

I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist

Session 6

1. Chapter 8: Signs of God or Gullibility

- a. Who made the cut?
 - i. The existence of truth is inescapable
 - ii. One objectively discoverable truth, beyond any reasonable doubt, is the existence of a theistic God.
 1. **Cosmological argument.** A eternally existent, super powerful and intelligent being is the only rational explanation for why anything exists at all
 2. **Teleological argument.** The being that created all things is supremely intelligent to have designed life with such incredible complexity, precision and interdependence on the rest of creation.
 3. **Moral argument.** The creator is absolutely morally pure and has provided humans with a moral law written on their hearts.
 - iii. To deny the observable evidence provided by these arguments is irrational and illogical. The evidence for each is undeniable. Combining all three, it should be clear that man is without excuse for objectively accepting that a theistic God is the source for all three lines of evidence.
 - iv. Therefore, theism is the only worldview that is consistent with the lines of evidence, also known as General Revelation (not recorded in "religious texts").
 - v. Theistic worldviews
 1. Judaism
 2. Christianity
 3. Islam
 - vi. All other secular and religious worldviews fail to acknowledge a single, theistic being who is responsible for the existence of everything. This includes Mormonism because it is a polytheistic religion.
 1. Polytheism is incompatible (false) because logically and mathematically there cannot be more than one infinite being.
 2. To distinguish one being from another, they must differ in some way.
 3. Differences between beings can only mean both lack something the other has. Thus neither would meet the definition of infinite.
 4. General revelation has already demonstrated that an infinite being must exist, as it is the only explanation for the observable evidence.
 5. Therefore, polytheism as a worldview, including Mormonism, is false
 6. Monotheism does not preclude other limited beings that are not infinite or eternal. This would include humans, angels, and demons.
 - vii. Using logic and reasoning based on the observable evidence, it seems likely (but not yet proven in the progression of the book's argument), that one of the three theistic worldviews is correct. In order to find out if any of the three remaining worldviews is correct, we need to look at the writings that the followers of these views claim to be inspired or divinely authored words.
- b. How does God communicate?

i. Possible divine communication systems

1. General revelation
2. Special revelation
3. Direct, personal communication to all of creation appears to run counter to God's greater purposes for His creation
4. C.S. Lewis – Screwtape Letters: ...”But you now see that the Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of His scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to over-ride a human will (as His felt presence in any but the faintest and most mitigated degree would certainly do) would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo.
5. Instead, God appears to have chosen to communicate specific message using Special Revelation. This method allows God to manifest Himself to a select group of people and inspire them to write down what they have witnessed or heard from Him.
 - a. Written words are precise and can easily be passed on to succeeding generations.
 - b. Special Revelation can also be ignored by those who freely decide that they don't want to be bothered by God.
 - c. Special Revelation appears to be a logical means of divine communication without using the overpowering presence of a God, but how can humans determine which messages are actually from Him, and which are frauds?

ii. The Kings Seal

1. In ancient times, kings would have a special, unique seal that they would use to confirm their messages. This helped the remote recipients to accept that the messages were authentic and official.
2. Hypothesis: God uses miracles to authenticate His messages in the same way a king in ancient times used his seal / signet ring.
 - a. Miracles are unusual and unique
 - b. Miracles can be easily recognized
 - c. Only a theistic God can do miracles
 - d. Even skeptics demand miracles from God to prove them wrong; they know that an authentic miracle would be sufficient proof that He is
3. A miracle is a special act of God that interrupts the normal course of events; they are an effect that would never occur in the laws of nature alone, and are thus more rare than naturally occurring events
4. If He chooses, God could use miracles to confirm which books were authored by Him. Likewise, the absence of miracles could reveal which ones were not.
5. If true, a miracle can be used to confirm the authenticity of the message
6. The working hypothesis is that a miracle is an act of God to confirm the word of God through a messenger of God.
7. Does God actually work this way?

iii. Is the box open or closed?

