

TRANSCRIPT

An Undeceptions podcast.

Speaker 1:

You won't get any of that here.

Kevin Bacon:

What's that?

Speaker 1:

Dancing. There's no dancing. Right?

unknown male:

That's right.

Kevin Bacon:

Why?

Speaker 1:

It's illegal.

Kevin Bacon:

Jump back.

unknown male:

That's true.

Speaker 1:

Has been for about five or six years.

Kevin Bacon:

Why?

Sarah Jessica Parker:

Go ahead. Tell him.

Speaker 1:

It started when a bunch of kids got killed in the car wreck. The whole town went bananas, blaming it on the music, and the liquor and dancing. Now they're just convinced it's all a sin.

Kevin Bacon:

Who's convinced?

Speaker 1:

The whole damn town.

John Dickson:

That's a clip from the original and the best, Footloose. The one with Kevin Bacon. The 1984 film that followed a city teenager who moves to a small town, only to discover that rock music and dancing have been banned.

John Lithgow:

And he is testing us, every day our Lord is testing us. If he wasn't testing us, how would you account for the sorry state of our society? If our Lord wasn't testing us, how would you account for the proliferation these days and this obscene rock 'n' roll music with its gospel of easy sexuality and relaxed morality? If our Lord wasn't testing us, why he could take all these pornographic books and albums and turn them into one big fiery sinner life? That. But how would that make us stronger for him?

John Dickson:

Footloose was based on a real story. In Elmore City, a farming and oilfield town about halfway between Oklahoma and the Texas state line, dancing was forbidden for 82 years. That is until 1980, when the high school's junior class won permission to have a prom. The local ban on dancing was put in place, of course, to prevent carousing. And much of the opposition to overturning the ban, even in 1980, came from the good old church.

John Dickson:

It reflects the broader Christian opposition to rock music in the 1950s and '60s, in places like the U.S. and Great Britain, when conservative religious leaders paved the way for the culture wars that we still see today. They believed themselves to be battling against music that was a threat to the family, the church, and even the State.

John Dickson:

It perhaps culminated in the Christian opposition to the Beatles, arguably the most popular rock band ever. Why do Christians do this? In what universe could songs like Here Comes the Sun, or I Want To Hold Your Hand be considered evil? That's one of the questions we've got for you on this season's Q&A episode, where I try to answer the questions you've thrown at us this year. I'm John Dickson, and this is Undeceptions.

John Dickson:

Undeceptions is brought to you by Zondervan's new book, Seven Things I Wish Christians Knew About The Bible, by Michael F. Bird. Each week at Undeceptions, we explore some aspect of life, faith, history,

culture, or ethics that's either much misunderstood or mostly forgotten. With the help of people who know what they're talking about, with the exception of the Q&A episode, we'll be trying to undeceive ourselves and let the truth out.

John Dickson:

Some of you recorded your questions on our website, Undeceptions.com, and we love hearing your voices. Thanks for being brave. Others went to the more traditional option, and Producer Kayley and Director Mark will read out those questions instead. Okay, here we go. What have you got for me, Producer Kayley?

Producer Kayley:

Okay. This question came up a few times actually, relating to our double episode in season three, about music with Jeremy Bagby, which we'll link to in the show notes. Here's the question, "Is all music at its best good or beautiful and at worst simply neutral? Or can some music be bad, evil or ungodly?"

Producer Kayley:

Someone asked a similar question and then added, "Are there dangers in pop music that we might steer our children from for example?"

John Dickson:

Well firstly let me say, I loved that episode, to do a whole episode... In fact, think we did two, but at least that one called Creation's Music was a joy. Okay. Let's take music itself, leaving aside the question of content, lyrics. I think there is such a thing as morally bad music. Music that sets out to undermine the good and beautiful, I reckon, is bad music. There is a place for music that is discordant and so on in the context of the beautiful, to illustrate the discord of life and the longing for resolution. I totally get that. But there is some music, and I won't name names, that relentlessly jars and shocks and it is entirely about negation of the good, and yep, I reckon it's morally bad music. I also think beautiful music can be used for bad ends, and so become bad music.

John Dickson:

Music moves us, right? I mean, that's so much an essential part of it. It can move us to joy or a sense of delight or goodness or whatever. And so, potentially good music can be employed for brutal nationalistic ends. For example, Nazi music becomes bad music. Another example might be a beautiful soundtrack in a movie can be bad if it deliberately reaches its sweetest or soaring moment when say, two lovers that we've grown to like in the movie commit adultery. The music actually supports a pretended goodness. And I think this is where lyrics come in. And I know I'm going to sound like a prude at this point, but some of the lyrics set to brilliant soundtracks can make the whole thing bad. There's the obvious criminal and abusive elements in some rap, but there's also the themes in a lot of pop songs, the just be yourself, freedom is doing whatever you want or that sex positivity as a cover for degradation. All of that is bad. So yes, Dickson is a prude. But remember prude comes from prudential, wisdom. Just saying.

Tim:

Good day, John. It's Tim here from Sydney. And my question is regarding the seven deadly sins. I'm wondering if you could shed some light on their origin and their accuracy in terms of Jesus teaching and Christian living. Thanks man. Bye.

