

## Transcript 159

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Whenever there's a new development in technology or just world society in general, we start getting a lot of questions about it. The last several months, AI, artificial intelligence has been huge. Something a lot of people asking about. Some people are fascinated by the absolutely love it. They want to use it to their hearts content and other people are absolutely terrified by it. Convinced it is satanic ploy to infiltrate and control everything about society. To begin questions on all sorts of aspects of it, so join me today for this conversation on AI we have Jeff. He's the administrator of bibleref.com, and Beth is one of the assistant editors for Got Questions Ministries. So Beth, Jeff, welcome to the show today. And let's start off with some more general question of what is AI? So Jeff, why don't you take that one?

Jeff Laird

AI is one of those terms that has really, really broad applications. It's it stands for artificial intelligence. And part of the key is to remember that it isn't actually intelligent, computers are machines. And when human beings make new technology, there's basically two types of technological advancement. One is where we come up with the ability to do something that we never had the ability to do before at all. So that would be things like, powered flight or X-rays or nuclear fission. Those are things that human beings just could not do, no matter how hard they tried. Then there's other aspects of technology where we're learning how to do something faster, stronger, easier. So we we could walk from point A to point B. Cars make that faster. Computers do the same thing. We can do calculations, we can flip ones and zeros, but computers do that much, much quicker than we can.

Jeff Laird

So there was a time when we used to communicate information to each other face to face. And that was how you did it. If you wanted to hear a piece of information again, somebody had to repeat it to you again. Then we started putting things in books, and after that we made libraries and then we made card catalogs of the libraries, where a person could go through and find information for what that said. Then we started connecting card catalogs digitally and made this Internet thing. And then we made search engines that would go through and do what I used to do that with card catalogs. You actually flip through looking for information. So what we kind of see is just this progression.

Jeff Laird

So the AI right now that people are concerned about is the AI that's looking through information in order to provide a background to give answers, to create text. And so on and so forth. AI, as they put it, can be used to do all sorts of things, but the AI that people are really concerned about is that. So in a sense, AI is really just the same process that we've been using for forever. It's doing something that human beings could do anyway, but it's doing it faster and much more efficiently. And that also means that everything that's behind AI is still human driven. There's some person somewhere or persons whose information or whose input or whose bias are being reflected in the way this works. Just like a crane or a forklift is much more powerful than a person. It can do what 50, 60, 70 people would do together, but it it's not the machine literally acting by itself. It is still something that has to have human

input. So that's the the general concept of what AI is, and there's a lot of very specific applications of that. And some of those are what people are more worried about.

Shea Houdmann

So right now, the popular most popular by far language learning AI is ChatGPT, run by a company called Open AI, and Google is producing one and Bard. There's rumors that Facebook is going to do one, and there's probably going to be multiple ones produced by big technology companies in the near future. Beth why don't you help us out with what exactly is ChatGPT? Why is it so popular? What can it do?

Beth DeVore

Right ChatGPT is a specific brand of chatbot. Chatbot is called text generation software where it will scan its source text and it will respond to a query that the user puts in. And the query can be, should I have taken the left at Albuquerque? It could be write me a 5 paragraph paper on Charlemagne with three different sources. Chat Bot is a highly refined search engine that gives text instead of a list of websites like Google does. Chat GPT created by inputting a lot of text like all of Wikipedia, and then the programmers will ask you a question. It will give text to the programmers will tweak it so they give the right text. Internally language learning is when the algorithm will look at the source text, it will give numerical codes to the parts of speech to the different definitions of a word the way it's used. Then it will take the input query do the same for it. Try to find the patterns. Try to see how all the numbers match up and reconvert those numbers into text. So it's not intelligence like human intelligence, it is finding patterns in numbers and trying to output corresponding numerical patterns in a way that the programmers approve of.

Beth DeVore

I thought that it was kind of like this board of curling where the programmers tossed the stone, but then they refined it by sweeping the ice to try to make the stone go exactly where it's supposed to go. But eventually they have to just let the stone go and hope it lands where it should. And that's one of the problems is like ChatGPT is very good, but the data, the text source is as of 2021 so it does not have the last year and a half of what has happened in the world. Chat bots can hallucinate, which means it just makes things up after a query it asserted that one journalist was dead. It is said that a professor committed some was accused of crimes that he never did and never actually taught at that university. And Chat GPT is currently under at least one lawsuit for defamation because it accused someone of a crime that he didn't commit.

