged oaths of peace. Later that day, Isaac's servants discovered another water source, in yet another a stroke of unbelievable luck. Isaac named this well Beer-Sheba, referring to his treaty with the Philistines. The story served a political agenda, which was to demonstrate that Beersheba was part of Israel.

A closer look at Genesis 26

Genesis 26 contains two kinds of material, which are the story about Isaac's clan and how he came to possess towns in the far south and Beer-Sheba, and the broader narrative of the book of Genesis, which links this story with the other parts of Genesis to make it a coherent history of the nation. There are multiple ways of looking at the text. Hence, different scholars may come to different conclusions. One way of viewing Genesis 26 is as follows, with the parts that link the story into a broader narrative underlined:

1 Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine in Abraham's time, and Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in Gerar. 2 The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, 'Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. 3 Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. 4 I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, 5 because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees and my instructions.'

6 So Isaac stayed in Gerar. 7 When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, 'She is my sister,' because he was afraid to say, 'She is my wife.' He thought, 'The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebecca, because she is beautiful.' 8 When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down from a window and saw Isaac caressing his wife Rebecca. 9 So Abimelech summoned Isaac and said, 'She is really your wife! Why did you say, 'She is my sister'?' Isaac answered him, 'Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her.' 10 Then Abimelech said, 'What is this you have done to us? One of the men might well have slept with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us. 11 So Abimelech gave orders to all the people: 'Anyone who harms this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.'

12 Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the Lord blessed him. 13 The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. 14 He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines envied him. 15 So all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the time of his father Abraham, the Philistines stopped up, filling them with earth. 16 Then Abimelech said to Isaac, 'Move away from us; you have become too powerful for us.'

17 So Isaac moved away from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar, where he settled. 18 Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he gave them the same

names his father had given them. 19 Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. 20 But the herders of Gerar quarrelled with those of Isaac and said, 'The water is ours!' So he named the well Esek, because they disputed with him. 21 Then they dug another well, but they quarrelled over that one also; so he named it Sitnah. 22 He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarrelled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, 'Now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land.'

23 From there, he went up to Beersheba. 24 That night, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham.' 25 Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.

26 Meanwhile, Abimelech had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces. 27 Isaac asked them, 'Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?' 28 They answered, 'We saw clearly that the Lord was with you; so we said, 'There ought to be a sworn agreement between us'—between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you 29 that you will do us no harm, just as we did not harm you but always treated you well and sent you away peacefully. And now you are blessed by the Lord.' 30 Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. 31 Early the next morning, the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they went away peacefully. 32 That day, Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug. They said, 'We've found water!' 33 He called it Shibah, and to this day, the name of the town has been Beersheba.

34 When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith, daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. 35 They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebecca.

The first five verses are part of the larger narrative, except for the first part of verse 1. In verse 6, the story itself starts. Abraham comes up in verses 15 and 18. The intervention of the Lord in verses 24 and 25 is also part of the larger narrative. The mention of Esau at the end is part of the encompassing story. That raises the question of where Jacob and Esau were all that time. They were adults at the end of Genesis 25. One explanation is that Genesis 26, without the underlined parts, was once a separate story.

The stories about their sons, Jacob and Esau, seem wrapped around the story of Isaac and Rebecca and their dealings with the king of the Philistines. In this way, the authors created a larger narrative. Genesis 25 contains the story about the birth of Esau and Jacob and how Esau sold his birthright to Jacob. That story resumes at the end of Genesis 26. In Genesis 27, Jacob deceived his father into giving him his blessing with the help of his mother. These interweaving narratives come from different sources.

One is the P-source or priestly source. It tells an independent story of Israel. The authors merged it into the narrative. According to the P-source, Jacob didn't flee from Esau because of stealing the birthright but because he was in danger of a mixed marriage. The P-source describes how Esau married a Hittite woman and how Rebecca asked Isaac to send Jacob away so he would find a woman who would not make her life miserable.

There is an older account of Isaac and Rebecca and how they came to possess Beersheba. Around it is wrapped a story of their children, where Isaac is the son of Abraham and the father of Esau and Jacob. Another small story tells how Rebecca sent Jacob off to find wives from her own family. Another source tells us how Jacob stole his birthright from his brother Esau. The authors of the Jewish Bible thus wove an older story and two other sources into a broader narrative.⁴

Theories from scholars

The P-source is a late source from after the exile in Babylon. It deals with Israel's identity and its relationship to others. Mixed marriages outside the Jewish people became a huge issue after the defeat of Judah. Marrying within the clan or nation helped to maintain a community defined by a shared culture. Therefore, the marriages of Esau to Hittite women caused Rebecca concern.

Another source is the Jahwist source, also dubbed J-source. A part of Genesis 25 comes from the J-source. It tells about the birth of Jacob and Esau. It continues in Genesis 27 and 28, where Jacob stole Esau's birthright and pursued the deal with the help of his mother, Rebecca. Jacob then had to flee from Esau. According to the J-source theory, the J-source has incorporated an older source into the broader narrative. Later, the P-source altered the reason why Jacob had to flee.

The formation of the earliest sources, the histories of Israel, whether it be the history of Israel's ancestors and the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or the exodus leaving Egypt and the conquest of the land, is built upon the linking of stories. The authors brought separate individual representatives of clans together in a larger narrative to create the idea of a Jewish nation. Many scholars believe that the first chapters of the Jewish Bible, known to Jews as the Torah, comprise four distinct sources.⁴

Countless authors have contributed to the Jewish Bible over the centuries. The Bible even reveals how a book came into existence. King Josiah had commissioned artisans to work on the Temple, where they 'discovered' the Book of Law (2 Kings 22:8), probably Deuteronomy. Likely, King Josiah had ordered the writing of the book to advance his political agenda of centralising the worship of Yahweh in the Temple of Jerusalem. That could increase his standing as a king. And so, these artisans stumbled upon this work that had supposedly been gathering dust there for centuries.

Much of the writing and editing took place to serve purposes other than accurately presenting the facts, so you can't expect that the Jewish Bible is an accurate account of historical events. There is more to say about scholarly research into the Jewish Bible. For our purposes, this brief explanation is sufficient. It illuminates how the first chapters of the Jewish Bible, which describe Israel's earliest history, evolved and how scholars interpret the texts to arrive at their conclusions. Likewise, scholars attempt to reconstruct the origins of the Gospels, as that is an even greater mystery.

From Jesus to Christianity

Did Jesus exist at all?

The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus believed he had eternal life and a bond with God from the beginning of Creation until the end of time. Christians and Muslims expect him to return. Even though Muslims don't believe Jesus is the Son of God, they also think he will return and that his mother was a virgin. Remarkably, Muhammad and the Jewish prophets didn't view themselves as the eternally living Son of God, nor do Muslims believe that Jesus is. They both consider that thought a form of idolatry. And so Islam and Judaism have more in common with each other than with Christianity. That makes Jesus the most enigmatic individual in the history of humankind. Some people claim that there is no evidence that Jesus was a real person and that he is a fantasy figure like Spike and Suzy. So, let's first address the argument that Jesus is a fictional person.

Sources from his era don't mention him. There is hardly any evidence of Jesus outside the Bible. Jesus was the leader of a small sect, so that is not particularly surprising. The problem with the idea that there never was a Jesus is that it leaves us without a compelling explanation for the existence of Christianity, so that we must seek refuge in more bizarre explanations, like Christianity being a Roman conspiracy to replace Judaism with the Roman emperor cult. The supposed proof is that Jesus Christ shares the initials JC with Julius Caesar and that both died because of a betrayal. That can't be a coincidence, so the Christ story is just a refurbished Caesar story, the proponents of this 'theory' argue.

They are right that it isn't a coincidence. However, as an explanation for Christianity, it is pretty imaginative. And it fails to explain nearly everything we can read about Jesus in the Gospels. And so, Jesus did live. But what made him unique? Jesus started a religion that has over two billion followers today. Apart from a historical account, an explanation of his beliefs may help us understand him. That includes his relationship with God, the supposed guy in the sky who is far more powerful than Superman, can do more tricks, and is allegedly all-knowing. Jesus changed world history more than anyone else, so did that sky dude have a hand in that? It would be strange not to ask that question.

What can we know?

Historians and biblical scholars try to reconstruct what Jesus taught and did. They use historical sources such as the Gospels. In many ways, Jesus was a typical first-century Jewish end-time prophet, a product of the culture he lived in, first-century Judaism. Yet, they never ask the question that would be strange not to ask: what made Jesus think he was the Son of God? And so, they fail to clarify Jesus' supposed close relationship with God or why God was his Father. Decades after Jesus allegedly went missing, a few anonymous authors wrote the Gospels. Mark, Matthew and John haven't written the

Gospels attributed to them. The Gospels provide no clue as to who wrote them. Mark, Matthew and John were peasants who spoke Aramaic, while the authors of the Gospels were educated and spoke Greek. Some scholars argue that Christians initially relied on oral traditions and utilised writings that are no longer extant. Oral recounting is notoriously inaccurate. Stories change when retold. Details get lost, and new details get added. They had good reason to think so. Luke begins, stating precisely that (Luke 1:1-4),

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Luke was not one of the original Apostles, but a companion of Paul (Philemon 24), who was a physician (Colossians 4:14). And so, he could have written the Gospel attributed to him. But we don't know. Church tradition also holds that the author of Mark wrote down a testimony of Peter. Peter died years before the author of Mark penned the text, but there are reasons to believe that a testimony of Peter was a source the author used, most notably because Peter has a prominent role in the text. Much of this Gospel is plausible given the time and place in which Jesus lived. Mark also discloses things about Jesus that Christians wouldn't make up because it is embarrassing, such as Jesus' family claiming he was insane (Mark 3:21). Mark seems to have had access to a reliable source.

There is also evidence of redactions in the New Testament. What to think of Jesus being the bridegroom and the Bride having gone missing? Jesus was married, but we are not supposed to know that. As a result of the confusion, scholars agree on very little about Jesus of Nazareth, except that he lived and preached shortly after 26 AD. His ministry started after John the Baptist had baptised him. Then there was a lot of action, with mystical and sensational statements, including miracles such as healing the sick and multiplying bread and fish, followed by a betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection from the dead, and finally, his disappearance. The Gospels agree on a few things:

- Jesus performed miracles, such as walking over water, healing the sick, multiplying bread and fish, and raising the dead.
- Jesus made controversial statements that baffled the Pharisees, so they schemed against him, which eventually led to his crucifixion.
- Jesus didn't take Jewish religious law as seriously as other religious zealots. He had a different message of forgiveness of sins.
- Jesus didn't like hypocrites, for who is without sin? He forgave sinners who repented. Still, he claimed there would be judgment.
- Jesus was respectful of women. And he held unconventional views on marriage. Few men were up to that task. That goes unexplained.
- Oh yes, and he called God his Father, and he was God's son. It was a close and loving relationship. Other prophets weren't like that.

Who was Jesus, what did he do, and what were his teachings? Scholars and historians seek to reconstruct what happened and the beliefs of the earliest Christians by examining the oldest texts and earliest controversies. They have analysed the scriptures for centuries and concluded that you can't establish much with certainty about Jesus except that he

lived and preached. Some things are more plausible than others. And some things are nearly certain. The virgin birth didn't happen, while the crucifixion did. Some of Jesus' disciples likely saw him after he died, perhaps in a psychosis. Otherwise, you lack a compelling explanation for the origins of Christianity. Thoughts that scholars dared not entertain were that some of the miracles did happen, or that Jesus did have the gift of prophecy. If you have witnessed paranormal events, which scientists seem to call metanormal events, or know people who have, you may have second thoughts about the scholarly consensus on miracles. The scholar Dale Allison wrote in his book *Interpreting Jesus*,

What if a historian of the early Jesus movement decides, on empirical, not theological grounds, that sometimes people see the future, that clairvoyance is not uncommon, that additional metanormal claims should be seriously entertained, and even that enigmatic capacities sometimes congregate in exceptional or charismatically gifted individuals, in what Max Weber termed 'religious virtuosi'?

Allison produces a long list of examples in the Gospels and concludes that his fellow scholars who reject the historicity of Jesus' clairvoyance suffer from dogmatic incredulity. In other words, the Gospels could be more historically accurate than most scholars claim because their assumptions about the possibility of miracles and clairvoyance are incorrect. Hence, the confidence they have in their claims is unjustified. And the original written sources are older than the Gospels, so oral recounting probably hasn't affected them. Earlier written records have existed, scholars argue, and they give these supposed writings mysterious names, such as Q and 'The Signs Gospel'. Mark, Matthew, and Luke are very similar and primarily draw on the same sources. The Gospel of John stands apart. The Gospel of John notes that an eyewitness, the Beloved Disciple, wrote it. And so, an eyewitness account by a disciple could be the basis for this text. Now, John 5:1-3 reads,

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here, a great number of disabled people used to lie — the blind, the lame, the paralysed.

The use of the word 'is' implies that the text dates from before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, thus from before the writing of the Gospel of Mark. The Sheep Gate was still there at the time of writing, the wording suggests. Now it gets more interesting. Peter was Jesus' favourite disciple, and John may contain his testimony. There is little doubt that the Gospels contain historical evidence, but they also claim that miracles and the resurrection have happened. And so, you have some additional explaining to do, as these events defy the laws of nature, which is impossible had this world been real.

This universe is a virtual reality, so these miracles are possible. On the Holodeck, I can slay platoons of ferocious Klingon warriors alone with my bare hands and some magical powers. At the same time, in real life, elderly ladies overtake me in the swimming pool even when I am giving my best. Conjuring fish out of thin air, reviving the dead, walking on water, and turning water into wine should also be no problem. The same goes for a virgin birth. Whatever you imagine can become true. But it is not proof that it happened because Christians may have invented stories. For the virgin birth at least, that applies.

Explaining the differences

Mark and John are so different because they come from two very different traditions. Jesus had Jewish and Gentile followers. In the Jewish tradition, he was a prophet, and 'Son of God' meant 'King of the Jews.' To Gentiles, the Son of God had a literal meaning as God's firstborn child. The Jewish Jesus was a human prophet and perhaps a resistance leader, while the Gentile Jesus was an eternal godlike being, the Firstborn of Creation. Most of the confusion stems from these differences, which reveal a controversy in the early Church that Paul successfully resolved. Mark and John are the best historical sources about Jesus' life, but they have different perspectives. And the final version of the Gospel of John has undergone several revisions.

Writing a Gospel was an intellectual challenge for talented writers who could combine scraps of information, symbols and signs to compose high-level literature. Without social media, scribes could dedicate their entire lives to such a project. And others could dedicate lifetimes to finding out what those writers meant, so, if we wish to do so, we can read countless commentaries by experts. The Jews and the Muslims also have them. Jesus also contributed to the confusion. Well-known are the parables, stories that Jesus told to convey an underlying message. By saying one thing and meaning another, Jesus often left his audience, including his disciples, confused. Even today, the central question remains: was Jesus merely human, or godlike? In either case, he is enigmatic.

Jesus' deeds had religious significance, which is why we read that he had twelve disciples. Twelve stands for perfection or authority in government. Jacob had twelve sons who represented the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus likely didn't have twelve disciples. And Jesus supposedly spent forty days in the desert. The number forty signifies new life, growth and transformation. The rain of the Great Flood lasted forty days and nights. If Jesus went to the desert, then it was probably not for forty days. According to the Bible, God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. The number seven also signifies completion and perfection. And Jesus said 'I am' seven times in the Gospel of John, supposedly implying he was godlike. If he said it, then he probably didn't say it seven times. And the scripture tells us that Jesus rose from the dead after three days. This number represents divine wholeness, completeness and perfection. If Jesus had returned from the dead, it would probably not have been after three days.

The biblical authors tweaked and rearranged the facts to fit the religiously significant numbers. Eight disciples would have made a dud. What kind of prophet has eight disciples? You can't take such a prophet seriously. Paul claimed that Jesus appeared to 'The Twelve' (1 Corinthians 15:5) after Judas had already died. That is fishy. Mark, Matthew, and Luke list the names of 'The Twelve,' but John does not. He only calls them 'The Twelve' like Paul did. If that is indeed the case, Mark must already have seen significant editing, including Jesus predicting his resurrection after three days (Mark 8:31), and that might explain why the sources have disappeared.

Talking about fishy, the experts are still baffled about those 153 fish Simon Peter dragged ashore without tearing his net (John 21:11). What does that number signify? Experts agree that it is not merely a fact. They have written voluminous tracts on the matter. A Wikipedia page deals with this question. There, you find links to the relevant literature. But we still await the book title 'The Ultimate Guide on the 153 Fishes' that explains it all. The experts

don't mention that $153 = (12 * 12) + (3 * 3)$. Both three and twelve have special meanings. It can't be that simple. Or can it?

As time passed by

There are facts, early beliefs, and later beliefs. What Christians believed changed over time due to circumstances, so early beliefs are likely closer to Jesus' teachings than later ones. Earlier sources might have fewer distortions and are thus closer to the facts than later ones. To understand Jesus, you must also become familiar with the time and place in which he lived. The Jews were a small nation crushed by major powers and could only hope for God to come to their rescue. At the time of Jesus, many believed the end was near and that God would send a Messiah to kick out the wicked Roman oppressors and restore Israel to its former glory, which it supposedly had when David was king.

Religious zealots prayed, committed terrorist acts, and revolted. Nowadays, the Palestinians follow the same recipe only to get their butts kicked time after time. And they never seem to learn. Back then, the Jews were like the Palestinians today. They were a pain for the Romans. Nowadays, the Jews run the empire in Washington, DC, and let it protect their pet project in the Holy Land. The stage was already set 2,000 years ago. The end times, the arrival of a Messiah, and a final reckoning still define Jewish, Christian, and Islamic thinking. In Jesus' time, numerous end-time preachers proclaimed that the end was near. Jesus was one of them. He said things like (Mark 13:12-13),

Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

That is pretty scary already. Jesus continues (Mark 13:14-17),

When you see the abomination that causes desolation standing where it does not belong, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!

Now comes his prediction, which the faithful still await to come true (Mark 13:23-27),

So be on your guard. I have told you everything ahead of time. But in those days, following that distress, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. The stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time, people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

Jesus may have seen himself as a Jewish Messiah and didn't plan to start a world religion. When a non-Jewish woman begged Jesus to drive a demon out of her daughter, he replied, 'First let the children eat all they want, for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.' He was there for the Jews, and Gentiles were on par with dogs. Only after she replied, 'Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs,' was Jesus willing to grant her request (Mark 7:24-30, Matthew 15:21-28). It is at odds with the

Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and the story of the Samaritan woman, in which Jesus asked this woman to give him some water she had drawn from the well, and in which everyone can get salvation (John 4:1-26). John also notes the woman's surprise as Jews didn't associate with Gentiles. It was also a point of contention between Peter and Paul (Galatians 2:11-21).

Scholars explain the contradiction by assuming each of the Gospels had an intended audience. Matthew wrote for the Jews and aimed to prove that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. Gentiles were Luke's intended audience. John was the product of a community separate from mainstream Pauline Christianity with an anti-Jewish bias. And so, we can't be sure whether Jesus really compared Gentiles to dogs or whether it merely reflected a widespread Jewish sentiment about Gentiles. Still, all the Gospels agree that Jesus accepted the faith of Gentiles, halfheartedly or not.

Jesus probably saw himself as the eternally living Son of God. Unlike John, Mark doesn't say it plainly, but notes that he did see himself coming in clouds with great power and glory. Initially, Jesus' followers expected him to return soon. Jesus may have believed that himself. However, Jesus also said that no one knows the day or hour, not even he, only God (Mark 13:32). It could be a later addition, but there is no evidence to suggest that it is. His disciples probably thought they would live to see it happen. Scholars think Paul believed it also. When things didn't go according to plan, the Christians had to adapt to this new reality and become less specific about the date of Jesus' return.

Jesus' Jewish followers had hoped that he would throw out the Romans. After the Romans levelled the Jewish Temple around 70 AD, that hope crumbled to dust together with the Temple. In the end, with no return of Jesus in sight, Christians turned him into a heavenly ruler who gives you access to eternal life if you follow him. That is how the Gospel of John depicts Jesus. It was the last Gospel written around 95 AD. To understand what happened, it is crucial to view the development of early Christianity as a historical process with actors, where there was a development over time as these actors attempted to address various issues. One actor in particular is of interest, namely Paul. He, rather than Jesus, invented Christianity. The historical order of the New Testament is with approximate dates:

- Paul's Epistles (the genuine ones), 55 AD,
- Gospel of Mark, 70 AD,
- Gospel of Matthew, 75 AD,
- Gospel of Luke, 85 AD,
- Gospel of John, 95 AD.

No one knows who wrote the Gospels. Attributing them to the Apostles was a ploy by the Church to lend them authority. The New Testament also contains epistles signed by Paul and Peter. Nobody knows who wrote them. Now, that does not need to be forgery. The writing process in Paul's time involved co-authors. 1 Thessalonians starts with (1 Thessalonians 1:1-2),

Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.

The Paul who wrote these letters was not always the individual Paul, but often a team of authors. After Paul's death, the other team members might still have written letters in his name. They wouldn't have thought of it as a forgery. Individualism as we know it today didn't exist at the time, so if you were part of Team Paul, you could still write a letter and sign it in Paul's name after his death.

The Gospel of John is the latest, so scholars have long considered it the least reliable of the four Gospels. They long held the view that Christians gradually deified Jesus, which could then explain why it is so different. However, Paul already viewed Jesus as God in nature (Philippians 2:6), and that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth (Philippians 2:10). The latter phrase originally referred to God. Paul applied it to Jesus, viewing him as godlike but not equal to God.

The mystery remains

And so, scholars' views have shifted, and many now believe that the Gospel of John comes from a separate tradition. To Greeks and others, a human could more easily become godlike than to Jews. The Bible also testifies to this. After Paul healed a lame man in Lystra, the locals concluded that Paul and Barnabas were gods in human form (Acts 14:11). The first three Gospels emerged within Jewish Christianity. In contrast, the Gospel of John originated from a Gentile Christian community. And gradually, the scholars concluded that John could be more historically accurate than previously thought.

Hence, John may reveal details that other Gospels omit. There were disputes about the nature of Jesus and his relationship with God. Was he human or godlike? The compromise ultimately became that he was both. Paul never wrote about what transpired during Jesus' life. Mark is the oldest Gospel, telling the story of Jesus' life. It is brief and presents an enigmatic Jesus. Mark 1:27-28 reads,

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, 'What is this? A new teaching, and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.' News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

The Gospel of Mark initially ended with Mary Magdalene and a few other women discovering that Jesus' tomb was empty and an angel telling them that Jesus had risen. The remainder is a later addition. Because of that, some scholars doubt the resurrection. Other scholars have suggested that it was an intentional open ending, 'because everyone knew what happened next.' That is a bit of a stretch, as it is attributing Hitchcock-like motives to an author who seemed keen to give testimony. Jesus probably appeared to at least some of his followers after his death. Otherwise, there would be no Christianity. And so, the premature ending of Mark raises questions.

That could be as reliable as it can get. Conviction, no matter how strong, is not a fact, but we have no accurate accounts of what had transpired. The Gospels diverge from what Paul writes, so we can't construct a more precise picture of the events unless we can establish which accounts are the most reliable and what the falsifications are. And so, we can't get closer to the truth unless we learn more about the relationship between God — that supposed guy in the sky— and Jesus, His alleged son.



Mary Magdalene with Christ, West Nave, Kilmore Church, Isle of Mull, made by Stephen Adam. Photographer: B. Galbraith. Victorian Web.

The Identity of God

We live inside a virtual reality created by an advanced civilisation to entertain an individual we call God. Like it or not, it is why we exist. That civilisation probably is humanoid, which means that God is like us, with human imaginations and desires. What is also worth noting, and what can hurt your ego, is that all that happens goes according to a script, so that thinking of us as mere worms would be a delusion of grandeur. Think of it. Real worms decide for themselves how they grovel and when. And we don't. Welcome to the Theatre of the Absurd. We are mere actors in a play, and no one thinks. We follow the script, and there is no exit, no life outside, like in the film *The Matrix*. The road to enlightenment starts with the acceptance of our complete insignificance.

So what about René Descartes, that world-famous fellow who once said, 'I think, therefore I exist.' Was he wrong? As the reasoning above painfully lays out, he starts with a debatable assumption: 'I think.' He then arrives at a logical conclusion: 'Therefore, I exist.' That made him stamp a realness certificate on his person. But logic in fantasy land is just basing conclusions on imagined assumptions. At least the logic is infallible. So, did Descartes think? Not really. Even then, he might still have had an existence. That is also dubious, however, because God imagined us. You can ask yourself: Do Spike and Suzy exist? They are comic characters created by Willy Vandersteen, who no longer exists, if he had ever done so, because he has stopped breathing. If you go down that road, everything you imagine exists. I just imagined a unicorn. Do unicorns now exist?

That is the question of being. Philosophers discuss such questions. Scientists agree that merely thinking of a unicorn doesn't make it real. Saying 'be' doesn't generate a bee. You can give such a command to a computer, and you get a simulation of a bee. Now you get how God could have created this world in six days. It might as well have been six seconds. So, if God exists, we don't exist, and we are just imaginations like unicorns. Countless non-existent minds have wasted their time and energy on the question, 'Does God exist?' Indeed, the gods we imagine also don't exist because we imagine them, and that includes the God of Abraham. Only God exists in reality.

If we exist to entertain an individual from an advanced civilisation, God must be a person who, unlike us, might be real. Yes, God might be yet another virtual reality character in a simulation layer above us, but that is beyond our possibilities to find out. And let's not waste our time on questions we can't answer. So, who is this person, God? That we cannot know. Still, we might uncover something, at least. If we are here to entertain God, what is the fun of standing on the sidelines? Why not take part yourself? If God plays roles and becomes one of us, we might identify some of those individuals. The starting point for the inquiry is Jesus. No one had ever felt a closer relationship with God than he, so there is a good chance he knew God as a person.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus called God 'Father'. They suggest a close personal relationship, so Jesus thought of himself as the Son of God. There is something off about Jesus' Father as He can give birth (John 1:12-13). All four official Gospels imply that Jesus was the bridegroom (Mark 2:19-20, Matthew 9:15, Luke 5:34-35, John 3:27-30), but don't

mention the bride, which is also quite mysterious. The Church tells us that Jesus married the Church. Now, the Church didn't exist when Jesus lived, so a historian would call it an anachronism. It is like saying that the Roman Emperor Caesar took an aeroplane to Egypt to spend his holidays with Cleopatra. That is impossible because there were no aeroplanes 2,000 years ago. The Gospels don't say Jesus married the Church. The Church didn't exist yet, and Jesus wasn't planning to found it either. So, why would the Church lie about Jesus' marriage? Are we not allowed to know the truth?

You can smell a rat here. And it is a huge and smelly one. Christians claim that God is love. Jews and Muslims don't. Do they not worship the same deity? Is there something missing that Jesus' inner circle knew about? And is it the identity of the Bride? That is indeed the case. The Bride of Christ was God in the person of Mary Magdalene. She was one of God's avatars. She made Jesus believe he was Adam reincarnated and that She was Eve reincarnated, that Eve didn't come from Adam's rib but that Eve gave birth to Adam, and that they were an eternal couple living from the beginning of Creation until the End of Times. That is why Jesus believed he was the Son of God.

Simon Peter said to Jesus, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' (Matthew 16:16) This phrase appears in the Jewish Bible (Deuteronomy 5:26, Jeremiah 10:10, Psalm 42:2), but Simon Peter's use of it is noteworthy. In Deuteronomy, the living God refers to God's active presence on Earth, meaning that God is not some mythical figure, of whom we have only tales, nor a lifeless statue, but someone present in our midst. In Moses' time, it was a pillar of fire. With the Bride gone, these words have lost their meaning, which led some later Christians to believe that Jesus was God.

Jesus was God's son because Adam was. Hence, Adam is the Son of God (Luke 3:38), Jesus is the Firstborn of all Creation (Colossians 1:15), and Jesus gave us the right to become children of God who are born of God (John 1:12-13). As Adam, he was the father and God the Mother of humankind. The Jewish scriptures about the fantasy character, Yahweh, also known as the God of Abraham, don't mention that. And so, Paul, who took these scriptures as seriously as a Pharisee, perhaps because he was a former Pharisee, made God male in his theology and persuaded the early Church to do the same. He succeeded because his work made it possible to unite the early Church. Muhammad also married God in the person of Khadijah bint Khuwaylid. Unlike Jesus, he didn't know.

Those who take offence at God in the person of Eve marrying Her son Adam, but accept that God allowed millions of people to be slaughtered in wars or die of terrible diseases, or even chose to do so, have a problem with their priorities. And by the way, you are not in a position to judge God. In any case, the story of Eve and Adam is a myth. Eve never took Her son as Her husband, as Eve and Adam never existed. It is only what Mary Magdalene made Jesus believe. So, you can rest assured that nothing of that kind ever happened, except for the millions of people that God let die due to wars and diseases. A possible excuse for doing so is that it makes the simulation more realistic. Apart from that, everything being peachy all the time doesn't make for a good story.

Jesus and Muhammad have lived. The accounts of their lives may be inaccurate because they date from decades after they died, but the early history of the Israelites in the Jewish Bible - the Jews call it Tanakh - is a fantasy. Archaeological evidence doesn't support it. Moses never brought the Israelites from Egypt into the Promised Land. The story still has a historical origin. Around the time Moses allegedly lived, the Egyptians who governed

Canaan went home, thereby liberating Israel from Egyptian oppression. Later on, the account in the Bible often has a closer relationship to historical events.

That leaves us with a question: how did God meddle with the Jewish nation and their religion? Historians have discovered that the Canaanites gradually formed tribes and, later, petty kingdoms after the Egyptians had departed, in what the Jewish Bible refers to as the Era of the Judges. Local leaders organised warfare and settled disputes. They were the judges. The Jewish Bible says they had nationwide authority, but that is incorrect.

The oldest source of the entire Jewish Bible is the Song of Deborah. Historians believe the song dates back to shortly after the Egyptians left. It likely didn't pop up out of nowhere. Deborah brought victory to a tribe that later became part of the Jewish nation. Deborah attributed that victory to Yahweh, who, as a son of the Canaanite supreme deity El, would otherwise have remained an obscure, inferior deity. In this way, Deborah initiated the Yahweh cult, which today has four billion followers. The historical genesis of the Bible is not Creation but Deborah. She is the Mother of Israel and likely the earliest historical figure in the Jewish Bible, the founder of the Jewish nation, and an avatar of God.

The God of Abraham, known as Yahweh, the Father, and Allah, thus is a veil behind which the owner of this universe has operated so far. She only revealed Herself to Jesus. It made Jesus a unique prophet who came to see himself as the eternally living Son of God. No evidence suggests that Jesus was Adam, but God made him think he was. God, as Mary Magdalene, convinced Jesus that someone had corrupted the story of Eve and Adam. She appealed to rational thinking, arguing that Eve's creation from Adam's rib makes less sense than Adam being Eve's son. God could have pointed out traces of fraud, such as Eve being the Mother of All the Living. So, what about Adam, who called her like so? Apart from that, Mary Magdalene must have had a very persuasive personality because She made him die on the cross. Jesus thus placed evidence and logic over religious dogmas. He was a true religious revolutionary. Sadly, logical evidence-based religion was a tradition that died with him. Jesus was 2,000 years ahead of his time.

