

# I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist

## Session 7

### 1. Chapter 10: Eyewitness Testimony

- a. NT claims
  - i. God has raised Jesus to life, and we are all eyewitnesses of the fact (Acts 2:32)
  - ii. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are eyewitnesses of this (Acts 3:15)
  - iii. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard (Acts 4:18-20)
  - iv. We were eyewitnesses of his majesty (2 Peter 1:16)
- b. Were they really eyewitnesses?
  - i. Acts (Luke)
    1. Luke details 84 facts in Acts 13-28 that reveal an incredible array of knowledge of local places, names, environmental conditions, customs, and circumstances that would only be known by an eyewitness who lived in the first century
      - a. Shipping ports and navigation routes used
      - b. Correct usage of names of people and places of the day
      - c. Correct titles for Roman officials who served in the first century
      - d. The existence of an altar to an "unknown god"
      - e. Gallio was proconsul in Corinth
      - f. Other proper titles for public figures used in the regions listed in Acts
      - g. The appropriate route across the open sea south of Cyprus which is favored by persistent northwest winds
      - h. The means of obtaining Roman citizenship in the first century
      - i. Ananias being high priest at that time
      - j. Right of appeal process for Roman citizens
      - k. Sailing characteristics of a square-rigged ancient ship
      - l. Using the precise nautical term for taking soundings, and the correct sounding depth of the waters near Malta
      - m. Superstitions of locals in the places listed as having visited
      - n. Conditions of Paul's imprisonment whereby he lived at his own expense
    2. The confirmation of Acts as a matter of history is overwhelming ... any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd – A.N. Sherwin-White, Roman Historian (Pg. 259)
    3. Luke also records 35 accounts of miracles in Acts interspersed with these 84 historically accurate details, all of which are given in the same matter-of-fact, narrative writing style.
      - a. Paul temporarily blinds a sorcerer (Acts 13:11)
      - b. Healing of a crippled man (Acts 14:8)
      - c. Exorcism of an evil spirit from a girl (Acts 16:18)
      - d. Performance of many miracles in Ephesus causing many to turn from sorcery (Acts 19:11-20)
      - e. Raised a man from the dead (Acts 20:9-10)

4. If Luke has been proven to be a reliable chronicler of Paul's journeys in the ancient world, why would he not be given the same level of trust and respect when he also records the miracles that surrounded Paul's effective ministry? It requires more faith to distrust Luke in light of his historical accuracy than to accept his recording of all events, including the miraculous (pg. 260).
- ii. Gospel According to Luke
    1. Acts is a continuation of Luke's gospel account, both written to Theophilus
    2. We should expect the same level of accuracy in the gospel as has been demonstrated in Acts
    3. Independent verification of Luke's accuracy in his gospel account
      - a. Names 11 historically confirmed leaders:
        - i. Herod the Great
        - ii. Caesar Augustus
        - iii. Quirinius
        - iv. Tiberius Caesar
        - v. Pontius Pilate
        - vi. Herod the Tetrarch of Galilee
        - vii. Herod's brother Philip, Tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis
        - viii. Lysanias, Tetrarch of Abilene
        - ix. Priesthoods of Annas and Caiaphas
        - x. Zachariah
        - xi. John
      - b. All of these figures have been confirmed by non-Christian writers or by archeological discovery
    4. Luke records the hematoxydrosis (sweating drops of blood), a medical condition that took nearly 2,000 years to confirm and label as a medical condition
    5. Luke should be placed among the very greatest of historians of all time since he has been confirmed independently on so many testable points. We have every reason to believe he is telling the truth throughout Luke-Acts (pg. 262)
  - iii. Matthew and Mark are synoptic or parallel accounts with Luke, both telling the same story of Jesus' life, but from differing eyewitness accounts. By extension, all three synoptic gospels are historically accurate and reliable based on independent verification
  - iv. Gospel According to John
    1. John is also presented as an eyewitness account of Jesus' life. As with Luke, numerous details in John's gospel account have been independently confirmed and verified as historically accurate.
      - a. Use of stone water jars in NT times (2:6)
      - b. Archeology confirms the place of Jacob's well (4:6)
      - c. Josephus confirms the enmity between Samaritans and Jews (4:9)
      - d. Archeology confirms the location of the pool of Bethesda (5:2)
      - e. Archeology confirms the location of the pool of Siloam (9:7)
      - f. John records Jesus walking on the Solomon Colonnade side of the temple (10:22-23); Josephus reveals this as the protected side of the temple in winter. The temple was destroyed in 70 AD so local knowledge while the temple was still standing is necessary to include this small detail.
      - g. Fifteen stadia is the precise distance from Bethany to Jerusalem (11:18)
      - h. Burial wrappings for Lazarus common in the first century (11:44)