John Dickson:

Well, there are a bunch of ideas coalescing here. The first is the distinction between mortal sins and venial sins. And the other thing is the list of the seven capital sins, all of which are meant to be mortal or deadly. The idea of mortal sins or deadly sins, that's what mortal means in that context, is that there are sins that eat away at the living principle of ethics, love that is. So anything that attacks love, kills love, is worse than other sins. They are mortal sins because they distance us from love itself, from God. That's the idea.

John Dickson:

The other kind of sin, according to this division, is venial sin. That's from the word *venia* which means something like pardon or permission. And it means understandable sins, although that's not an absolutely accurate translation, but that's the idea. So to put it simply a venial sin is one that merely contradicts the moral order in our soul, but doesn't eat away at that order. If I can put it this way, reflects disorder, but doesn't create more disorder. By contrast a mortal sin or a deadly sin is one that eats away at the moral order.

John Dickson:

Now I should have said at the outset, this division is Catholic. It's a Catholic tradition and it's not one that I buy. It originally goes back to the 3rd and 4th centuries, but it was Thomas Aquinas in the 1200s who wrote a massive treatise defending this distinction. But there's another concept. There are the seven capital sins, all of which are deadly by the way, hence we say the seven deadly sins. And this list goes back to Gregory the Great who was a Pope in the 500s AD. So it's super old. And again, it was Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century who wrote about them extensively. And he's probably the reason the seven deadly sins or the seven capital sins are so well known today. The seven by the way, pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony which includes drunkenness, wrath or anger and sloth or laziness.

John Dickson:

These seven are the capital or headline sins, that's what capital means, because they're thought to lead to all the other sins. They are the head of the river from which all sin flows. Now, the thing I'd say about all of this is that we can't really get it from the Bible. But when you read the analysis of it all, especially in Thomas Aquinas, you come away thinking a pretty good argument could be made that these seven sins are the root of all sins. It's a human argument, right? Not a biblical one, but it's a pretty good human argument. I'll say one more thing about the seven deadly sins, Christ died for all seven and all the rest, and anyone who trusts him is freely forgiven.

Producer Kayley:

Right. There were several questions that came up after our episode called Racist Church, where you spoke to American Black Christian writer, Jamar Tisby, who wrote *The Color Of Compromise And How To Fight Racism*, and also Aboriginal Christian leader, Brooke Prentice. There's a link in the show notes. Here's the first question. This one's from Allison, "If I have a conversation with a person who is sceptical of Christianity about the issue of race, I know they're going to bring up times when God ordered the wiping out of a whole city or a whole race, like when Israel wiped out the Amalekites in the book of 1 Samuel, as evidence that the Bible is racist."

Producer Kayley:

I reckon this question might also be relevant here, so I'm going to double barrel it. This one's from Sephora, "Why were the Jews God's chosen people? According to a lot of Christian principles, at least the ones I was brought up with, people who were alive before Jesus but didn't know the Hebrew God would go to hell for not knowing him. So why did God choose the Jews? Why condemn the people who lived at the same time, but in other parts of the world, like the Australian indigenous people, for example?"

John Dickson:

Yeah, just a couple of easy ones. Thank you, Producer Kayley.

Producer Kayley:

No problem.

John Dickson:

There are actually a couple of things going on here. So firstly, the violence against the Amalekites, it's just like the violence against the Canaanites more broadly. It's awful, I totally agree. There are parts of the Bible I was never super keen to read to my children when I used to read to them when they were young. But these passages are awful because of the violence, not because of any lurking racism. There is no racial component and it's really easy to demonstrate. These people were the enemies of God and Israel. And so God used Israel, which was much weaker than these enemies, as an instrument of divine judgment. But there is no fair reading of the text that can put this down to racism or ethnic cleansing or any of those other criticisms people throw at the Bible. For one thing, these conquest narratives make clear that God has no favourites.

John Dickson:

So for example, before the battle with the Canaanites in the book of Joshua, Joshua chapter 2, which incidentally was my Bible reading this morning as I went on my walk, we hear about the Jewish soldiers meeting a Canaanite woman Rahab, who was a prostitute. And the whole point of the story, before you hear any of the battles with Canaan, you hear about a Canaanite woman who is saved. And so the narrator is clearly saying to the readers, hey, this has nothing to do with the Canaanite race. The very next scene in the book of Joshua, just before the violence begins, Joshua is confronted by a vision of the

angel of the Lord we're told, and Joshua says, "Oh, hang on, are you for us or for our enemies?" And the angel says, "Neither."

John Dickson:

Okay. What's the narrator doing, telling us this before the battle with the Canaanites? It's the narrator's way of saying this has nothing to do with God playing favourites, nothing to do with race. And this can be said for the Amalekites battles and all the other battles that you meet in the Old Testament, it's got nothing to do with race. It's got to do with God using the Israelites as an instrument of his justice and punishment in the world. I agree it's violent and it's terrible. And I thank God the concept of holy war is forbidden in the New Covenant, the New Testament. But my point is, it has nothing to do with race.