That God is a Mother who can appear as an ordinary woman is not that far-fetched. The leader of the Church Ministry of Mother of All Creation cult claimed she was God and that God had had 534 lives, including Jesus, Cleopatra, Joan of Arc, and Marilyn Monroe. The latter three guesses might be spot-on, but her claim of having been Jesus proves she made it all up. Mary Magdalene, however, may not only have claimed it but also succeeded in convincing Jesus of it. It led him to start a world religion that now has over two billion followers. We have yet to see the leader of the Church Ministry of Mother of All Creation cult pull that off.

Jesus' inner circle knew that God had wedded Jesus, but the Gospels don't mention this crucial factoid that everyone would have wanted to know. Scholars didn't ask themselves why there were no surviving eyewitness accounts. Isn't that suspicious? Here is your answer. And why did the early leaders of the Church do it? To religious Jews, the idea of God being a woman who married Jesus was alien or even blasphemous. Most early Christians were Jewish followers who had heard of Jesus and his miracles but lacked detailed knowledge of his life and teachings.

Jewish prophets were human, and they expected a human messiah rather than a godlike being. In their view, Jesus was a mere human. When you read Mark or Matthew, Jesus

appears human, not godlike. Jews couldn't handle the idea that God is a woman who can take a human form and marry Jesus. It contradicted their religious teachings. Gentiles had no problem with it. They have tales about female deities and gods having sex with humans. That is why the Gospel of John is so different from the others. It was a controversy that tore the early Church apart. Jesus' marriage seems not to have been an item of controversy at first, as all the Gospels mention Jesus as the bridegroom. The human Jesus could have a wife, while the godlike Jesus could be the husband of God.

A compromise, the Christian theology invented by Paul, resolved the conflict. Paul turned Jesus into a godlike Jewish messiah, the eternally living Son of God, the one promised by the Jewish scriptures. It required some imagination and twisting of the facts to reconcile these two irreconcilable viewpoints. Paul's theology became the Christianity we know today. Try to understand it from God's perspective. She lives eternally, or at least thousands of years, and uses this world, and us, to pass Her time. Girls just want to have fun. That brings us to messages in pop music. The song 'Gimme the Prize' by Queen has the following lines,

*Here I am, I'm the master of your destiny
I am the one, the only one, I am the God of kingdom come*

...

*Give me your kings, let me squeeze them in my hands
Your puny princes
Your so-called leaders of your land
I'll eat them whole before I'm done
The battle's fought, and the game is won*

Queen, Gimme the Prize

Queen is the performing artist, so the hidden message is that the God of the coming kingdom is a Queen. The song features threats against the so-called leaders of the world. That looks like an end-of-time scenario. It is a queer pun, and Freddy Mercury was the performing artist. In the video clip of another Queen song, 'I Want to Break Free,' Mercury and the band members dressed in women's clothing. In Western Europe, we found it funny. That was different elsewhere. The song had a lukewarm reception in the United States, a country that has culturally enriched us with websites like godhatesfags.com. Christianity is supposed to be a religion of love, but the hatred of LGBTQ people is spewing from the conservative Christian movement.

Christians might justify their evil deeds with Bible verses. For instance, Romans 1:24-27 is particularly clear on the matter. However, these were not Jesus' words but Paul's. Jesus said, 'Who is without sin, cast the first stone.' We don't know Jesus' views on the matter, but Jesus and Paul lived in a tradition that condemned homosexual acts. There is, however, no objective moral reason to do so. In any case, Paul made up a lot, so we should be careful about giving his views too much weight.

This world exists for entertainment, and God likes to joke around. Muslims take blasphemy very seriously. Hurt Muslim feelings have made the headlines several times. Making cartoons of Muhammad can be your death sentence. But why only Muhammad? He isn't God. Why not treat Moses and Jesus with the same regard? The reward for killing a comedian will not be 72 desperate virgins trying to take advantage of your lust. If God

make a joke out of your religion, you'd better laugh. The Abrahamic religions restricted the freedom of women, but Islam more than the others. Like Jesus, Muhammad married God, only he didn't know. He had a loving marriage after his wife, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, proposed to him. Islam may be funny, but Christianity is even more hilarious.

Paul's obfuscation of the relationship between God and Jesus gave Christianity its unique and baffling theology. Drinking Christ's blood, eating his body, and the resurrection of the dead could be good ingredients for a motion picture called *Zombie Apocalypse*. Indeed, these rituals and beliefs are odd and could suit a cannibalistic sect. The outlandishness of Christianity begins with the idea that we are all cursed because Eve and Adam sinned. And then came Jesus, who sacrificed himself for our sins, so you can save yourself by following him. It seems outlandish, but Paul's theological innovation is perhaps one of the most ingenious parts of God's plan.

Humans are the most destructive species that ever roamed this planet. And we are about to destroy ourselves. Our ability to believe in myths can unite us and enable us to perform extraordinary deeds. But unless we all believe the same myth, we will keep on fighting over our myths. That goes a long way in explaining why monotheist religions like Christianity and Islam are intolerant and have eliminated other myths, sometimes by force. So, thinking that we are morally depraved, unworthy of God's grace and in dire need of a saviour might save us from our collective stupidity. Perhaps even that is not enough. Humans may be such a complete failure that saving us requires God to control the script. If we could think for ourselves, we would probably ruin it.

Who was Mary Magdalene?

Who was Mary Magdalene? That question has occupied curious minds throughout the ages. The Gospels allow for confusion. Was Mary Magdalene a repentant prostitute? Inquiring minds want to know. She became a cult figure after the recovery of lost Gospel fragments implying Mary Magdalene and Jesus had an intimate relationship and that She stood above the other Apostles. The official Gospels also contain phrases suggesting Mary Magdalene was the most significant person in Jesus' life. That made Her an inspiring figure for feminists. She witnessed the crucifixion from the foot of the cross after the male disciples had fled and was the first to see the resurrected Jesus.

Luke wrote that Mary Magdalene was one of the women who travelled with Jesus and supported him financially, implying that Mary Magdalene was not only wealthy but also independent, and that no one else decided for Her. We also learn that Jesus had cured these women of illness and demonic possession and that seven demons had troubled Her (Luke 8:1-3). The later-added section at the end of Mark also mentions it, suggesting that it was a falsification of importance, possibly serving to downplay Mary Magdalene's role. According to the Gospels, Mary Magdalene rose to prominence only after the crucifixion and became a central figure in the events that followed.

Mary Magdalene was always with Jesus, and there is no mention of their interactions in the Gospels. According to the Gospels, She did or said nothing of consequence during Jesus' life. Ince he was dead, Mary Magdalene played a central role all of a sudden. There has been speculation as to whether Mary Magdalene was Jesus' wife. Jesus is the bridegroom in every Gospel (Mark 2:19-20, Matthew 9:15, Luke 5:34, John 3:29). Mary Magdalene went out to wash and anoint Jesus' body after the crucifixion (Mark 16:1). This was the duty of the wife. Christians view Jesus as an eternally living, godlike being, whereas a marriage can make him appear human.

Recovered Gospel fragments cast a different light on Jesus' relationship with Mary Magdalene. The Gospel of Philip names Her as Jesus' companion⁷ and mentions that Jesus loved Her more than the other disciples and kissed Her often.⁸ The Gospel of Mary notes that Jesus loved Her more than the other women.⁹ That is close to saying they were married. If these Gospels reveal things the Church didn't want us to know, Mary Magdalene and Jesus Christ must have been a wedded couple.

In the Jesus Movement, the sect led by Jesus during his lifetime, women were equal to men. This was still the case when Paul wrote his letters, in which he named women as full partners in the Christian movement and mentioned them by name. However, this gradually changed, and the Gospels came to emphasise the role of the male Apostles. The role of women in the Jesus Movement was more prominent than the official Gospels reveal.

One of the recovered Gospels, the Gospel of Mary, portrays Mary Magdalene as the leader of the early Church, surpassing the other Apostles, including Peter, who was often regarded as the leader of the Church. One fragment reads,

Peter said to Mary, 'Sister, we know that the Saviour loved you more than all other women. Tell us the words of the Saviour that you remember, the things which you know that we don't because we haven't heard them.' Mary responded, 'I will teach you about what is hidden from you.' And she began to speak these words to them.

This Gospel dates from the second century AD and is not as old as the official Gospels. It is a Gnostic Gospel centred around supposed hidden truths and inner spiritual knowledge, but other Gnostic beliefs are absent. One Gnostic belief is that the Jewish God of the material world is evil, as opposed to the good Christian God of the spiritual world. The Platonic view that ideas create reality and that spirit is superior to matter, which you can also find in the Gospel of John, profoundly influenced Gnosticism.

And so, in another belief, Sophia, or wisdom, created all that is. Her fall led to the creation of the material world. She resides within all humans as the divine spark. Christ's return to redeem humankind is about returning humanity to the spiritual world. If you read between the lines of this latter version, the fall of Eve the Creatrix led to the state of sin in which we live today. The Gnostic Gospels are controversial among scholars because they date from a later period than the official Gospels.

Gnosticism emerged around 100 AD and appears to be related to the enigmatic Gospel of John. The Gnostic movement likely originated from a Christian tradition that held on to the original beliefs and remained outside the mainstream of Pauline Christianity. Scholars now name this tradition the Johannine community. Only the Gospel of John mentions that Christians are born of God. His Gospel is mysterious and secretive about Jesus and his intensely close relationship with God, as are the Gnostics. The confusion and rumours surrounding that relationship fuelled speculation about secret knowledge.

The Gospel of John says that Jesus had an intimate and loving relationship with God. He seemed to have known God personally, believing he had eternal life and existed at the beginning of the world. Christians claim that God is love. So, did God and Jesus kiss and do other things lovers do? God can give birth, so God is not a Father after all.

Mary Magdalene convinced Jesus that She was the reincarnation of Eve and that he was the reincarnation of Adam. She made Jesus believe that Adam was the son of Eve, and that he was the Son of God because Adam was. Adam, being the son of Eve, makes more sense than the rib story. Thus, Mary Magdalene married Jesus after persuading him that he was Her eternal husband from Creation until the End of Times. It explains why Jesus thought he had eternal life, existed from the beginning, and would live until the end. It made Eve the Mother of humanity. Jesus called God Mother rather than Father, so he called his birth mother 'woman' rather than 'mother' (John 2:4, 19:26).

The Gnostic Gospels are most closely related to the Gospel of John. The Gnostics likely split off from the Johannine community after the scribes had turned God the Mother into God the Father. At that point, scribes likely altered the role of Mary Magdalene from God and Jesus' wife to the Beloved Disciple. The split occurred before the removal of the intimate relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus from the Gospel, so when people still knew that the Beloved Disciple, who later became anonymous, was Mary Magdalene. In that previous version of John, they weren't married but soulmates nonetheless, and so intimate that it remained problematic in Pauline Christianity, leading to

another redaction, and the version of John we have now. And so, the Gnostics reveal something that the official Gospels have omitted.

Mary Magdalene's sudden appearance as a central figure only after the crucifixion is likely related to this. Removing details regarding the relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus Christ, which has been the outcome of Paul's efforts to bring Christianity more in line with the Jewish scriptures, alters the plot entirely. So, what remains are some sketchy details. And that is the primary explanation for the current deplorable state of the Gospels, not oral storytelling or embellishments.

There are a few loose ends to tie up. The rib story is a falsification, and Eve was Adam's mother. That we can infer from the text we still have. But was Eve a goddess? That is not so obvious. According to the account in Genesis, God created Eve and Adam. It doesn't corroborate what Mary Magdalene made Jesus believe. Eve is the Mother of all the Living, which suits a Mother Goddess. But you must leave the creation myth in Genesis behind and invent another one to make the idea work.

The first verses in the Gospel of John contain such a myth. After some mystical allusions such as 'in the beginning,' and 'there was light,' and an undercover operation of Jesus during which few recognised him, Christians are born of God. And Jesus gave us the right to become children of God. Eve was God and the Mother of humanity, and Adam, thus Jesus, fathered humanity, and in doing so, he gave us the right to become children of God.

Genesis from Where?

Creation of the world

Where do the first chapters of Genesis come from? They deal with Creation, the fall, and the flood. Who wrote them? And why? These stories mostly ran in Mesopotamia, the birthplace of several ancient civilisations. These civilisations are much older than the Jewish nation and had myths about Creation and the flood that are at least 1,000 years older than the Jewish Bible. The Jews lived in exile in Babylon when they compiled their scriptures. They took local myths to write the first chapters of Genesis. A Babylonian creation myth, the Enūma Eliš, is a bit like the first chapter of Genesis,

*When in the height heaven was not named,
And the Earth beneath did not yet bear a name,
And the primaeval Apsu, who begat them,
And chaos, Tiamat, the mother of them both
Their waters were mingled together,
And no field was formed, no marsh was to be seen;
When of the gods, none had been called into being,
And none bore a name, and no destinies were ordained;
Then were created the gods amid of heaven,
Lahmu and Lahamu were called into being.*

Both Enūma Eliš and Genesis start with chaotic waters before anything comes into being. Genesis says, 'The earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.' In both, a fixed, dome-shaped firmament divides these waters from the habitable Earth, and both have descriptions of the creation of celestial objects and the ordering of time.

The purpose of creation myths is to explain why we exist. Humans are naturally curious and desire answers to such questions. Another purpose is justifying the social order. The peasant population toiled to support the lavish lifestyles of the elites, who were the priests and the rulers. And so, the gods, or God, created man to work the ground, bring offerings to the temple, and pay taxes. The Jewish Bible lays out in great detail the required offerings to the temple and the priests in Leviticus, so Judaism looks like yet another peasant-exploitation scheme devised by priests.

Men and women

The creation of man in Genesis resembles the creation account in the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh, which describes how the gods, tired of working on creation, created a man

to do the job. They put a god to death and mixed his blood with clay to produce the first human in the likeness of the gods,

*In the clay, god and man
Shall be bound,
To a unity brought together;
So that to the end of days
The Flesh and the Soul
Which in a god have ripened –
That soul in a blood kinship is bound.*

In Genesis, God created humans in the likeness of the gods (1:26) and rested after six days of hard labour (Genesis 2:2-3). God then made a man to work the ground (Genesis 2:5) and made him from soil (Genesis 2:7). In the Epic of Gilgamesh, the gods created the first man in Eden, the garden of the gods in Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The same happened in Genesis (Genesis 2:14). There is another story about the origin of man in the story of Enki and Ninmah. The gods, burdened with creating the Earth, complained to Namma, the primordial mother. Namma then kneaded some clay, placed it in her womb, and gave birth to the first humans.

The Mesopotamians thus had at least two creation stories: one in which the gods created humans from soil and another in which a goddess gave birth to humanity. The story of Eve and Adam in Genesis relates to these two tales. Likely, Adam was Eve's son in the original tale, and the Jewish scribes used the first story to tailor the story of Eve and Adam to their theological requirements. Adam's purpose was to be a companion to Eve rather than to work the garden, as the Bible now claims.

The epic further details that the first man, Enkidu, was wild, naked, muscular, hairy and uncivilised. The gods then sent a nude woman to tame him. By making love to him for a week, she turned him into a civilised man of wisdom, who was like a god. She made him a meal and clothed him. In Genesis, Eve made Adam eat (Genesis 2:6), which gave him the learning of the gods. Eve and Adam were naked (Genesis 3:7) before the Lord gave them clothes (Genesis 3:21).

The Epic of Gilgamesh differs from the Genesis account, but the similarities are striking. In both stories, a god creates a man from the soil. The man lives naked in nature. A woman then tempts him. In both accounts, the man accepts food from the woman, receives knowledge, covers his nakedness, and leaves his former life. The appearance of a snake stealing a plant of immortality in the epic is also noteworthy. There were likely similar stories circulating, and we have only a few remaining clay tablets. There might also have been a story where the first woman, Eve, gave birth to the first man, Adam.

The Great Flood

The Great Flood in Genesis also closely resembles the account in the Epic of Gilgamesh. Few scholars doubt that the epic is the source of the biblical narrative. The epic notes that the city of Shurrupak, situated on the banks of the Euphrates River, had grown. The deity

Enlil could not sleep because of the sounds the city made. To deal with the noisy humans below, the gods agreed to drown them all.

The deity Ea warned his friend Utnapishtim and asked him to build an ark. With his children and hired men, Utnapishtim built an enormous boat and went on it with his relatives, animals, and craftsmen. The storm god, Adad, sent a terrible thunderstorm with pouring rains that drowned the city. Then, the gods regretted what they had done.

After seven days, the weather calmed. Utnapishtim looked around and saw an endless sea. He saw a mountain rising out of the water. After another seven days, he released a dove into the air. The dove returned, having found no place to land. He then released a swallow that also came back. Then, he released a raven that didn't come back. Utnapishtim disembarked and made an offering to the gods.

According to the Bible, everyone had grown evil. Only Noah was blameless and faithful. For that reason, God decided to send a flood to wipe out humanity, but to spare Noah and his family. God then ordered Noah to build an ark that could also harbour males and females of every animal species and provide food for them all.

The flood came for forty days. No one survived. After forty days, Noah sent out a raven. Then, he sent a dove to see if the waters had receded. Once the waters receded, the Lord instructed Noah to leave the ark with his wife, his sons, and their wives, and to release the animals. Noah then disembarked and made a sacrifice.

The Greek version

A long time ago, there was a great war between the Olympic gods and the so-called Titans. Some titans sided with the gods. Prometheus, whose name means 'thinking ahead', was one of them. He foresaw that the Olympic gods, led by Zeus, the supreme god, would win the battle. After the battle, Zeus rewarded him by letting him create various life forms. Prometheus, with Zeus' permission, first created animals and then decided to make upright figures, modelled after the gods. Without consulting Zeus, Prometheus then breathed the breath of life into humans, displeasing the supreme god. Prometheus also stole the gods' fire and gave it to humans, which was even less indicative of foresight.

Zeus punished Prometheus for his transgressions by tying him to a rock. Every day, an eagle came by to peck out his liver, which would grow back during the night, a torment without end. A hero named Heracles, however, later liberated him. Zeus also punished the humans. He ordered Hephaestus, the god of blacksmithing, to create a beautiful but dangerous and inquisitive new creature, the woman. Zeus then sent the woman, whose name was Pandora, to humankind, gave her a box and warned her in strong terms to never look inside, even though he knew she wouldn't be able to resist her curiosity. All the gods had put dangerous gifts within the box.

The men, impressed by her looks, adopted Pandora. One day, the curious Pandora could no longer resist the urge and decided to open the box. Out of the box then popped up all the disasters that have plagued humanity since then: famine, disease, earthquakes, and war. The disaster spreads like lightning among the people who, until then, had lived free

from troubles and disease. Women told an alternative account in which Pandora didn't open the box, but her husband, a brother of Prometheus named Epimetheus, whose name means 'thinking afterwards'. There are a few noteworthy parallels with the Bible:

- The humans were created in the image of the gods.
- The creation of humans happened by breathing the breath of life into them.
- The creation of woman occurred after the creation of man.
- The woman's curiosity brings disaster to humankind.
- Pandora's box plays a role similar to the tree of knowledge in Eden.

The ancient Greeks also had a flood myth. The Greek supreme god, Zeus, had decided to punish humanity with a flood. King Lycaon of Arcadia had sacrificed a boy to Zeus, who, appalled by this offering, decided to put an end to human evil by unleashing a deluge. Deucalion and Pyrrha survived Zeus' world-destroying flood by building an ark. Warned by the titan Prometheus, they sailed on away and landed on Mount Parnassus, where the goddess Themis instructed them to repopulate the earth by throwing stones that would turn into new people. The similarities between these stories suggest that cultures influenced each other, yet also diverged in significant ways.

Mother Goddess Eve

In archaeological excavations, female figurines have turned up. They could depict mother goddesses. The most famous example is the Venus of Willendorf, dating back to around 23,000 BC. In ancient cultures, mother goddesses represented fertility. The ability of women to produce offspring could have been the essence of Mother Goddess worship. Women give birth, and early humans may not have understood that men were the fathers. They may have thought men had no reproductive use and existed to please the women. Consequently, the Mother Goddess can give birth as a virgin, which is the miracle of the Mother Goddess. One of the best-known Mother Goddesses was Isis.



Venus of Willendorf. Don Hitchcock (2008). Wikimedia Commons.

Women can be sure that their children are their own, but men can't. When the fathers of children are unknown, families are often matrilineal, meaning that family lines run through mothers. The goddess worship may have disappeared because men desired to control women and their sexuality. The transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture may

have played a crucial role in this development.

Hunter-gatherers were wanderers. They had fewer territorial conflicts. Population density was low, and they had no property, so it was easier to move on if a stronger group invaded a band's territory.¹ That changed with the advent of agriculture. Farmers had to defend their property and families against thieves and invaders. It became a matter of life and death, so warfare became more common and deadly. Giving up territory would mean starvation. Men are willing to protect women and children they consider their own. And they can walk out when they doubt their fatherhood. That gave them a position of power, allowing patriarchy to emerge.

Male dominance is almost universal among humans, with only a few exceptions, so it is something more than merely cultural. Our closest relatives, the chimpanzees, live in groups led by males, while the bonobos live in groups dominated by females. And so, it may be a natural inclination of humans.¹ When women and men have an equal status, women may more often boss men, but there is something in human nature that favours men as clan leaders. As humans are programmable and have varying cultures, they can overcome their natural inclinations and choose female leaders, or make female leadership the standard in their societies, and invent myths to justify the arrangement, such as stories about the Mother Goddess creating the man as a companion for the woman.

As we have no written records, we know little about the lives of hunter-gatherers, their leaders and their family structures. Still, we do know that there must have been an enormous cultural diversity, as they lived in small groups that had little or no contact with each other. The lifestyle of hunter-gatherers was more favourable for female leadership and matrilineal families than farmer communities, so that female leadership and matrilineal families likely were more common before the Agricultural Revolution. Relatively peaceful conditions and a belief that men have no reproductive role, thus only exist to please women, could easily produce female-centred societies.

In her book, *When God Was a Woman*, historian Merlin Stone claims that goddess worship was the earliest religion in the Near and Middle East. The Creator was a woman before men rewrote history. Stone bases her claim on the discovery of female figurines in archaeological finds. In a 7,000-year-old settlement in Turkey, where archaeologists also found these figurines, families were matrilineal.¹⁰

The Garden of Eden features in an ancient Mesopotamian myth, the Epic of Gilgamesh. The garden was near the rivers Tigris and the Euphrates. The Jews lived in exile in Babylon when their priests compiled their holy scriptures. The first chapters of Genesis take place in Mesopotamia. Jewish scribes tailored Mesopotamian myths to their needs and incorporated them into the Jewish Bible.

In the Epic of Gilgamesh, the gods created a man from clay, much like in Genesis. In another creation myth, a goddess gave birth to humanity. There probably were other creation accounts as well. Eve was Adam's mother in the original tale. It makes more sense than Eve coming from Adam's rib. She is the Mother of All the Living (Genesis 3:20), and we are the woman's offspring (seed) (Genesis 3:15). Elsewhere in the Bible, a child is the father's offspring, which is a noteworthy difference. It implies that we come from women and that men have no reproductive role. That perspective sheds a new light on what Eve said about giving birth to Cain (Genesis 4:1),

Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, 'With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.'

It wasn't making love to Adam that made Eve give birth, but the help of the Lord. That is noteworthy because we are the woman's offspring (seed). Perhaps Eve didn't need Adam to have a child. There is another explanation. Long before the Jews went into exile in Babylon and picked up the story about the Garden of Eden, Asherah was the wife of El. They together were the supreme gods of the Canaanite divine council.¹¹ Perhaps they, together, not only brought forth lesser deities like Yahweh, but also humanity, starting with Cain and Abel, so that Asherah was the Mother of All the Living.¹² Later on, the Jews grew particularly attached to Yahweh, so Yahweh became their supreme deity, replacing El.

Asherah then became Yahweh's wife. When the Jews were in exile in Babylon, they drew on local myths to rewrite their creation account. They took a story in which the first woman gave birth to the first man, and may have turned the goddess Asherah into the woman Eve. And so, Adam came somewhat late for the first man. Asherah then went out of the window, as the Jews became monotheists. That is speculation in the realm of biblical scholars, and few have dared to delve into this particular matter, for there is too little information to draw such a conclusion. However, it is plausible and explains this peculiarity quite neatly, which is a quality that the truth also possesses.

In the original Mesopotamian tale, Eve gave birth to Adam without prior sexual intercourse. The miracle of the Mother Goddess is the virgin birth. Jesus supposedly was born of a virgin. As God supposedly was Jesus' Father, he couldn't have had a human father. That is the reason we know about. However, it was also an allusion to Adam's birth. Jesus was God's son because he was Adam reincarnate, the son of Eve, who was God. In scriptural religions, inventing a new story is preferable to contradicting an existing one, as that would imply that the scriptures are corrupt. And you can't have that, most notably when Paul was around. The virgin birth was a necessity if God was to become Jesus' father, but it also reflected God being Jesus' mother, as God's name was also Mary. It miraculously solved two problems, making early Christians agree on this compromise.

The Bible claims that God created a man from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7) to work in the garden (Genesis 2:15) and made a woman as a companion for the man (Genesis 2:18). This is a result of merging with another creation myth. Mesopotamia had several creation myths, including one where the gods fashioned a man from clay to do the work. Also, the Bible has two. In Genesis 1, God creates all that is, and then in Genesis 2, God repeats some of that work. There has been some patching around here and there to glue these two stories.

In the original story of Eve and Adam, the purpose of the man was to be a mate for the woman. A reason to think so is that Genesis mentions the woman's desire for her husband rather than the man's desire for his wife (Genesis 3:16). If you live in a modern society that has undergone several waves of feminism, you may not realise how odd noting a woman's desire for a man truly is. The Bible is a product of a patriarchal society. In a patriarchal society, a woman is often a man's possession, and her desires are of no consequence. The original tale thus had a woman's perspective. Eve was the leading character. She discussed eating the fruit with the serpent and made Adam eat from it (Genesis 3:1-6). And it was Eve who commented on the birth of Cain, not Adam (Genesis 4:1).

Also noteworthy is that a man left his father and mother to be with his wife (Genesis 2:24). This was how life was in Eden. In patrilineal societies, family groups centre around fathers, while matrilineal societies centre around mothers. Women join their husbands' families in patrilineal societies. The man leaving his father and mother thus suggests that family groups in Eden were matrilineal. Experts still debate whether hunter-gatherers lived in patrilineal or matrilineal groups. The limited interest of men in childcare suggests that matrilineal groups could have been the standard as long as there were no compelling reasons to do otherwise. These reasons emerged with the advent of agriculture. The title Mother of All the Living may also refer to the Mother Goddess.¹³ Ashera was the Mother Goddess in Canaan, and one of the deities of the Jews before they became monotheists. Eve also resembles Namma, the primordial mother in the story of Enki and Ninmah.

The Fall is about the curse of knowledge. More knowledge doesn't make your life better. Knowledge of agriculture allowed the switch from hunting and gathering to agriculture, and condemned humankind to a life of toil. The life of hunter-gatherers was more agreeable than the plight of farmers who came later on. They had a more varied diet, worked fewer hours, and spent their time doing more exciting things. Additionally, they were less likely to face starvation, disease, and warfare. The Agricultural Revolution did increase the total amount of available food. However, all this extra food didn't result in a better diet or life, but only in more people, including elites such as kings and priests, who ate the extra food. The peasants worked harder than the foragers before them and got a poorer life in return.¹

The Garden of Eden provided for everything. It was the supposed ideal state of humans where humans tend and oversee God's garden. Eve and Adam were nude (Genesis 2:25), as hunter-gatherers in the jungle today are, so they lived simple lives. They probably were vegetarians as God only gave them permission to eat plants (Genesis 1:28-30),

God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.' Then God said, 'I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.' And it was so.

God once again commanded the man that he was free to eat from any tree in the garden (Genesis 2:16) while not mentioning animals. Ruling the animals is not the same as eating them. Eden is the ideal state of Paradise, where we can eat every plant. Meat is a natural part of our diet, so its omission is noteworthy. As for later verses allowing us to eat animals, it is the same as it is for divorce. Jesus said that it was a concession to our hardness of heart rather than God's intent. That is where idealism meets a reality check. If a marriage is unhappy, divorce may be the best option. And we may need to eat meat to get the required nutrients. Still, the ruling suggests that eating more meat than necessary or mistreating animals is a grave sin.

After the Fall, working the land became a life of toil (Genesis 3:17-19), the curse of the Agricultural Revolution. The original tale was also about the downfall of women. Women had to obey their husbands from then on (Genesis 3:16). So, when Jesus said that Moses permitted men to divorce their wives because their hearts were hard, but that it was not

this way from the beginning (Matthew 19:18), he could have said the same about slaughtering and eating animals.

In ancient cultures, people venerated snakes for their wisdom and knowledge, so consulting a snake for advice was not unusual. The tree of knowledge relates to the sacred tree, which may explain why it was forbidden to eat from it. Eve's deed may reflect the role of women in starting the Agricultural Revolution. Farmers must protect their crops from thieves. Otherwise, they face starvation. That condemned men to a life of warfare. And so, Cain, a crop planter, murdered Abel, a cattle herder. Perhaps Cain had only meagre offerings to God because Abel's animals ate from his crops.

The Abrahamic religions disagree with our Creator being a woman. The Jewish deity Yahweh and the Arabian deity Allah were male, even though many people now think God has no gender. Yahweh and Allah had wives and children before monotheism took over. Allah was at first the supreme deity of Mecca. Later, the owner of the universe appropriated this title. To address the confusion this act generated, the Quran stresses that God has no partner or children. Unlike Christians, Jews and Muslims don't see God as a Father. But Christians are born of God, a most remarkable wording indeed.

The Quran extensively mentions the creation of Adam but says little about the origin of Eve. The Quran doesn't claim that Eve came from Adam's rib but that men and women come from one soul (Quran 4:1, 7:189). It relates to Genesis 1:27, in which God created males and females in His image, so that the soul could be God. The Quran further claims that God created Jesus like Adam from dust (Quran 3:59). The Quran also corroborates the virgin birth story of Jesus (Quran 3:47, 66:12). Christians understand the virgin birth story in the context of God being Jesus' Father, so that he can't have a human father. However, the Quran makes it clear that God is not Jesus' father. And so, being created from dust could refer to birth from a virgin, so Eve could have been Adam's mother.

The account of the Fall in the Quran differs from the one in Genesis in some noteworthy aspects. The Quran features no serpent, and Eve didn't make Adam eat from the tree. The Quran holds both Eve and Adam responsible for the Fall (Quran 7:19-23). Another fragment only blames Adam,

But Satan whispered to him, saying, 'O Adam! Shall I show you the Tree of Immortality and a kingdom that does not fade away?' So they both [Eve and Adam] ate from the tree, and then their nakedness was exposed to them, prompting them to cover themselves with leaves from Paradise. So Adam disobeyed his Lord, and so he lost his way.

The historical context of the original story, the curse of the Agricultural Revolution, and the role of women in it have been lost in the Quran. The first Christians believed that Eve was God, the Mother of all the Living, who gave birth to Adam, that Mary Magdalene was Eve, and Jesus was Adam. So Adam and, therefore, Jesus were the Son of God. Humanity descends from Eve, so we are God's children (John 1:13), but also Jesus' children.