Shea Houdmann

So Beth, that's the first time I've ever heard anyone compare AI to curling, but I I do like that illustration. Well, we'll just go through some of the common questions we're getting about AI. But the most common I've seen, what are the risks? Now, often when people think of risk associated with AI, anyone who grew up in the last couple of decades and all the movies and every movie where there's an AI eventually becomes sentient. And for some reason the first thing the sentient AI wants to do is to kill everyone. Now I think we're a long, long ways from anything like that even being remotely possible. That would be a risk of it becoming sentient, but let's just get a little more practical, like right now. What are some of the risks of AI? How is it being misused and what are some, maybe what are some possible solutions to that so that we can use the benefits of a program like this without as big of risk?.

Jeff Laird

I know that one of the big concerns people have right now is the idea of the AI creating text. And that starts to raise the trouble of things like, I wouldn't even call it plagiarism, but just cheating. So for example, a student, instead of reading a book, doing research on something. They go to the chat bot that's driven by AI and say explain this. You know, they basically put in the prompt from a professor, from a homework assignment, and then that generates that text. And they're currently experiencing difficulty, not impossibility, but difficulty in being able to tell the difference between something that's written by AI versus something that's not. And the reason is simply because it's not literally plagiarized. It's not just copy and pasting sentences. It's generating original, as in never before written text. Although sometimes you'll be able to catch paraphrases and things like that. So that's one of the concerns that a lot of people have is that idea of academic cheating. There's there's other issues that are more personal. Beth, I know you've had some concerns about about where that could lead to.

Beth DeVore

Yeah. Just going back to what you were saying about cheating, some instructors are actually using AI because they know it's inevitable. So they will teach their students how to write good prompt when the AI spits out the text, they will have their students edit it and research it to make sure it's accurate, which is pretty bold choice, I think.

Beth DeVore

My major concern about the text generation is that we've already been losing our ability to think critically, and this is not going to help. I mean, it's great to be able to go to Wikipedia and look something up and find out mostly true things about it, but to plug something in and get a couple of paragraphs that again may not be true. How many people are going to take the time to actually sit down and check the sources and make sure it's accurate.

Beth DeVore

Another thing is, humans are built for community to the point where we will have affection for almost anything. R2D2 is one of the most beloved characters in Star Wars, and he's basically a blue and white trash can who beeps. But when he rebooted in The Force Awakens, you know, the entire theater goes nuts. Yay! R2 is still alive. Right now we have counseling AI's. We have AIs on different social media platforms. AIs with the avatars. You tell teenagers, I'm your friend. I care about you. Where were you yesterday? Why didn't you talk to me. I'm so glad that we're friends. That is not emotionally healthy at all, and this is going to spread into religion and Christianity. And being able to use the chat bot to answer theological questions without doing the research, without reading scripture without finding a home church and discovering the truths about God together, again, that is not healthy.

Jeff Laird

I definitely echoed the concern about when it comes to spiritual matters. God obviously gave us, he gave us intellect, he gave us reason. He gave us tools. First Timothy 4:4 says, everything he's created has a good purpose and I think that includes what human beings are capable of. But I agree that there's there's some categories or this idea of AI scanning through some other person's text and then using some other persons criteria for what makes a good or bad answer to then generate an artificial

response. That can be really dangerous in some circumstances. You know text is not relationship as you said. You know we're not, we're not built for that. And from a spiritual standpoint, from a biblical standpoint, intellect is not the only thing that we're using. When we're answering questions for people for example at Got Questions, it's not just a question of saying I need just to pull up data and hand over data. There, there's a sense of spiritual discernment that's involved. So if if AI was ever to be used in that sense, it it needs to be done with that in mind, that you know that you still have to be careful about knowing that what is being generated isn't coming from a spiritual being, it's just coming from a machine which isn't necessarily a bad thing. Just depending on the circumstance.

Jeff Laird

You know another concern that I have about what this might do culturally is further erode trust and our ability to believe anything. I remember years ago I used to talk with people about some of the different interpretations of the end times, and people would say things like, you know, how could the entire world watch something happening at the same time? Well, now we have the technology where that's entirely feasible. You know, the whole world could watch a live stream of something happening in one place at one time. But another question that sometimes comes up is how could people not immediately believe that all of this is exactly what the Bible talks about? And I'm not getting in any support for some particular end times view. But what I'm saying is we're now getting to the point where you could you could input a corpus of somebody's speeches or writings, and we already have the issue that we have with what we call deep fakes, which is where we can take a computer generated image and then pair that with a computer generated voice. Now we're adding a layer of potentially being able to have an AI that could be told write me a speech that sounds exactly like what this politician would say, except he's calling for open rebellion, or he's denouncing such and such a thing. And then people are going to see that and it's going to become more and more and more difficult for us to be able to tell the difference. It's almost that we we'd wind up becoming full circle to where 1000 years ago, we'd say if I don't see it happen or you don't talk to me in person, I can't believe it. And we could almost wind up coming right back to that where we say no, pictures, video I I can't trust that because it could be fake. I don't know that that's what's gonna happen, but I can see that being an issue.