John Dickson:

The other question here was about God's selection of the Jewish people. The most basic principle to observe is that the calling of the very first Jew, Abraham, emphasized that the whole point of him being chosen was to bless all the peoples of the earth. So you can take out Genesis chapter 12, where all this happens and the passage says that God called Abraham and said, "I'm going to bless you and make you into a great nation." And then the punchline of it is, "And through you all peoples on earth would be blessed." Right? So the whole point of the selection of the chosen people is that they might be an instrument of blessing. We find the same thing in Deuteronomy 4, where the law is given, because it's basically says that the 10 commandments and all that stuff was given so that Israel might shine the wisdom of God to the other nations. In other words, it's not about them being set apart in the exclusive sense, they are to be a blessing.

John Dickson:

And if I were to take you through the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament we'd see the same thing, that Isaiah's great vision is that all the nations might know and love God. And of course the New Testament has that in spades because the whole point is that Christ came as the Messiah for Israel and the saviour for the whole world. As for the subsidiary question about what God was doing with other people outside the chosen people in ancient Israel, I think there are one or two hints that God was at work in the world beyond the borders of his specifically revealed will. Early in Genesis for example, in chapter 14, Abraham meets this strange character called Melchizedek, some weird priestly figure from a foreign nation who is said to be, "Priest of God Most High."

John Dickson:

Now Abraham gives Melchizedek a donation, right? Like he's a real priest of the true God. Even though according to the story we've been tracking in Genesis, Abraham is the first in the biblical story to be called by this God, but already Melchizedek is there worshipping God, and more than that is a priest of God for others to be worshipping God. So God was clearly doing something outside of what is revealed. The other hint is in the book of Acts chapter 17, where the Apostle Paul is speaking to the Athenians and he says that God has set the boundaries of all the different nations and cultures of the world so that,

"They would seek him, God, perhaps reach out for him and find him though he is not far from any one of us." Paul says.

John Dickson:

Now Paul doesn't then confirm that other cultures have found God, that would be to take the text too far. But it does leave open the hope that the God of Grace has met these ancient searches in times past. I should just add though, Paul then says that God commands everyone everywhere to repent and turn to Jesus Christ. And that is where my emphasis lies. Director Mark, what's next?

Director Mark:

This one's from Andrew, it's also about the Racist Church episode. It's not actually a question, but Kaley and I decided to make it into one. "I thought that you gave the Black Lives Matter organization a very soft run in this podcast. It's not anywhere close to a Christ-centered organization. Their website until recently noted that they were seeking to disrupt the Western prescribed nuclear family structure requirement and foster a queer affirming network and do the work to dismantle cisgender privilege." Well, that's Andrew's comment. Here's our question. Did you go too soft on this whole Black Lives Matter thing?

John Dickson:

Well, I think the answer is yes. I knew that episode was going to be hard to communicate to all sides of the debate. So I was trying to avoid being unnecessarily contentious. I was trying to make points about racism in the human heart and in the church without stoking any of the political fires. So I guess I was trying to emphasize that I really agree with the slogan Black Lives Matter without having to pin my colours to the mast on what I know has become a very divisive issue. So Andrew, if you really want to corner me, I'm going to admit that I was weaker in that episode than I might have been in a different context. I do have real concerns about the BLM organization and its goals, especially what it says about families. It's just that I never want my criticisms of this particular organization to drown out my support for the plight of people of colour. So hopefully you'll consider this a venial or understandable sin.

Ziggy Ramo:

Gather around people, and I'll tell you a story. 200 years of history that's falsified. British invaders that we remember as heroes. Are you ready to tell the other side? We start our story in 1493 with a piece of paper called the Doctrine of Discovery in vote by Pope Alexander VI, without this good Christian, our story don't exist.

Paul Kelly:

From little things, big things grow.

Producer Kayley:

We're keeping with this theme. So here's a question from a different Andrew. He says, he's listened to that version of Little Things, which we just played a clip from by Ziggy Ramo and Paul Kelly, which says the tragic story of Australia's colonization starts with the Pope's Doctrine of Discovery in 1493, which

Captain Cook later used to claim Australia as Terranalias, nobody's land. He says, he's looked into the Doctrine of Discovery and it's just terrible. Why did the church make such a decree?

John Dickson:

Yeah, the Doctrine of Discovery sucks. Pope Alexander VI in 1493 wrote an official papal bull, that's a decree with papal authority, granting the church's blessing to go and take uncivilized lands in the Americas and certain islands, roundabout. Spain was already well underway with plans to do this for political and financial reasons. And the Pope's decree was basically saying, first that it's fine with him and God, and second that it really only has his blessing if the Spanish seek to convert all the indigenous people they meet. So he insisted that the Spaniards take priests and educators and so on to make sure that Christianity was spread in the so-called new world. And having read the official decree itself, it is a little bit chilling. As an official papal decree it was interpreted, for the next few hundred years, as full divine permission to take new lands from others. So long as Christianity is promoted along the way.

John Dickson:

It's not that the Pope told them to go out and conquer. And he certainly intended that any conversion would take place through persuasion, not through violence, but there's no avoiding the fact that decree gave a certain moral cover to the rapacious Western expansion in the so-called age of discovery. This church law was taken into common law and there's nothing the church could do to wind it back. I should say that one Pope tried, less than 50 years later, to modify the whole thing.