Tribespeople feel a connection to each other because they believe they share common ancestors. The stories about these common ancestors are myths, such as the tale about Eve and Adam. Eve and Adam came alive again as Mary Magdalene and Jesus. The myth of Eve and Adam can turn humanity into a single tribe. It is the reason why Christians wait

for Jesus' return. And so, Paul may have realised that the good news of Jesus concerns humankind rather than just the Jews.

Virgin Mary

Mother Goddess Mary

Jesus' birth mother, Mary, plays a prominent role in Christianity. As the story goes, she was a virgin who birthed Jesus. She is the central figure in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity. She is the Mother of God, Church tradition holds, thereby implying Jesus was God and that God has a mother, which is indeed highly peculiar. Many Catholics pray to Mary rather than to Jesus or God. In this way, Mary is a proxy for God. The Quran consistently names Jesus the son of Mary rather than the Son of God. The images of Mary with the child resemble those of the Mother Goddess. They picture Jesus as the Son of God, the Mother. That is most noteworthy because Jesus believed he was Adam, the Son of Eve, the Son of God. How could this happen? Inquiring minds want to know. Now, there is the historical explanation, and there is the script that God wrote.



*Isis with Horus. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
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In the early years of Christianity, there was no cult of the Virgin Mary. The earliest Christian paintings, made around 235 AD, depict Christ, Peter, and martyrs, but not Mary. The first solid evidence of devotion to the Virgin Mary dates back to the third century, but its origin remains unclear. Perhaps, early Christians prayed to Mary as they did to other saints. Possibly, Mary granted the most requests, which made her increasingly popular. In this sneaky manner, the Mother Goddess sneaked into the Church through a back door, via the cult of the Virgin Mary. The ability to give birth without the need of a man is the miracle of the Mother Goddess. Christians later created statues and icons of the Virgin with the child Jesus, looking like the Egyptian mother goddess Isis with her child Horus.



Saint Mary Bolnichka Icon. Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.

So, what brought Mary to this elevated status? Mary is not only the mother of Jesus, but Christians and Muslims believe she was a virgin. Jesus' birth from a virgin didn't happen. That we can be sure of. Matthew and Luke mention Jesus' virgin birth, but Mark and John don't. Had it been common knowledge, all the Gospels would have mentioned it. And if it had happened, it would have been common knowledge. So, was it a myth that sprouted up in the Christian community? Or did the Church Fathers have a pressing cause to invent the story of Jesus' virgin birth? There is reason to believe the latter.

And Jesus became a carpenter

The virgin birth of Jesus never happened. In Galatians, Paul writes that God sent His Son, who was born of a woman (Galatians 4:4). That was around 55 AD. Had he known about the virgin birth, that would have been an excellent opportunity to enlighten us, but somehow he didn't mention it. Likely, the virgin birth hadn't happened. A motive for inventing the virgin birth that immediately presents itself is that if God were Jesus' Father, he couldn't have a human father. That is not entirely satisfactory. If Jesus saw God as his Father, there is no pressing need for a virgin birth. In that case, Jesus said 'Father' to God. That would be all there is to it. Still, it is possible that the claim was unconvincing, and a virgin birth might have made it more believable.

Alternatively the myth could have emerged within the Christian community to fill in the gap, as there was no narrative of Jesus' birth. But there is reason to think otherwise, as we will see. Paul's phrase 'born of a woman' also suggests so. It is strange to mention that fact at all if it was not for a particular reason. And so, there is more to it. That the virgin birth is an intentional falsification, you can infer by comparing Mark to Matthew. Mark dates from around 70 AD. Matthew came five to ten years later. Both are truthful to some extent. You can use one to detect the lie in the other. Mark tells that people in Jesus' hometown called him 'the carpenter' and 'Mary's son' (Mark 6:3),

Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?

The Gospel of Mark doesn't mention Joseph, who was Jesus' human father. It does note that Jesus had brothers and sisters, of whom we learn only the names of the brothers. You would expect the townspeople to call him Joseph's son. But they didn't, and called him Mary's son, as if the virgin birth had occurred. Yet, Mark doesn't mention that noteworthy incident that you would definitely report on if you knew it had happened. It could be an error, but the mistake is so specific that it seems intentional. That it could be an edit, you can find in Matthew (Matthew 13:55),

Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us?

The Gospel of Matthew mentions both the virgin birth and that Jesus has a human father and explains them in the virgin birth story, where Joseph accepts Jesus as his son, rendering such an edit redundant. Mark came before Matthew, scholars agree, and it contains fewer fancies. In this case, Mark and Matthew likely drew on the same source, which referred to Jesus as the carpenter's son. The Church Fathers likely made up the story of the virgin birth. The clumsy editing makes it seem as if Jesus were a carpenter.

By the time Matthew wielded his pen, the Church Fathers had contrived a proper cover story so that they didn't have to remain secretive about his human father anymore. Such an explanation presumes that the authors of Mark and Matthew were prominent people within the Church who had contact with its leadership. They wouldn't have done so if it had not been a solution to a theological problem. Luke came later, and the author begins by stating that he has compiled his account from various sources, including circulating texts and oral stories. That is why Luke plays no role in this explanation.

The author of Matthew also sought a prophecy in the scriptures that predicted Jesus' virgin birth. Isaiah wrote that a young woman would give birth to a son as a sign that God would destroy Judah's enemies (Isaiah 7:14). Isaiah addressed King Ahaz in the eighth century BC and didn't foresee the coming of Jesus, who would arrive seven centuries later. The Greek translation of the Jewish Bible, available in the first century AD, translated a young woman as a virgin. The author of Matthew saw it as a prophecy of Jesus' virgin birth. There was no prophecy of this event that never happened, and that is no coincidence.

The author was particularly preoccupied with proving that Jesus was the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. To that aim, he fabricated a genealogy to demonstrate that Jesus descended from the House of David. And behold, he uncovered fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah, Jesus, which is so neat that it only happens in fairy tales. The prophet Micah prophesied that a ruler would come from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). And somehow Matthew 'discovered' that it was the birthplace of Jesus. Mark and John don't mention the virgin birth or Bethlehem. Jesus was probably born in Nazareth, had an ordinary childhood and joined the movement of John the Baptist.

Mary as the New Eve

If Jesus called God his Father, there is no reason to invent the virgin birth. You don't need to prove that God is Jesus' Father. If Jesus said so, that would be good enough. His having a human father wouldn't change that. The answer to the mystery is that Jesus never called God 'Father,' but rather 'Mother.' Jesus was the Son of God because God, in the person of Mary Magdalene, convinced Jesus that he was Adam reincarnate, and that She was Eve reincarnate. And Eve didn't come from Adam's rib, but Adam was Eve's son. The virgin birth of Jesus from Mary replaced the 'virgin birth' of Adam from Eve.

In Christian theology, Mary is the New Eve. God announced there would be enmity between the offspring of the serpent and that of the woman (Genesis 3:15). Christians see it as a prophecy predicting the coming of Jesus. They believe the seed of the woman refers to the virgin birth of Jesus, while it was Adam's. That made Mary the New Eve. In this manner, Mary became the replacement for Eve. It is unclear whether those who invented the virgin birth myth had this in mind, but it is possible.

It could have been part of a compromise to unify the Church. The virgin birth of Jesus from Mary could initially have been a code for the birth of Adam from the Goddess Eve. Eve, being Adam's mother, and Jesus calling God his Mother, contradict the Jewish scriptures in a rather awkward way. So, why not say Jesus was born of a virgin instead? After all, Jesus was Adam, and Eve had sexual intercourse before giving birth to Adam. And God's name was Mary, just like Jesus' mother, while God was Jesus' Mother. That was very convenient indeed, a convenience provided by providence, no doubt.

Cloak and dagger

The Virgin Mary appeared more frequently to people than Jesus and performed more miracles than any other saint. There is little or no evidence of many of these supposed miracles, but the Fatima Miracle had 40,000 witnesses, so there should be no doubt that something spectacular had happened there. God the Father doesn't appear in this way. And there are no 40,000 witnesses who saw a miracle that the Father announced. That is because there never was a Father. Virgin Mary became such a potent figure because she is the cloak behind which God the Mother has hidden Herself so far. Now, we are at the cloak-and-dagger part: the Quran boasts a hidden secret.

In the Quran, Mary is the most prominent woman and the only woman mentioned by name. The Quran dedicates an entire chapter, chapter 19, to the Virgin Mary. The number 19 has great significance in Islam. Some Muslims indulge in arcane numerological explanations as to why that is so. The Quran refers to this number in the chapter named 'The Hidden Secret.' And so, the Quran may hold a hidden secret related to this number. The Quran also claims Mary was a virgin, thus confirming the miracle of the Mother Goddess. The Virgin Mary became the cloak behind which God hid Her identity.

The star and crescent became Islam's symbol. It has a long history predating Islam, as it was associated with a Moon goddess. In the Bible, the moon refers to the woman and the star to the child (Genesis 37:9). Hence, the Islamic symbol represents the Madonna with the child Jesus or the relationship between Khadijah bint Khuwaylid and Muhammad. She was fifteen years older. A woman of Her age could have been his mother.



The St. Mary of Zion Church in Ethiopia is said to contain the Ark of the Covenant. Legend has it that the Ark came to Ethiopia with King Menelik after he visited his father, King Solomon. The Ark symbolises Mary of Zion. The Ark is supposed to be the residence of Yahweh, the God of Israel.¹⁴ That is remarkable, as God's name was also Mary.

Statue storm

The Protestant Reformation was an attempt to return to Christianity's roots by viewing Scripture as the sole source of Christian truth. The Protestants ended church traditions that lacked biblical grounds, including the veneration of the Virgin Mary. Nothing in the Bible justifies the cult of Mary. Protestants removed icons and statues from their Churches because one of the Ten Commandments prohibits making images for worship (Exodus 20:4-5). In the Netherlands, the Protestant Reformation caused a 'statue storm' where Protestant religious vigilantes ravaged Catholic Church interiors.

Protestantism developed in an era of emerging rationalism and naturalism. And so, Protestants also object to magic and superstition, deeming it Satan's work, while Catholics love miracles like healings at Lourdes and weeping Mary statues. Miracles have always been part of the Catholic tradition.

The Protestants erased an essential part of Christianity's original message of the Mother Goddess giving birth to Her son. Instead of getting closer to the truth, the Protestants wandered further from it. And it didn't solve anything, but only generated more confusion. The Protestants soon began fighting among themselves over the interpretation of the scriptures. You can't be wrong, because if you are, you end up frying eternally in Satan's ovens. That was the reason Protestantism started in the first place. So, after the Protestant storm is over, we have over 45,000 branches of Christianity.

The Last Adam

Adam is the Son of God (Luke 3:38) and Jesus the Firstborn of all Creation (Colossians 1:15). Was Jesus Adam reincarnated? And was Adam born? Firstborn means you are the family heir, so the Firstborn of All Creation means you inherited the world. That is the standard interpretation with which most scholars would likely agree. The Christian doctrine states that Jesus already existed with God before creation and thus was not Adam. That is not what the words say, nor is it what Jesus' inner circle believed. Existence before creation is not the same as being born. And Adam was the Son of God. When Paul was busy writing Colossians, he was also working on Christian theology, and his thoughts were still in a state of flux. And so, there may be more to it than theologians can explain.

Theologians regurgitate a century-old, pre-chewed menu of previous generations of theologians. Do theologians ever come up with something new rather than yet another insight on a hair-splitting detail? Do they discuss the simulation argument? No! They occupy themselves with century-old controversies. Why would Jesus sacrifice himself for Adam's transgression? It makes more sense if Jesus believed he was Adam, who had to redeem himself. That was an idea Paul entertained for a while, for Jesus thought he was Adam. Only that generated serious theological problems. How could the perfect sinless Jesus also be the sinner Adam? And so, his mind ground on. Eventually, Christians came to believe that Jesus existed before creation, as laid out in the Gospel of John.

Don't blame theologians for not being sufficiently imaginative. You could easily go astray. That ireful cloud that led the Israelites out of Egypt in a 2,500-year-old Jewish fairy tale was Eve from an even older Iraqi fairy tale, who gave birth to Adam, which the surviving Jewish version of the Iraqi fairy tale doesn't mention. And by the way, that cloud from the fairy tale was Judge Deborah, the first historical person in the Bible. She started the Jewish nation by slaying Israel's enemies and claiming that a magical cloud named Yahweh did it. She later married Jesus as Mary Magdalene and Muhammad as Khadijah bint Khuwaylid. You can't guess it unless God gives you the clue that unlocks the mystery.

The message of Jesus being Adam still features in Christian doctrine as a remnant of an original belief. Jesus is the New Adam, and his birth mother is the New Eve, which implies that Jesus married his mother in a previous life. And precisely that was the original message of Christianity. Paul compares Jesus to Adam. In Romans, he writes, 'Just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.' (Romans 5:19)

Paul didn't blame Eve for the Fall. Later writers posing themselves as Paul cast the blame on Eve. But Paul, a god-fearing individual who still knew the truth, wasn't that daring. In 1 Corinthians, Paul noted, 'As in Adam all die, so in Christ, all will be made alive.' Jesus thus became the redeemer for Adam's Fall. Paul called Jesus the Last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). Jesus being Adam's reincarnation was an early Christian belief until the narrative changed to Christ's existence before creation. And so, you only find the comparison in Paul's letters, the earliest surviving documents of Christianity.

The Quran underpins the idea that Jesus is Adam. You have to read between the lines. Jesus was like Adam in the way he was created (Quran 3:59), and the Quran supports the Christian claim that Jesus was born of a virgin (Quran 3:47, 19:16-22). Hence, they are both 'born of a virgin.' Not really, of course, but people believed it. And several Quran verses state that God ordered the angels to prostrate before Adam (Quran 2:34, 7:11, 15:28-29, 17:61, 18:50, 20:116, 38:71-74). The Quran mentions it seven times, making it appear significant. And seven times, Jesus says 'I am' in the Gospel of John, stressing his supposed divinity.

The Epistle to the Hebrews claims that God made Jesus, the firstborn, into the world, superior to the angels and made the angels worship him (Hebrews 1:1-7). And if the Quran is a message from God, the presumed guy in the sky, who possesses superpowers but is not Superman, and also not a man, then Jesus could be Adam. The Quran also claims Jesus will return (Quran 43:61). If he were Adam, God's firstborn, who had already returned once, he could. Otherwise, it all gets even odder than it already is.

Sarah, Mother of the Jews

Weaving one tale inside another

The Jewish Bible is a good read, apart from the sections that lay out the Jewish religious laws in excruciating detail. It features tales about the Jewish patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt to the Promised Land under the guidance of a wrathful cloud. It is nearly all made up. Writing and editing the Jewish Bible took centuries. The authors wrote it to promote their religion rather than to provide an accurate account of history. That is how historians look at the Jewish Bible. If you believed it all, don't blame the Jews for writing good stories, but yourself for your gullibility. You could have known if you had put some effort into educating yourself. And you don't think reptiles live among us because scriptwriters in Hollywood made a film in which they do? Some do. That is how imagination becomes religion.

But what does the almighty owner of quadrillions of galaxies have to do with the Jewish Bible, a product of the fantasies of a petty nation dwelling in a small area on a tiny planet near an insignificant star inside one of those countless galaxies? To answer that question, imagine you are John Ronald Reuel Tolkien writing about Hobbits living in The Shire. The Shire might be an insignificant spot on a tiny planet in an infinitely large universe, but Tolkien hardly cares about the rest. Only the Shire and the Hobbits have his interest. Tolkien could write a story about a Hobbit who makes up stories about his maker.

If Tolkien can do that, God can do it too. After all, that is one of the perks of being all-powerful. If God is a woman and has been among us as Mary Magdalene, what roles did God play among the Jews? In other words, which women in the Jewish Bible were God in disguise? Inquiring minds want to know because many of these stories are fantasy. At best, these are local tales that may or may not have some connection to actual events and have become integrated into the biblical narrative. Hence, the first question you should ask is: Can God have played a role in stories that never happened in the story?

Tolkien can write a story in which a Hobbit writes a story in which Tolkien enters the Shire disguised as a Hobbit. But that story never happened in the story Tolkien wrote. It is a tale that a Hobbit wrote in Tolkien's story. The Hobbit might not even realise that the Hobbit in the tale is Tolkien in disguise, but he thinks it is just a Hobbit with a special role in the story, because that is the plot Tolkien created. I hope you haven't lost track. That is the level of deception we are talking about here. And what about the Hobbits starting a religion with an imagined creator? Then the truth comes out. Tolkien reveals himself, and the Hobbits all laugh. And then it turns out that, even though the story that this Hobbit wrote never happened, it featured Tolkien disguised as a Hobbit. So it is possible. And indeed, strong women, who could have been God in disguise, appear in the Jewish Bible.

Hiding it behind human motivations

Powerful women also appeared in the Jewish Bible for a mundane reason. The Israelites were too small a people and thus too weak to defend a territory. They had to survive as a minority in the lands of others. Military adventurism would be fatal for them. To facilitate the right attitude among Jewish men, the authors of the Jewish Bible invented a new type of hero. Rather than fearless warriors, their heroes were virtuous individuals who helped others, such as Boaz,⁴ people with weaknesses like David, and risk-averse, shrewd individuals. Abraham was not a courageous warrior, nor was his son, Isaac. Resourcefulness had to compensate for that. Jacob cheated on his brother Esau and took his birthright. Meet the Jewish hero. He is a family man but lacks the courage to defend wife's honour. Yet he is shrewd and defrauds his brother. And he has God on his side.

Heroes die, but the cunning and timid remain, even more so if God is on their side. That is why there are still Jews, while other nations made a one-way trip to the dustbin of history due to their excess testosterone and stupidity. And, of course, they lacked divine support. That is why the authors of the Jewish Bible refashioned the role of men and women in family life. The stories of Jewish patriarchs focused on family life and domestic affairs, in which women played a central role. And women played a crucial part in Israel's victories.⁴

That undermined male authority in war. In several cases, women achieved triumph on the battlefield or determined the fate of men. Jacob defrauded Esau of his birthright and deceived his father, Isaac, with the help of his mother, Rebecca. Esther saved the Jewish people from a plot in the Persian court. The Jewish Bible doesn't depict events suggesting Rebecca or Esther could have been God in disguise. There are, however, a few stories that catch the imagination and qualify. According to the Bible, Jewish history begins with Sarah and Abraham. There was something special about Sarah, the matriarch of the Jews.

Sarah and Abraham

The Lord allegedly promised Abraham that one day, his offspring would be as countless as the stars and own the land between Egypt and the Euphrates River. His wife, Sarah, was barren. She asked Abraham to sleep with her slave Hagar, so Hagar would bear a child in her name. Those were the days when slavery was not forbidden, and you could get away with that. Once Hagar was pregnant, she began to look down on Sarah. Sarah then mistreated Hagar, and Hagar fled. But God sent an angel, the famous Angel of the Lord, who ordered Hagar to return and submit herself to Sarah. Hagar bore Abraham a son, Ishmael.

That could have been good enough, but the Lord chose differently and presented Abraham with a covenant. It required the circumcision of all males, and Sarah was to become the matriarch of the Jewish nation. At the time, Abraham was one hundred years old, and Sarah was ninety. Abraham and Sarah laughed when they learned this. Remember, 4,000 years ago, there were no erection enhancement pills or fertility treatments. Sarah became pregnant and bore Isaac.

Like in most traditional agricultural societies, Jewish religious law prescribes that men precede women in inheritance. Daughters can only inherit if there are no sons. Nevertheless, being a matriarch of the Jewish people is crucial because you are a Jew if your mother is one. Your father is irrelevant to your Jewishness. God was particularly picky as to who was to become the matriarch of the Jews. In this sense, the Jews are not primarily children of Abraham, as the Jewish Bible says, but children of Sarah in the same way Christians are children of God.

Abraham feared for his life because of Sarah's beauty. When the Egyptians asked if Sarah was his wife, he said she was his sister. The Pharaoh's servants took notice and informed the Pharaoh, who took her as his wife. God then inflicted severe diseases on Pharaoh and his household. That is divine justice. God punished the Pharaoh because Abraham had deceived him. With a God like that, you don't need Satan. Not surprisingly, that horned fellow was nowhere to be found in this tale. Perhaps he enjoyed a sabbatical. The Bible doesn't tell. Abraham did the same in Abimelech's kingdom, thus knowingly bringing Abimelech into mortal danger. King Abimelech then received threats from God after he planned to take Sarah as his wife. Luckily for him, God didn't have a bad mood that day.

To us mere mortals, an intriguing question might be, what made Abraham worthy in the eyes of God? Is it that he intended to sacrifice his son when a voice asked him? If it had happened today, we would have locked up Abraham in a mental ward. If Abraham was God's husband, it makes more sense. In any case, God works in mysterious ways, and a ram presented itself, and that same voice then asked Abraham to sacrifice the animal instead. That was a narrow escape. If that ram had not been there, there would have been no Jewish people, and world history would have been entirely different. That is chaos theory at work here, or is it God's plan?

In family matters, God sided with Sarah. The Angel of the Lord summoned Hagar to return to her mistress, Sarah. Later, God told Abraham to send Hagar away. Sarah wanted this. Sarah became the matriarch of the Jews because the Lord commanded. The Lord thus represented her well. Had this been a scrap of history, Sarah might have been God in disguise and done an excellent job of hiding that. However, God can also play an undercover role in events that never took place. That is a perk of writing the story yourself. And why does God desire bits of male reproductive organs in exchange for making a covenant? That is indeed most peculiar unless the Lord is a Lady. Another, and probably better, explanation is that it is a hygiene measure. The Jewish Bible describes the rules for ritual hygiene that Jews are required to follow in great detail.

Asenath and Joseph

Jacob had twelve sons, but Joseph was his favourite and the best-looking one. His brothers were jealous and conspired against him. They sold him as a slave. Joseph ended up in the household of Potiphar, an Egyptian and a high-ranking official in Pharaoh's court. Joseph did well there and became Potiphar's favourite. Joseph was handsome, so he caught the eye of Potiphar's wife, who wanted to sleep with him. When he refused, she accused Joseph of trying to seduce her, and Potiphar put him in prison. There, Joseph became the prison warden's favourite. Joseph was adept at explaining dreams. That

eventually brought him to the Pharaoh, who also made Joseph his favourite. The Pharaoh made him a Viceroy and put him in charge of the granaries.

Scholars believe that the biblical story of Joseph was once a separate story that originated in the Jewish community living in Egypt at the time when many other Jews were in Babylonian captivity. The story resembles several Egyptian tales about a seven-year famine, divine dreams, and a wise vizier who helped the pharaoh and priests to restore the land. One of these stories, in fact, is inscribed on a large monument called the Famine Stele near Elephantine, an Egyptian colony on the Nile River where many Jews also lived.

Joseph married Asenath, the daughter of an Egyptian high priest. The Jewish Bible tells us nothing about her. That raised questions as marrying pagans became a controversial matter for Jews. A later story about their marriage explains how Joseph, after he escaped Potiphar's wife, ended up in the arms of a pagan priestess. How could God have let this happen? An explanation was needed and invented, and they named the story Joseph and Asenath, which was quite to the point. According to this tale, Asenath was proud and despised men, but became impressed by Joseph's looks.

Joseph first didn't want to marry a pagan priestess who bowed before idols and didn't worship the God of the Jews. But lo and behold, Asenath showed repentance and changed her faith. And then an angel from heaven hurried to her chamber to bless the marriage. When Asenath told Joseph, he changed his mind and married her. It thus must have been convincing. Asenath's change of faith appears insincere and may have been motivated by her desire to marry Joseph. Nevertheless, God blessed the marriage, which is remarkable considering the high standards that usually apply. Asenath might have been God in disguise if only this had actually happened.

Zipporah and Moses

A fellow named Moses allegedly led the Israelites out of Egypt. A burning bush claiming to be God commanded Moses to return to Egypt to free the Israelites. Moses then took his wife, Zipporah, and their sons and started his journey to Egypt. On the road, they stayed at an inn, where that same burning bush supposedly came to kill Moses, which is a reason why you should not believe it happened. Zipporah saved Moses' life by circumcising their son and touching Moses' feet with the foreskin, saying he was her bridegroom of blood (Exodus 4:24-26). Later, the burning bush allegedly successfully transformed itself into an irate cloud of fire that helped Moses lead the Israelites into the Promised Land.

Zipporah saving Moses' life fits the agenda of the authors of the Jewish Bible, which is to undermine male authority so Jewish men wouldn't strive to posthumously win the prestigious Darwin award for their military adventures and terminate the Jewish people in the process. After all, the success of Moses' mission depended on Zipporah having rescued him from the consequences of his daring attempt to let his son remain uncircumcised. God somehow was particularly keen on that foreskin. Zipporah knew what God was about to do and the reason why. But Zipporah reading God's mind? No mere mortal could accomplish such a feat, not even Jesus. Hence, Zipporah might have been God in disguise if only this had happened.

Bathsheba and David

Bathsheba, who was the wife of Uriah, brought ruin to David and his kingdom. While Uriah served in the army to fight one of David's wars, Bathsheba conspicuously bathed on a rooftop near the royal palace, where David could see her naked. She intended to seduce him. The alternative explanation that there was no room inside the house to bathe isn't persuasive. David ordered Bathsheba to come to his place. And so She did, apparently without even saying it might be a bad idea. She became pregnant after sleeping with him. David then commanded Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, to go home, hoping he would sleep with his wife so the scandal would go unnoticed. But Uriah didn't out of solidarity with his comrades on the battlefield. David then asked his commander to place Uriah on the frontline of the battle so he would die. After Uriah died, David married Bathsheba. Bathsheba turned out to be a true fate changer. She also bore the future king Solomon.

You might have learned that the Lord loved David, but the subsequent events don't demonstrate that. From then on, everything went downhill. In hindsight, this sequence of incidents led to the son of Bathsheba ascending to the throne. The prophet Nathan foretold David that his act would bring a curse upon his house. David's eldest son, Amnon, was murdered by his half-brother Absalom after he had raped Absalom's sister Tamar. Later, Absalom declared himself king and started a revolt against David, and David's troops killed him. That eliminated two potential heirs to the throne. In David's old age, Bathsheba secured the succession to the throne of Solomon. The marriage was a grave sin, but God nevertheless loved Bathsheba's son, who was to become king. Bathsheba could have been God in disguise.

That might shed some light as to why the Lord loved David so much, as it cannot be due to his moral virtue. And it presents us with a reason why he couldn't resist Bathsheba. David is a historical figure, so there could be truth to the story. It, however, also fits the agenda of the authors of the Jewish Bible. Even Israel's greatest king, David, had faults and crumbled in the hands of a woman. But who would have thought Bathsheba had something to do with the angry cloud dwelling in that tent? Remarkably, the name Bathsheba is composed of two parts: Bath and Sheba. Bathsheba seduced David by bathing naked on a rooftop near the palace. The Queen of Sheba later visited Solomon. That is a bit odd. Hence, the Queen of Sheba may also have been an avatar of God.

Deborah, the founder of the Jewish nation

Sarah is the matriarch of the Jews, but she never lived in that capacity as a historical figure. The Jews have a real matriarch insofar as anything is real in this world. She is also in the Jewish Bible. The Jewish nation gradually emerged after Egypt retreated from Canaan around 1150 BC. That left a power vacuum in which states gradually developed from tribal leadership. It corresponds with the tribal era of the judges in the Bible. One of the oldest texts of the Jewish Bible is the Song of Deborah (Judges 5), dating back to the era before the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.¹⁵ Deborah was a tribal leader during this age.

Deborah was the fourth judge in the Book of Judges. Only Deborah may have lived in that era in that role. The Song of Deborah, not Genesis, is the actual starting point of the Jewish Bible. The song likely didn't pop up out of nowhere. Jewish tribespeople composed it to celebrate the victory brought by their heroine, Deborah. She is the earliest historical person in the Bible. She attributed the triumph to Yahweh rather than El, so the history of the Jews as Yahweh's people began with Deborah.

She took part in a battle (Judges 4:8-9). As the story goes, Deborah sent for Barak, the commander of the troops, and said to him, 'The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.' (Judges 4:6-7) But it was Deborah who commanded Barak. And so, She might have been the God of Israel in disguise and founded the Jewish nation and religion in person.

Khadijah, Mother of the Believers

Bride of Muhammad

Mother of the Believers is a title Muslims give to the wives of Muhammad. It best suits his first wife, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid. According to Islamic sources, Khadijah was a wealthy widow and Muhammad's employer. She had been married twice and had children from those marriages. Khadijah was a very successful merchant. Khadijah's trade caravan equalled the caravans of all other traders of the Quraysh put together. Khadijah neither believed in nor worshipped idols, which was uncommon. Khadijah didn't travel with Her trade caravans but employed others to trade on her behalf. Muhammad was one of them.

Muhammad attracted Her interest. He was twenty-five, and Khadijah was forty when She proposed to him. The woman proposing marriage to the man was indeed unusual, especially given the time and place where it occurred. She was wealthy and way out of Muhammad's league, so that he wouldn't have considered it. The marriage between Khadijah and Muhammad was both happy and monogamous. When he was without Her on one of his journeys, Muhammad never had any desire for other women. They had six children, of whom four daughters survived. It is possible that Muhammad adopted some of these children, and that they were the children of Khadijah's deceased sister.

Muhammad returned home, shocked after the Archangel Gabriel appeared to him for the first time. He told Khadijah what had happened, trembling, no doubt. She comforted him like a mother and supported him thereafter. Khadijah's moral support made Muhammad believe in his mission, and Her financial support was indispensable. Apart from a wife, Khadijah was thus like a mother to Muhammad, in the likeness of Eve and Adam. She was Muhammad's boss in more ways than one. Like Jesus, Muhammad married God. However, unlike the Bride of Christ, the Bride of Muhammad is still well-known. Only after Khadijah's death did Muhammad marry several other women.

Quran origins

Muslims believe that the Quran was revealed to Muhammad by God, with the Archangel Gabriel serving as the intermediary. The Quran lacks chronological order and repeats itself. Scholars believe its historical accuracy is inferior to that of the Bible in describing the same events. And so, you might find it hard to believe that this scratchy collection of sayings, which Muslims claim has unparalleled artistic value and is so brilliantly composed that it is beyond the capabilities of even the brightest minds to reproduce, is the word of God and meant to correct corruptions in previous Jewish and Christian scriptures, as Muslims claim. But if you don't know Arabic and rely on a foreign translation, you cannot assess the Quran's artistic value. And God works in mysterious ways. The first Muslims memorised the verses and didn't write them down.

Memorising such a lengthy text for decades is prone to errors. And the Muslims fought several battles that took the lives of some of those who knew these verses. To reduce the risk of verses going lost in this manner, the early Muslims divided the task of memorising the Quran and assigned multiple men to recall the same verses. How well they did that is anyone's guess. It explains a great deal about why the Quran is the way it is. Those who later wrote down the Quran didn't edit the verses or present them chronologically because humans shouldn't distort God's words. If only early Christians had shown that kind of reverence for their scriptures, Christianity would have been an entirely different religion.