- i. Precise composition of the Sanhedrin in Jesus' time (11:47)
    - j. Josephus records Caiaphas as high priest from 18-37 AD (11:49)
    - k. Mention of the tiny, obscure village of Ephraim (11:54)
    - l. Not even Jewish slaves were required to wash guest's feet, but John details how Jesus did this for His disciples (13:4)
    - m. John records a spear was thrust into Jesus' side and that blood and water came out. This possibility has been confirmed by modern medical analysis, but would not have been known by John unless he was an eyewitness. Most victims of crucifixion would not have had a spear thrust into them to confirm their deaths (19:34).
  - 2. It would take a lot of faith to not believe John's gospel account as being historically reliable given the details of events included and confirmed by non-Christian sources.
- c. Historical crosshairs
  - i. 140 NT details documented that confirmed to be authentic between Luke, Acts and John
  - ii. At least 30 historical figures were listed by name in the NT who have been confirmed by non-Christian historical writers or by archeology (Table 10.1, pg. 270)
- d. Historical Novel or Novel History?
  - i. Why would so many non-Christian writers affirm the details included by the NT writers?
  - ii. Why would the NT writers endure persecution, torture, and death to conceal a fictitious account that they knew was false, and which gained them nothing by inventing it?
  - iii. Historical novelists do not use real names as characters in their stories because including them would destroy their credibility, and would likely get them executed for doing so.
  - iv. It is not plausible that nine different authors, spread out all over the ancient world (with no mass communication technologies available to them), could invent a storyline that is so consistent and verifiable from outside resources. Such a grand conspiracy to invent a fictitious storyline would be easily detectable and exposed.
- e. Independent eyewitness testimonies – nine writers
  - i. Each includes early and unique material that only an eyewitness would know
  - ii. The accounts describe the same storyline, but include divergent details
  - iii. Too much harmonization would be a sign of editorial interference with the independent accounts. Divergent details help confirm the true story. Overly homogenous accounts would indicate collusion since no two people would see the same events the same.
  - iv. In the final analysis, we find that six sane, sober, eyewitnesses, who refuse to recant their testimony even under the threat of death, would easily convict a person in any court of law. Such eyewitness testimony yields a verdict that is certain beyond any reasonable doubt. Unless you saw the event yourself, you can't be any more certain that those historical events actually occurred.

## **2. Chapter 11: 10 Reasons the NT Writers Told the Truth**

- a. They included embarrassing details about themselves. If the storyline was invented, what would the writers gain from making themselves appear dim-witted, uncaring, rebuked by Jesus, and doubting cowards?
- b. They often depict themselves as complete morons
  - i. Often fail to understand what Jesus said to them (Mark 9:32, Luke 18:34, John 12:16)
  - ii. They were uncaring about their Master's instructions or His safety.
    - 1. They fell asleep when He asked them to pray for Him (Mark 14:32-41)
    - 2. They make no effort to give Him a proper burial after His death