John Dickson:

So Pope Paul, is it the second or the third? Someone will Google that for me, issued a papal bull in 1537, condemning the mistreatment and enslavement of indigenous people in the new world. So this has equal authority to the previous one. And this Pope said, "The Indians and all other people who may later be discovered by Christians are by no means to be deprived of their liberty or the possession of their property. Even though they be outside the faith of Jesus Christ and that they may and should freely and legitimately enjoy their Liberty and the possession of their property, nor should they in any way be enslaved. Should the contrary happen, it shall be null and have no effect."

John Dickson:

He wanted them to be converted, but only through persuasion. He in fact ends the papal decree saying, "The said Indians and other peoples should be converted to the faith of Jesus Christ by preaching of the word of God, and by the example of good and holy living." But it was too little too late. The Doctrine of Discovery had taken on a life of its own and it caused irreparable damage. Before we go to the break, regular listeners will know that a couple of months ago, my friend Ben Shaw lost his battle with cancer or as he put it a few weeks before, the first of his mates to see Jesus. Ben spoke to us several times for this podcast back in episode 13, titled It's Cancer. And then a couple of short singles recently. You might want to check out Still Cancer and Facing Death, his last public words before he died. Anyway, I want to say how grateful I am for all the kind messages that came in from listeners by email, on social media or this one recorded straight to our website.

Blake Decker:

Yeah. Hi, my name is Blake Decker and I'm calling from Plano, Texas, so I guess coming through the Internet's a better way to say it. I just heard the podcast interview that Dr. Dickson did with his best friend, Ben Shaw. I heard the first interview back a year or two ago whenever it was, but was just very touched by his story. I'm sure he goes through some deep valleys at times of sadness and wondering what's going on, but just his calmness and his facing this with dignity and trust in the Lord is just truly inspirational. I just went out and pre-ordered the book. And I look forward to reading that when it comes out. One thing, I know this is a super small gesture, but I plan on ordering a Undeceptions T-shirt and my hope is when I put that on to remember Dr. Dickson's friend, Pastor Shaw, and just think of him and just the inspiration that he's providing.

Blake Decker:

I don't know much about him, but I look forward to learning more through reading the book. But I trust what Dr. Dickson said in the podcast, just what a pillar he's been, for the Lord just bearing so much fruit for him during the many, many years of his life. Anyways, I'm rambling a bit now, so I'll go, but just good day and a good week to all of you. And just continued peace and rest in the Lord as he continues to face this trial. Thanks guys. God bless. Bye

John Dickson:

Blake. Thank you so much. I've played your message to my wife and to Ben's wife, Karen and we were really touched. Thank you.

John Dickson:

Today's episode of Undeceptions is brought to you by Zondervans new book, Seven Things I Wish Christians Knew About The Bible by Mike Bird. Mike is a friend of this podcast. He's actually my friend and we spoke to him for the Cannon Fodder episode back in season three. That's about how the Bible came together. And in a way it's a shame the title, this book is seven things Mike wishes Christians knew about the Bible, because actually it's really seven things everyone should know about the Bible, especially before they dismiss it. It's a really short, readable introduction to the Bible, how the Bible became the Bible and how we're supposed to read it.

John Dickson:

Michael tackles questions like, what do we really mean when we say the authors of the Bible were inspired by God? Or are we supposed to read the Bible literally? And how do we know when we should and when we shouldn't? Consider this book, a bit of an instruction manual about how to handle the Bible well. And it's got Mike's characteristic, sometimes sarcastic, humour. It's a really fun read. Grab a copy of Zondervan's Seven Things I Wish Christians Knew About The Bible by Michael F. Bird. It's at Amazon right now. There's a link in the show notes, or just go to Zondervan.com for more.

John Dickson:

Tens of thousands of people fled their homes after severe flooding in South Sudan last year. They're now living in tents in the new Mongala refugee settlement. Many won't be able to return home for years. There is no access to clean water in the settlement, refugees walk for over an hour to collect water from the Nile River. They take the dirty water back with them in jerry cans each day, water that carries disease into the overcrowded camps. Anglican Aid is trying to change this. Through their Waterworks campaign they're trying to raise money to sink boreholes in the Mangala settlement, which will provide safe drinking and washing water for thousands of refugees. You can help make this happen. Please visit waterworks.org.au. That's waterworks.org.au to find out more.

Mr Holden:

You look down and you see a tortoise, Leon, it's crawling towards you.

Leon:

Tortoise, what's that?

Mr Holden:

You know what a turtle is?

Leon:

Of course.

Mr Holden:

Same thing.

Leon:

Never seen a turtle, but I understand what you mean.

Mr Holden:

You reach down, you flip the tortoise over on its back, Leon.

Leon:

Do you make up these questions, Mr. Holden? Or do they write them down for you?

Mr Holden:

The tortoise lays on its back, it's belly baking in the hot sun, beating its legs trying to turn itself over but it can't, not without your help. But you're not helping.

Mr Holden:

What do you mean, I'm not helping?

Leon:

I mean, you're not helping them. Why is that Leon? They're just questions, Leon. In answer to your query, they're written down for me. It's a test designed to provoke an emotional response. Shall we continue?

Producer Kayley:

You haven't seen this, have you?

unknown male:

I haven't.

Producer Kayley:

You haven't, have you?

unknown male:

I haven't watched all of the Scott's 1982 dystopian, cult, plastic film, Blade Runner. I'll leave it to the imagination for you to work out how much of it I've seen. But I have heard about it. I have heard about it.