1. The box is open, meaning miracles are possible. A miracle is the only rational explanation for the creation of the universe just stated in Genesis 1:1
2. Once we accept the opening verse of the Bible, all other miraculous accounts are easy to accept since they require less of God's power than one that brought everything into existence.

3. Accepting the reality of an all-powerful, all-knowing and eternally existent God means we can also accept, and should expect, that He performs miracles whenever He chooses to.
- iv. Objections to miracles by skeptics
 1. The assumption that natural laws are immutable (cannot be changed).
 - a. First popularized by Benedict Spinoza, a Jewish pantheist, in 1670
 - b. His claim is based on:
 - i. Miracles are violations of natural laws
 - ii. Natural laws are immutable
 - iii. It is impossible to violate immutable laws
 - iv. Therefore, miracles are impossible
 - c. When has it been proven that natural laws are immutable, especially by an all-powerful God?
 - d. Creation itself demonstrates that natural laws are not immutable. Something doesn't come from nothing, so when God created the heavens and the earth, He suspended the natural laws of the universe. We know this because, as hard as atheists try, they cannot explain how matter, the building blocks of life, the first life, or any other aspect of creation came to be by natural forces. That's why atheists have adapted to hypothesize about panspermia, multiverses, and dark matter / dark energy. They need an unimaginably powerful means of overcoming natural laws.
 - e. Natural laws can be described, but they cannot dictate how the universe works (descriptive, not prescriptive).
 - f. With intelligent beings, the natural laws can indeed be overpowered. Gravity is overpowered all the time by planes and other human activity.
 2. The assumption that accounts of miracles are not credible
 - a. This is another false theory advanced by David Hume:
 - i. Natural law is by definition a description of a regular occurrence
 - ii. A miracle by definition is a rare occurrence
 - iii. The evidence for the regular is always greater than for the rare
 - iv. A wise man always bases belief on the greater evidence
 - v. Therefore, a wise man should never believe in miracles
 - b. Point #3 above is the main failure of Hume's premise. However, it can easily be disproven
 - i. The origin of the universe only happened once. It was a singular occurrence, yet science has repeatedly confirmed that the universe had a beginning. A wise man would believe in this rare occurrence event.
 - ii. The origin of life, according to Darwinists the world over, was a rare event that has only happened once in the past 4.5 billion years. Men who claim to be wise believe in this single, never repeated event.
 - iii. The entire history of the world is comprised of rare, unrepeatable events. David Hume's birth only happened once in all of human history, but he knew that he was born.
 - c. Exposing the problems with naturalistic thinking

- i. It confuses believability with possibility. If we are eye-witnesses to a rare event – even a miracle – should we not believe it so that we can remain a “wise man”?
 - ii. It confuses probability with evidence. Hume is not interested in evaluating truth claims for rare events, he would rather disregard all rare events regardless if they can be verified empirically or not.
 - iii. Example: if you witness a hole-in-one golf shot, should you not believe it because they are rare occurrences?
 - iv. The issue at hand is not the frequency or repeatability of the event, but whether we have good supporting evidence or not.
 - v. Hume’s argument is circular. Hume admits that miracles are rare, but then he rules them out precisely because they are rare. He then refuses to evaluate miracles based on the evidence. In other words, Hume hides his conclusion in the premise of his argument by way of a false philosophy that rules out rare events because they are rare. This is a clear bias, not objectivity.
 - vi. It’s as if Hume is stating that he might be willing to believe in miracles if they were more common. However, since he defines them as rare, he rules them out without any evidence to support his conclusion.
 - vii. Of course it is the rarity of miracles that helps us distinguish them from the effects of natural laws at work in the first place.
 - viii. Ultimately, disbelief in miracles is purely a matter of the will not to accept them. Refusing to look at evidence is not a defensible intellectual position.
 - ix. Rejecting even the possibility of miracles is just another means of denying God Himself. For if God exists, then He can perform supernatural acts (miracles), and we know that He already has.
- c. What is a miracle (and what is not)?
- i. Miracles are acts of God that only He can do; the results or effects of His actions which cannot be explained by natural laws, natural forces, or anything else in the physical universe. The specific criteria for a miracle, based on General Revelation, are:
 - 1. Supernatural power (for example, the Cosmological Argument)
 - 2. Intelligent design and purpose (for example, the Teleological Argument)
 - 3. The promotion of good or right behavior (for example, the Moral Law)
 - ii. Providence
 - 1. Those events caused by God, directly or indirectly
 - 2. God uses natural laws to accomplish His providence (they are still at work)
 - 3. The results may be unlikely or improbable, but they still do not violate natural laws (such as the fog at Normandy).
 - iii. Satanic signs
 - 1. Satan is not the evil equivalent to God.
 - 2. He uses the power God has given him for evil purposes
 - 3. Satan’s tricks fail to meet the characteristics of a true miracle
 - 4. Satan’s signs are often associated with error or promote immoral behavior
 - 5. They may be supernormal, but are not a supernatural suspension of natural laws
 - iv. Psychosomatic