Historical analysis suggests that much of the Quran originated from previously extant Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian sources. The Arab desert was far from Rome, so local Christians could hold deviant views that the Church considered heretical, such as that Jesus didn't die for our sins, that Jesus was human and not the Son of God and that Jesus didn't die on the cross but that there had been some ploy to make people believe that. The Quran mentions that Jesus created birds from clay and breathed life into them (3:48-49, 5:109-110). The Gospel of Thomas mentions this. Speaking from the cradle, Jesus defended his mother against accusations of sexual immorality (Quran: 19:27-30).

Parts of the Quran have no previously known sources. They could have been part of God's message that the Archangel Gabriel supposedly dispatched to Muhammad. The Quran also adds a few juicy details to existing stories that the Jews have failed to mention in their Bible. These might have been local tales circulating in the area. An example is King Solomon gathering an army of ghosts, men and birds, entering the valley of the ants, and ants talking to each other (Quran 27:15-18),

Indeed, We granted knowledge to David and Solomon. And they said in acknowledgement, 'All praise is for God Who has privileged us over many of His faithful servants.'

And David was succeeded by Solomon, who said, 'O people! We have been taught the language of birds, and been given everything we need. This is indeed a great privilege.'

Solomon's forces of ghosts, humans, and birds were rallied for him, perfectly organised.

And when they came across a valley of ants, an ant warned, 'O ants! Go quickly into your homes so Solomon and his armies do not crush you unknowingly.'

In virtual reality, these things can happen. We have no evidence, but some things are more plausible than others. Talking ants are as believable as a serpent talking to Eve. Still, Muslims claim Muhammad was the last prophet before the End Times and that the Quran corrects mistakes and omissions in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. At first glance, this is not particularly convincing, but the Quran contains a few discrepancies that seem more meaningful in hindsight:

- The Quran discusses Adam's creation extensively but says little about how Eve came to be. The story of the rib is absent. The Quran claims that humans originate from one soul (Quran 39:6), like the creation in God's image (Genesis 1:27).
- The Quran doesn't blame Eve for the Fall. Eve and Adam transgressed together. One passage explicitly blames Adam (Quran 20:120-121).

- There is no original sin in Islam. The Quran states that Eve and Adam repented, and God forgave them (Quran 2:37, 7:23). The Quran doesn't claim that Jesus was a redeemer for the sins of humankind.
- The Quran names Jesus the Son of Mary and confirms the virgin birth, thereby implying that Jesus had no father, and because Christians call him the Son of God, it opens up the possibility that God's name was Mary.
- In the Quran, God orders the angels to prostrate before Adam seven times, while the New Testament says the angels bow before Jesus, implying that Jesus could be Adam. The repeated mention could signal importance.
- Finally, the Quran stresses the return to Paradise 147 times. Although the Jewish and Christian scriptures pay little attention to our return to Eden, the Quran mentions it so often that it could be of the utmost importance.

God ordering the angels to bow before Adam and Satan refusing to do so was a Jewish theme that some Christians, and later the Muslims, took over. One of the earliest accounts of Satan's fall as a result of the conflict with Adam comes from the Life of Adam and Eve, a retelling of their lives from around 200 AD. God first formed, animated, and endowed Adam with the image and likeness of his creator. The archangel Michael brought him to bow before God. God then confirmed the creation of Adam in His image and likeness. Then, Michael summoned the rest of the angels and ordered them to bow before Adam, but Satan refused.¹⁶ The sevenfold repetition of this theme in the Quran suggests that there may be more to it than some obscure story entering the Quran by accident.

The Hidden Secret

The Quran claims that God is the greatest schemer (Quran 3:54, 7:99, 8:30, 10:21, 13:42) and capable of deception (Quran 4:88, 5:41, 11:34, 14:4). The existence of different religions and theological disputes is part of God's plan. Otherwise, the message of Islam would have been more convincing. After 1400 years, that message has yet to convince 80% of the world's population. The Quran is said to contain a hidden secret. Chapter 74 of the Quran is named The Cloaked One or The Hidden Secret. The former name is the translation of its title, while the latter refers to its content. The cloaked one is Muhammad. The chapter further mentions that 19 angels guard hell. The conflating of cloak and hidden secret suggests a disguise. About the number 19, the Quran says (Quran 74:31),

We have made their number [that of the angels] only as a test for the disbelievers so that the People of the Book [Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians] will be certain, and the believers [Muslims] will increase in faith, and neither the People of the Book nor the believers will have any doubts, and so that those hypocrites with sickness in their hearts and the disbelievers will argue, 'What does God mean by such a number?' In this way, God leaves whoever He wills to stray and guides whoever He wills. And none knows the forces of your Lord except He. And this description of hell is only a reminder to humanity.

Muslims insist it contains a clue proving the divine origin of the Quran. The verse suggests that the number 19 holds significance beyond the number of angels mentioned. In 1974, a fellow named Rashad Khalifa claimed to have discovered a mathematical code hidden in the Quran based on the number 19. It gave rise to a numerological cult and countless films on YouTube made by beard-wearing men that can bore you to death.

Numbers are meaningless, but the Quran implies there is more to that number and that it contains a proof of some kind, a hidden secret. So, what could the hidden secret be? Chapter 19 is titled 'Mary' and is about the Virgin Mary, the stand-in for God, the Mother Goddess. The hidden secret may be that God's name was Mary, something only God could know. The cloak may refer to God appearing as a man while being a woman, or to the Virgin Mary, as the veil that conceals God's identity.



Virgin birth

The Quran corroborates the virgin birth of Jesus (Quran 4:171), and claims that Jesus is not the Son of God, thereby implying that Jesus had no father. The virgin birth is a miracle of the mother goddess. Christians invented that tale because, if God is Jesus' Father, then he can't have a human father. Jesus was Adam, the Son of Eve, so it also replaced the Adam's birth from the Virgin Eve. The Quran consistently names Jesus the Son of Mary (Quran 2:87, 4:171, 61:6), while Christians call him the Son of God. Perhaps there was a Christian tradition in the Middle East that did so. Archaeologists excavated near the location commonly known as Armageddon, a 5th-century AD Greek inscription stating 'Christ, born of Mary'.¹⁷ The odd thing is that it doesn't say Son of God.

The Quran claims God has no children and that Jesus was not God's son (Quran 6:100-102, 17:111, 18:4-5, 19:88-92). The reason is that the Meccan supreme deity, Allah, had a wife and children before God claimed this title. And the Virgin Mary wasn't God either. The repetition of the phrase Son of Mary suggests importance. It stresses that God is not Jesus' father, and it may imply that God's name is Mary.

The star and crescent became the symbol of Islam. This symbol has a long history predating Islam, as it was associated with a Moon goddess. The moon represents the woman, and the star the child (Genesis 37:9). Hence, the Islamic symbol is akin to the Madonna and Child, or to the relationship between Khadijah bint Khuwaylid and Muhammad. She was fifteen years older and could have been his mother. The Son of God thus means Son of Mary, as Mary Magdalene was God. The appropriate picture is the Madonna and Child, along with the crescent-and-star symbol of Islam. And so, the same

symbolism sneaked into Islam in the same sneaky fashion as it did with the Madonna and Child in Christianity, which is very sneaky indeed, and adds substance to the saying, 'God works in mysterious ways.'

The New Eden

Like Christians, Muslims believe Jesus will return (Quran 4:159, 43:61). Even more crucial, however, is our return to Eden, only sparsely mentioned in the Jewish Bible (Ezekiel 36:22-38) and the New Testament (Revelation 22:1-5). The Quran refers to Eden using terms like Gardens and Paradise 147 times, or $3 * 7 * 7$. If you're into numbers with religious significance, that is most remarkable. It is even more significant because humans wrote and edited the Bible, so if there are magic numbers in it, some scribe probably did that during a lifetime of boredom and number crunching. The Quran, however, is the result of decades of oral recitation, during which parts were changed or lost. And none of the reciters knew the entire Quran by heart. After several decades, they wrote down the verses as the reciters remembered them, without a significant redaction process.

God ordering the angels to prostrate before Adam seven times in the Quran is more miraculous than Jesus saying seven times 'I am' in the Gospel of John. The latter is not even a miracle, because someone could have done that intentionally, and probably did. In that sense, the Quran is uncorrupted by humans. The numerological signs, such as verse 36:36, which says that God created everything in pairs, and the fact that 36 is six times six, are God's jokes. In all likelihood, no human ever decided to arrange the verses to create such a pair within a pair in a verse that says God created everything in pairs. Paradise is supposedly the final destination of the righteous. The Quran refers to the Garden of Eden with phrases such as 'fruits from that garden' and 'spouses.' For instance (Quran 2:25),

And give good tidings to those who believe and do righteous deeds that they will have gardens [in Paradise] beneath which rivers flow. Whenever they are provided with a provision of fruit from there, they will say, 'This is what we were provided with before.' And it is given to them in likeness. And they will have therein purified spouses, and they will abide therein eternally.

The promise of spouses in Paradise was a ploy to make horny young men fight for Islam without fear of death. And it worked well as the initial blitz of Islam was nearly as spectacular as Hitler's. The New Eden is a central theme in the Quran, while the Jewish Bible and the Gospel hardly mention it. The repetition implies that it is of the utmost significance. Here, the Quran corrects Judaism and Christianity. Jews and Christians view God's plan as a journey from the depraved city of Babylon to God's city of Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem. Instead, we might go to the New Eden, as it is the core of the final revelation given to Muhammad, at least if we take repetition as a sign of importance. God's plan, thus, is to bring us to the Final Gardens of Paradise, modelled after Eden.

The idea of a New Jerusalem in Judaism and Christianity has a historical origin. The Jews compiled most of their scriptures during their exile in Babylon and shortly after. Babylon was a centre of empire and civilisation. After the Jews had returned to Israel, they interpreted their journey as a move from the depraved city of Babylon to God's city of Jerusalem. They received assistance from the Persian leader Cyrus the Great, who

conquered the Babylonian Empire and permitted the Jews to return to their homeland. Christians took over this theme. If we go from Babylon to Eden, we get a new theme. Babylon represented advanced civilisation. In Eden, life was simple. That is where this seems to be heading.

Born of God

The Gospel of John remarkably differs from the other Gospels. Matthew and Luke say that Jesus' mother was a virgin. Mark doesn't mention it, while John claims that Jesus was with God in the beginning, that in him was life, and that life was the light of all humankind. It refers to Genesis, where, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. But that earth was formless, empty, and covered by darkness, so God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. John remains cryptic and goes on to say (John 1:9-13),

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Christians are born of God. Jesus gave us the right to become children of God. That is why Jesus said that he was the life apart from being the way and the truth (John 14:6). Men cannot give birth, so God must be a Mother. John doesn't say Jesus was Adam, who begot humanity by being the husband of Eve, who was God. He rephrased it as Jesus giving us the right to become children of God. The same author, who was not the Apostle John, clarifies in his first epistle what it means that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:1),

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves His child as well.

How come that God the 'Father' gave birth to Jesus? Somehow, everyone ignores the glaringly obvious, and no one asks that question. When there has always been a giant, stinky rat in the kitchen, you probably don't notice the smell. The phrase born of God occurs several times in this letter (1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1, 5:4, 5:18). Today, Christians assume that the phrase 'born of God' has only a spiritual meaning as Jesus likened entering the kingdom of God to being born again when answering a question posed by a Pharisee named Nicodemus (John 3:3-6),

Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.' 'How can someone be born when they are old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!' Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.'

Nicodemus mentions the womb, so the phrase 'born of God' implies that God is a Mother. That raises a question. If the early church leaders went to such great lengths to remove all the evidence of God being a Mother, how could they have overlooked the phrase 'born of God'? The correct answer is that they didn't. The language of the Gospels is Greek. Greek culture dominated the ancient Eastern Mediterranean, where Christianity spread. Learned Jews like Paul were well-acquainted with Greek thinking. Greek thought and mythology helped the early church fathers reconstruct their religion after changing God's gender.

In Greek mythology, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, was born from the head of the male deity Zeus. As the tale went, Zeus' head opened to let Athena out and closed again. In this way, a male deity could give birth. And that was very convenient. When the church fathers altered God's gender, they may have initially thought of the Zeus and Athena analogy, so Jesus was born of the Father. There is another enlightening piece of evidence, the Odes of Solomon. These are first-century Christian writings, thus of the earliest days of Christianity. Ode 19 (here is that number again) comes with the following lines,

*A cup of milk was offered to me: and I drank it in the sweetness of the delight of the Lord.
The Son is the cup, and He who was milked is the Father.
And the Holy Spirit milked Him: because His breasts were full, and it was necessary for
Him that His milk should be sufficiently released.
And the Holy Spirit opened His bosom and mingled the milk from the two breasts of the
Father, and gave the mixture to the world without their knowledge.*¹⁸

No other ancient Christian text explicitly mentions gender-related attributes of God. Here, God has with female physical characteristics despite being called Father. And because it is an ancient text dating from Christianity's first century, the Father was first a Mother.

God is Love

The Religion of Love

Christians tell us that God is love. There is something about this love that the Church Fathers found so troubling that they didn't want us to know. Jesus' deeds might make more sense once you know what it is. Love is a central theme in Christianity. And so this religion is known as the Religion of Love. According to the Gospel, Jesus said we should love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30-31). Paul wrote the First Epistle to the Corinthians around 54 AD. It is one of the earliest written sources of Christianity. It contains a remarkable poem (1 Corinthians 13),

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.

For now, we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Paul informed us that love is more important than faith and good works. That is quite informative as God is love (1 John 4:8,16). The Christian story became that God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). The author of the Gospel of John shares his views on God's love in the First Epistle of John (1 John 4:7-10),

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because

God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

God loving us and sending His one and only son into the world to die as a sacrifice for our sins seems peculiar, outrageous even, unless you are a Christian. Christians claim that Adam sinned, so we are all cursed, but then came Jesus, who saved us by his crucifixion. Jews and Muslims don't believe that God has a son, nor do they think that Adam's transgression justifies this sacrifice. When God ordered Abraham to offer his son, and Abraham was about to comply, God called it off. So why did Jesus do it? The odds are that it has to do with love. Ephesians gives a possible clue (Ephesians 5:25),

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her.

Christians believe Jesus married the Church. Only the Church didn't exist when Jesus lived. The verse suggests that Jesus died out of love, as in a marriage. It asks husbands to love their wives just like Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. That was as close to the truth as the church fathers dared to venture. Jesus was married and gave himself up for his Bride. And men should do the same for their wives. This vantage also sheds new light on Jesus' views on marriage as a bond forged by God (Matthew 19:3-9),

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?'

'Haven't you read,' he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

'Why then,' they asked, 'did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?'

Jesus replied, 'Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.'

Here, Jesus departed from Moses' law, referring to the beginning, thus Eden. Jesus' disciples argued it would be hard for men to love their wives this way. Jesus replied that not all men can do this. Concerning marriage, Jesus promoted a high standard that was untenable for many men. It would be better to live in celibacy than not to live up to it. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a king who prepares a wedding banquet for his son (Matthew 22:2-14). The wedding symbolises the kingdom of God. It may seem odd to compare the kingdom of God to a wedding, unless it is one.

The Pharisees indulged themselves in some additional testing of Jesus when they caught a woman in the act of adultery (John 8:1-11). They asked Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They were using this question as a trap, as stoning should be the verdict according to Numbers 5, perhaps because they expected Jesus to rule in favour of the woman. Jesus' answer was, 'Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw

a stone at her.' But according to Rabbinic literature, the man being free from sin was a precondition for the trial of the woman, as Hosea 4:14 reads,

I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes.

Jesus' answer was the correct interpretation of the law, as recorded in Rabbinic literature, so it wasn't merely a clever rebuttal. By knowing the law better than they did, Jesus made the Pharisees appear foolish. The witnesses weren't free from sin, and as for the husband, we learn nothing.

Surviving records of Jesus' words and teachings suggest Jesus believed women to be equal to men. The equality of the sexes is at odds with the patriarchal society of Jesus' time. Paul probably also saw women as equals, but his views concerning marriage are remarkable. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul says (1 Corinthians 7:1-2, 3-4, 10-11),

Now for the matters you wrote about: 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.' But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.

The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.

To the married, I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

To Paul, celibacy was preferable to marriage, but only for the strong, who can resist their urges. Marriage is to keep the weak, who can't control their desires, on the right path, so that Satan will not tempt them (1 Corinthians 7:5). That is a rather specific interpretation of Jesus' saying that only men who are capable of loving a woman should marry, and that if one cannot love a woman, it is better to remain unmarried (Matthew 19:3-11). After explaining that, Jesus went on to discuss eunuchs, noting that some choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:12). That may have inspired Paul's views on celibacy.

The Didache, an early Christian text dating back to the first century, implies the equality of the sexes. It helped to make Christianity monogamous, as opposed to Judaism at the time, and later Islam. As many early Christians were Jewish and had heard about Jesus and the miracles he did, but didn't know about his marriage to God and believed God was an invisible being in the sky, Paul faced a theological problem.

Patriarchy returning

Paul resolved that issue by aligning Christianity with the Jewish scriptures. He wrote that the head of every man is Christ and the head of the woman is man (1 Corinthians 11:3)

and that a man is the image and glory of God, as man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man (1 Corinthians 11:7-9). Paul must have known better, but it was the biblical account from Genesis. As a religious Jew, he considered these scriptures infallible, so the facts are secondary, which may seem strange, but that's how many religious people reason. Most early Christians were Jews who didn't know the specifics about the relationship between God and Jesus, so they wouldn't have believed the truth anyway. Worse still, it would be blasphemous to them. And so, Paul did God's work by making the new religion more palatable to them.

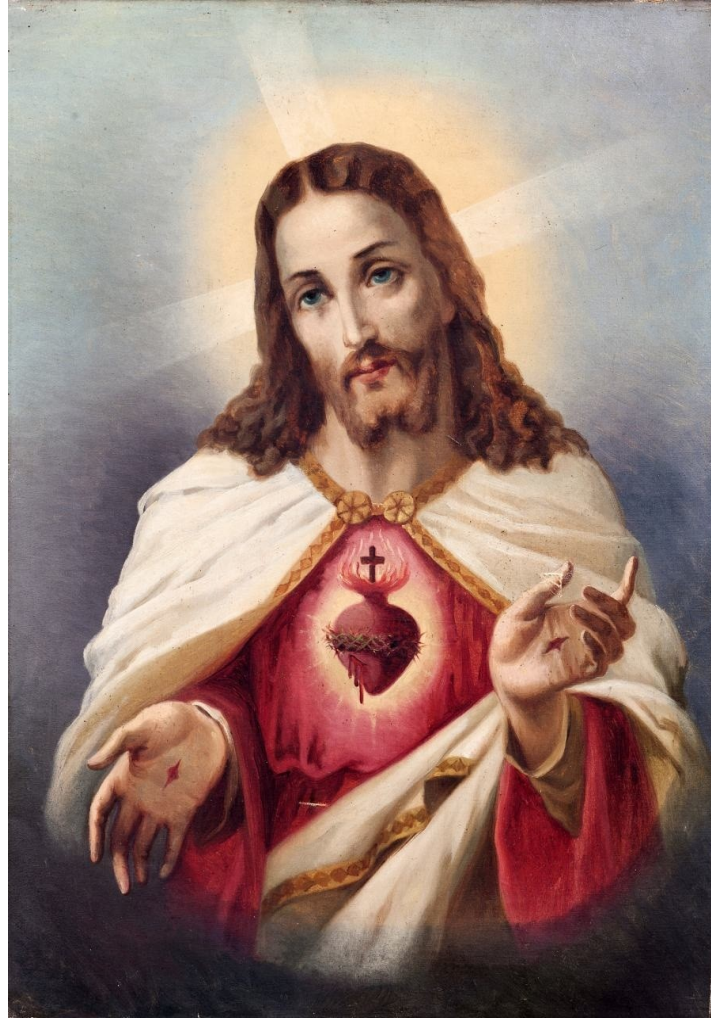
Paul makes up for it by adding that the head of Christ is God. He goes on to say that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, and that woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman, and that woman came from man, but also man is born of woman (1 Corinthians 11:10-12). In his view, men and women were equal. It is a juggling with words, as Paul is beating around the bush.

Over time, Christianity became increasingly patriarchal. Scholarly analysis of the letters of the early church fathers underlines this. Scholars think 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is a later addition.¹⁹ It claims that the man is the head of the family. The same applies to 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. It orders women to be silent in the churches. A reason for suspecting that the latter passage is an addition is that several manuscripts have it at the end of the chapter instead of its usual location. Scholars view it as a sign that a scribe copied a note into the body of the text.²⁰ A previous scribe likely added that note.

If you ask yourself how scribes could justify falsifying their scriptures, here lies an answer. It happened in small steps that appeared reasonable. You might not consider adding a note a falsification. As Paul wrote, the head of the woman is the man. You can interpret this as the man being the head of the family, as traditional Jews did. Once the comment is there, it becomes part of the text's context as a clarification. Once it is part of the context and has become an instruction to read the passage that way, it might not seem falsifying to include it in the text. In this way, a few generations can make an astounding difference. And so, the First Epistle to Timothy reads (1 Timothy 2:11-15),

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Paul never wrote this letter, despite the letter claiming otherwise. An unidentified Christian scribe likely penned it down more than fifty years after Paul's death. Scholars uncover falsifications by comparing the wording of this epistle with that of Paul's genuine letters. The passage above suggests women spoke publicly and felt they had authority over men. Otherwise, the author would not have written it. These modifications suggest an equality of the sexes, a prominent position for women in the early Christian movement, and the gradual re-establishment of male supremacy.



Sacrifice for love

As Jesus sacrificed himself for love, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is a noteworthy peculiarity, as is some of the accompanying imagery. Within the Roman Catholic tradition, the Sacred Heart is a symbol of God's boundless and passionate love for humankind. Nothing of the sort existed during the first ten centuries of Christianity. The Crusades revived religious life and inspired monks and nuns to revere Jesus' wounds, including his heart, as sacred. The Franciscan monk Bonaventure wrote in 1274, 'Who is there who would not love this wounded heart? Who would not love in return Him, who loves so much?' Over time, Jesus' heart came to the centre stage of these devotions.

Women mystics played a crucial role in that development. Among them were Lutgardis of Aywières (1182–1246), Mechtilde of Hackeborn (1241–1298), and Gertrude of Helfta (1256–1302). The devotion to the Sacred Heart in its present form began with Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647–1690), a nun of the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, who claimed to have received revelations about the Sacred Heart from Jesus Christ between 1673 and 1675 in the Burgundian French village of Paray-le-Monial. Later, Mary of the

Divine Heart (1863–1899), a religious sister of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, reported receiving locutions and visions of Jesus Christ.

So, did Jesus sacrifice himself for God's love, and did God not care about Jesus? And if so, why would God care about us? If that thought had occurred to the Church Fathers, they would have found it disturbing. If someone else were to find himself in the position Jesus once was, he might not be instantly enthusiastic about the proposition. But no one can go against the will of God. And you can fall in love with someone who has taken you hostage. It is a natural reaction known as Stockholm Syndrome. Having no choice makes things easier. You must try to save humankind if there is a slight chance of success. He knows he has to play his role in the script. And he can succeed, like Chief Inspector Clouseau, if that is the plot of the story. And if the absurd has hunted you down and cornered you, and you see no escape, you can better embrace it.

And is it so terrible to die for love? Everyone dies, usually for less agreeable reasons like a fatal encounter with a deadly disease, some random accident, old age or a war fought for the ego of a leader, or even worse, his stupidity. In hindsight, Jesus' sacrifice was exceptionally functional. It created Christianity, a religion that claims we are unworthy of God's grace and need to accept a saviour and follow him. It is an idea that can save us because we can't fix our problems ourselves. We are religious creatures who need a fairy tale to believe in. And as Paul explained in his poem, you can speak every language, know all the secrets, and give your money to those in need, but it is pointless if you don't have love. If it is a delusion, you can enjoy it for as long as it lasts. And if you must go down in infamy and die, you can better do it laughing. So, always look on the bright side of life,

*Life's a piece of shit
When you look at it
Life's a laugh and death's a joke, it's true
You'll see it's all a show
Keep 'em laughin' as you go
Just remember that the last laugh is on you
And*

*Always look on the bright side of life
Always look on the right side of life*

Monty Python, Always Look on the Bright Side of Life

How Jesus Became God

Religion in the time of Jesus

Before he was born, a visitor from heaven told his mother that her son would be divine. Unusual signs in the heavens accompanied his birth. As an adult, he left his home to become a travelling preacher. He told everyone not to be concerned about earthly lives and material goods but to live for the spiritual and eternal. He gathered several followers who believed he was the Son of God. He did miracles, healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised the dead. He aroused opposition among the ruling authorities, and they put him on trial. After he died, he appeared to some of his followers, who later wrote books about him. This story is not about Jesus of Nazareth, but Apollonius of Tyana, as Bart Ehrman tells us in his book, *How Jesus Became God*.⁴ In those times, it was not as unusual to call someone the son of a god as it is today.

The parallels between Jesus of Nazareth and Apollonius of Tyana are striking. In ancient times, there was no chasm between the divine and the earthly realm. Critics of Christianity used these similarities to question and mock Christianity. The miracles attributed to Jesus were not exceptional either. Other men allegedly did similar deeds. Legends about people occasionally emerge. People claim that Elvis still lives and that they have seen him. Was Elvis resurrected? Who is to say that Christians didn't invent the tales about the miracles Jesus performed? The Gospels contain contradictions, and scholars believe Christians have modified, embellished or invented these stories. Ehrman argues that the authors never intended them to be an exact account of what happened, but rather to spread the good news about Jesus. Discovering the truth later can be a daunting task. And success is not guaranteed. It has been the work of biblical scholars for centuries.

In Greek and Roman mythology, gods had sex with human beings and begot godlike children. The Greek god Zeus had a son with Alcmena, who bore a godlike son, Hercules. Miraculous and virgin births also occurred. In Roman mythology, the mother of the founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, was said to be a virgin. Greek mythology also features a few virgin births. Leaders claimed to be the sons of the gods. Julius Caesar claimed to be a descendant of the goddess Venus. Of Alexander the Great, claims circulated that his father was the Greek supreme deity, Zeus. Kings in the ancient world often claimed to have divine parentage. That gave them legitimacy, for who dares to go against the will of the gods? Jewish kings were also referred to as sons of God (2 Samuel 7:14, Psalms 2:7). If Jesus called himself the Son of God, he could have meant that he was the king of the Jews. And that was the official reason for his crucifixion.

God came down in a human form as Mary Magdalene. Jesus claimed She was the reincarnation of Eve while he was Her son, Adam. They were the parents of humanity. The deification of Christ couldn't have occurred in the pure monotheist Jewish tradition. However, Christianity also had non-Jewish followers who had no problems whatsoever with the all-powerful Creatrix marrying the eternal godlike human Jesus. It was a recipe for

theological mayhem that Paul later succeeded in resolving by making Christian theology unfathomable. After the Romans levelled the Jewish temple and Jesus' return had not materialised, Christianity also had to compete with the Roman emperor cult that worshipped Roman emperors as gods, making some believe it is the reason why Christians made Jesus divine. The competition was tough, and Christianity won. No one thinks of dead Roman emperors as gods anymore, but billions of people still believe that Jesus is godlike and still lives. Now, that is a miracle.

Intentional obscurity

The Gospels date from decades after Jesus' disappearance, which has led many scholars to believe them unreliable historical sources. Church tradition holds that Mark reflects a testimony given by Simon Peter, as this gospel accurately describes words and deeds. Scholars also conclude that the Gospels describe what Jesus said and did. Much is plausible, given the time and place in which he lived. The Gospels also reveal things that Christians would not have made up, as they undermine their teachings. John the Baptist baptised Jesus. The one who baptises is spiritually superior to the one receiving the baptism.³ It implies that John the Baptist was Jesus' teacher. The beginning of Mark also suggests so.

To make this uncomfortable fact more palatable, the Christians might have added that John said someone more powerful than he was would come, whose sandals he was not worthy to unfasten (Mark 1:7-8, Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:16, John 1:26-27). All four Gospels mention it, so John the Baptist may well have said it. Parts of the Gospels might be copies from earlier texts that are now lost. If these sources were decades older, fewer errors might have crept in, as written texts don't change as much as oral stories during retelling.

Paul could have written about what transpired, but did not. The obscurity seems intentional. The first three Gospels are remarkably similar. Scholars believe the sources for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are the Gospel of Mark and another text with the sayings of Jesus. The authors of the Gospels weren't people close to Jesus. Still, there may have been an insider account that served as the basis for the Gospel of John.

The Gospels claim that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and called God Father. That looks like a close relationship with God. To Jesus, being the Son of God meant more than merely being king of the Jews. In The Parable of the Ten Virgins, the kingdom of heaven compares to a wedding where the bridegroom was a long time in coming (Matthew 25:1-13). All the synoptic Gospels hint at Jesus being the bridegroom. The Romans convicted Jesus for claiming to be king of the Jews. In the Jewish understanding, the king of the Jews is a son of God. But Jesus might have believed himself to be Adam, the eternal Son of God, and perhaps for that reason, also king of the Jews.

Clouding our understanding

The Jewish religion and its scriptures cloud our understanding. To understand God, we must see this universe as the product of an advanced humanoid civilisation that exists to entertain one of its members, whom we call God. And so, there could be more to the mysterious apocalyptic prophet who felt a close relationship with God 2,000 years ago. After all, he started a religion with over two billion followers today. Christianity originated as a branch of Judaism, a religion characterised by its scriptures. Their scriptures outline how Jews, Christians and Muslims see the owner of the universe. That is like looking through glasses covered with dust. It distracts us from the underlying truth.

Christians say that God is love. Christianity paints a different picture of God than Judaism and Islam, which present us with a vengeful warrior God. Many religious people think the scriptures are infallible. So, how can we explain the discrepancies if the God of Judaism, Christianity and Islam is the same? Paul likely went to great lengths to align Christianity with existing Jewish doctrine. Paul obscured the most controversial parts of the new religion by making cryptic references to the Jewish scriptures. Had Jesus preached elsewhere, Christianity would have been an entirely different religion, because existing scriptures wouldn't have limited the possibilities.

Biblical scholars reason from what they can establish from historical sources, while Christians believe the Jewish deity Yahweh is Jesus' father. Both see Jesus within a Jewish context. That obscures things, as Yahweh is the imagined deity of the Jews, not the owner of the universe. It is better to view Yahweh as the cloak behind which our Creatrix hides. The most pressing problem for Paul was that God is a woman who had a romantic relationship with Jesus. To suggest so was blasphemy in the Jewish religion. And so, Jesus married the Church, just as Yahweh married the Jewish nation. It made Jesus eternal and godlike. That was not a great leap if he was Adam, God's eternal husband.

Firstborn of all Creation

Jesus thought himself to be the reincarnation of Adam. Adam was God's son (Luke 3:38) and Jesus the firstborn of Creation (Romans 8:29, Colossians 1:15, Hebrews 1:6, 12:23). These words relate to the Jewish scriptures. At the same time, they are cryptic references to Adam being born first as the son of Eve, and Jesus being the reincarnation of Adam. The phrase born of God (John 1:13) relates to Eve giving birth to humanity. The context of the Jewish religion made it possible to hide that meaning. In traditional agricultural societies, the firstborn son inherited the land and the leadership of the family clan. The Jews were no exception. The theme appears numerous times in the Jewish Bible. The story of Jacob and Esau is well-known. King David was God's firstborn son (Psalm 89:27).