Producer Kayley:

This is a travesty.

Director Mark:

I was doing other things.

Producer Kayley:

Classic film is something that happened to other people, isn't it, John?

John Dickson:

In 1982, I was busily doing other things shortly before-

Producer Kayley:

I wasn't born, but I still have seen it.

John Dickson:

I know. Yeah. I guess there is that thing, you can see films after they've come out. Okay. So am I reading this editorial or what?

Director Mark:

Go ahead.

Producer Kayley:

Yeah, why not?

unknown male:

That's a clip from Ridley Scott's classic 1982 dystopian cult classic, Blade Runner. In the flick, Rick Deckard is a special agent with a mission to exterminate a group of violent androids called replicants. In the clip you heard one replicant is undergoing the Voight Kampff test, a series of questions designed to separate out humans from replicants by provoking a physiological response, indicating empathy. Only true humans, not replicants, feel that emotion. Actually, you can take the test yourself, we'll put a link in the show notes. Producer Kayley is 18% likely to be a replicant. I'm assuming that's low and means you are very human, no surprises there. Direct Mark on the other hand is 86% likely to be a replicant.

Director Mark:

I have no feeling about that.

John Dickson:

Okay, 46% likely. And I'm in the middle, 21% likely to be a replicant. Blade Runner deals with a deep philosophical question, who or what counts as human? Especially in a world of advanced technology. Which is basically our next question, right? Producer Kaley

Sarah Jessica Parker:

Yep. Here's Diane.

Diane Lovo:

My name is Diane Lovo. I'm a CMS Australian missionary serving as the Dean of Women at George Woodfield College here in Cape Town, South Africa. My husband has a PhD in Artificial Intelligence and Robotics. And so of course, over the years we've had number of conversations about robots and machine learning particular has been very interesting. How robots do actually learn and produce things that perhaps the coders are not expecting, and can't explain how they might have come to that point or come to that conclusion or figured out that problem in that way. And a lot of our conversations have more recently been around the idea of persons and personhood. And I'd just like to know what you think about the idea of machines being persons.

John Dickson:

Okay. So Diane, this is not really my topic, so I'm just going to shoot from the hip. I do know the philosophical debate about personhood is really complex and not at all resolved, which is itself very interesting.

John Dickson:

The conversation seems to revolve around certain human capacities for rational or moral reflection. So a person, in some people's minds, is someone who has those mental properties in their possession. Others

say that a person is someone who is capable one day of acquiring those mental properties. So an infant can be a person in that sense. And others say that personhood is simply about belonging to the class of beings that typically, under normal circumstance, have those mental properties. So disabled humans and so on can be because they are in that class, so they are persons as well. I don't really know what to make of all that. Whether or not machines will be able to fit into the category of personhood understood in those ways? I just don't know because for me, a person has to be understood theologically. And I see a person as any human being, because every human being is made in the image of God and it's got nothing to do with capacities.

John Dickson:

The image of God in the Bible, doesn't refer to a particular capacity, whether mental capacity or rational intuition or moral intuition or anything like that, it refers to those whom God sees as his representatives and in a sense his children. So if this were a different episode and I had more time I'd unpacked that this Imago Dei, this image of God, is a filial expression. It's what parents said of their children, they are my image. And that's the way it's referred to in the Bible that humans are, in this sense, God's offspring or children. So unlike some philosophers, I'd say that the severely mentally handicapped adult is a full person because they're still made in the image of God. And I'd say the same about an unborn baby being a full person, which is a fun topic for next episode.

Director Mark:

This question's from Alba from the United States who asks, "There seems to be a slew of so called prophets coming out of the woodwork here in the USA, prophesying all sorts of messages, especially about the political scene. What does the Bible say about this?" I'm going to say that Alba is talking about people like Jeremiah Johnson, a 33 year old who describes himself as a prophet and guarded quite the social media following in the run up to last year's us presidential election. Amongst other things, Johnson shared a prophetic dream of Donald Trump stumbling while running the Boston Marathon until two frail older women emerged from the crowd to help him over the finish line. So when Joe Biden was certified as the winner of the election, Johnson had to admit he had let his followers down and asked for forgiveness. We'll add a link to a few articles about this in the show notes.

John Dickson:

I hope I don't lose friends here, but frankly I don't believe in prophets in this Old Testament model. And if I did, I'd be advocating that these political prophets of recent times should be stoned to death, since the old Testament says that the punishment for making false predictions as a false prophet is death. And these guys and girls have been wrong, wrong, and wrong. But as I say, I don't actually believe they are prophets. And I don't believe in that model of prophecy at all. The New Testament idea of a prophet is very different from the Old Testament. We do get a story about one prophet in the book of Acts in chapter 11, and again in chapter 21, you can go and check that out, his name is Agabus and he does make, what we might call a Nostradamus prediction, a prophecy as it were, about the Apostle Paul ending up being arrested.

John Dickson:

But mostly the New Testament portrays prophets as much closer to what we call preachers. They're not Nostradamus they're Tim Keller. The closest we get to a definition of prophesying in the New Testament is in 1 Corinthians 14, where there's a whole discussion about prophecy. And the Apostle Paul basically says, prophesying is speaking to the congregation for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort, that's his definition. Someone who gets up and speaks to the congregation for strengthening, encouragement, and comfort. Paul's entire argument in these chapters is that prophesying is an ordinary type of encouraging believers in the church. It's contrasted with speaking in tongues, which Paul says just confuses people if it's not translated. Outside the New Testament, we do have people called prophets at the end of the 1st century and the beginning of the 2nd. But again they're preachers, they're not predictors of the future.