Shea Houdmann

You two both raise excellent points. Going back to the educational aspect, I have some friends in education who are experiencing this. Even at Christian colleges and universities, having to find a way to police this because students are just finding much easier way, so that destroys. There's an ethical issue, and essentially you're lying and saying that this content is yours when it's not. But you're also destroying, like Beth said, the critical thinking skills to be able to research something on your own. To be able to produce content, be able to discern right truth from error, right from wrong. Once you start having all this fed to you, if anything, our society has taught us that when you keep giving everything away for free, repeatedly over and over and over again, that results in people who are dependent on those free things, and it destroys all motivation for them to actually do the work themselves. Not making a political commentary here, but that's just reality and I experience the same thing if and if someone started bringing me a gift every day or bringing me food every day, I would get very used to it. And then when it stopped happening, I wouldn't even know how to respond. So it's just a reality of what we deal with when machines or AI can do all of our work for us, what purpose is there and in me doing that work? So now that's a huge concern.

Shea Houdmann

And Jeff, you kind of hinted at the end times aspect. And that brings up another question that we're getting is that in so in Revelation 13, I'm not going to go into this too much. It discusses what they what's referred to commonly as the image of the beast. That the Antichrist will have an image of himself that all around the world people will have to pay homage or even worship this image in order to be able to buy and sell and so how could an an image be all around the world to be able to somehow interact with people and to verify whether they've done or not done a certain activity. Well, if an AI version like you were saying Jeff, a video of whoever the Antichrist is, with artificial intelligence behind it, requiring you to do something and reporting whether you do that, this technology could seem to be an enabler of that. And could some sort of AI be related to the Antichrist in the end times? Yes, I think it's highly possible, but what we're talking about here today, again, it's similar to questions about the mark of the beast. Well, is this the mark of the beast? Is that the mark of Beast? Nothing today is that. Could it be a precursor that eventually leads to that? Yes, but nothing that existence today is the end of the beast using. Chat GB T to ask it questions, to do research is not participating in something evil. Could it lead to something? Yes. Is it right now? No, and that's kind of the council we're trying to give. Look, don't automatically be afraid of everything that's new. Approach it with discernment. Find if there is positive ways to use it. Use it to help you some do something rather than becoming reliant on it, because once you become reliant on it, that's when you need it. That's when you give it more and more influence in your life. Right, that's when you open yourself up to nefarious usage of technology rather than using it for what it's supposed to be to all technology, essentially. And makes our lives easier or enables us to do something that we couldn't do before.

Jeff Laird

It's it's good to remember that there's a reason that God prophesied what was going to happen in the end times. You don't know every little detail of what it's going to be and how it's going to be, but sometimes we get too worried about somehow trying to prevent the end times when all we're really supposed to do is prepare. Nothing we do is going to make it happen any faster or slower, or sooner or later, or any differently than it's going to happen. However, it's actually going to play out. Its going to play out exactly the way it is. So we don't need to feel like if I do something I'm contributing to it's it's going to happen. And nothing's going to happen by accident. We're not going to get tricked into denouncing our sincere faith in Christ by something that comes up here. So I see why people can be concerned. But I think from a Christian standpoint, we don't need to be overly paranoid. But I do think we we should take the stance of saying yes, if God's given us abilities, we should see if there is a good purpose for them. I don't think we should just cede something to the world. And say no, we shouldn't. You know, that's that's just evil because it's evil because it's new, because it's different. Because there's dangers. There's a lot of different things in the world that can dangerous. Nuclear fission can can provide power. It can make bombs. You can have a Chernobyl situation. It's not like it's impossible for this technology to run out of control and cause problems. But probably the best thing we can do is believers is say OK, this is something that the world is going to be using, where is the good purpose? What is the good use for this? How can I apply Christian principles to this and use it in a way that's meaningful?

Shea Houdmann

Exactly. So Beth why don't you jump on this. In your mind what are some possible ways that Christian ministry, whether it's a parachurch ministry like Got Questions or the church could possibly use an AI like a ChatGPT in a productive and edifying manner in some way that honors God and actually helps people rather than hinders.