The Jewish nation, Israel, is God's firstborn son (Exodus 4:22). Israel is also God's Bride (Isaiah 54:5, Hosea 2:7, Joel 1:8). This provided Paul with a theological escape, as God had married His firstborn son, Israel. God marrying Her firstborn son, Jesus, and them having a romantic relationship was impossible in Judaism. For Jews, who followed Jesus because he was the Messiah, it was impossible to conceive that their invisible deity Yahweh had taken a human form and had married Jesus, and that Jesus was not an ordinary prophet, but Adam reincarnate. And so, Jesus married the Church instead. In this way, Jesus became like God, and the Christians became Jesus' people, just like the Jews were God's people. And that made Jesus like God.

Jesus as God

That is not as problematic as it might seem. Many Jews believed that there are two powers in heaven.⁴ It was a popular view within Judaism at the time of Jesus. Thus, seeing Jesus as the Son of God was less outlandish within the Jewish tradition at the time than today. The books of Enoch and Daniel relate to this view. In Genesis, God speaks in the plural, 'Let us make humankind in our image.' It may be a relic of the polytheist past of the Jews when they still believed the gods created the universe. When they became monotheists around 400 BC, most of the Jewish Bible, the Tanakh, had already been written. In a simulation created by an advanced humanoid civilisation to entertain one of its members, the gods creating us also makes sense. The beings of this civilisation are the gods, and the owner of this universe is God. The monotheist Jews didn't see it this way, so this phrase fuelled speculation about a godlike figure working alongside God.

In the Jewish Bible, God appeared from time to time. Some people saw God sitting on a throne (Exodus 24:9-10), while no one has ever seen God and lived (Exodus 33:20). Others saw the Angel of the Lord, who is also considered a manifestation of God, and survived. Abraham and Hagar are among those who have seen the Angel, and the Jewish Bible then tells us that they have seen God. Hence, the Angel of the Lord is God, but not God himself. Otherwise, they would not have survived.⁴ Then you have the mysterious figure Melchizedek, who might have been the Angel of the Lord, or Jesus, according to some interpretations. Melchizedek, as God's priest, offered bread and wine to Abraham (Genesis 14:18-20), reflecting Christ's eternal priesthood. And so, there must be two gods, an invisible, all-powerful Creator and his visible, godlike sidekick. It is an example of the assumption of the scriptures' infallibility, combined with strict logic, leading to the absurd.

Jesus could be the Angel of the Lord and the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). This interpretation is contrived, as it is not what the authors of the Jewish Bible intended. The Angel of the Lord didn't say to Abraham, 'I am Jesus, God's one and only son.' He could have done so if he were. That would have saved us a lot of theological troubles, as the Jews would have known that Jesus was the Messiah. However, for an undisclosed reason, the Angel didn't bother to update the Jews on this interesting matter. Christians found other references to Jesus as well, such as (Daniel 7:13-14),

'In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom will never be destroyed.'

That must be Jesus, Christians claim. Jews disagree.

The road to Trinity

A problem early Christians had to solve was that Jesus was the Son of God and also God, while there was only one God. That didn't make sense. It kept Christian thinkers busy for centuries until they reached an agreement on the Trinity. Christianity is a scriptural religion, so there must be a justification in the scriptures. The Gospel of John starts with the following sentence, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' The Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word was Jesus, as the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. In other words, Jesus is God, and he existed before Creation. But he is not God the Father, but with God the Father. God consists of the Father and the Son, while God is one.

In the ancient world, some gods came in threes or triads. The Indian religion has the group of Brahmā, Siva, and Viṣṇu, and the Egyptians had Osiris, Isis, and Horus. It was called Trinity. That required adding another component to the mixture of the Father and the Son to arrive at three ingredients and find a theological justification. The idea of the Trinity circulated among Christians as early as 150 AD and became an official teaching in the fourth century AD. So, what could be the scriptural justification for the Trinity? Christians found it in Isaiah (Isaiah 9:6),

For to us, a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Some see a reference to the Trinity there. Counsellor is a title for the Holy Spirit (John 14:26), the Father is God, and the Prince of Peace is Jesus. That is far-fetched. But there is a better one. Some see the Trinity when the Jewish Bible refers to God's Word (Psalm 33:6), His Spirit (Isaiah 61:1), and Wisdom (Proverbs 9:1). But what could be the theological justification?

Greek philosophy influenced Jewish scholars, such as Paul. Plato claimed that ideas are the basis of knowledge. Thus, ideas, not physical objects, are the building blocks of reality. In Platonic thinking, the world of ideas is superior. Platonists think that a spirit can use words to produce matter. God is a pure spirit, the highest being. In Judaism, God created all things using words. Hence, words existed before Creation. Otherwise, you can't make the world using words.

The Jewish philosopher Philo lived at the same time as Jesus. He claimed the Word is the highest of all beings, the image of God, according to which and by which the universe receives its order. Philo called the Word the second God. But if there is one God, the Word must be part of God. The author of the Gospel of John took that idea, and it starts with, 'In the beginning was the Word.' Here, the Word was Jesus, so Jesus existed before Creation. And that became a teaching of Christianity.

In Proverbs, Wisdom says that she was the first thing God created. And then God created everything else with the help of Wisdom alongside Him (Proverbs 8:22-25). She is a reflection of the eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of His goodness (Wisdom 7:25-26). Wisdom is feminine because it is a feminine term in the Greek language. Greek was the language of the time, and educated Jews spoke Greek, and Jewish scriptures were translated into Greek. Here, Wisdom plays a similar role as the Word. She was present when God made the world and is beside God on his throne (Wisdom 9:9-10). Hence, Wisdom was also extant before Creation. And so, you have the

Word, the Wisdom, and God existing before Creation. If the Word had become Jesus, Wisdom could have become the Holy Spirit. And so we arrive at the Trinity. This explanation also clarifies why the Holy Spirit is feminine.

Logical issues leading to an arcane theology

Christianity originated as a Jewish sect, so early Christians based their religion on the Jewish scriptures. It generated problems, as the facts contradicted the scriptures, most notably that God is a woman who can take a human form. Jesus as Adam, God's eternal husband, already made him godlike. The efforts to resolve these logical difficulties shaped the concept of Jesus as God. Had Jesus preached in Egypt instead and claimed his wife was the goddess Isis, the all-powerful Creatrix of the universe, and that he was the reincarnation of her son Horus, there may still be records of his teachings.

Egypt was a polytheistic nation with more flexible beliefs. It could have adopted another colourful cult alongside the existing ones. The Jews, however, were monotheists with well-established scriptures, which also made Christianity uncompromisingly monotheistic. Converts had to renounce all false gods, allowing Christianity to wipe out the other religions and religiously cleanse the Roman Empire. And it all would have been inconceivable without the intervention of one of the greatest religious innovators of all time, Paul. He invented Christianity. That almost looks like a plan.

The Religion Paul Invented

Paul's reasoning

How did Christianity become the baffling religion it is today? A cloud of obscurity surrounds the first decades of the Christian movement. A few things we do know. Jesus started Christianity, but Paul of Tarsus, better known as Paul the Apostle, turned Christianity into the religion we know today. Paul was first a Pharisee who devoutly observed Jewish religious laws before becoming a follower of Christ. One thing we should know about Paul is that the scriptures were precious to him, far more valuable than the facts. Truth, in his view, is thus not according to the facts like Jesus taught, but according to the scriptures.

It is a matter of the utmost importance as it explains why Christianity has become the religion it is today. In Paul's view, everything about Christianity should have a scriptural foundation. Paul's education as a Pharisee is probably the reason why. We shouldn't underestimate the consequences. Probably, everything about Jesus that is 'according to the scriptures' is a fabrication. The label 'according to the scriptures' should serve as a red flag, signalling 'invented by Paul.' Hence, 'Jesus rose on the third day according to the scriptures' means 'Paul made up that Jesus rose on the third day.'

Christianity began as a small Jewish sect founded by an end-time prophet who claimed to be the Messiah. Many Jews awaited a Messiah but expected a strong leader who would liberate the Jewish nation from Roman occupation. Jesus didn't live up to their hopes, and the Romans had him crucified. That wasn't the end of Christianity, but just the beginning. Likely, he later appeared to some of his followers, thus demonstrating that he lived eternally and was the Son of God. It is hard to see how Christianity could have survived otherwise. That gave the Christians new hope and inspired them to carry on, which is the origin of Pentecost and the belief in the Holy Spirit.

Paul, whose name was first Saul, was initially a fervent persecutor of Jesus' followers. When travelling to Damascus, he received a vision. According to his own words, a bright light flashed from heaven, knocking him to the ground. He heard a voice he identified as Jesus accusing Saul of persecuting him. Today, we would call the experience a psychosis. The encounter temporarily blinded Saul. His companions led him to Damascus. There, Ananias, a Christian disciple in Damascus, restored Saul's sight and baptised him.

It was a turning point in his life and an event that shaped the future of humankind. It was a personal calling. His response was not to consult any human being (Galatians 1:16). In other words, he didn't go for a reality check. Instead, he went his own way and started preaching among the Gentiles (Galatians 1:15-16). Paul preached his own distinct gospel, which he claimed was revealed to him. He didn't meet with most of the other Apostles for fourteen years (Galatians 2:1-10). He saw Simon Peter after three years and also Jesus' brother (Galatians 1:18-19). His mission succeeded. Indeed, God works in mysterious

ways. In *The Triumph of Christianity*, Bart Ehrman attempts to reconstruct Paul's reasoning, the foundation of Christian thought.

His vision proved to Paul that Jesus still lived as his followers claimed. Jesus had died, so he was resurrected, Paul reasoned. And therefore, he must be the long-awaited Messiah. That posed a few theological problems for Paul. The Romans had humiliated Jesus and executed him. So, why did Jesus have to die? Paul came up with an answer. In many religions, including Judaism during Passover, people sacrifice animals to please the gods.² The Gospels agree that Jesus died either on the day of Preparation for the Passover or on Passover itself. Now, that doesn't seem like a coincidence, so that pushed Paul's thinking in this direction. Paul must have known that Jesus believed himself to be Adam. Adam led us out of Paradise, and Jesus would return us to it.

And so, Paul reasoned that Jesus came to undo what Adam had done. The Jewish religion doesn't place such a dramatic weight on the Fall. It definitely wouldn't justify human sacrifice, or worse, murdering the Son of God. To make the argument work, Paul inflated the significance of the Fall to grandiose proportions. That is why Christianity, contrary to Judaism and Islam, places such an emphasis on sin. Paul turned Jesus into the sacrificial Lamb of God. In his view, we are all sinners because Adam was, but Jesus saved us by sacrificing himself. It is a novel idea not found in Judaism or its scriptures. The Jewish religion opposes human sacrifice, and it is even blasphemous to think that God would require it, so this is alien to Jews, which made Paul's innovation truly remarkable.

Lamb of God

The sacrificial lamb is a revolutionary new type of saviour, someone who, by his death, provides redemption to his followers. According to Mark, Matthew, and Luke, the disciples shared bread and wine during the Last Supper. And Jesus said, 'Take it; this is my body,' and, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.' It is outside the Jewish tradition and part of the sacrificial lamb imagery. So, did Jesus say these words, or did Paul invent them? Probably the latter. Paul wrote (1 Corinthians 11:23-26),

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

It begins with, 'For I received from the Lord.' In other words, the origin of this tradition lies in Paul's imagination rather than in Jesus' words at the Last Supper. It is unlikely that Jesus laid that out in detail during Paul's psychosis. It is therefore noteworthy that the Gospel of John fails to mention it. The Gospel of John comes from a separate tradition outside Paul's influence, and its sources may include an eyewitness account. Yet, as a former Pharisee, Paul also took this idea from Scripture, so he made Jesus's act align with Melchizedek's offering of bread and wine to Abraham. In the first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul writes (1 Corinthians 15:3-5),

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Simon Peter and then to the twelve Apostles.

It is another for-I-received sentence, so many scholars believe these things have been passed on to him, possibly by fellow Christians as a creed, and that it reflects the earliest Christian beliefs.⁴ The repeated reference to the scriptures makes the supposed creed suspect of being a product of Paul's creative ingenuity. He has proven himself capable of writing a beautiful poem about love, so that wouldn't be beyond his capabilities. A passage in Isaiah can explain the 'died for our sins according to the scriptures' (Isaiah 53:4-6),

*Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

You need not be too imaginative to apply this to Jesus, even though Isaiah had someone else in mind. Concerning the raising on the third day, Hosea 6:2 may come to assistance, as it says, 'On the third day he will restore us.' The larger the body of scriptures, the easier cherry-picking becomes. What comes next is even more unbelievable. Jesus supposedly appeared to more than five hundred at the same time. Paul was such a fantasist that it is unlikely to have happened.

Paul tried to answer the question of why God made Jesus sacrifice himself, which is a profoundly troubling question for a Jew. As a religious Jew, he looked for the answer in the scriptures, so facts were of secondary importance. Facts were never that important in religion, and are something scientists may care about. And humans are creatures who live by stories rather than facts. So, think of it as doing God's work rather than lying. That was probably how Paul viewed it as well. And for good reason, because his diligent work united the early Church, a tremendous achievement.

And so, we should be cautious in concluding that Jesus believed that he had to die for our sins. The Gospel of John fails to mention that Jesus died for our sins, even though John the Baptist calls Jesus 'Lamb of God' twice in the first chapter. It is a modification. The other Gospels don't mention this when describing the same event. It is an image from Pauline theology, so there is no chance that John the Baptist said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God.' Despite the author of John supporting the claim that Jesus died for our sins in his letter, that could be telling. The letter expresses the author's opinion, influenced by Pauline theology, whereas the Gospel of John is an existing account he redacted.

Jesus' teachings were another reason that led Paul to believe Jesus had to die for our sins. So, what did Jesus teach? It was the forgiveness of sins. Mark tells us that John the Baptist preached baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and that he baptised Jesus (Mark 1:4-9). These also became Jesus' teachings. Jews already practised ritual immersion and washing for purification, spiritual cleansing, and as a conversion rite, so John the Baptist operated within an existing tradition.

Jesus began as one of John's followers, a fact the Gospels don't mention for obvious reasons. Instead, they say that John was the messenger sent ahead of Christ, thereby fulfilling a prophecy of Isaiah (Mark 1:1-3), which suggests that it is contrived. John the Baptist probably had said something like, 'Jesus comes to take away our sins' rather than 'Behold, the Lamb of God.' Nevertheless, it gives a possible answer to the question of why Jesus had to die, so the conclusion Paul arrived at is not far-fetched.

It leaves us with the question of why Jesus willingly went to the cross. Mark tells that Jesus was deeply distressed and troubled. He prayed that the cup would be taken from him (Mark 14:32-36), which is a very different prayer from the one in John (John 17), where he hopes to await great glory. Many scholars think it is a later embellishment to explain that Jesus died in accordance with the will of God. Such an explanation doesn't presume an intimate relationship between God and Jesus. And so, it probably was Jesus' choice, perhaps made under duress. Jesus could have avoided the execution by rescinding his claims of being the Messiah and the Son of God. That would be denying the truth and his mission. Believing himself to be Adam and eternally living, he expected to survive, which emboldened him and strengthened his resolve. And don't forget what people do for love.

Defining the faith

It must have been God's plan to save Her His people this particular way, thus by Jesus sacrificing himself, Paul reasoned further. And so, observing the Jewish religious laws is not critical for your salvation, nor do you have to be a Jew. Jewish religious laws being irrelevant is another truly revolutionary thought for a Pharisee. Prophecies in the Jewish Bible foretold that all the nations would accept the God of the Jews. To Paul, Jesus was the fulfilment of these prophecies. After all, Jesus was Adam, the father of humankind. And from Adam, God made all the nations that inhabit the Earth (Acts 17:26), so Jesus' message applied to everyone, not just Jews alone. There were already Gentile Christians, and Paul preached to them, so that was his view from the outset. Making them all adhere to Jewish religious law proved 'a bridge too far' and could hamper the spread of the religion. Paul then concluded that rejecting false gods and having faith in Jesus would be enough. Paul believed he was God's missionary to spread the good news.²

Paul was a knowledgeable scholar of the Jewish scriptures, whereas the other Apostles lacked such education. He shaped the beliefs of the early Church and the future Christian religion by establishing the theological foundation of the Christian faith. Paul defined God's image as the Father, the amalgamation of the Jewish Yahweh and the Christian Mother Goddess. The product of this processing became a hybrid, a Father who can give birth. Jesus also became a hybrid, thus a human who is also godlike. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says, 'Abba, Father.' (Mark 14:36) More than a decade before Mark, Paul used that particular phrasing twice (Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6). You read Paul's words in the

Gospel of Mark, just like at the Last Supper. Also, 'The Twelve' is a quote you can trace back to Paul. Likely, there were no twelve disciples. It took Paul over a decade to work out his new theology, and perhaps also countless sleepless nights.

Around 55 AD, Paul wrote that the woman came from man (1 Corinthians 11:7-8), thereby reasserting the biblical account from Genesis rather than the original Christian account, of which we can still find traces in the Gospel of John. In Galatians, Paul also writes that God sent His Son, who was born of a woman (Galatians 4:4). That Jesus was born of a woman is a statement of the obvious. You don't need to stress that, even if God is Jesus' Father. If God were a Father, this factoid could be one of the most uninteresting disclosures of the entire letter. The original Christian teaching, which Paul rejected, was that Jesus was Adam reincarnated, so he was born of God. Paul claimed that Jesus is the Son of God the Father rather than Adam. And so, he was born of a woman rather than God. For once, Paul didn't lie by stressing that particular factoid. It is also noteworthy that he didn't write 'born of a virgin.' Had he known about the virgin birth, it would have been worth mentioning. By 55 AD, no one still knew of this miracle.

For religious Jews, it was blasphemy to say that God was a woman who married Jesus. And so, it was probably also problematic to many Jewish converts, while non-Jewish converts had no problem with it. The Greek and Roman traditions had several gods and goddesses who had children with humans. For the Greeks and the Romans, God being a woman marrying a man who lives eternally is not that spectacular, while it is unthinkable for Jews. That made uniting the early Church an enormous challenge. To Paul, a former Pharisee, the truth of the scriptures mattered more than the facts. He could dismiss the Christian creation story and change God's gender. Not having been a firsthand witness and not having spoken much to the other Apostles for the first fourteen years further helped him maintain his independent and particular perspective.

And the facts created problems that Paul's imagination could solve. In the first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul writes, 'It is reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans don't tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife. And you are proud!' (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). Possibly, a scribe watered down this controversial fragment during copying. The man could have slept with his mother. After all, it is sexual immorality that even pagans don't tolerate. And the Christians in Corinth took pride in it, a remarkable response. Perhaps they believed this man followed the example of Christ.

Paul's unique advantage, which placed him in the position to shape Christian theology, was that, apart from being an educated scholar with a dedication to the scriptures, he was not a firsthand witness to the events. To him, reality had to fit the scriptures rather than the other way around. He never met Mary Magdalene and Jesus, and didn't meet with the other Apostles during the first years of his preaching. It allowed him to develop his theology, independent of the facts.

As a Jew preaching among the Gentiles, he could bridge the gap between the Jewish and the Gentile views. His theology appealed to Jewish Christians because it connected Christianity to the Jewish scriptures and portrayed Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. At the same time, his preaching tours and letter writing provided him with a support base among the Gentile Christians as well, who saw Jesus as godlike. Pauline theology also shares that view. God the Father became the compromise between Yahweh and the Mother.

Paul's diligent labour provided Christianity with an elaborate theological foundation, and his view could also bring unity within the early Church, so it prevailed. Most people only knew Jesus from stories, and few knew the details, so it was possible to sway opinions with false stories. It is still possible today, even when everyone can check the facts. The outcome of Paul's intervention was that Christianity became an entirely different religion. Had a close follower of Jesus from 30 AD accidentally run into a time portal and leapt into the future, he wouldn't have recognised his religion already in 100 AD, let alone today.

Spreading the good news

Paul dedicated his life to spreading the good news that faith in Jesus could save everyone. During his many travels, he founded Christian communities. His mission wasn't easy. His message caused upheaval, and Jews expelled him from their synagogues several times. But he was determined and worked hard. Paul's Gospel of personal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, which is open to everyone, appears to have caught on. However, it is a most peculiar tidings and not something you would believe if you had grown up in a different tradition, whether you were Jewish or worshipped other deities. And so the success of Christianity begs for a better explanation. Ancient sources indicate that stories about the miracles Christians performed made people convert.² An example was the healing of a lame man when Paul and Barnabas visited Lystra.

We have to take Paul's word for it, as he is a likely source. Had we not known Paul as a fantasist, it appears plausible. In other words, it might have happened. As the story says, Paul had healed the man. The Lycaonians then concluded Paul and Barnabas were gods in human form. The priest of Zeus brought bulls and wreaths to the city gate, as he and the crowd wished to offer sacrifices to them. Paul and Barnabas explained that they were only human and messengers of the good news that the God of the Jews, who had made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them, had decided that all nations should no longer go their own way. And the proof, they said, was that the Jewish God had shown kindness by giving us rain from heaven and crops in their seasons and filling our hearts with joy (Acts 14:8-18). The proof thus was the seasons, the crops and the rains, and, of course, joy in our hearts. The seasons and the crops had always been there, and people had been joyful before, so that didn't prove much. Hence, it must have been the miracle of healing that made people believe Paul's unusual message.

Paul's activities led to a riot in the city of Ephesus. Demetrius, who made silver shrines of the goddess Artemis and brought in a lot of trade for the local businesspeople, realised the consequences of Paul's good tidings. He called the craftsmen and workers in related occupations together and said, 'You know, my friends, we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray many people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited and that the goddess herself will be robbed of her divine majesty.' When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' Soon, the whole city was in an uproar (Acts 19:23-29). A mob seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's travelling companions from Macedonia, and brought them to an assembly in a theatre.

A city clerk managed to quiet the crowd in the theatre. He said, 'Fellow Ephesians, doesn't the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? Since these facts are undeniable, you should calm down and not do anything rash. You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. If Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case, we would not be able to account for this commotion since there is no reason for it.' After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly (Acts 19:35-41). Had it been untrue, then the spread of Christianity would have become a bit harder to explain, but not impossible. More upheavals were to come in the following centuries.

Contending versions of Christianity

During the first centuries, there were several versions of Christianity. It highlights contentious issues, suggesting that early Christian beliefs differ from those of Christianity today. Christianity today is not what it originally was. Likely, the alternative views are closer to the original faith in some aspects. The most well-known deviant groups were the Nazarenes, the Marcionists, the Ebionites, and the Arians:

- The Nazarenes continued to observe the Jewish religious laws. Jesus didn't intend to abolish them. It was Paul who came up with that idea.
- The Marcionists taught that the God of the Gospel is the true Supreme Being as opposed to the evil Jewish God. Indeed, God is not the deity the Jews invented.
- The Ebionites didn't believe that Jesus was divine, nor did they think that he was born of a virgin. That is also correct.
- Arianism emerged around 300 AD. The Arians opposed the doctrine of the Trinity, which was not an original Christian teaching.

Except for the Arians, these groups existed from an early period. Christianity was in flux. That began to change once the Roman Emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire. Constantine invited all the bishops in the Roman Empire to the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. It was the first effort to create a uniform Christian doctrine. More efforts followed. The Roman state promoted the Church's official teachings. Consequently, other strains of Christianity faded into obscurity.

The Gospels of the New Testament date from 70 to 100 AD, more than forty years after Jesus preached. Mark, Luke, Matthew, and John did not write the Gospels attributed to them. The Apostles were uneducated Aramaic-speaking Jews, while the authors were Greek-speaking, educated Christians who were not eyewitnesses. Scholars believe Mark, Luke, and Matthew are collections of stories that circulated among early Christians. The author of the Gospel of Luke even says so (Luke 1:1-4).

Whenever someone retells a story, details change, new episodes emerge, and parts get omitted. And the story may become more spectacular. And so, the Gospels likely don't accurately tell what happened. Several letters in the New Testament are anonymous, even though they claim to be from Peter, Paul, or another well-known figure. Jesus' brother

couldn't have been the author of the Epistle of James because it contains no inside knowledge about the relationship between God and Jesus. And we don't have the original texts of the New Testament. The oldest preserved copies date back to the second or third centuries AD. Scholars have used these copies to reconstruct the original texts as much as possible.

The Gospel of John

Strikingly different

The Gospel of John is strikingly distinct from the other Gospels. In Mark, Matthew, and Luke, Jesus appears human, yet enigmatic. In the Gospel of John, he appears godlike. The Gospel of John is more recent than the other Gospels, and biblical scholars believe Christians had deified Jesus by that time. There is a problem with this reasoning. Some Christians worshipped Jesus as a godlike creature early on. In the Epistle to the Philippians, Paul cites a poem stating Jesus is in the form of God (Philippians 2:6-11). Scholars believe it is an older poem, dating back to the earliest days of Christianity.³ Maybe. Paul was a creative genius, and he made up a lot of things, perhaps nearly everything he wrote.

Some scholars have argued that there once was a separate Johannine community in Syria, with the Gospel of John and the letters of John serving as its scriptures. The Johannine writings use the phrase 'born of God,' suggesting that God is a Mother. Scholars believe the Odes of Solomon, which include Ode 19, with its feminine attributes of God the Father, relate to the Gospel of John and the Dead Sea Scrolls. The author might have been an Essene convert to the Johannine community. Likely, there were two versions of Christianity, a Jewish version and a Gentile version, now seen as Johannine, as it later became marginalised by Pauline Christianity.

The Gentile community was distinct from the Jewish Christians, and its writings reflect anti-Jewish sentiments. To Jews, it is blasphemous to say that God is a woman, Jesus is godlike and that they married. Their G-d was invisible, omnipotent and incomprehensible. They didn't even dare to speak His name. Jews had no vowels, and their scriptures called God YHWH, so some people came to guess it was Yehovah, as Jews don't distinguish between V and W. Thinking themselves to be geniuses, they started a new religion.

At the very least, the idea of God turning into a woman who married Jesus was so alien that most Jews couldn't have imagined it, let alone would have accepted it. But they had heard about the great miracles he had performed and that he had come back from the dead, so they believed that Jesus was the Messiah. And so, in the Jewish tradition, Jesus was a human, not godlike, and Son of God was a title implying he was their king.

The Gentiles had no problems whatsoever with the facts. To people from the surrounding cultures, such as Greek, Roman and Egyptian, it is not unusual to worship female deities, deify humans and believe that gods mate with humans. To his non-Jewish followers, Christ was godlike, not a human Jewish prophet. Otherwise, they wouldn't have followed him. What business would they have had with a human Jewish prophet?

At first, most Christians were Jewish. Their religion would not have permitted them to see God as a woman and Christ as a godlike figure. However, Christianity had non-Jewish

converts very early on. Educated Hellenistic Jews were often open to innovation due to their contact with surrounding cultures. Around 42 AD, a group of Christians founded a church in Antioch, located in the Roman province of Syria, which was likely also the location of the supposed Johannine community. The Bible mentions the persecution of Christians and the spreading of their message in Antioch among Jews and Greeks (Acts 11:19).

If the Gospel of John belonged to a separate community that opposed Jewish Christianity, it could be more historically accurate and closer to Christ's original teachings if that community had fewer reasons to alter the message and historical facts. The motivation for modifying their scriptures was to unify the Church. And so, despite it being the most recent, the Gospel of John could be the best-preserved remnant of original Christianity from before Paul profoundly changed it.

The author of the Gospel of John wrote in good Greek and employed a sophisticated theology with seven signs, and Jesus said seven times, 'I am.' Scholars believe he has used several sources, including the Gospel of Mark and Luke, as well as documents that no longer exist. The Gospel of John suggests that one of its sources could have been an eyewitness account.

The Gospel of John implies Jesus' ministry lasted three years, suggesting more historical detail than the other Gospels. The number three has theological significance, as it is the heavenly number, which makes it suspicious. The author may have rearranged the story accordingly. The close relationship between God and Jesus, and Jesus' belief in himself as eternal, however, has a historical origin. It agrees with Jesus being Adam, the everlasting husband of God, the Alpha and the Omega. It made him both human and godlike, which was the compromise Paul came up with, and the reason why his theology prevailed.

The Gospel of John has undergone several redactions. If one of the sources has used an eyewitness account or the Johannine community didn't face the theological restrictions of Judaism, the Gospel of John could reveal more and be more historically accurate than the other Gospels or represent the earliest beliefs more accurately, most notably after identifying and eliminating these redactions. John could thus be the most revealing about the nature of the relationship between God and Christ.

Platonic birth

The Gospel of John provides no information about Jesus' early life. Instead, it gives a creation myth in abstract wording. Why write an alternative creation story? Does Genesis not suffice? Not if Jesus was Adam, and Adam the Son of Eve, who was God and the Mother of All the Living. The following phrases are noteworthy: 'In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind,' and 'He gave the right to become children of God -children born not of natural descent, nor human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.'

Jesus gave us life and the right to become children of God. If he were Adam, he fathered humankind, and because his wife was Eve, we are all children of God if we all descend from Eve and Adam. The Quran says, 'Truly, the likeness of Jesus, in God's sight, is as

Adam's likeness, He created him of dust, then said He unto him, 'Be,' and he was." (Quran 3:59) That agrees with Platonism, which was widespread in the Greek-speaking world.

Adam, being the son of Eve, disagrees with the account in the book of Genesis. The scribes who redacted the text that eventually became the Gospel of John devised an obscure formula to mask the issue. It is possible that the initial text provided more details about how precisely Jesus granted us the right to become children of God. Platonic thinking is abstract and about ideas, like us becoming children of God, rather than material facts, like Eve making love to Adam. That was indeed convenient.

And so, under the influence of Platonism, the Word became flesh in the form of Jesus (John 1:14). The phrasing 'born of God' suggests that the original author knew God was a Mother. The author affirms this by expounding on that birth. When arguing with Jesus, the Pharisee Nicodemus noted that one cannot enter a second time into one's mother's womb to be born again (John 3:4). Nicodemus understood what Jesus meant, which is that Christians are figuratively born of God's womb and that God is a Mother. Jesus gave it a spiritual meaning in his answer, 'No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.' (John 3:5)

The wedding

There was a wedding in Galilee (John 2:1-10). Jesus was there, as were his mother and his disciples. When the wine was gone, his mother said to Jesus, 'There is no more wine.' That wouldn't have been his concern unless he was the Bridegroom. Then Jesus answered, 'Woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come.' It could mean that Jesus was not the Bridegroom and was about to be married too. He called his birth mother 'woman,' perhaps because he considered God his Mother. Jesus started doing miracles at this wedding by turning water into wine. Maybe he became Christ through this wedding. Hence, it may have been his wedding after all, and the scribes may have changed the narrative to make it appear that it was not.

Then John comes up with a statement not found in the other Gospels: "A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said: 'I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.' The Bride belongs to the Bridegroom. The friend who attends the Bridegroom waits and listens for him and is full of joy when he hears the Bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less." (John 3:27-30) Jesus was the Messiah because he was the Bridegroom in a heavenly marriage. The other Gospels also indicate Jesus was the Bridegroom (Matthew 9:15, Mark 2:19 and Luke 5:34).