John Dickson:

So here's a snippet from a book called the Didache Section 15, this is a Christian document from the end of the 1st century. It's not part of the New Testament, but it's written in the period immediately after, say, the Book of Revelation. And it says, "Therefore a point for yourselves overseers and deacons who are worthy of the Lord, who are humble, true, and approved for they carry out for you the ministry of the prophets and teachers." The idea seems to be that prophets are just a regular part of the congregational preaching team. It's certainly got nothing to do with predicting the future. And just for free today, another historical aside, it's not widely known that in the 1500s the Puritan preachers would get together in small and large groups outside of the church service time for sessions they called prophesyings. Where one of them would get up and preach on a passage of scripture and then the others would share their thoughts in response and both the preaching and the response were called prophesying. And that's a lot closer to the biblical idea of the prophet than these modern political prophets.

Karen:

How does one explain the Egyptian culture and the gods that they believed in and afterlife that they believed in? Was there any part of the God that we worship today? Was he the same God then? It's very confusing to me.

Director Mark:

That question was from Karen. Here's a related question that was emailed in too, "Could the God of the Jews be the God of other faiths could other faiths be just interpreting the same God in different ways? I've heard stories of other cultures around the world who hadn't been exposed to Christianity, having similar principles and creation stories to that of the Bible. Could God have been revealing himself to them?"

John Dickson:

Whoa. So there are multiple layers to these questions. There's obviously the philosophical layer, which tries to ponder the degree to which divinity in other religions relates to or overlaps with the one God of the Bible. And then there's the secondary question of whether worship of these other beings is going to

be accepted by the one true God. On the philosophical front, we have to distinguish between the gods and God. This is so often misunderstood. Gods are super beings within the creation like Athena, Thor, Hanuman and so on. The concept of God on the other hand is completely different. In classical theism God is the source of every being. God isn't a being in creation, he's the reason there's a creation in the first place. Worshiping gods and worshiping God have almost nothing to do with each other.

John Dickson:

Now behind much polytheistic religion, whether in Greece or across in India, whether among First Nations peoples in America or in Australia, there is a concept of the one, far away, creator beyond the various supernatural beings that are in the creation. And often this one being is thought of as too great and too distant to be approached in normal, regular worship. Dealing with the various super beings in the rocks or the rivers or whatever is regarded as more manageable than worshiping the far away one God. Religious expression of this kind is, in my view anyway, a degradation of and often a substitute for the worship of the true God behind all things. Instead of worshiping the source, you go and worship things that are part of the creation itself.

John Dickson:

So I see no overlap between the worship of gods and the worship of God. That said there is overlap, at least conceptually, between the true God of the Bible and this notion of the one behind the gods, which seems to have been pushed aside in much historical religion. So philosophically speaking, someone who is worshiping an object in the creation, like the Sun God or the Fire God, can't be said to be worshiping God, they're pursuing superstition as an alternative to true worship. But I would also say, theoretically and philosophically, that someone who looks past the mere gods and reveres the one true source, even vaguely understood, is seeking God in the biblical sense. As to whether God accepts that worship of him in this vague sense. I don't know. I'm happy to leave it to God's wisdom and mercy. I certainly think it's in keeping with the Christian ethos to hope that God will show mercy in surprising ways, but I don't think he is obliged to do so.

John Dickson:

Now this raises a related very common question, is the God of Muslims the same God as the God of the Bible? At one level, at the of philosophy, you have to say, yes, Muslims are worshiping, not a super being within the creation, a divine creature, they're worshiping the source and creator of all being. Their concept of God in broad terms is the same as that of the Jews of the Christians of Plato and Aristotle, for that matter. The problem though, is that in the course of their claimed revelations, from that God in the Quran, Muslims end up saying things that are completely contradictory to the heartbeat of the biblical revelation.

John Dickson:

They say, for example, that God requires your good deeds to atone for sins. They say Christ can't be God in the flesh. In fact that idea is a blasphemy, they say. And they say that Christ didn't even die on a cross. So while the starting concept of God is the same, the traditions attributed to God flatly contradict and

therefore obscure true worship of the true God. Before the next question, here's another lovely message from one of our listeners, Rebecca.

Rebecca:

Hi, John. Just finished listening to your latest podcast while sitting in the car parching at Maccas, waiting for my eldest to finish his shift. I just wanted to let you know that I really, really, really enjoy your podcasts. I'm mum of four kids. And as soon as I've dropped all the kids off at school, I'd put on the latest podcast and listen to it while I'm driving in the car. I love the way it makes me realize that my faith in my heart can cope with the thinking processes in my head, so that my heart and my head line up together. So thanks very much for all that you do. Bye.

John Dickson:

Thanks Rebecca. It's so fun knowing what our listeners are up to while they listen, and what the show means to them. Others should feel free to do the same, get in touch. We just love it. And if you haven't already, please do us a favour by letting the world know what you think of Undeceptions by leaving a review of the podcast on iTunes. Apparently reviews are still one of the best ways to spread the word about the pod. Next question please.