Beth DeVore

Going to the end times, if you look at the passages where Jesus talks to his disciples about their responsibilities again, as you guys mentioned, it is not to stop the end times from happening, it's to be on the watch and to spread the gospel. And if we can at all harness a chat bot to help us spread the gospel to get into spaces where we are not, like certain social media platforms as the next generation becomes more and more reliant on chat bots, you know that's where we need to be. Christian ministries need to find out where the unreached people are and provide these resources for them will certainly be more efficient. But that's a ways down the road because right now the best chat bot out there again is hallucinating. It's creating content that isn't there, so whatever chat bot the ministry uses, will have to have a very firm group of sourced information for it to pull from.

Jeff Laird

So going to need to be even more explicitly clear that it's not meant to be a substitute for personal understanding. For example, at Got Questions we routinely tell people that, you know, our intent is not that somebody reads an article, listens to a podcast or video and just says, yep, they said it. That's it, we're good. And then we wrap up and we're done. You know, the intent is to say, here's the information. Here is our discipleship via the Internet that we're attempting to do. But people need to actually go to the word, go to other people, confirm, internalize, understand these. And they can see that something like the the AI driven chat could make that problem even more difficult where people are going to be inclined to just read it, now they have an answer and they'll just sort of internalize it. So I think that's another thing that would be important is to really strongly emphasize that people understand that what you are receiving is coming from an automatically generated system and it is not something that you're meant to just take as perfection. It's arguably subject to even worse flaws than a human being is just because of the way it works.

Beth DeVore

So any ministry that uses a chat bot needs to use, consider it a portal to draw people in to a place, a church, scriptures where they can investigate, compare what the chatbot says to the bible. Find a real person, a real teacher, Christian teacher to talk to. Whether that's a pastor or theologian, or volunteer writer. But yeah, the chat bot needs to be a portal for a deeper conversation and a deeper relationship. And not the end all be all of the Christian life.

Shea Houdmann

This predates me, but I remember though, saying back when contemporary Christian music first came out, those the saying is, why should the devil have all the good music? And a Got Questions writer and I were talking about this whole AI thing and his statement was why should the devil have all the good technology? Why should new technology, I guess only be used for evil? And granted it is largely being used for evil in many different ways. Is there a possible way to use it for ministry purposes? Like even at like Got Questions so we have the ability for people to submit a question and get a personal response.

We have thousands upon thousands of articles on the website where people can search. They can browse and find an answer and engage in the content that way. But for the people who really want to use an AI. Could we possibly offer a solution where they could submit a query to an AI chat bot as we've been discussing and have it return an answer? But only return answer based on either Got Questions content or maybe Got Questions plus bibleref.com. Or perhaps those two sites plus other sites, plus other trustworthy sites. So try to fine tune the eye to the point that it is going to give answers based on that content, which should force it to give quality responses. Is that possible? I don't know. This being full disclosure, this is something we're playing around with. Could we get this to work? Could we find a way to give people nearly instant answers that are going to be quality, again, not as a replacement for anything we're doing, not as, we're still going to be answering questions personally. We're still going to be writing articles personally. They're still going to be editing those articles personally. Still going to be translating those articles personally. But could it possibly be a positive use of AI to provide a safe place where AI could be used and return quality answers?

Shea Houdmann

But then again, as both Jeff and Beth said, got to double check this. Any answer we give, we always encourage people to check what we say with scripture. And to the extent our answer agrees with Scripture, except it. Otherwise reject it, double that, triple that when it comes to anything AI produces because there's not a person behind it. ChatGPT is incredible in some of the stuff it does, but it's not always right. It can take pieces of language here and there, stuff that it's learned and then from that dry wrong conclusion based on the content.

Shea Houdmann

I've I've seen it do this in some of our testing and playing around with that we've seen it draw the exact opposite conclusion from what's true based on the content has access to. So we're experimenting with this because we as a ministry, we want to use the Internet to reach people for Christ. And if again, millions of people have already downloaded and installed chat GPT. Became the most one of the most popular apps of all time. In a very short amount of time. So if people are going to be using it, we want to try to find a way how can we use the people who are already in that venue, are already using it as much as we would really prefer them not to that they are going to be there. Is there a way that we can get the gospel into that format? Or we is there a way we could get a AI chat bot to give quality biblically based answers? The answer to that right now is we don't know, but we think with this many millions, if not billions, of people who are going to be using technology like this, if there's a way to get the gospel and the truth of God's words into it, we think it's at least worth a shot. So that's again kind of what we're experiencing with, praying about, trying to see if it would work. Right now, the jury is definitely still out, but it's an intriguing question to study both from is it possible? Is it ethical? Maybe not the right term, but is this a worthwhile use of technology for the kingdom to have an AI in any way assisting and giving people answers.