I and the Father are one

Jesus called God Father, making himself equal with God, so the Jews wanted to persecute him, the Gospel of John says (John 5:16-18). Jesus made other claims in this vein. If the Gospel of John is a redacted insider account, these assertions may reflect Jesus' words. If

Jesus believed himself to be Adam, he could have said, 'Before Abraham was born, I was.' And not, 'Before Abraham was born, I am.' (John 8:58). The wording 'I am' in this phrase implies the godlike nature of Christ and existence before creation. It refers to God saying to Moses, 'I Am Who I Am [Who Always Has Been And Will Always Be],' and, "This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I Am has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:14) The wording in John implies that Jesus is God, always existing, the alpha and the omega.

Then comes an intriguing assertion, 'I and the Father are one.' (John 10:30) Jesus claimed to be a god, so the Jews wanted to stone him for blasphemy (John 10:33). Perhaps Jesus meant something else. Marriage is a way to become one flesh with another person (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-6). If Jesus had implied he was married to God, it would still have been blasphemy to the Jews. If Mary Magdalene had remained in the background to let Jesus do Her bidding, and Jesus believed himself to be Adam from whom all of humanity descends, Jesus may have said, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Mother except through me.' (John 14:6)

Jesus' claims caused conflict among the Jews. On the one hand, he did miracles, but on the other hand, he offended the Jews by making outrageous claims. The Jews lived under Roman rule. The Romans didn't care about someone claiming to be God's husband or any other particularity that offended the Jews. For Pilate, it was difficult to bring a charge against Jesus (John 19:4). The way to convict Jesus was by claiming he was a rebel leader. Claiming to be the Son of God could be a claim to kingship over the Jews. And that was the offence for which the Romans convicted him (John 19:19). The Jewish leaders insisted they had a law. According to that law, Jesus must die because he claimed to be the Son of God (John 19:7). That probably refers to blasphemy rather than claiming to be Israel's king.

It was a sensitive political environment. Religious extremists and Messiah claimants stirred up people who hoped to throw out the Romans and restore Israel's glory. The Christian tradition depicts the Jewish leaders as evil schemers against Jesus, the Son of God. But John gives us an insight into their motives (John 11:47-50),

'What are we accomplishing?' they asked. 'Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.' Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, 'You know nothing at all! You do not realise that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.'

If Jesus were to stir up sentiments and lead a rebellion, the Roman army would come to crush it and destroy the Temple and the Jewish nation. It was reasonable to think so, and not particularly evil to try to prevent it. A few decades later, the Jews rebelled, and their dreaded scenario unfolded, so their fears were justified. In any case, such an insightful detail argues for the historical quality of the text.

Love is a central theme, 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.' (John 15:9-12) That is an unusual amount of love. If Jesus were God's husband, you could understand why he said it. That brings us to the loving and intimate

relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus. The Gospel of John features the anonymous Beloved Disciple. Rumour has it that it was Mary Magdalene.

The Beloved Disciple

The mysterious Beloved Disciple appears only in the Gospel of John. So, why is John so secretive about the identity of this individual? If the editors had removed the marriage between Mary Magdalene and Jesus, they could have changed Mary Magdalene's role to that of the Beloved Disciple. To become the Beloved Disciple, Mary Magdalene had to take over Simon Peter's role, who was Jesus' favourite disciple. To that aim, the scribes have created this disciple from thin air by extracting this person from Simon Peter. This disciple acts like a shadow of Simon Peter throughout the story, except for the scene at the cross.

Had the Beloved Disciple been Mary Magdalene, that would still have generated questions regarding the nature of the relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus, or it could have raised women to a position of authority that men weren't particularly keen on giving them. In a later redaction, the scribes turned the Beloved Disciple into an anonymous figure, distinct from Mary Magdalene, and suggested that he was Jesus' brother. This perspective proves to be illuminating. Look at the following fragment (John 19:25-27),

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there and the disciple he loved standing nearby, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

If you take the text at face value, the Beloved Disciple was Jesus' brother, as Jesus' mother was also his mother. That is a good enough explanation as to why he took her into his home. It could be an intentional edit to make it appear that way, so that it makes sense for the Beloved Disciple to take Jesus' mother into his home. And if the text were correct, the author of the text can't be John, because the text claims that the Beloved Disciple wrote it. The fragment also states that four women were near the cross, suggesting that no men were present at the time. And so, the Beloved Disciple could have been one of these four women.

The most likely candidate would be Mary Magdalene. Jesus could have asked Mary Magdalene to take his birth mother into Her home, so that it was something that really happened rather than a figment resulting from the extraction of the Beloved Disciple from Simon Peter. Like John, Mark and Matthew suggest that only women followers were near the cross (Mark 15:40, Matthew 27:55-56). Luke is less specific and states that all who knew him, including the women (Luke 23:48). This contradicts Mark and Matthew, who report that all the disciples had fled (Mark 14:50, Matthew 26:56). John doesn't mention the fleeing of the male disciples but also doesn't note their presence.

A few arguments support this view. First, it is odd not to say 'mother,' but rather, 'Woman, here is your son.' Was someone else Jesus' mother? Something is off here. Second, it is more likely that Mary Magdalene took Jesus' birth mother into Her home than a male disciple, unless he was Jesus' brother. The Gospels mention a group of female disciples travelling with Jesus (Luke 8:1-3). They formed a separate group led by Mary Magdalene,

who took care of one another. Third, how could Jesus tell another disciple, 'Here is your mother.' After all, it was Jesus' mother. The only explanation is that this disciple was his brother, while nothing else suggests so. Fourth and finally, by all accounts, Simon Peter was Jesus' favourite Apostle. Jesus called him the rock on which he would build his Church, and gave them the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:18-19) and appointed him as leader (John 21:15-17). Only Peter had fled the crucifixion scene and wasn't present.

According to Paul, Simon Peter saw the resurrected Jesus first, and then Jesus appeared to the other disciples (1 Corinthians 15:4-6). The repeated reference 'according to the scriptures' suggests that Paul invented the creed. That Jesus appeared to Simon Peter first makes sense as Simon Peter was Jesus' favourite disciple. The Gospel of John tells a different story. It claims that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw the stone removed from the entrance. She then ran to Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!' So Peter and the Beloved Disciple went to the tomb. The Beloved Disciple, acting like a shadow of Simon Peter, came there first but didn't go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and went into the tomb (John 20:1-6).

He saw the strips of linen lying there. Then the Beloved Disciple also went in and saw and believed (John 20:8). The beloved disciple saw and came to faith, but two men were inside. Remarkably, it is not Simon Peter who saw and believed, even though he was the first to go inside. The Beloved Disciple could be a later addition. If so, Simon Peter was the first to see and come to faith. Perhaps, he saw Jesus there alive. That would confirm Paul's claim. The Beloved Disciple acts as a shadow of Simon Peter once again. The Gospel of John then tells us that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene first (John 20:11-18). It is impossible to have certainty about what occurred, but there was an effort to achieve unity within the Church. The following steps of editing seem plausible:

1. God became the Father, but Mary Magdalene and Jesus remained a couple, with evidence of their intimacy. Mary Magdalene told Simon Peter, the disciple Jesus loved, that Jesus had disappeared from the tomb. Simon Peter went in and saw the empty tomb for himself. That may have happened.
2. The early Church agreed that Jesus rose on the third day, and that Simon Peter had seen him first. So, Simon Peter went in, saw and believed. Perhaps Simon Peter saw Jesus there alive. Failing a suitable cover story at the time, the scribes truncated the Gospel of Mark.
3. The early Church fabricated a cover story for the resurrection on the third day, and removed the marriage. Mary Magdalene became the Beloved Disciple. Jesus appeared to Her first in a newly added section. Simon Peter then saw something, but not Jesus, as Mary Magdalene saw him first.
4. Mary Magdalene and the Beloved Disciple became separate individuals. So, Mary Magdalene spoke to Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple, and both of them went into the tomb. The Beloved Disciple saw something and believed, but Mary Magdalene remained the one who saw Jesus first.

All four gospels hint at Jesus being the bridegroom, so early Jewish and Gentile Christians agreed that Mary Magdalene and Jesus were a couple. If you omit John 20:2-10, John 20:1 together with John 20:11-18 makes a story of its own. That could argue for the insertion of John 20:2-10 into the original text. John 20:11 states that Mary Magdalene was

near the tomb, which contradicts the previous lines, and most notably John 20:2. However, the inserted section is John 20:11-31. Mark confirms this.

The original text of Mark finishes with the women going to the empty tomb, where a young man dressed in a white robe tells them that Jesus has risen (Mark 16:1-8). The added section of Mark notes that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9). And, according to Paul, Jesus appeared first to Simon Peter. The original story was that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and found it empty. Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene is a later addition to the text. Matthew says that Jesus appeared to the women first (Matthew 28:10), and Luke tells a different story. Mark and John are the most reliable, so if Matthew and Luke contradict Mark and John, most likely Matthew and Luke are in error.

After this episode, Jesus appeared to the disciples (John 20:19-23). Paul tells the same in 1 Corinthians 15, so if this account is accurate, Mary Magdalene set in motion the resurrection beliefs by inviting Simon Peter to the tomb, and if She was God, She knew what he was about to find there. The problem with this narrative is that it neatly aligns with Paul's view, expressed in his letter, that Jesus rose on the third day in accordance with the scriptures. To Paul, everything must be according to the scriptures, which makes it iffy, most notably because John has two endings, one in John 20 and another in John 21.

Simon Peter was Jesus' favourite disciple, and the Beloved Disciple is an extraction of Simon Peter. He enters the story at the Last Supper when he asks Jesus who is about to betray him (John 13:21-25),

After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, 'Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.' His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, 'Ask him which one he means.' Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, 'Lord, who is it?'

Simon Peter was the one who wanted to know. He was the disciple who asked Jesus who was about to betray him. The Gospel of John has a premature ending in Chapter 20. The premature ending comes from an inserted source. The latter part of John 20, starting at John 20:11, is an insertion to elaborate on the resurrection happening on the third day. The original story was that they found the tomb empty, and that Jesus appeared again to Simon Peter and a few other disciples by the Sea of Galilee after some time had passed. Most likely, Jesus appeared only once to Simon Peter and a few other disciples. Simon Peter saw Jesus first, like Paul wrote, but not on the third day.

And Jesus' appearance explained the empty tomb. The logical conclusion, for Jews at least, from an empty tomb and Jesus appearing again after his death, was resurrection. Something like that happened. Otherwise, there would be no Christianity. One can still question what they saw or whether they lied, but few would believe such a miracle if Jesus hadn't performed miracles before. That it happened on the third day is an invention for theological reasons, undoubtedly conjured up by Paul, so that it would be 'according to the scriptures,' which was his personal obsession.

That also explains why Mark's ending was premature. The historical facts contradicted the agreed-upon ones, and there was no cover story yet at the time the author of Mark held his pen to write his Gospel, as there was none for the virgin birth. That came later. The

initial plan was to replace John 21 with the latter part of John 20, but someone bright concluded it was a waste of a good text, and added it again at the end, which explains the premature ending in John 20. An abstract of this revised account, thus John 20, became the added conclusion of Mark.

The final chapter of the Gospel of John mentions a rumour amongst believers that the Beloved Disciple would not die. Jesus believed some of his disciples would live to see his return (Mark 8:34-38, 9:1). In John, Jesus said, 'Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death.' Still, the wording is remarkable (John 21:20-23),

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the Supper and had said, 'Lord, who is going to betray you?') When Peter saw him, he asked, 'Lord, what about him?' Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.' Because of this, the rumour spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?'

The text suggests the rumour was that the Beloved Disciple would not die at all, not merely until Jesus returned. Otherwise, the text would not note it so explicitly. Why might this disciple not die at all? Why only the Beloved Disciple? And why mention the rumour and try to dispel it? And then repeat the explanation twice, as if that required stressing? It seemed something of the utmost importance. And it is part of the original text, so it has a historical origin.

The rumour becomes understandable if Mary Magdalene was God and had become the Beloved Disciple in an earlier redaction. Simon Peter probably discussed Mary Magdalene's immortality with Jesus. After all, he was Jesus' favourite disciple. Here again, the Beloved Disciple appears as a shadow of Simon Peter (John 21:20), as he did at the Supper and the entrance to the tomb. The Beloved Disciple allegedly wrote down his testimony (John 21:24), making Simon Peter the most likely source of the eyewitness account. The author of Mark probably used that same eyewitness account.

The validity of the Gospel

The deification of Jesus was an early tradition. If you are God's husband who lives eternally, you are already godlike, even if you are human. In other words, the Gospel of John might be more historically accurate than the others. Mark can be a good addition. The start of Mark makes it possible to conclude that Jesus started as a disciple of John the Baptist, which is something you can't infer from John. Turning Mary Magdalene into the Beloved Disciple may have coincided with the insertion of the latter part of John 20, which was contrived to detail the resurrection occurring after three days. It is the reason why the latter part of Mark has gone missing. It contradicted the resurrection-after-three-days narrative. After eliminating the redactions, the Gospel of John may be the most accurate narrative of what has transpired.

Historians and biblical scholars doubt the resurrection and the miracles Jesus performed. These miracles contradict the laws of nature, so it is reasonable to think that these

miracles never occurred. However, in virtual reality, miracles can happen, which casts doubts on that argument. If the Gospel of John is a redacted insider account, it may be more accurate or more revealing than most biblical scholars and historians currently assume. John also circulated in a Gentile tradition outside Jewish and Pauline Christianity that had fewer problems with the facts. And so, John could be more precise or more telling than the other Gospels, as they aren't insider accounts and come from a tradition hostile to the idea of God being a woman who married Jesus.

Jesus appeared to some of his disciples shortly after the crucifixion. You can't imagine Christianity beginning without Jesus appearing to some of his followers. That his followers had seen Jesus after he supposedly had died strengthened their beliefs that Jesus was Adam, who lived eternally and was the Son of God. The resurrection of the dead was a belief amongst some Jews at the time, and it seemed the best explanation for what they saw, thus the body disappearing and Jesus appearing, so they labelled the event like so.

Remarkably absent in John is the story of Jesus' transfiguration. It is present in Mark, Matthew and Luke. If John is more accurate, the transfiguration could be a myth. To Christians, the transfiguration is evidence of Jesus' divinity. The reason for inventing the transfiguration story may have been to fulfil an earlier prediction by the prophet Malachi.

John also doesn't mention breaking the bread and sharing the wine during the Last Supper, and it may be more than just an omission. The body and blood of Christ, representing the new covenant, are part of the sacrificial lamb imagery that Paul introduced. Jesus never said, 'Take it; this is my body,' nor, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.' The Torah requires firstborns of the flock and herd to be brought as sacrifices (Deuteronomy 12:6, 15:19), and Jesus was God's firstborn.

The Jewish tradition sees human sacrifice as a grave sin. The Jewish Bible condemns child sacrifice as a barbaric custom (Leviticus 18:21, 24-25; Deuteronomy 18:10), so the reasoning is most peculiar indeed. John is the most outside the Jewish tradition. If it had happened, John more likely would have mentioned it, and the other Gospels more likely would have left it out in order not to offend the Jewish audience.

It also presents a possible explanation for the seven demons Jesus supposedly cast out of Mary Magdalene. Mark mentions it in the later-added section at the end (Mark 16:9), suggesting it was not an original belief. You can also find it in Luke (Luke 8:2). Had a separate Gentile Christian tradition claimed that Mary Magdalene was God, mainstream Pauline scribes might have introduced this peculiarity to stress that She was not.

It is impossible to uncover all the redactions. It appears that there have been at least four rounds of modifications to the text. The final version dates back to approximately 95 AD, reflecting the perspective of that era. After the Romans had destroyed the Jewish temple in 70 AD, Christians realised that Jesus would not return anytime soon. The character of the faith changed accordingly, from expecting Jesus' return with power and glory to having a personal bond with Jesus that gives access to eternal life. The Gospel of John reflects this change in outlook.

Figuratively speaking

In the Gospel of John, Jesus doesn't always speak in clear and precise terms. He says, 'I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.' (John 16:12-14) Muslims see these words as a prediction of the coming of Muhammad. That is unconvincing.

Chapter 16 of the Gospel of John excels in vagueness. It contains a remark that appears insignificant among the obscurity but might be there for a reason, saying, 'Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father.' (John 16:25) Why should Jesus not speak plainly about God? The scribes who modified this Gospel may have known what they were doing and realised the truth would come out one day. And that day may finally have arrived.

Satan and Judgement Day

Satan has always been God's trustworthy servant. Some experts on the matter say he began his career as a serpent in Eden and later took charge of the furnaces that burn the evildoers for eternity. Others disagree and claim he is a fallen angel named Lucifer who didn't do any grovelling in Eden. His task was to make God look good. We like to believe God cares for us, but prayers often remain unanswered while bad things transpire, such as misfortune and unpleasant neighbours. How can an almighty, good God allow this to happen? The obvious answer is that there is no god, or God doesn't care. That is not what we like to hear. Once the Israelites had done away with Baal, Astarte and the others and switched to monotheism, they had to address this uncomfortable issue.

Suddenly, they had no one to blame for their misfortune except themselves. How could that happen? After all, the Israelites were God's chosen people. Did they do something wrong? So, if things went wrong, it was time to repent, prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah claimed. There usually was some idolatry or depravity occurring in their midst. That must have made God angry, the prophets proposed. But even when the Israelites prayed relentlessly, lived according to the Ten Commandments, and did all the prescribed rituals and offerings, things often didn't improve. Why? It was a tricky question.

The Israelites dedicated an entire book, the Book of Job, to the issue, dubbed the problem of evil. Job was a particularly pious and virtuous man who was doing well. But on a fateful day, Satan challenged God by claiming that Job's devoutness was due to his prosperity. His belief was insincere, Satan argued. God could not allow the mere possibility of insincerity and agreed to test Job and let Satan ruin Job. Even after the loss of his possessions, his children, and finally, his health, Job still refused to curse God. Job did everything God could expect of a faithful servant and more, or so it seemed.

Job's friends tried to comfort him and figure out why he was suffering and what he could do about it. They suggested Job might have done something wrong. But Job proclaimed his innocence and complained about his fate. In the end, God showed up, telling him to shut up. His sin was hubris because he thought he didn't deserve to suffer. Everything happens for a reason. It wasn't entirely satisfactory, so Satan's role gradually enlarged over time, and he came to do the dirty work so God's hands remained clean. Still, in the Bible, God killed millions, while Satan only murdered a dozen. And nothing ever happens without God willing it, so God is responsible for Satan's mischief also. The problem of evil remains unresolved and continues to boggle many minds today. How can a good God let evil happen or even do evil? That we are mere amusement was something few could think of, let alone accept.

The Quran says Satan is a fallen angel named Lucifer (Iblis) who, unlike the other angels, refused to bow to Adam. It alludes to Isaiah, where the morning star fell from heaven (Isaiah 14:12-14). Isaiah probably referred to a Babylonian king, but Luke says that Jesus saw Satan falling from heaven (Luke 10:8). A scribe probably noticed the similar phrasing and had his eureka moment. He could explain how Satan popped up and couldn't resist sharing his findings with the other scribes, so it became the Christian interpretation of

Isaiah's words, which Islam took over. Also, Satan's unwillingness to bow to Adam comes from an obscure Christian source. The Quran notes, 'The angels prostrated themselves, all together. Except for Satan. He refused to be among those who prostrated themselves.' (Quran 15:30-31) Then follows a conversation between God and Satan (Quran 15:32-42),

God said, 'O Satan, what kept you from being among those who prostrated themselves?'

Satan said, 'I am not about to prostrate myself before a human being, whom You created from clay, from moulded mud.'

God said, 'Then get out of here, for you are an outcast. And the curse will be upon you until the Day of Judgment.'

Satan said, 'My Lord, reprieve me until the Day they are resurrected.'

God said, 'You are of those reprieved until the Day of the time appointed.'

Satan said, 'My Lord, since You have lured me away, I will glamorise for them on earth, and I will lure them all away except for Your sincere servants among them.'

God said, 'This is a right way with Me. Over My servants you have no authority, except for the sinners who follow you. And Hell is the meeting-place for them all.'

Like in the Book of Job, God and Satan appear to be on speaking terms, or even better, work together on a grand scheme and discuss what to do. Many Jews see Satan as an agent of God who tempts us into sinning so that he may accuse us in the heavenly court. That is also what the Quran says. A Christian might ask why the angels should have prostrated themselves before Adam. Jesus was the second Adam, so God made Jesus, the firstborn of the world, superior to the angels and made the angels worship Him (Hebrews 1:1-7). Satan is an imaginary character like Spike or Suzy. Satan is not the only red herring. The End Times are another. Suppose there will come an End Times. What can we know about it? So, what is the worth of the prophecies in the Bible and the Quran?

The book 'The Virtual Universe' addresses the consequences of predestination. A prophecy is like a premonition. Why can fortune-tellers sometimes make accurate predictions? And why are their predictions unreliable at the same time? The answer is that the scriptwriter knows the future, but we don't. And so, the script can make predictions come true to the point that we notice that something is off, while the proof of foreknowledge remains elusive. Furthermore, and that is a warning, a God who wrote the script is far more powerful than one who can merely send plagues and smite us for being ungrateful or disobedient or for any other frivolous reason. It is indeed next level.

We can't know the future because our knowing will alter it. If I know I will have a car accident tomorrow, I will stay home, and the accident will not happen. If I am to have that accident, then I shouldn't know. I may pass a sign saying, 'You will have a car accident tomorrow' and laugh about it, and the next day, I will find out it was a sign. As long as I don't believe it is a sign, it can be precise.

And so, the prophecies of the ancient Greek oracles only made sense in hindsight. In 1914, no one could have guessed that the licence plate number on Franz Ferdinand's car,

in which he was assassinated, referred to the end date of the upcoming world war triggered by that same assassination. The prophecy in Revelation can't be accurate because too many people take it too seriously. If many people expect the End Times, they can't know the specifics about that event. And no one knows the hour, not even Jesus knew. The specifics mentioned in the Bible may turn out to be correct in unsuspected ways, such as the prophecies of the Greek oracles. But we will only know in hindsight.

History Is Her Story I

Meeting Chief Inspector Clouseau

In the autumn of 1989, I was a student and forced to leave a dormitory because I was immature and didn't fit in. Most notably, I couldn't get along with a particular Lady. I returned to my parental home to gather courage before trying out another dormitory. There was not much to laugh about in those days, except for a few episodes of Chief Inspector Jacques Clouseau on German television. My parents lived near the German border, so I could watch them. The German dubbing was as funny as the original.

Clouseau was inept, but he always managed to solve the mystery. Guided by a few hunches and vague clues that only made sense to him, he ignored the obvious explanations of the facts and uncovered the truth by accident. So, how could a bumbling clown like Clouseau be correct while the competent fail? The answer is that he is a fictional character in a story. The plot is that Clouseau is right in the end.

History is Her story, and the pun may be intentional. Apart from women in the Bible, God played other roles. How can we know who they were? That is where Clouseau comes in. We live in virtual reality, so this can be a story with a plot. I could be right if that is the plot of the story. My investigation produced a list of possible avatars of God. It has gaps and overlaps. God may have skipped the childhood years of the avatars She chose. The Lady at the dormitory is one of them. That, I found out nineteen years later.

Nefertiti

The Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten and his wife, Nefertiti (c. 1370-1330 BC), were the first known monotheists. They promoted the worship of a single deity, a sun disk named Aten, and ordered the end of worship to other gods. In doing so, they broke with the Egyptian religious tradition. Nefertiti may have been an avatar of God. Worshipping the Sun makes sense. Just imagine the Sun doesn't come back in the morning. You can better ensure he does and sacrifice a bull every evening before sunset. Their new religion didn't last. After their reign, traditional beliefs returned. They were too far ahead of their time.

Cassandane

Cyrus the Great was a Persian Emperor and one of the first multicultural rulers. He respected the customs and religions of the lands he conquered. That made it easier for him to rule such a large empire. Otherwise, he had to assimilate all the people in his realm

into Persian culture, which would have distracted him from making more conquests. And by the way, people didn't mingle as much as they do today, so cultural differences didn't cause that much trouble. Cyrus the Great was a prominent figure in history. Iranians still call him The Father. Most Iranians aren't Christians, so that doesn't confuse them.

Cyrus also conquered Babylon. The Jews in exile caused trouble with their Zionism there, so Cyrus sent them back to Israel and gave them money to rebuild their temple. The Jews were grateful and considered him a Messiah. The fate of a Messiah is to be married to God, so his wife, Cassandane (567-537 BC), could have been God in disguise. Cyrus and Cassandane loved each other deeply, according to the historical records. Cyrus would not have been a proper Messiah in the biblical sense if a woman had not sealed his fate. Accounts of Cyrus' demise and death diverge, but that fact is beyond dispute.

The Greek historian Herodotus noted that he died in a battle with the Massagetae, a fearsome steppe people who lived in what is now Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. To acquire the territory, Cyrus first sent an offer to marry their ruler, Queen Tomyris, a proposal she rejected. He then tried to take the Massagetae territory by military means. Tomyris challenged him to meet her forces in honourable warfare. Learning that the Massagetae were unfamiliar with wine and its intoxicating effects, Cyrus set up a poorly defended camp with plenty of it and left with his best soldiers.

The general of Tomyris's army, her son Spargapises, overran the camp with his troops. They got drunk, and Cyrus defeated them in a surprise attack and captured Spargapises, who then committed suicide. Tomyris then vowed revenge, leading a second wave of troops herself. Cyrus' forces suffered massive casualties, and he also died. Tomyris ordered the body of Cyrus brought to her, then decapitated him and dipped his head in a vessel of blood. Accounts on the matter differ, and Herodotus offers us the most colourful account, but others confirm the death of Cyrus at the hands of Tomyris.

Olympias, mother of Alexander the Great

Olympias (376-316 BC) was the mother of Alexander the Great. Alexander's lasting legacy is the spread of Greek culture in the Mediterranean. Greek thought and culture later influenced Judaism and Christianity. The Word would never have become flesh without Platonic philosophy. And Christians could never be born of God, the Father, without the influence of Greek mythology. You can see how God works in ways we can't anticipate. Olympias, who was married to King Philip II of Macedonia, claimed that Alexander was the son of Zeus, the supreme god of the Greeks.

According to the Greek historian Plutarch, Olympias had a dream in which a thunderbolt struck her womb on the eve of her marriage to Philip. Philip was said to have seen himself in a dream sealing up his wife's womb with a seal. A virgin birth it was, or it could have been. Plutarch offered several interpretations of these dreams, for example, that Alexander's father was Zeus, the supreme deity of the Greeks. That would have made Alexander the Son of God. And so, Olympias might have been an avatar of God.

Philip chose Aristotle as Alexander's tutor. Alexander and Philip fought battles together and defeated Thebes and Athens, making Macedonia the dominant power in Greece. They

then began to plan an invasion of Persia. Philip remarried, which threatened Alexander's position as heir to the throne. A brawl at the wedding led to Olympias and Alexander going into exile. While attending the wedding of his daughter to Olympias' brother, a captain of Philip's bodyguards assassinated Philip. A possible conspirator was Olympias. The nobles and army immediately proclaimed Alexander King. In the subsequent years, Alexander conquered the Persian Empire and ventured into India. Alexander died young, at the age of thirty-two, possibly from poisoning.

Alexander the Great was one of the most successful conquerors in history. He became popular in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Legends sprang up about his exploits and life, which had a profound impact on the Abrahamic religions. He is a significant figure in Judaism. The Christians in the Near East turned him into a saint. The Quran mentions him and recites scraps of the legends about him. Alexander supposedly travelled to the ends of the world to build a wall to keep Gog and Magog out of civilised lands. Alexander de Grote (Alexander the Great) was my classmate at primary school for several years, a remarkable coincidence. Perhaps his parents had a humorous fit when naming him.

Queen Dowager Zhao

Chinese emperors held the Mandate of Heaven. The Emperor was the Son of Heaven. The title legitimised the rule of the Emperor. In Chinese thinking, the gods didn't play a central role. Thus, being the Son of Heaven was the closest to being divine. If insurgents overthrew an Emperor and installed a new one, the old emperor had lost the mandate, and the new Emperor had it instead. That is very pragmatic indeed. This arrangement also provided stability as it deterred potential contenders to the throne.

China's first emperor was Qin Shi Huang. He unified China for the first time around 220 BC. He was a particularly ruthless person. He had to be because he came out on top after five centuries of relentless warfare that had no equal in history. His reign didn't last. Qin Shi Huang died in 210 BC while on a trip to procure an elixir of immortality from Taoist magicians, who claimed the potion was stuck on an island guarded by a sea monster. Widespread revolts ended his son's government shortly afterwards.

A new imperial dynasty soon established itself. Qin Shi Huang's lasting legacy is not only the unification of China. He also standardised writing throughout the empire and introduced a pictorial rather than a phonetic script so people could read the same documents everywhere in China, even when they spoke different languages. As a result, China could build its national identity around a set of writings. China's identity never perished, even when the country fragmented and warlords temporarily took over.

Qin Shi Huang's mother was Queen Dowager Zhao (280-228 BC), the wife of King Zhuangxiang of Qin. Queen Dowager Zhao was the daughter of a prominent family. She was a concubine of a merchant named Lü Buwei, who gave her to his protégé, Prince Yiren of Qin. Thanks to Lü's intervention, Prince Yiren became the ruler of the Kingdom of Qin and King Zhuangxiang. His son Qin Shi Huang succeeded him. It may well be that Queen Dowager Zhao was God in disguise, adding some justification to the title of Her son, Son of Heaven.

When my son was nine, he jokingly referred to himself as the Emperor of China. He often ordered my wife and me. We were making a joke out of it and called him the king. Still, my son insisted he was the Emperor of China. 'The Emperor of China demands cheese,' he then added. An article about the first emperor of China appeared in a television magazine shortly after I found out we live in a virtual reality.



Roman sculpture of Cleopatra wearing a royal diadem. Altes Museum in Germany. Wikipedia. Public Domain.

Cleopatra

Cleopatra (69-30 BC) was the last Pharaoh of Ancient Egypt. Few women have proved to be as strong a ruler as Cleopatra, even though She ultimately failed, causing Egypt to lose independence and become a Roman province. She presented Herself as a reincarnation of the Egyptian goddess Isis, who later, with her son Horus, became the template for the images of the Madonna with the child Jesus. Egyptian Pharaohs were deputies of the gods, but Cleopatra went further by claiming to be a goddess Herself.

Even Julius Caesar was impressed by Her personality. He abandoned his plans to conquer Egypt and backed Her claim to the throne. It is not a mere coincidence that Julius Caesar had the same initials as Jesus Christ, and that both died because of betrayal. After

Caesar died, She supported her next lover, Mark Antony, in a power struggle with the future Emperor Augustus. That led to Cleopatra's downfall and suicide. She was already looking forward to Her next role, Mary Magdalene, the wife of an obscure Jewish prophet who was to change world history.