Producer Kayley:

Michael asks, "I was listening recently to a podcast People I Most Admire, hosted by Freakonomics author, Steven Levitt, interviewing magician, Joshua Jay. They speculate whether Jesus' miracles were simply tricks and they claim trickster at the time were doing exactly the same thing, obviously inferring Jesus was just a trickster too. I've never heard this suggestion before. And I wondered if you could fact check it based on your study of Jesus' times." Okay. So we're going to play part of that podcast now.

Joshua Jay:

This is a crazy question. I once heard it argued that perhaps Jesus was a really talented magician and had pulled off many of the miracles in a magical sense. Have you ever thought about that?

Steven Levitt:

That's a crazy left field question. I love it. I took a class at university, the Founding of Religions, and we read this book, The Kingdom of Matthias about alternate messiahs in and around the time of Jesus Christ. And they all practice tricks. I don't want to offend anybody here. They all practice tricks that can be simulated by conjuring tricks in contemporary times. In other words, water to wine is a trick that would have been used in basically all civilizations at that time. Walking on water, I know they say that it often can be the illusion created when walking in a desert, when they create that oasis of hot air rising, it can look like ripples in water. I don't have any specific insight as to whether Jesus was really good with a deck of cards. But what I can say is a lot of the so-called miracles he became known for are contemporary conjuring trips.

Joshua Jay:

No comment. I don't want to get into trouble.

Steven Levitt:

Yeah.

Joshua Jay:

Wow. Can you imagine the implications?

Producer Kayley:

Yes. JD, can you imagine the implications?

John Dickson:

Yes. Producer Kayley, I can imagine. But that's about all we can do. The whole thing is imaginary. The first thing to say is it is simply untrue that there were loads of messiahs and tricksters in this time and place. We know of very, very few claimants to be the Messiah. And the ones we know about were political messiahs or warriors. They weren't miracle workers. There were a couple of rabbi healers and rabbis who were known for prayer. So there's Rabbi Honi the Circle-drawer. Surely I must have talked about Rabbi Honi the Circle-drawer at some point. No. Yeah. Okay. Mark remembers, Kayley doesn't. Okay. Anyway, Rabbi Honi the Circle-drawer drew a circle, prayed to the Lord that it should rain and it rained, according to the source that we have that says it.

John Dickson:

Then there's Rabbi Hanina, who's about the same time as Jesus. He wasn't really a trickster. He just had a reputation for praying for people, and then being healed. There's no trickery, it was just a life of prayer. The evidence for these two, by the way, comes from one or two sources a century or two after their death. By contrast, we have for Jesus eight separate sources for his healing work within living memory.

John Dickson:

As for claims like water into wine being a common trick, I'm sorry to say, that's just entirely made up. Perhaps the more important thing to point out is that interpreting Jesus as a trickster has to be squared with what he also taught about himself. I mean, follow this argument, one gets the sense from reading his words about love and honesty and humility about the rejection of power and manipulation, that a trickster is the last thing Jesus could possibly have been. You would have to conclude that this sublime teaching about ethics was all just cover so that he could then deceive people with his tricks, and to what end? So that he could end up giving his life away on a cross? If you can believe that your imagination is better than mine.

Director Mark:

Here are a few quick questions I reckon you can knock off pretty quickly. The first ones about our last episode in season three, called 100 Pages where you interviewed author Dan Kimball about how not to

read the Bible, and all the weird and wacky stuff that can so often side track us. Beck asks, "Did this episode mention the talking donkey? How do you tackle that one?" Before you do here's Kayley reading part of the book of Numbers chapter 22, that features said talking donkey.

Producer Kayley:

Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?" Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me. If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now." The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey which you have always ridden to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you? No" he said.

unknown male:

So how do I tackle this, Beck? This is one of those times where I want the Bible to tackle me, instead of trying to tackle it. My basic approach to scripture is to assess each passage according to its literary genre. So if it's poetry or parable, I feel I have permission to view things, metaphorically or theologically. If it's straightforward prose or historical literature, I read it more concretely. So I want the intention of the original author to guide my interpretation. It won't surprise some of my listeners that I read the opening chapters of Genesis, basically like a parable in its literary style. So I feel free. I feel like I have the author's permission not to take it concretely or literalistically, but in a more theoretical and theological way. The same would be true of the Book of Revelation, which is written in the symbolic, apocalyptic style.

unknown male:

But when it comes to, for example, the gospels, it's clear to me they're written in the style of historical biography. Apart from the parables they quote from the lips of Jesus. The whole thing is historical prose, and it's clear that's the intention of the author. And I think the author's intention is the clue to the divine intention. So to your specific question about talking donkeys, this story appears in what reads to me like straightforward prose. So I accept it. It's not that I believe donkeys can talk. It's just that I believe the Bible is God's word. And so when the Bible intends to teach me something, I accept it.

Director Mark:

Another quick one, which comes on the heels of The Bible Mistakes episode, there's a link in the show notes to that ep. I'll let Tim ask it himself.

Tim:

At the end of the Book of Mark, Mark describes how the women went away and said nothing to anyone. Other gospel accounts say that women went away and talked to various people. What is the explanation for this apparent contradiction in the Bible?