- iii. Rebuked
  - 1. Peter is called Satan by Jesus (Mark 8:33)
  - 2. Paul rebukes Peter for being a hypocrite (Gal. 2:11)
- iv. Cowards
  - 1. All but one of them hid after Jesus' arrest (Matt. 26:33-35)
  - 2. Peter denied knowing Jesus three times when asked directly about Him
  - 3. Women are presented as being braver than the disciples during tough times
- v. Doubtters
  - 1. Despite Jesus' teaching about rising from the dead after the third day, they were doubtful when others first reported His resurrection
  - 2. Some were even doubtful after seeing Jesus with their own eyes (Matt. 28:17)
- c. Including embarrassing accounts and difficult sayings of Jesus
  - i. Jesus was called "out of His mind" by His own family members (Mark 3:21,31)
  - ii. His own brothers do not believe Him (John 7:5)
  - iii. Was called a deceiver (John 7:12)
  - iv. Many followers abandon Him after following Him for some time (John 6:66)
  - v. Some, who once followed Him, wanted to stone Him to death when they did not like what He taught (John 8:30-59)
  - vi. He was called a drunkard (Matt. 11:19)
  - vii. He was called demon-possessed (Mark 3:22, John 7:20, 8:48)
  - viii. He was called a madman (John 10:20)
  - ix. He permitted a known prostitute to wash His feet and dry them with her hair (Luke 7:36-39)
  - x. He was crucified (hung on a tree) which is considered being cursed according to the law of Moses (Deut. 21:23, Gal. 3:13)
  - xi. Jesus declares that His Father is greater than He (John 14:28)
  - xii. Jesus does not know when He will actually return at His second coming (Matt. 24:36)
  - xiii. He appears to deny His deity by asking why He should be called "good" (Luke 18:19)
  - xiv. He curses a fig tree for not bearing fruit when it was not the right season to bear fruit (Matt. 21:18)
  - xv. He appears to be unable to perform miracles in His hometown (Mark 6:5)
- d. Demanding Sayings
  - i. Adultery is expanded to even include looking at a woman lustfully (Matt. 5:28)
  - ii. Divorcing a wife, except when she has committed adultery, is now a violation of God's law (Matt. 5:32)
  - iii. Jesus instructs His followers not to resist an evil person (Matt. 5:39-42)
  - iv. Jesus tells His followers to be perfect because God is perfect (Matt. 5:48)
  - v. He instructs us not to hate, but rather to love your enemies (Matt. 5:44-45)
  - vi. He instructs us not store up treasure on the earth (Matt. 6:19-21)
  - vii. He instructs us not to judge others, lest we be judged in the same manner (Matt. 7:1-2)
  - viii. All of these sayings are effectively impossible for humans to keep perfectly, and would not be in the best interests of the men who supposedly invented these sayings.
  - ix. Only a perfect person could perfectly keep these holy commands (and He did).
- e. The NT writers carefully distinguish Jesus' words from their own words
  - i. It would have been easy (and very tempting) for the NT writers to resolve disputes by inventing sayings of Jesus to give them perceived divine authority to get their way.