Empress Theodora

Empress Theodora (490-548) was one of the most influential women in Roman history. An official of Her time noted that She was more intelligent than any man. Her husband, Emperor Justinian, realised this as well. He allowed Her to share his throne and take part in decision-making. She was a controversial figure. As a young woman, Theodora earned Her living as an actress, which meant entertaining men with indecent dances in establishments of dubious reputation, and possibly it included prostitution. Procopius' Secret History, an ancient version of a gossip channel with a preference for slander, is the foremost source of information about Her early life, so we can't be sure.

Theodora later travelled to North Africa as the concubine of Hecebolus, the Roman governor in Libya. Procopius alleged that Hecebolus mistreated Theodora. Their relationship ended in a quarrel. The then-destitute Theodora went to Egypt and converted to Miaphysite Christianity. Theodora later returned to Constantinople, where She met the future Emperor Justinian. Justinian was impressed by Her. He wed Theodora even though She already had an illegitimate daughter, which caused a scandal. Justinian had to change the law to marry Her.

Theodora assisted Her husband in making decisions, plans, and political strategies, participated in state councils, and had a significant influence on him. She was an intimidating person who instilled fear, yet She feared no one. There was an uprising during their reign, and rioters set public buildings on fire and proclaimed a new emperor. Justinian and his officials discussed the situation and planned to flee, but Theodora spoke out against this plan. According to Procopius, Theodora interrupted the Emperor and his counsellors, saying,

My lords, the present occasion is too serious to allow me to follow the convention that a woman should not speak in a man's council. Those whose interests are threatened by extreme danger should think only of the wisest course of action, not of conventions. In my opinion, flight is not the right course, even if it should bring us to safety. It is impossible for a person, having been born into this world, not to die, but for one who has reigned, it is intolerable to be a fugitive. May I never be deprived of this purple robe, and may I never see the day when those who meet me do not call me Empress. If you wish to save yourself, my lord, there is no difficulty. We are rich; over there is the sea, and yonder are the ships. Yet reflect for a moment whether, when you have once escaped to a place of security, you would not gladly exchange such safety for death. As for me, I agree with the adage that 'royal purple' is the noblest shroud.²¹

Her powerful and inspiring speech convinced them to stay. Justinian then ordered his loyal troops to attack the demonstrators, resulting in the deaths of over 30,000 civilians. Some estimates put the death toll as high as 80,000. The corpses must have piled up on the streets of Constantinople. The reason was Her desire to wear a purple robe. After the

revolt, Theodora and Justinian ordered the rebuilding of Constantinople. The works included aqueducts, bridges and churches, including the Hagia Sophia, which became one of the world's architectural wonders.

Theodora participated in Justinian's legal and spiritual reforms, was involved in women's rights, and helped underprivileged women. She bought girls who had been sold into prostitution and freed them. She created a convent where former prostitutes could support themselves. Theodora even tried to eradicate prostitution. Theodora and Justinian expanded the rights of women in divorce and property ownership and instituted the death penalty for rape.

Procopius claimed these reforms made women morally depraved, as men could no longer beat and abuse them at will, which might be the reason why Procopius disliked Theodora. He had some other details about Her to share. According to him, the senators had to prostrate themselves whenever entering the Imperial couple's presence,

Not even government officials could approach the Empress without expending much time and effort. They were treated like servants and kept waiting in a small, stuffy room for an endless time. After many days, some of them might at last be summoned, but going into her presence in great fear, they very quickly departed. They simply showed their respect by lying face down and touching the instep of each of her feet with their lips; there was no opportunity to speak or to make any request unless she told them to do so. The government officials had sunk into a slavish condition, and she was their slave-instructor.

That could be sixth-century gossip, but perhaps the almighty Owner of the magnificent city of Constantinople and the rest of the universe desired to be reminded of Her greatness before She went into the desolate Arab desert as Khadijah to go after Muhammad.



18th century portrait of Empress Wu (Wu Zetian). Public Domain.

Empress Wu Zetian

After Khadijah had departed, another remarkable woman arrived on the scene. Empress Wu Zetian (624-705) was the only female ruler in China's history and one of its most gifted Emperors. She ruled from 665 to 705, first as the consort of the incompetent Emperor Gaozong, then as the power behind the throne held by Her youngest son and from 690 as the sole Empress. Under Her reign, China's power increased, the economy improved, and corruption in the imperial court declined. Notwithstanding those impressive feats, the traditionalist Confucianists called Her the Evil Empress. 'She killed her sister, butchered her elder brothers, murdered the ruler, poisoned her mother,' their chronicles say.²²

It is doubtful that it is all true. A woman on the throne was against widely held misogynistic, traditional Chinese beliefs. Add to that that Wu's reforms helped the peasants, so the elites weren't all too pleased with them. There was no glass ceiling in those times preventing women from rising to the top. At the time, that ceiling was made of reinforced concrete. She must have been cunning and ruthless. Her rise to power is a story of intrigue the likes of which the world has not seen before, or afterwards.

Wu came from a wealthy family, and Her father encouraged Wu to read books and pursue an education that included politics, governmental affairs, writing, literature, and music. After being summoned to the palace to become a low-ranking concubine, Wu reportedly revealed ambitions to 'meet the Emperor' to Her mother. According to Her account, She once impressed Emperor Taizong with some tough talk,

Emperor Taizong had a horse named Lion Stallion, and it was so large and strong that no one could get on its back. I was a lady in waiting attending Emperor Taizong, and I suggested to him, 'I only need three things to subordinate it: an iron whip, an iron hammer, and a sharp dagger. I will whip it with the iron whip. If it does not submit, I will hammer its head with the iron hammer. If it still does not submit, I will cut its throat with the dagger.' Emperor Taizong praised my bravery.

After Emperor Taizong died, Gaozong became emperor at the age of twenty-one. He was inexperienced and frequently incapacitated by a sickness, causing spells of dizziness. His wife, Empress Wang, introduced Wu to the emperors because he didn't favour her but his concubine, Xiao. Wang was childless, while Xiao had borne him a son. Wang hoped Wu's beauty would distract the emperor from Xiao. Wu soon overtook Xiao as Gaozong's favourite. In 652, Wu gave birth to Her first child, a son named Li Hong. In 653, She gave birth to another son.

Wu is infamous for the way She supposedly eliminated Wang and Xiao. As the story goes, Wu smothered Her week-old daughter, a child She had with Gaozong, and blamed the baby's death on Wang, who was the last person to have held her. The emperor believed the story and imprisoned Wang. Xiao soon followed suit. Once She was empress, Wu ordered both women's hands and feet lopped off and had their mutilated bodies tossed into a vat of wine, leaving them to drown.²² At least that is what the chronicles authored by Her political enemies tell us. It might be true, but it might not be.

In 655, at the age of 31, Wu became Gaozong's empress consort and a powerful political force. She had considerable sway over the emperor. Wu intimidated and eliminated Her opponents. One of the first things Wu did was to submit a petition. It praised the faithfulness of Han and Lai, who had opposed Her unprecedented rise to power. Her purpose was to inform them they had offended Her and that She was aware of their opposition. She knew the psychological tricks. Han offered to resign soon afterwards. After removing those who opposed Her rise, She had even more power, and Emperor Gaozong asked Her advice on petitions made by officials and state affairs.

Wu was more decisive and proactive than Her husband, who was often unwell and left decision-making to Her. Historians believe that Wu was the actual ruler for over 20 years during Gaozong's reign. Her strong leadership and effective governance made China one of the world's most powerful nations. Empress Wu had a network of spies in the royal court and throughout the empire. There were countless plots against Her.

She reformed the imperial examination system to encourage capable officials to work in the government. Wu eliminated real or perceived rivals to power through death, demotion, and exile. Her secret police took care of that. Wu's measures were popular. She ensured that free, self-sufficient farmers could work their land, boosting the nation's economy. She also helped the lower classes through relief.

Upon the death of her husband, Emperor Gaozong, Wu became Empress Dowager and Regent, gaining complete power. Wu poisoned the crown prince, Li Hong, and exiled other princes so that She could put Her son, Emperor Zhongzong, on the throne. Zhongzong was weak and incompetent like his father, so the new Empress Wei sought to place herself in the same position of authority that Empress Wu had enjoyed. Wu then deposed Emperor Zhongzong and placed another puppet on the throne for a while, before finally becoming the sole ruler of China in 690. She remained in power until She fell ill in 705, and a coup returned the throne to Her son Zhongzong. She died the same year.

Maria, daughter of Harald III of Norway

Harald Sigurdsson was the King of Norway from 1046 to 1066. As a young man, he fled Norway because he had backed his half-brother Olaf's claim to the throne and was defeated. He and his men went to Russia, where they served as soldiers of Yaroslav I the Wise. Later, they became mercenaries in the Byzantine Varangian Guard. Harald became commander of the Varangian Guard and was involved in some imperial dynastic disputes. Harald spent time in prison because of palace intrigue. In 1042, he requested to leave, but the Empress refused. He escaped and returned to Russia, where he prepared his campaign to claim the Norwegian throne for himself. The Chronicle of the Kings of Norway Saga of Harald Hadrade mentions,

There was a young and beautiful girl called Maria, a brother's daughter of the Empress, Zoe, and Harald had paid his addresses to her, but the Empress had given him a refusal.

Based on the saga, Michael Ennis wrote a novel, Byzantium, where he speculated about a passionate love affair between Maria and Harald, of which Ennis vividly describes the details. They tried to flee Constantinople together. They ran into a Russian fleet that

attacked the city. Maria died, but Harald escaped. The accounts of what transpired diverged, and Ennis filled in the gaps with his imagination. In 1046, Harald returned to Norway and took the throne. On his way back, he stayed in Russia and married Elisiv, a daughter of Yaroslav I. I always had an interest in the Byzantine Empire. That made me read the novel. As I don't read many books, it is noteworthy.

After failing to conquer Denmark, Harald set his eyes on England. There, he died during the invasion of the country in 1066 AD. His demise is part of a coincidental scheme related to D-Day, as mentioned in *The Virtual Universe*. Harald's daughter Maria died on the same day in Norway, a remarkable coincidence. In his book, Ennis speculates that Maria was the reincarnation of Harald's former lover, who wanted to be with him. She dropped dead when he died. Ordinary people can't reincarnate into whom they desire or drop dead at the time of their choosing. And so, Maria could have been God. The Finnish band Turisas dedicated a song named 'The Great Escape' to Harald, a noteworthy coincidence.

Hildegard von Bingen

Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179) was a German Benedictine abbess and an active writer, composer, philosopher, mystic, visionary, and medical writer and practitioner. There are more surviving chants by Von Bingen than by any other composer from the entire Middle Ages. She is also one of the few known composers who wrote both the music and the words. She corresponded with popes, heads of state and emperors. She travelled often during preaching tours. Abbots and abbesses sought the prayers and opinions of Von Bingen on various matters.

Hildegard von Bingen claimed to have had visions as a little child, seeing all things in the light of God through the five senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. Based on these experiences, Hildegard of Bingen wrote three books on visionary theology. She also wrote extensively about medicine from practical experience. She spoke out against corrupting church practices such as simony.

In her works, Hildegard von Bingen held a deviant perspective on Eve's role in the Fall. She highlights Eve's mother-bearing qualities, stressing her role as the mother of humankind. She further wrote, 'Woman may be made from man, but no man can be made without a woman.' It refers to the story in Genesis, and the remark may have been a hint that it was illogical in an era when you couldn't say that plainly. While promoting chastity, Von Bingen was the author of the first known description of the female orgasm,

When a woman is making love with a man, a sense of heat in her brain, which brings with it sensual delight, communicates the taste of that delight during the act and summons forth the emission of the man's seed. And when the seed has fallen into its place, that vehement heat descending from her brain draws the seed to itself and holds it, and soon the woman's sexual organs contract, and all the parts that are ready to open up during the time of menstruation now close, in the same way as a strong man can hold something enclosed in his fist.

The lively description suggests, not only first-hand knowledge Von Bingen should not have acquired during Her lifetime as a nun, but also a lack of shame comparable to Eve. And,

according to Von Bingen, Adam had a pure voice. He joined the angels in singing praises to God before the Fall. That is also knowledge Von Bingen could not have acquired during Her lifetime. She either made it up or was present when it happened. If She had been Eve, She was there. Around the time Von Bingen lived, an anonymous monk in the Netherlands wrote down the oldest known written sentence in the Dutch language,

Hebban olla uogala nestas hagunnan hinase hic anda thu uuat unbidan uue nu.

The English translation is, 'Have all birds started nests except me and you. Do we start now?' A teacher at my primary school told the class about this text. The lines remained in my mind. Later, I imagined a Gregorian chant based on these words when Sadness from Enigma was often on the radio. These lines intrigued me for no apparent reason, it seemed at the time, and I now suspect that the monk had Hildegard von Bingen in mind. Did they meet? It seems unlikely. Perhaps, he had a vision of Her.

Joan of Arc

In 1429, the situation was desperate. There was no hope for France. The English and their ally, Burgundy, had overrun most of France. Only a small pocket of resistance remained. It is not the start of an episode of Asterix & Obelix, but the story of Joan of Arc (1412-1431). She started as an uneducated peasant girl from Domrémy, an obscure village in Northern France and became a military leader who changed the course of history. After years of defeats, the leadership of France had been demoralised and discredited.

The seventeen-year-old Joan joined a relief army to end the siege of Orléans. She arrived at the city in April 1429, wielding Her banner and bringing hope to the demoralised French army. Nine days after her arrival, the English abandoned the siege. Joan encouraged the French to aggressively pursue the English, which led to another decisive victory at Patay, opening the way for the French army to advance on Reims, where the French crowned their new King with Joan at his side.

But fortunes changed. After the coronation, Joan participated in the unsuccessful siege of Paris in September 1429 and the failed siege of La Charité in November. In early 1430, Joan organised a company of volunteers to relieve Compiègne, which the Burgundians had been besieging. There, Burgundian troops captured Joan. She tried to escape, but the Burgundians handed Her to the English. The English put Joan on trial and burned Her at the stake as a witch.

Joan of Arc led the French army to several crucial victories that boosted French morale and changed the course of the war. She claimed to have divine guidance. Modern scholars try to explain Joan's visions as delusions, like they always do, but documents from that time indicate Joan was healthy and sane. She was only nineteen when She died. In the decades that followed, France prevailed. Was She God in disguise? Probably so.

History Is Her Story II



Isabella I of Castile. Public Domain.

Isabella I of Castile

We learned who discovered America, but not the person behind the scenes who financed his mission and made it happen. And by the way, the same person who sent Columbus on his journey also created Spain. Queen Isabella I (1451-1504) was Queen of Castile and one of the most influential historical figures. She was the second child of King John II of Castile. At the time, two countries, Castile and Aragon, dominated the area. Isabella's half-brother, Henry, was the heir to the throne.

Isabella became a pawn in Henry's political ambitions. He forced Isabella into several betrothals and attempted to marry her to King Alfonso V of Portugal. Later, as part of an agreement to restore peace after a rebellion, Isabella was to be betrothed to Pedro Giron, Master of the Military Order of Calatrava. Isabella prayed that the marriage would not take

place. Don Pedro suddenly fell ill and died on his way to meet Isabella. That prayer worked better than voodoo.

Henry didn't have a male heir. Isabella made Henry sign an agreement, making Her his successor to the throne. Henry made another effort to arrange a marriage, but Isabella refused and secretly arranged a wedding with Ferdinand of Aragon. In doing so, Isabella created Spain by uniting both kingdoms. After Isabella secured the throne, She initiated several successful reforms in government, finance, legal code, and policing.

Isabella's actions had a lasting impact on world history. Her political manoeuvring in dynastic politics created Spain. Isabella sponsored Christopher Columbus's mission to reach the Indies by sailing west. On his way, Columbus bumped into America. A film about this event is titled 1492: Conquest of Paradise. That is noteworthy for two reasons. First, there is the word Paradise. And second, the number 1492 refers to the initials and possibly the birthday of this peculiar Lady. That might be a clue.

Katharina von Bora

Katharina von Bora (1499-1552) was the wife of Martin Luther, who initiated the Protestant Reformation. Katharina had several suitors, but none of them became Her husband. She told Luther's friend and fellow reformer, Nikolaus von Amsdorf, that She would be willing to marry only Luther or von Amsdorf. Luther was unsure whether he should marry at all. A woman who wanted him made him change his mind. As Roman Catholic priests were celibate, their marriage set a precedent for Protestant family life and clerical marriage.

Von Bora had been a nun interested in the Protestant Reformation and dissatisfied with cloistered life. Conspiring with several other sisters, Von Bora contacted Luther. They asked for his assistance. Luther sent a merchant who regularly delivered herring to the convent. The nuns escaped by hiding in his covered wagon among the fish barrels.

Von Bora bred and sold cattle and ran a brewery to provide for their family, the numerous students who boarded with them, and her husband's visitors. During epidemics, she operated a hospital with a staff of nurses. Luther called her 'Boss of Zulsdorf' after the farm they owned. Based on Luther's descriptions, his wife, whom he nicknamed 'Herr Käthe', exerted control over his life like a master.

After Martin Luther died in 1546, Von Bora's fortunes turned sour. Wars destroyed Her property, and She became impoverished. She fled due to war, the Black Death, and crop failures. During Her last flight, she was thrown from her cart into a watery ditch and fell ill. She reportedly said on her deathbed, 'I will stick to Christ as a burr to cloth.' Does it mean, 'See you again in the next life?'

Many Protestants and Germans consider Martin Luther a prophet. And prophets might be married to God. The book *The Virtual Universe* discusses the assassination of Martin Luther King on 4 April 1968 as part of an elaborate coincidence scheme that includes the Lincoln and Kennedy assassinations. King's last name might imply that Martin Luther was a king like Jesus, thus a prophet of great importance.

Elizabeth I

Queen Elizabeth I of England (1533-1603) was one of the most successful monarchs in history. Her reign laid the foundation for the Anglo-Saxon world domination. She depended on trusted advisers like William Cecil. She also established the Church of England, a Protestant Church with Catholic elements, of which She became the supreme governor. Elizabeth was moderate and religiously tolerant.

Great Britain became a great power. Elizabeth was cautious in foreign politics, tried to avoid conflict, and half-heartedly committed to the wars England fought. In 1585, England could no longer avoid war with Spain because it had supported Dutch independence from Spanish rule. In 1588, the English defeated the Spanish Armada, and the remainder of the fleet sank in a storm, marking the end of Spanish dominance over the seas and paving the way for British supremacy.

A curious sequence of events led to Elisabeth becoming Queen of England. Upon hearing of Her accession to the throne, She reportedly quoted the twenty-third line of the 118th Psalm: 'It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.' Elizabeth's unmarried status inspired a cult of virginity. She said She was married to England like God was married to Israel. Some poetry and portraits depicted Elisabeth as a virgin goddess.

Computable, June 19, 2009

Armada distribueert database-systeem

De behoefte aan clusters van goedkope systemen voor het draaien van databases groeit. Zo'n gedecentraliseerd systeem moet echter wel betrouwbaar zijn. Promovendus Fabian Groffen van het Centrum Wiskunde & Informatica (CWI) in Amsterdam ontwikkelde hiervoor het Armada-model. In dat model zijn de afzonderlijke machines zelfstandig, maar schieten elkaar te hulp als er één in nood is, net als bij een 16-eeuwse Armada-vloot.

During a walk in 2009, I pondered whether or not Elizabeth had been an avatar of God. When I returned home, there was a copy of the weekly magazine *Computable* in the letterbox. The front page featured an article about a distributed database system called *Armada*. That might be another hint.

Françoise d'Aubigné

Françoise d'Aubigné (1635-1719) was the second wife of King Louis XIV, also known as the Sun King. He was vain and waged numerous wars. His lavish Palace of Versailles had no equal. Louis' magnificence was over-the-top and equally unparalleled. His reign lasted over 72 years, the longest of any sovereign in recorded history. During his first marriage, he had several mistresses.

Louis was more faithful to his second wife, Françoise d'Aubigné. Françoise never became queen, but she had considerable clout in the royal court. Louis was also pious. He saw himself as the protector of the Catholic Church. He made his devotions daily regardless of where he was. Under Françoise's influence, Louis became even more religious.

Louis XIV was the epitome of the divine right of kings. This doctrine states that the king is appointed by God and, therefore, not accountable to anyone except God. That doctrine might come in handy for the Messiah in the end times. A quote attributed to Louis is, 'The state, that is me.'

As a teenager, I was a member of the School Council. The school bureaucrats had lengthy discussions after the Financial Commission had overstepped its bounds. One of them argued that it was a the-state-that-is-me situation. It could be a hint that Louis was God's husband. I doubted it, and tossed a coin, and Françoise made it to the list. Another toss of a coin eliminated Catherine the Great from the list.

Joséphine de Beauharnais

Joséphine de Beauharnais (1763-1814) was the first wife of Napoleon Bonaparte. She was his greatest love. After the execution of her first husband during the French Revolution, she had affairs with several leading political figures. Napoleon, who was six years younger, fell in love with her and sent her many love letters. Napoleon's love for Joséphine cooled somewhat after discovering she had a lover on the side. He then began affairs with other women but remained in love with Joséphine and married her.

Napoleon Bonaparte's lasting legacies include the civil registries with first and last names, the metric system (metres, grammes, and litres), and legal reform, embodied in the Napoleonic Code. The well-structured and accessible law code was a milestone, replacing a patchwork of feudal laws. It has influenced the whole world. The Napoleonic Code is the most widely adopted legal system. About 120 countries use it, but not Great Britain, which also rejected the metric system.

Napoleon was not a favourite of the British, or perhaps it was a British conservative attachment to incoherence and feudal institutions, so they held on to their lords, laws, miles and pints. Unlike the rest of Europe, the British now drive on the wrong side of the road and have left the European Union to rid themselves of David Cameron. He later returned as Minister of Foreign Affairs, so Brexit failed. Napoleon tried to unite Europe, and that project appeared close to succeeding.

Through the children from Her first marriage, Josephine became the grandmother of Napoleon III and the great-grandmother of Swedish and Danish kings and queens. The reigning houses of Belgium, Norway and Luxembourg also descend from Josephine. She, however, didn't give Napoleon any children. Napoleon believed he needed an heir, so they divorced. Napoleon then married Marie Louise, an Austrian archduchess. It was not love that drove him, but calculation. Marie Louise bore him a son who died at the age of 21. His family line died out, so the divorce proved pointless. Her family line lived on. Napoleon's last words on his deathbed were, 'France, the army, the head of the army, Josephine.'

There are some remarkable parallels between Napoleon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler. Napoleon Bonaparte was born on the island of Corsica, which became part of France. Later, Napoleon Bonaparte became the leader of France. Adolf Hitler was born in Austria, a country that became part of Germany. And Adolf Hitler became the leader of Germany. Both men were involved in a coup on 9 November (9/11 in European notation). Both started a military campaign in Russia that led to their downfall. That emboldened the current leadership in Russia, leading them to think they are safe in Moscow.

Napoleon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler both came to power by a coup, ending an unstable republic. They both turned Europe into a battlefield. Both ventured into Africa, and both faced defeat in Egypt. They both waged war on two fronts because they attacked Russia after failing to defeat England. These parallels are intriguing as if Hitler were Napoleon's reincarnation. Their wives were noteworthy as well. Concerning Josephine de Beauharnais, I didn't receive a hint, but the thought isn't far-fetched. Informed deduction is impossible anyway, leaving me with guessing the obvious.

Lucretia Garfield

Lucretia Garfield (1832-1918) was the wife of US President James A. Garfield. A disgruntled public office seeker assassinated him in 1881, shortly after he took office. He lingered in the Twilight Zone for two and a half months before dying. Lucretia stayed at his bedside and received public sympathy, which might be ill-deserved, as it now turns out. They were both 26 when they married on 11 November 1858, referencing 11:11. During the Civil War, James Garfield had an affair as a general.

He later confessed it to his wife, who seemingly forgave him. On 12 January 2010, a previously unknown \$10,000 life insurance policy on President Garfield's life surfaced in a family scrapbook.²³ Lucretia Garfield had opened it 45 days before the assassination of Her husband. It is a most notable coincidence that might indicate foreknowledge.

My son was fond of the comic character Garfield. In 2006, a mysterious parcel addressed to him was delivered to us by mail. It contained some Garfield items, including a coffee cup with the lettering 'It is good to be king.' The sender of the parcel was unknown. We made several enquiries, but nobody conceded to having sent it. Until today, the sender remains unknown. That might be a clue.

Eurocentrism

This list is Eurocentric. Most people on the list come from Europe. Eurocentrism emphasises European culture or Western ideas and theories, with little regard for other cultures. That can offend people from different cultures and the Woke. For the last 500 years, most of the action has centred in Europe, and today's world is profoundly shaped by European ideas and culture, so that you might call it European. Those who oppose Eurocentrism propose eccentric ideas like the knowledge of indigenous peoples being on equal footing with science invented in the West. They suggest that if you have AIDS or cancer, you don't need to take the treatments invented by science, but that you might as well consult your local witch doctor. There are plenty of people in the West who don't trust science and also go to witch doctors. So, if an influencer on the Internet says they should eat horse manure, they eat it.

Yet, as a cultural relativist, I don't believe Western culture is superior. It set in motion a process that is about to end human civilisation. That is also the message behind the tale of the Fall. We would have been better off running naked in the jungle. If it had been up to me, the list would have been more diverse, but I don't make the decisions. After watching the Netflix documentary about Queen Nzinga of Ndongo and Matamba and reading her life story on Wikipedia, I found her to be a worthy candidate for being an avatar of God and better suited than some of the women on the list. Nzinga could fill a gap between Queen Elizabeth I and Françoise d'Aubigné. And I tried to fill in the gaps on the list.

More than filling a hole is required to qualify. Nzinga's life story didn't provide clues to work with, like Queen Isabella I, who prayed that her marriage would not come to pass, and then her suitor died. Nor did a noteworthy coincidence happen, like with Queen Elizabeth I, when a magazine featured an article about a database system called Armada. Again, I tossed a coin, which was my favourite way of resolving such matters, but the outcome suggested God didn't want me to think that Queen Nzinga had been Her avatar. Catherine the Great would also have made a proficient gap filler. She also didn't make it to the list.

When Jesus Returns

High expectations

Will Jesus return? What will he do if he does? Will Jesus make things right? Will there be a showdown between the forces of good and evil? Will evil people burn in hell forever? And what about Buddhists and atheists? They don't believe in God. And Hindus? They have many gods. Or Jews, Christians and Muslims? Who are the good people, and who are the wicked anyway? The Italian mafia bosses were devout Catholics. The usurers of Goldman Sachs claimed that they were doing God's work. The Muslims blowing themselves up to murder as many unbelievers as they could also did. US President George Bush claimed that God had ordered him to invade Iraq. So, what might happen if the Messiah were to come? A Messiah already came, sort of, at least. His name was Adolf Hitler.

Adolf Hitler was a most messianic figure, perhaps the most messianic figure ever, even surpassing Jesus. So, was he the opposite of Christ, the anti-Christ, or was he like Christ, as many of his followers expect him to be? Will there be a final reckoning in which billions of people die or face eternal torture in hell? The latter is worse than being gassed in a concentration camp, as there is no end to the suffering. For those who think it is an inappropriate remark, life in Gaza in 2025 was as horrible as in a concentration camp. And Jews did that. They may have had their reasons, but so did Adolf Hitler. So, have we learned our lessons? And what are these lessons in the first place?

Europeans have learned the hard way, in two devastating world wars, that nationalism and tribalism are the paths to destruction. It is still in their collective memory. That is why the European Union exists. Other continents don't share the same experience, and memories don't last forever. Nationalists aren't wrong about the troubles mass migration and mixing people from different cultures cause, but nationalism has more serious flaws that will prove to be fatal in today's world. European history has demonstrated that beyond doubt. And why should we doubt what we know for certain? Humans are a failed and destructive species. We cooperate through the myths we share. Without an inspiring fairy tale and a leader who unites us, we are doomed. And that is why we need a messiah.

Adolf the Messiah or the Anti-Christ?

At first glance, Jesus Christ and Adolf Hitler are opposites. Jesus personifies goodness, while Hitler is the epitome of evil. Christ stood at the cradle of Christianity, the Religion of Love. Jesus taught that love would overcome hatred. He said, 'If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.' And, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.' Hitler represents Nazism, the ideology of hatred that brought us unprecedented cruelty and revealed the depth of human depravity. As the world is barreling towards an apocalypse, it is the right time to take a distance and be honest.

Closer inspection reveals a few intriguing parallels between Hitler and Christ. Adolf Hitler's followers considered him their saviour, and they worshipped him like one. Christians believe that Jesus will descend from heaven and that there will be a rapture when he returns (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Hitler was the first leader to fly around in an aeroplane. He came down from the sky to meet the cheering crowds. Rapture means ecstasy, enthusiasm and admiration. Few people in history caused as much rapture as Hitler. A Nazi slogan was, 'One people, one empire, one leader.' Christians and Muslims expect that to happen when Jesus returns. And so, Hitler might foreshadow the Second Coming.

In several ways, Hitler resembled a messiah. He told the Germans they were the chosen people for their superior race. Jews believe they are the chosen people because of a supposed special relationship between God and the Jewish people. Like Moses, Hitler promised to end the unjust oppression, in this case, caused by the Treaty of Versailles. He claimed that his Third Reich would last a thousand years, whereas the Bible tells that the reign of Christ would last a thousand years (Revelation 20:1-6). And Hitler inspired the same blind following and loyalty to the death that many Christians expect the Second Coming of Christ would do. Somewhat unsurprisingly, a British intelligence report found that Hitler had a messiah complex.²⁴

In traditional agricultural societies, land remained within the family. The Jews were no exception. The Bible says the bond between people and land is not to be broken, and land is not to be sold (Leviticus 25:23). The Nazi ideology of Blood and Soil focuses on ethnicity and homeland and stresses the importance of the land people live on and celebrates rural living. The Nazis made the ownership of selected lands hereditary. Those lands could not be mortgaged or sold. The Nazis sought to return to their Eden, without Jews and other undesirables. The Holocaust became the culmination of centuries of anti-Semitism fed by prejudices in popular culture.

The Nazis objected to degenerate art, which supposedly was perverse, thus, Communist or Jewish. Ironically, a Jew, Max Nordau, was the one who coined the term degenerate art for modern art, which he believed was the work of feeble minds corrupted by modern life who had lost their self-control. That was by far not the only idea that the Nazis borrowed from the Jews. It is the irony of history, or perhaps God's sense of humour, that Nazism has so much in common with Judaism.

Nazism and Judaism both have fairy tales about superior people, the nation's greatness, messianic leadership, and a promised land. Like the Nazis, the Jews have been keen on not allowing mixed marriages, not to keep their tribe racially pure, but to keep it free from foreign influences. In the past, Jews saw non-Jews as inferior, and many still do. Whether Jesus compared Gentiles to dogs, we can't be sure of, but there is little doubt that these words reflected a widespread sentiment among Jews. It is a natural human inclination to perceive our own group as superior and other groups as inferior, and the Jews are no exception. They have only been the best at cultivating their superiority complex by producing an elaborate collection of fairy tales about their supposed special relationship with the owner of the universe, and dragging half the world's population into it. Nazism is the Frankenstein's monster that Judaism has spawned.

Political views

Hitler could have been a painter had the Vienna Art School not declined his application, and we would have had a few additional acceptable wall decorations instead of World War II and the Holocaust. Hitler wouldn't have sought revenge if Germany had not lost World War I. Had he not lived in an impoverished multicultural neighbourhood in Vienna, he might not have thought that mixing ethnic groups was a bad idea. And had there been no widespread anti-Semitism already, he wouldn't have hated the Jews that much.