John Dickson:

This is a little simpler. The text of Mark itself says that the angel at the tomb commanded the women to go and tell the Apostles about the empty tomb and the resurrection. So when it says just two verses later that the women were terrified and ran away saying nothing to anyone. I take it, this simply means they

said nothing to anyone on the way to telling the apostles what they'd been instructed to tell. It's pretty hard for me to believe that Mark would report a divine command to tell the disciples something, and then report a few lines later that the women didn't do it. That just doesn't make any sense to me. Now it's true that our earliest manuscripts of Mark finish at this weird point, with the women just running away from the tomb. They say nothing to anyone, and it's full stop. And you go, what?

John Dickson:

Some scholars think this is the ending Mark intended. But they would agree with me that we're still meant to assume that the women ran away saying nothing to anyone to go and report what they'd heard to the Apostles. But actually I'm strongly persuaded by the argument of other scholars, that we are missing the final page of Mark's Gospel. It was the bit rolled up tightest in a scroll of Mark and so probably broke away early in the copying process. The original last page, almost certainly, told how the women ran to the Apostles, told them what they saw. And then the Apostles went to Galilee where Jesus appeared to them. That's probably what was on the last missing page of Mark's Gospel. Why do I think that? Because twice in Mark's Gospel already, before the end, Jesus has said that he will appear to his disciples in Galilee, after his risen from the dead. And that is the narrative clue to what's missing on the last page. And as you probably know, that's exactly what we have in the Gospels of Matthew and John.

Producer Kayley:

Our final question is from a different Tim. He asks, "The podcast often proudly cites non-believing references, for example, Professor Atkinson. I value this approach, but is there a weight behind all these people who know scripture so well, but don't believe?"

unknown male:

Well, I do think there's value in any scholarship that is good scholarship, and this is especially so when it comes to history. One doesn't need to be a Christian in order to be a good historian or a good scientist or a good philosopher or a good plumber for that matter. Atkinson is a good historian, even if he's sceptical about all the religious claims of Christianity. I wouldn't call on him for theological point, just as I wouldn't draw on him for science or philosophy or plumbing. He makes a fine historical argument though, that the Apostle Paul knew a large amount of material about the historical Jesus, the teachings of Jesus, the healings of Jesus and so on, even though Paul wasn't one of the original disciples during Jesus' lifetime.

unknown male:

So I will often happily draw on mainstream scholarship of this kind, even though I don't rely on the religious views that Atkinson might have. In some ways, Tim, your question takes us to something pretty important to us on this show. Undeceptions doesn't want to restrict itself to Christian scholarship, to mere Christian apologetics. All truth is God's truth, wherever it comes from. Naturally as a Christian, the Bible is my ultimate authority, but I want the Bible in one hand and good history, science, philosophy and so on in the other hand, confident that through these things we can undeceive ourselves and let the truth out. See what I did there?

unknown male:

If you've got more questions, we'd love to hear them. You can tweet them via @Undeceptions, send us a regular old email at questions@Undeceptions.com, or if you're brave, go and record your question for the show by heading to Undeceptions.com and clicking the record button. While you're there, check out everything related to this episode and tons of bonus content. If you like what you see and hear at Undeceptions, will you please consider clicking the donate button at the website as well? We do need your support to keep the Undeceptions Project going every little bit helps. So thanks so much.

unknown male:

And if you like this show, why not check out the other shows in the Eternity Podcast Network? Go to eternitypodcast.com or just Google Eternity Podcast Network. Next episode, it's our final for season four. And we've, again, chosen a topic that has been called the most divisive issue in the U.S. And I think it ranks highly everywhere. Yes, we're going there, we're going to talk about abortion. See ya.

unknown male:

Undeceptions is hosted by me, John Dixon produced by Kayley Payne and directed by Mark 86% replicant Hadley. Our theme song is by Bark arranged by me and played by the fabulous Undeceptions band, editing by Richard Hamley. Thanks mate. Special thanks to our series sponsor Zondervan for making this Undeception possible. Undeception is part of the Eternity Podcast Network an audio collection showcasing the seriously good news of faith today.

Speaker 18:

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John Dickson:

Are you a replicant?

Producer Kayley:

Shall we take bets? Is he a replicant, Mark?

Director Mark:

Ah, no, he doesn't have the style.

John Dickson:

Come in, it says, "Sit down, reaction time is a factor in this." Really?

Producer Kayley:

Yeah.

Director Mark:

Please pay attention. Don't think too much.

John Dickson:

What is a replicant by the way? Is it a reptile or something?

Director Mark:

Oh Lord.

Producer Kayley:

It's a machine.

Director Mark:

Yeah, a human symbiotic.

John Dickson:

Okay. I'm taking the test.

John Dickson:

Okay. It's given me a score of 21% likely to be a replicant.

Producer Kayley:

Oh, that's not too bad.

Director Mark:

Yeah. You're almost human.

John Dickson:

Oh, is that what it means? I'm less likely?

John Lithgow:

The lowest you're-

Producer Kayley:

You're less human than me. Just FYI.

John Dickson:

I'm less human than you Kayley?

Producer Kayley:

But way more human than Mark.

John Dickson:

Both of those are no surprise.

John Dickson:

But now I can laugh. But now I can Laugh.