1. Based on the psychological health of a person, not a supernatural act of God
2. The mind can trick the body, but this is part of nature
- v. Anomalies
 1. Unexplained freak of nature
 2. Example: the bumblebee power pack
 3. Lead to discovery of the truth behind the anomaly in natural laws
- d. Why don't we see biblical (publically displayed) miracles today?
 - i. The Bible contains approximately 250 recorded miracle accounts
 - ii. Most of the recorded miracles occurred during three distinct time periods
 1. Lifetime of Moses
 2. Lifetime of Elijah and Elisha
 3. Lifetime of Jesus and the Apostles
 - iii. These periods were occasions when God was affirming new truths, through new messengers who were entrusted with those truths
 - iv. We don't see biblical miracles today because the Bible is true and complete. God is not revealing new truths through new messengers today as He did in time past when God's was still communicating new truths.

2. Chapter 9: Do we have early testimony about Jesus?

- a. Historical references to Christ
 - i. Flavius Josephus (37-100), considered the greatest Jewish historian of all time
 - ii. Josephus served as a historian for the Roman emperor Domitian
 - iii. Josephus wrote the *Antiquities of the Jews* about 93
 1. 18:3:3 – “At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.”
 2. Josephus also writes: “Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he [Ananus the high priest] assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.”
 - iv. These are first-century references to Jesus in secular historical documents. They also confirm that Jesus' half-brother James was martyred, likely because he was the leader of the church in Jerusalem.
 - v. In addition to Josephus, there are nine other non-Christian writers who mention Jesus by name within 150 years of His death. As a result, “Jesus” is mentioned by more non-Christian writers in this period more frequently than the emperor of Rome, Tiberius Caesar! When the biblical references to Jesus are included, He is mentioned 4 times as often as Tiberius.
 - vi. Some of these “non-Christian” writers were actually anti-Christian sources, meaning they should be viewed as hostile to Christian doctrines. Nevertheless, here's what we can confirm about Jesus from these non-Christian writers in the ancient world:
 1. Jesus lived during the time of Tiberius Caesar
 2. He lived a virtuous life