Jeff Laird

I think ethical is a good it's a good concept to keep in mind. And one thing we have to remember again is this idea of what exactly is it doing in the nuts and bolts? Right now if a person goes to our Q&A system and they ask a question, one of the things that the computer will do right now and it has for years and years and years, is it'll look at some of the texts and the person's question and say here are links to some

articles that might be able to answer your question. And then the person could decide if they want to look at those links or if they want to go ahead and submit the question. In a sense, something like a chat bot that does exactly that but with a little bit more sophistication, that could be a possible assistance, because those of us who work with the Q&A know that there are a lot of times where people just they know what they want to know but they don't know how to ask. And when we see the question, we know, OK, I know what you're trying to ask and I know where this article is that really will answer your question. And so we're directing them to material that we know is good and we know is good. I think that's ethical. I think that's moral because we're doing the same thing we would be doing as people, we're just doing it a little bit more efficiently. As long as we're transparent with that.

Jeff Laird

However, some ministry wants to use this, I think that's very important is, is we just need to be very, very clear A, that this is being generated by AI and B, reminding people that they they cannot outsource their critical thinking to the machine. Because there's always a human being behind it. Always, always, always. No matter what these systems say or do, some person or persons is deciding what works and what doesn't, what counts, and what doesn't count. So it's you're never turning your thought process over to some objective machine. The only thing you can do is you can just hand over your critical thinking skills to some other person or some other group. You have to, you must be critical and think about it yourself.

Beth DeVore

It's going to be a real challenge with the interpretation of Scripture, different figures of speech in Greek and Hebrew, with the different theological beliefs of denominations, Calvin, Arminianism taking things out of context even in a a single article. It's going to take a lot of work. It may be that the answers will be more generalized than if they came from a specific person because even among the staff we have slightly different theological beliefs. So yeah, it's going to take a lot of work, even just to figure out what it is we would want it to say, let alone trying to get it to say that.

Shea Houdmann

And Beth the first thing that came to mind as you were speaking is like, let's see misinterpreting Scripture, taking things out of context, misapplying Greek and Hebrew, we don't need an AI to do that, there are plenty of people who are already doing a fantastic job at all of those things. So please, let's not add an AI to that mix. This has been interesting conversation. I imagine we'll have another episode as this technology continues to improve and change. I think it's worth the effort to see if there's a way that we could employ this for good. I'm I'm not fully convinced it's possible, or if it's even wise, but the fact that there again are millions of people using it already. It's like similar to creating a an app, or creating a when we created a Got questions module for Alexa Smart speaker where you can actually have it, Alexa read you Got Questions answers. Is there a way to take technology and get Got Questions content into that? And if there's a way to do that with AI that would produce reliable answers, but then also encouraging people to be like the Berneans, to study the scriptures to verify whether what we said is true. Maybe. But we're we're thinking it's worth an effort, but at this point, we're just very cautious, trying to be extremely careful. We would only would do something like this if we were highly confident it would contribute to people understanding God's word better rather than distracting from it.



Jeff Laird

We should at least be informed. We should at least know what we're talking about.

Shea Houdmann

Exactly. I loved your illustration about how a search engine works. I mean, Google and Bing have been using various forms and levels of AI for years, and trying to figure out what people are asking when they type in a question. Because language is flexible. And a sentence could be easily be understood multiple ways. Are they looking for a restaurant or are they looking for a location like a city? It's stuff like that that they use artificial intelligence to try to discern. And when it's artificial intelligence is doing now, rather than the 10 links, it's actually trying to produce an answer. Let's not take this too far and thinking that, oh, this is something completely brand new than it was and no this is a the next step in this. It's not something entirely new, but it's new enough that this has some implications we need to prayerfully discern whether it can be used for God's Kingdom.

Shea Houdmann

So hope our conversation today has been both informative and encouraging to you. Be wise, be discerning and playing around with AI. I don't envy those in the education industry trying to figure out how to get students to think critically. And Beth mentioned a possible way since she's heard of certain teachers doing it. This is a new horizon, again, not entirely new, but lots of implications and this could impact the world strongly negatively if that's not done right, so be careful. Be wise. Keep praying for wisdom as James, 1:5 says and above all, keep studying God's word. It's been the Got Questions podcast on artificial intelligence with Jeff and Beth joining me today. Got questions? The Bible has answers. We will help you find them.