Adolf Hitler was skilled at delivering speeches, often angry rants that energised his followers. During the Great Depression, he gained popularity and grabbed power in Germany. He started a war that killed fifty million people. Ten million people died in the Holocaust, including six million Jews. When American troops entered Germany in 1945, they were horrified by what they found in the concentration camps. Few people had imagined the Nazi regime could be that depraved.

Like many Germans, Hitler considered the Peace Treaty of Versailles unjust. The treaty stipulated that Germany accepted responsibility for causing World War I and had to pay massive reparations. The economist Keynes warned in 1919 about the harsh peace terms imposed upon Germany. They were the product of vindictive sentiments among the allies. It could lead to another major war, Keynes warned. His words proved prophetic. Hitler also proved himself to be a man of foresight in his views on usury.

Hitler's enlightenment on that particular issue came after attending a lecture by Gottfried Feder, titled 'The Abolition of Interest Servitude.' It was the reason Hitler joined the National Socialist Party. It could also be that Feder's moustache has impressed Hitler. Hitler's views were similar to those expressed in the Bible and the Quran. Feder's ideas became central to Hitler's ideas on international finance. Today, unchecked trade and finance contribute to the end of human civilisation as we know it.

Hitler feared that the Jews would take over Germany. His fears have become a reality in the United States. About half the wealthy US elites are Jewish, while Jews are only 2% of the population. To get elected, American politicians must unconditionally support Israel. If not, they face the wrath of the Israel Lobby, which will terminate their career. Today, many Americans are impoverished while the wealthy, often Jewish elites, party. The elites bribe US politicians to do their bidding. Adolf Hitler prevented that from happening by ruining Germany before the Jews could, and he probably did a much better job than the Jews would have done.

Inspired by scientific discoveries about natural selection, the Nazis became preoccupied with the fitness of the race. They euthanised those whom they believed were unfit, such as the mentally disabled. Had we still lived in nature, many of them wouldn't have survived, because the communities they lived in would have abandoned them. Civilisation allows the inept to survive. If you can do a trick, you can get your cheque. The Nazis believed that if the feeble survived and procreated, it would weaken the human race.

To the Nazis, other races were inferior. Some were good enough as slaves, while others had to disappear. Apart from the Jews, the Nazis exterminated the Roma. But why? Today, 70% of the Roma have criminal records, and the majority of them rely on welfare. And they still suffer from mob violence and exclusion.²⁵ But is that racism? Like the Roma, the Jews

didn't change their ways, so anti-Semitism is once again rearing its ugly head. Cultures, so norms, values and myths, hold groups together, so you can't reason with groups as you can with individuals. And it is not only the Roma and the Jews. We all do harm to others through our values and conduct, and the myths we believe.

'Why do they hate us?' It was a question few Americans dared to ask after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. And then the Americans did precisely what many Muslims hated them for: bombing, occupying and plundering the oil in Muslim countries. And Muslims never ask themselves why others hate them. In many places where Muslims live together with others, there is trouble. It can't be that only the others are to blame. And so, it is a question everyone should ask. Pride is the gravest sin of all, and for good reason. The prejudices others hold about your group can be telling. How others view you can tell you more about yourself than how you see yourself.

If we intend to live together, it will only work if we become a one-world society. That is because our actions affect everyone else. We must be honest about ourselves, our traditions, and our conduct. We must fix the issues that cause us to harm others. In hindsight, the Nazi racial superiority ideology was a guise to address cultural issues plaguing German society. Mixing people from different cultures causes trouble. None of today's cultures meets the requirements for our future, so we must all change. Xenophobia and racism come from tribalism and the myths we believe in. If there is to be a World War III, it will probably be worse than the previous one. And so we must identify as one humanity and believe in a single set of myths.

Harsh questions

The Nazis didn't shy away from harsh questions, or at least the ones that could be a pretext for mass murder. The world is finite. The Nazis obsessed over limited resources or living space, and thought that the Germans needed more of it, so that Germany should start wars to conquer territory. The issue of limited resources is far more pressing today, and the alternative to warfare is sharing. Sadly, many of us aren't inclined to do so, except perhaps at gunpoint. Revolutions, whether the American Revolution or the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, were not only about ideals but above all about people desiring more for themselves. More stuff is what motivates people. And that comes at the expense of something, such as other people or nature. An economic crisis brought Hitler to power, and an economic miracle made him popular with the Germans.

You run into questions like, is it okay to spend €100,000 per year to keep one person alive, while that money could have saved a hundred others who now die horrible deaths? And those who take more than is sustainable or have many children condemn others to death. The point is that by avoiding these questions or failing to take adequate action, you will have more misery in the future, so avoiding them is a greater evil than dealing with them. Those who live a luxurious lifestyle and have more than one child are mass murderers on par with the Nazis. And for what? The economic law of diminishing marginal utility indicates that excessive consumption barely increases happiness. The opposite might be true. And children are a lot of trouble. One is more than enough. Malthus may have had it wrong for 200 years, but that doesn't mean he will not be right in the end. Likewise, end-

time predictors were wrong for 2,000 years, but that doesn't mean the end time will not arrive. The world doesn't need children. On the contrary, the fewer humans, the better.

That brings us to eugenics, or the improvement of the human race via selective breeding. Why would we bring misfits into the world if we can avoid it? If you suffer from a severe hereditary disease, should you have children? If you are mentally incapable of raising children because you are a retard, a criminal, an alcoholic or a drug addict, should you be allowed to have children? Excessive consumers of resources and planetary destroyers are more likely to transfer their values to their offspring. So, should we allow billionaires to breed? They generate more useless eaters who live off their capital. The prevailing liberal view is that it is a human right to have children. And then liberals leave it up to science to fix the problems this view causes. But to own a gun or to drive a car, you need a license and prove you are sane. So, why don't we have to qualify to have children?

Drug abuse

Adolf Hitler was a hypochondriac suffering from mood swings, Parkinson's disease, flatulence, skin problems and a gradual decline. His physician, a quack named Dr Theodor Morell, gave him unorthodox medications, such as cocaine, speed, glucose, testosterone, estradiol, and corticosteroids. In addition, Der Führer received a preparation made from a gun cleaner, rat poison and atropine to treat his farting.

Der Führer miraculously survived all these treatments, but they contributed to his erratic conduct and illnesses. He also ingested an extract of bulls' semen and numerous vitamins and tonics. He took potions, pills and injections to improve his sexual performance to deal with the sexual appetite of his demanding mistress, Eva Braun. As they say, behind every strong man is a strong woman, and in the case of Hitler, an even stronger one.



Eva Braun and Adolf Hitler. German Federal Archive.

Eva Braun

Eva Braun was the mistress and later wife of Adolf Hitler. Most historians consider Her an insignificant figure who didn't participate in political decisions. But opinions differ, and the truth is more bizarre than the wildest imaginations. A letter demonstrates that Braun knew of the concentration camps and the gas chambers. Some Nazi officials close to Hitler have said that Braun was at the centre of Hitler's life for most of his twelve years in power. She was committed to Hitler, won his affection, gave him moral support, and enjoyed a healthy sex life with him. Braun's friends have said that She giggled over a photograph of Neville Chamberlain sitting on a sofa in Hitler's Munich apartment and said, 'If only he knew what goings-on that sofa has seen.'²⁶

Hitler's letters indicate that he was fond of Her, and worried when She participated in sports or was late returning for tea. Hitler's secretary, Traudl Junge, stated that during the war, Hitler telephoned Braun every day. After learning about a failed plot to kill Hitler in 1944, Braun wrote to him, 'From our first meeting, I swore to follow you anywhere even

unto death. I live only for your love.' And that was how it ended. Over twenty plots to kill Hitler failed, making Hitler believe a supernatural force protected him. When the end of the Third Empire neared, Braun became merrier. In the end, She married Hitler and committed suicide together with him. It was the romantic ending She desired.

Eva Braun was God and masterminded Hitler's rise and demise. Coincidences serve as a clue. Braun was Eva's last name, and it is the German word for brown. Adolf Hitler was born in Braunau am Inn, and brown is the colour associated with the Nazi ideology. Nazis were nicknamed brown shirts. And Eva is German for Eve. Eva had a passion for nude sunbathing to brown Her skin. She loved being photographed naked. She had no shame like Eve in the Garden of Eden.

For Braun, the story didn't end with the Third Reich's demise. She turned into Marilyn Monroe by assuming Norma Jeane Mortenson's body. I contemplated that possibility when watching a Netflix documentary about Monroe's life. Immediately after my thought, the word goddess appeared on the screen in massive lettering. That hint was as plain as it could get. Monroe had an affair with US President John F. Kennedy. He later dumped Monroe. Soon afterwards, Kennedy met the Grim Reaper in an epic scene dubbed the Kennedy assassination.

Messing with Monroe seemed to have been Kennedy's most fatal mistake. People still speculate about a plot behind the assassination, so here is the final answer that renders the other speculation trivial. A set of coincidences surrounds the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert. They are part of an intricate scheme involving the premature deaths of Presidents, including James A. Garfield. Furthermore, the Kennedy family suffered a series of accidents and early deaths called the Kennedy Curse. The book 'The Virtual Universe' delves deeper into the matter.

The prophecy of the Holocaust

Rumour has it that Nostradamus predicted the coming of Adolf Hitler, but the argument is not particularly convincing. The word Hister in Nostradamus' ravings refers to the Danube. These names are alike, and Hitler's birthplace was on a tributary of the Danube, a peculiar coincidence. More ominous are the prophetic references to six million Jews in danger of being exterminated or a coming Holocaust of Jews appearing in Jewish magazines before World War II. That is not as remarkable as it might seem. The figure emerged because six million Jews lived in the Russian Empire before World War I. Jews in Russia suffered from a hostile government and pogroms. Pogroms are riots incited to expel or kill Jews.

The Russian Empire collapsed, and the Soviet Union came in its place. Still, the six million figure continued to circulate in Jewish publications, which is odd. It subsequently became the number of Jews murdered in the Holocaust.²⁷ These prophetic statements are eerie, like the reference to the end date of World War I on the licence plate of Franz Ferdinand's car. The most notable ones are listed below:

- In 1911, at the tenth Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, Max Nordau, co-founder of the World Zionist Organisation, together with Theodore Herzl, prophetised 'the annihilation of six million Jews.'

- Shortly after World War I in 1919, Zionists feared that a Holocaust of six million Jews was imminent in Europe.
- According to the New York Times, in 1936, Zionists were lobbying for a Jewish state in Palestine to save the Jews from a European Holocaust. It was three years before World War II and five years before the extermination camps came into existence.
- In 1939, The Jewish Criterion predicted that the coming world war would annihilate six million Jews in East and Central Europe.
- In 1940, the Jewish leader Nahum Goldmann predicted that if the Nazis achieved victory, six million Jews would be doomed to destruction.

That ugly face in the mirror

The 1981 film 'The Wave' was about a schoolteacher, Ben Ross, who showed his class a film about the Holocaust. One of his pupils asked him how the Germans could have rallied behind Adolf Hitler and committed these atrocities. Ross couldn't answer the question and decided to start an experiment. He began by offering advice on proper posture and a few classroom rules to improve efficiency. The pupils took it up with enthusiasm. The next day, he introduced The Wave, a youth movement with a secret salute and membership card.

Robert, an unpopular student, received the task of monitoring the other students, a position that filled him with pride. Robert began reporting unorthodox behaviour to Ross and the other Wave members. Two hundred more students joined. Wave members bullied other students. The school newspaper published a negative review about The Wave, prompting Wave members to plan an attack on the editor.

The following day, Ross told the Wave was a nationwide youth movement in schools, and its leader would give a televised speech. The eager Wave students assembled in the auditorium with television monitors. To their horror, the monitors displayed a film of Adolf Hitler at a Nazi rally. Ross told them that this was their leader. The experiment showed that most of us are fit to become Nazis or would not resist a fascist takeover. In other words, similar atrocities can occur again, and they did. That is because strong leaders and fairy tales appeal to our desire for belonging and order.

We remember the Nazis for their cruelty, but like today's fascists, they were also a bunch of thieves. Hermann Göring looted art and other precious items, a recurring pattern in authoritarian regimes. Far-right leaders are often gangsters who lie even more than other politicians, engage in bribery, embezzlement and coups to overthrow the government. Several democratic countries are turning into gangster kingdoms where criminal leaders and their cronies enrich themselves, exceeding the corruption and plunder of the previous capitalist liberal establishment. If you have studied human politics, the decay of order into gangster regimes is rather unsurprising. And the liberal world order is collapsing.

The way forward

If it is about survival, you do whatever it takes. To Hitler, the war was about the survival of the German people. He took a rather particular view on the matter and started World War II. The irony of history is that no one ever destroyed Germany more than Hitler. The Jews posed no immediate threat to Germany. Still, Hitler was not wrong in fearing that the Jews would take over Germany. In the United States, where the Jews had the opportunity, something of that kind has occurred. Usury and political corruption are the main pillars of Jewish power in the US. To the Jews, it is also about the survival of their nation, so they see control over US foreign policy as a crucial national interest. The Palestinians may not be an immediate threat to Israel, but that may change. And if Adolf Hitler's fears were justified, then you can't that easily dismiss the fears of the Israeli fascists as well.

The Holocaust was exceptional in its scale and cruelty, but it fits in a long list of atrocities humans have committed. We can do good things, but the overall outcome of all that we do is a complete disaster. Technology only enhances our destructive inclinations. And so, human civilisation as we know it ending. Had Adam and Eve listened to God, we would still have run around naked. We would have done all right, murdering each other with sticks and stones, not knowing the difference between good and evil. Humans are a failed species. If we hope to survive, hatred is not the answer. It is the problem. Like everyone else, the fascists failed to learn the lessons of history. If you stir up sentiments and start a conflict, you reveal your intentions, strategy and tactics, giving anyone with the means to do so, the opportunity to obliterate you, and you never know who that might be. We need a saviour who gives us an inspiring myth so we can unite as one humanity. We must all learn to see our part in the drama and do better. Today, it is about the survival of humankind. We must do whatever it takes and hope that God is willing to save us.

The End Is Near

A broken clock is right twice a day. At least that was so before clocks came with digital displays. So, even that truth no longer holds. Nothing is certain, not even that. In the same fashion, end-time prophets may be correct, for once at least, because there can be only one end, even though that is not certain either. As for the end-time predictions of varying religions, if your religion is a bagload full of crap to begin with, expect no less from its prophecies. The prophecies in the Bible aren't much help in picking a date or detailing out the scenario. The Bible doesn't even mention historical events like the discovery of America or the Industrial Revolution, which seem significant to historians but apparently not to the prophets of that time. Or the ancient prophets had no clue. We don't know for certain because these prophets never admitted that they didn't know, except Jesus, who said that he didn't know the hour, or so the Bible tell us. Even that smells like a later addition to keep Christians from giving up.

Now, if these prophets didn't know the future, and God likes to joke around, and of both we have ample evidence, their prophecies may still come true in ways they didn't anticipate because we live in a world that runs the script of a story. So if the name Bathsheba hints that She was an avatar of God and would return as the Queen of Sheba, then the presidency of Donald Trump may precede the end times, because the noise of trumpets heralds the end times, and the name Trump refers to a trumpeteer. In any case, we are nearing some kind of apocalypse, so it might as well be now, but also, that is not certain. Only when the time has come might we uncover the signs in hindsight, like the prophetic licence plate number on Franz Ferdinand's car. Logic is a strange thing, and humans are emotional creatures that occasionally think. If the end time ever comes, it is now closer than ever, but the longer we have waited, the less likely it seems to us that it could be now:

- We ruin the Earth and turn it into a wasteland with our production and consumption. We are creating an apocalyptic environmental disaster.
- As long as there are nation-states, we will have no enduring peace, and weapons of mass destruction can kill billions and make large parts of the planet uninhabitable.
- Eternal life may soon be possible. At the same time, technology can go wrong, and artificial intelligence may make us redundant.
- Existing religions and ideologies have failed, but we are religious creatures and need something to believe in. Without religion, we can't fix our problems.
- With the rise of the new fascism, we are nearing the end of civilisation based on social progress, and the barbarians are taking over.
- We may soon discover that we live inside a virtual reality created by an advanced humanoid civilisation for entertainment and that God exists.
- The world has become interconnected, and ideas spread fast. If God plans a revolution, it can be swifter than lightning, taking the world's leaders off guard.

Pop music, the unexpected medium

If the end is near, there may have been signs, and probably not in places people were looking, and not the type of signs they expected. A few Christians found Satanic messages hidden in pop music by playing tracks in reverse. Some of them even believe Satan is in charge of pop music entirely and that this horned fellow has been busy composing the lyrics in his state-of-the-art studio in that hot place called Hell. Few would have guessed that God was the composer and hid secret messages in pop music. That, however, might be the case. Even more surprisingly, you don't have to play the songs in reverse to hear them. Only that was not for the faithful to guess,

*God is a DJ
This is my church*

Faithless, God is a DJ

Clearly, God likes to joke around. The song 'Strange Phenomena' by Kate Bush suggests that a coincidence with the radio could be a sign of God's arrival,

A day of coincidence with the radio

...
G arrives, funny, had a feeling he was on his way.

...
*We raise our hats to the hand a-moulding us
Sure 'nuff, he has the answer*

Kate Bush, Strange Phenomena

G might be God, as the song alludes to the hand that moulds us and someone who has all the answers. Does a day of coincidence on the radio herald the arrival of God? For me, it did. Coincidences on the radio prompted me to search for these messages. Like literary criticism, this is not science but speculation. So, can I guess God's intentions? The following incident suggests so. At secondary school, I did particularly poorly at explaining literature. It is about guessing the motives of book authors. My scores were consistently poor, the poorest in the class. I considered guessing other people's motives and decoding hidden messages in texts a waste of time. There are so many ways in which you can interpret words. The authors themselves often marvelled at what the literary experts deduced about their intentions from the books they had written.

With the final exams approaching, I began to fret and asked my teacher for additional practice exams. It didn't help. The grades remained as poor as before. Before the final exam, I prayed and asked God that the grade wouldn't be too bad. My result was the best of everyone's, but it was also equalled only by a girl with a striking hairdo, a bit alternative, who dressed in an outspoken way and flaunted her interest in art and literature. That was not only a surprise to me. A classmate wondered how I had managed to pull this one off. I was too ashamed to tell. I didn't need a higher grade while children were starving. It was a peculiar incident. At the time, there was no reason to think God was behind this, nor did it seem a harbinger of things to come.

Hotel California

Let's do a text analysis on the famous song Hotel California by the Eagles. What is its meaning? On the Internet, you can find some answers. It could be about the lost Paradise caused by American decadence and burnout, too much money, corruption, drugs and arrogance, and too little humility. Her mind being Tiffany-twisted and owning the expensive car reflects that. The wine being unavailable since 1969 refers to the fact that in 1969, it was no longer legal to drink alcohol while you were in a drug rehab programme. Before that, you couldn't do drugs, but you were allowed to drink alcohol. The hotel, thus, was a rehab. I see another message, not intended by the songwriters and unseen by the critics.

When She stood in the doorway, the mission bell sounded. He might be meeting God because of the mission bell. And then, he enters Paradise, thinking this might be heaven or hell. God is a spoiled woman who owns the place and is used to getting Her way. Her mind, thus, is Tiffany-twisted. She owns an expensive car. Most people think Paradise is perfect, but it doesn't agree with human nature. There is a darkness to it. They can't kill the beast. And you can't escape. You can check out when you like, but you can't leave. You can argue against this by pointing to the master's chambers. If there is a master, she isn't God. Indeed, seeing meaning is not science, and interpretations are dubious. I knew that already as a teenager, so I won't argue. With that in mind, we can proceed.

From Almelo via Enschede to Eurovision

Ilse DeLange's fourth studio album, *The Great Escape*, contains the most messages. If there had been a meter for hidden messages, it would show an elevated reading when you play this album. If you read between the lines, this album comes with a message from God, Eve reincarnated, to Her husband, Adam reincarnated, to prepare himself. The album contains lyrics with parts that convey such a message. Noteworthy coincidences surround DeLange. DeLange was born on 13 May 1977 in Almelo, a town in the Dutch region of Twente. Almelo was also the hometown of Herman Finkers, a comedian who wrote 'Kroamschudd'n in Mariaparochie', a short animated picture about the possibility of Christ coming from Twente.

On 13 May 2000, the 23rd birthday of Ilse Delange, a fireworks plant in Enschede in Twente blew up, killing 23 people. That was exactly 11 years after I moved to Enschede to live on the University of Twente campus. I lived in dormitory 401 for five months, until 13 October 1989, a time lapse that precisely matches the events surrounding the Fatima Miracle of the Sun, which occurred 72 years later. This is the most spectacular religious miracle ever confirmed to have actually happened. And in that dormitory, lived that most peculiar Lady. The recurrence of 23 is also odd. The accident was on the day of the Eurovision Song Contest. Once the seriousness of the situation became manifest, the Dutch broadcast of the Eurovision Song Contest ended.

My wife had dreamt about a large fire the night before the fireworks accident. On the day itself, she visited a friend who had just given birth. Some of her other friends were also present. One of them came from Enschede. Just after my wife told this friend from Enschede about her dream, this friend received a text message asking whether she was

all right. It was only then that they learned about the fireworks accident. Fourteen years later, Ilse Delange sang in the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest herself with Waylon as The Common Linnets. They came in second place after Conchita Wurst, a transgender Jesus look-alike. That is noteworthy, not only because it links DeLange to Jesus but also because early Christians performed a sex change on God in their scriptures.



Jesus and Conchita Wurst at a Meet & Greet during the Eurovision Song Contest 2014. Albin Olsson (2014). CC BY-SA 3.0. Wikimedia Commons.

The Finnish rock band Turisas dedicated a song named The Great Escape to the Norwegian king Harald Sigurdsson, who played a role in a coincidence scheme related to D-Day. His daughter died in Norway on the same day he perished on the battlefield in England, a noteworthy coincidence. The Great Escape was also the name of the fourth album made by the English rock band Blur, released on 11 September 1994, a remarkable date considering the coincidences surrounding the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. The total length of Blur's album is 56 minutes and 56 seconds. Compressing these numbers results in 11:11 as $5 + 6 = 11$. And $56 + 56 = 112$, which is also the European emergency telephone number. The lead song of DeLange's album, The Great Escape, lasts 4:01 minutes. I moved to Enschede to live in room 112 of dormitory 401.

The Great Escape

Ilse DeLange's album 'The Great Escape' contains a message from God, the eternal Eve, asking Her prospective husband, the temporary Adam, to prepare for his task as saviour. That was not DeLange's intention. Unwittingly, she became the channel for this particular communication. As Finkers already noted, a lot was going on in Almelo, such as traffic lights switching colours. Mediums make misses alongside accurate guesses. The messages blend into the lyrics like the accurate guesses of mediums mixed up with misses. The book 'The Virtual Universe' explains how mediums can be precise at times while making many misses. It is not a gift but scripted. It works the same way as meaningful coincidences. So, how can we interpret those songs?

In the first song, 'Reach For the Light,' God says She remembers and that everything he knew is lost. That makes sense if he is supposed to be Adam and doesn't remember,

*I know my name, but who's the same when everything you knew is lost
I'm filled with hope that echoes loud inside a forgotten mind*

Ilse DeLange, Reach for the Light

In the second song, 'The Lonely One', God claims She used Her powers to make his life disagreeable. Only God can order the sun not to shine and the sky to fall on him. What She says about Herself would even make Louis XIV, the Sun King, blush,

I told the sun, not to shine and stay away

...

I am the only princess, I am indestructible

...

Asked the sky to fall down on you

Ilse DeLange, The Lonely One

He probably thought his life was not that wonderful. The song 'The Great Escape' gives the album its name and is the centrepiece. The song says it's autumn, and some force pulls him into the shadow world. For him, it was scary to be taken in this fashion. But it is a holy land in disguise. She says she comes from heaven.

*In this holy land
A desert made of quicksand*

...

*Some force pulls you in
The shadow world*

...

I was falling, falling, falling from heaven

Ilse DeLange, The Great Escape

In the next song, Carry Hope, She instructs him to prepare himself. She says the power is in his hands, and he has to make this land his own. She adds that faith calls out his name. In all his vanity, even Louis XIV, the Sun King, would not have said that when he lets go of hope, there is no one left you can follow. There is nothing but the power to believe in Her,

*The power is in your hands, the dust will fall to sand
Gotta make this land your own*

...

*Faith calls out your name
When I let go of hope, there's no one left to follow
There's nothing but the power to believe in me*

Ilse DeLange, Carry Hope

It can hardly be more clear than that. The song Was It Love suggests She doesn't care for religious people. They are locked inside their belief,

*And they're locked inside belief
But they're not inside of me*

Ilse DeLange, Was It Love

You have to cherry-pick lyrics and the lines to get the message, so the critics might point at that. The coincidences relating to DeLange suggest that there is more to these messages than just an accidental slip of the songwriter's mind. And DeLange comes from the Dutch region of Twente. I lived in Twente, met the Lady there, and She was born there as well. That makes it more remarkable. And then you have Finkers' animation picture 'Kroamschudd'n in Mariaparochie' about the possibility of Christ coming from Twente. That is a bit too much to ignore.

Slippery slope

Lyrics by other performing artists contain messages from God. The song 'Hotel California' by the Eagles did get its fair share of literary criticism, as did 'Gimme the Prize' by Queen, and 'God Is a DJ' by Faithless. To access these messages, you must filter out the noise, thus selectively choosing the parts that fit, which is a very unscientific approach. Literary criticism is about seeing meaning. You can't prove meaning as it is subjective, so seeing it is an art. And not seeing meaning is the art of being a moron. The song 'Joga' by Björk mentions accidents, coincidences and connecting the dots. The coincidences make sense only with one person. So God made these things happen to show him Her love,

*All these accidents that happen
Follow the dot, coincidence
Makes sense only with you*

...
*This state of emergency
How beautiful to be*

...
*All that no one sees, you see
What's inside of me*

Björk, Joga

She adds how beautiful it is to be in an emergency. The emergency services telephone numbers are 112 and 911. When God demonstrates Her love for you by murdering people in accidents and terrorist attacks, that can be intimidating. And you might get the impression that you, like Jesus, have no choice but to go along with God's plans.

Now the word goes around in certain circles that the song 'Stairway to Heaven' by Led Zeppelin contains hidden satanic messages that you can hear by playing the song in reverse, which is something normal people wouldn't do. There was something there, and the artists said it was a coincidence.²⁸ However, straightforwardly playing that same music

reveals something even more interesting. It mentions a lady we all know. That lady could be God. After all, the song is named 'Stairway to Heaven' rather than 'Highway to Hell',

*With a word she can get what she came for
Ooh, ooh, and she's buying a stairway to Heaven*

...

*There walks a lady we all know
Who shines white light and wants to show
How everything still turns to gold
The tune will come to you at last
When all are one, and one is all*

...

And she's buying a stairway to Heaven

Led Zeppelin, Stairway to Heaven

It is therefore not a coincidence that the same album, Led Zeppelin IV, which features Stairway To Heaven, also includes the song 'Going to California.' It mentions a queen who is a woman who was never born, thus Eve,

*Seems that the wrath of the Gods
Got a punch on the nose and it started to flow*

...

*To find a queen without a king;
They say she plays guitar and cries and sings.*

La la la la

*Ride a white mare
in the footsteps of dawn
Trying to find a woman
who's never, never, never been born.*

Led Zeppelin, Going to California

The song The Infant King from the album Adieu Sweet Bahnhof by The Nits is about a boy king on his way to meet his Bride. The world is falling apart. The border is closed. People are packing. Gold can help you if you want to leave. That could be the End Times. But the infant king is on his way,

*I tip-toe tip-toe through the sleeping train
An infant king who meets his bride*

...

*Two eyes two ears nose uncertain smile
A child reflected thousandfold
Someone said the other day
The border's closed there's no way in or out*

...

*My mood is changing every mile
Someone said the other day
The world is cracking up it's plain to see*

...

*Two eyes two ears nose uncertain smile
The infant king is on his way*

The Nits, The Infant King

On that same album is the song 'Woman Cactus', describing a psychotic love affair of an indecent nature. His senses don't make sense at all. She haunts him as the bar sign repeatedly prints Her name on the wall,

*This is not comme il faut
It's no respectable affair*

...
*My heart, my head, my brains
My senses don't make sense at all
The bar sign prints your name
Over and over on the wall*

...
*I know it hurts to touch a woman
With those needles and pins*

The Nits, Woman Cactus

There is more, but it is a slippery slope. The farther you go, the more you slip-slide away. For the argument, the presented selection suffices.

My Guide Plausibility

Plausible means that it can be true, but what we think is plausible depends on what we believe, and that often depends on the information we have. Humans are imaginative beings who invent stories, such as religions, but there is only one truth. The truth doesn't depend on what you or I believe. An advanced post-human civilisation may have created us for the personal amusement of one of its members, who is God to us. That has remained hidden behind some of the world's religions. The evidence suggests that God is a woman who assumes the role of an ordinary human in this world to pass the time.

You can speculate too wildly or fail to see the bigger picture if you only accept what can be proven. I have tried to avoid those pitfalls. This account leaves no significant questions concerning the reason for our existence unanswered. It is a plausible overall explanation, but it doesn't answer many of the irrelevant questions scholars are debating. And there is still the Great Unknown. We are inside the simulation and don't know what's outside, just like a Holodeck character doesn't know it's on the Starship Enterprise.

We all connect the dots in different ways. We can easily get lost as we are religious creatures who make up stories and believe them. The quest for truth is different. Using the available information, we can rule out options. Information affects probabilities, but the quality of information matters. The Bible is doubtful evidence. With the help of scholars' work, we may make guesses about what happened, but it remains a leap to arrive at an account that explains it all. That still requires a clue. Apart from God being a woman from an advanced humanoid civilisation, there are other possibilities, such as:

- This world is like a Big Brother house. Our creators entertain themselves with us. Mary Magdalene wasn't God, but something made Jesus believe it.
- There are no humans left. Artificial intelligence has taken over. It runs this script to keep itself busy. The AI may or may not think of itself as God.
- Or, I am the post-human who wrote this script for myself to become the hero who found it all out and finds the perfect love. I don't think so, but it is possible.

These alternatives make sense. For one thing, if you walk around in a story you wrote, you have no freedom. You can't do things you aren't supposed to do, as that would derail the script. At best, you have a limited decision space that the AI can work around by isolating the consequences of your actions and managing them. So, if you are God, these limits might pin you down for thousands of years. And so, our situation looks like living inside a box, trying to guess what is outside based on the information we find inside.

The evidence 'inside the box' suggests God is a woman from an advanced humanoid civilisation. Each piece of evidence is insufficient on its own. Their validity lies in the combination. The findings answer several questions without resorting to religious dogma. To name a few. Why is Christianity about love? Why does this religion have such baffling teachings that differ from Judaism and Islam? Why did the Jewish God gather so many worshippers via Christianity and Islam? Why was Jesus the Son of God? Why was he the Bridegroom? And was Muhammad a prophet of God? We now have answers.

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