3. He was a wonder (miracle) worker
 4. He had a brother named James
 5. He was acclaimed to be the Messiah
 6. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate
 7. He was crucified on the *supposed* eve of the Jewish Passover
 8. An unnatural darkness and an earthquake occurred on the day of his death
 9. His disciples believed He rose from the dead
 10. His disciples were willing to die for their belief
 11. Christianity spread rapidly as far as Rome
 12. His disciples denied the Roman gods and worshiped Jesus as God.
- vii. Based on this early, non-Christian testimony, it would be unreasonable to conclude that the Jesus did not live and die as described in the Bible a matter of historical fact.
 - viii. Multiple non-Christian writers have confirmed the baseline account of Jesus' life. This level of additional historical confirmation should form the basis of believing the narrative claims about Jesus in the Bible.
 - ix. Beyond the baseline accounts that correlate with the New Testament, can the rest of the New Testament be trusted to provide an accurate and unbiased presentation of the facts? Two questions will help to make this determination:
 1. Do we have accurate copies of the original documents that were written down in the first century?
 2. Do those documents speak the truth?
- b. Question 1: Do we have an accurate copy?
- i. Nine, independent eyewitnesses/contemporaries of Jesus wrote about what they saw.
 - ii. The copies we have available to us are manuscripts (not original writings). Original writing from the ancient world would not survive, so manuscripts are the means of preserving and validating these ancient works, both biblical and non-biblical.
 - iii. The New Testament manuscripts are more numerous and dated earlier (closer to the time of the original writing) than the next ten pieces of classical literature combined.
 1. More manuscripts
 - a. 5,700 hand-copied New Testament documents
 - b. More than 9,000 translated into other languages
 - c. Many of these are complete copies of the New Testament, others are fragments, but these fragments agree with the rest of the evidence
 2. Earlier transcripts
 - a. Earliest, undisputed manuscript is from John's gospel dated between 117-138 at the latest
 - b. This demonstrates that John's gospel was copied and distributed great distances by early in the second century
 - c. Other "disputed" documents can be dated from 50-70 and were found with the Dead Sea Scrolls.
 - d. These early scrolls prove that at least Mark was written within a few years after Jesus' death
 - e. We can conclude that the New Testament gap is no more than 25 years from Jesus's ascension to the first written account of His life.
 3. Abundant support

- a. Despite a Roman edict to destroy all the works of the New Testament, the early church fathers (one generation after the Apostles) have quoted the New Testament extensively...
 - b. We have 39,289 direct NT quotes from the church fathers
 - c. All but 11 verses of the NT can be reconstructed from these quotes
 - d. This supporting evidence makes it nearly certain that the NT manuscript evidence we have is accurate to the original writings
- 4. How is the original reconstructed?
 - a. Scholars can use all of the manuscript evidence and the church father citations of the same, to get an extremely accurate understanding of what the originals must have contained.
 - b. In reality, there is statistically a very small variance between all of the source evidence, making reconstruction a simple process
- 5. How accurate is the reconstruction
 - a. Of the supposed 200,000 “errors” found in the manuscripts, only 1/60 are even remotely significant (about 55 total)
 - b. We can conclude that the New Testament is at least 99.5% accurate to the original writings, and probably much higher than that
 - c. Of the 0.5% that is doubtful, none of those passages affects a single doctrine of the Christian faith.
 - d. The substance of the New Testament is certain. This can be said of no other ancient book in the world.
- c. Question 2: Is the New Testament Historically Reliable?
 - i. Did the major events portrayed in the New Testament actually happen?
 - ii. Is the basic storyline present fact or fiction?
 - iii. Historical tests will reveal that the New Testament is factual and reliable (following chapters answer each of the seven questions on pg. 231)
- d. Are the New Testament documents early?
 - i. All New Testament books were written before 100 A.D. (early church fathers were quoting them between 95-100 A.D., so they much pre-dated those (table 9.1, pg. 236).
 - ii. Most, if not all, were actually written prior to 70 A.D. because none of the authors mentions the predicted destruction of the Jewish temple. The Jews lost their country, their capital city, and their temple that had been the center of their national heritage for more than 1000 years!
 - iii. Many New Testament books were composed before 62 A.D. (within 30-years of Jesus’ death) since Paul was executed in 62 A.D (all of his epistles, and Luke-Acts, plus Mark and Matthew by extension).
 - iv. Some of the New Testament books were written in the 40’s and used sources from the 30’s, the same decade Jesus was crucified.
 - v. In one of Paul’s earliest writings, he effectively challenges readers to test his account of Jesus’s death and resurrection by telling them to go ask other known eyewitnesses who would certainly confirm his account.
 - vi. Scholars have identified approximately 40 creeds that began as an oral account of the Christian faith that had to pre-date their inclusion in the New Testament books. These creeds were the best means of learning and communicating in a predominantly illiterate culture.