- ii. The NT writers never do this. Paul, who wrote most of the NT and presided over many disputes in the church, only directly quoted Jesus a few times. He appealed to his appointed role as an Apostle, but did not invent words that Jesus never spoke.
- f. NT writers include events related to the resurrection that are not likely to be invented
  - i. Burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea. They had no reason to place a member of the Jewish leadership in a positive light. Additionally, if Joseph did not bury Jesus, including this falsified detail would have easily been exposed as fraudulent.
  - ii. The first witnesses of the resurrection were women. Women were considered unreliable witnesses, especially one who was formally demon-possessed.
  - iii. Conversion of Jewish priests to the faith (Acts 6:7). Luke could not have included this detail if the Jewish priests knew and could prove that none of them converted.
  - iv. The Jewish explanation for the empty tomb. The Jewish leaders were already spreading the story of a stolen body to explain the empty tomb. If the tomb wasn't empty, or if Jesus' body could have been found, the authorities would have certainly exposed the lies claimed by the NT writers about the resurrection.
- g. More than 30 historically confirmed people are cited in the NT
  - i. The NT contains far too many historically confirmed people to be a fictionalized story.
  - ii. Some of these were leaders in the Roman government, and they had substantial power to punish and discredit the NT writers if what they claimed was not true.
- h. Divergent details from the NT writers
  - i. Genuine eyewitness accounts will all differ from one another, even if all are telling the truth about what happened.
  - ii. Collusion is disproven by the diversity in the details
  - iii. The accounts are complimentary, not contradictory
- i. The NT writers directly challenge their readers to investigate verifiable facts
  - i. The marks of an apostle – signs, wonders, and miracles – were done among you (2 Cor. 12:12).
  - ii. Paul was a true apostle and he did perform the signs of an apostle. This is a fact that his readers could easily verify, even if they were not direct eyewitnesses of the events.
- j. Miracles are described with simple, unembellished accounts
  - i. All accounts, including the miracles and resurrection descriptions, are all written in a matter-of-fact style.
  - ii. The evidence shows that NT writers' primary concern was to get the historical events right; they were clearly not attempting to invent fanciful miracle stories
  - iii. N.T. Wright – "If Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wanted to tell stories whose import was 'Jesus is risen, therefore you will be too,' they have done a remarkably bad job of it."
  - iv. The gospel writers were conveying history, not theology
  - v. The 35 miracles performed by Jesus are described as if from a fact-based reporter, not from wild-eyed preachers.
- k. The NT writers abandoned long-held sacred beliefs and practices, adopted new ones, and did not deny their testimony under persecution or threat of death
  - i. They abandoned the animal sacrifice and temple worship practices. These were replaced by the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ which God required for eternal life
  - ii. They abandoned the supremacy of the Law of Moses, claiming it was now powerless because of the sinless life of Christ; He fulfilled the Law in order to put an end to it

- iii. They abandoned strict monotheism and worshiped Jesus, the God-Man despite the fact that:
  - 1. The most cherished Jewish believe had always been, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” (Deut 6:4)
  - 2. Man-worship was considered blasphemy, punishable by death
- iv. They abandoned observing the Sabbath, even though not strictly observing the Sabbath was punishable by death (Ex. 31:14)
- v. They abandon a belief in expecting a conquering Messiah as a single event. Instead, they placed all their faith in the suffering servant who became the sacrificial lamb as the true Messiah (until He returns again in power and judgment).
- vi. Further, it was not just 9 NT writers or 12 disciples who followed this new lifestyle, but thousands of Jews, including Pharisees and priests, all who converted to Christianity. They all abandoned their long-held beliefs. What they abandoned is significant:
  - 1. Institutions and practices handed down directly from God 1,500 years earlier
  - 2. They previously thought that following these practices would gain them eternal life (at least those who believed in life after death). They also believed that rejecting God’s ordinances would send them to eternal judgment / damnation
  - 3. They gave up all the rigorous teachings from their childhood, both theologically and sociologically, knowing that to do so meant they would be despised and hated by those they formerly had relationships with.
  - 4. They also adopted entirely new beliefs and practices
    - a. Sunday became a new day of worship (was a day of work in Genesis 1)
    - b. Baptism was the acknowledged sign of the new covenant whereas circumcision was the sign of the old covenant. As a result, they abandoned the practice of circumcision given to Abraham
    - c. Communion was practiced regularly an act of remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice for sins
- l. Conclusion: it is entirely rational to accept the testimony of reliable eyewitnesses who had nothing to gain by making up a story. If it was fabricated, all that they accomplished was to die a martyr’s death, and they were hated and despised by their own nation.
- m. In reality, there is little else the NT writers could have done to prove that they were telling the truth. Objective observation of the facts reveals that they did indeed tell the truth.
- n. Unlike Islam, which was spread by the sword (convert or die), why would a religion like Christianity spread when its adherents faced persecution, torture, and death for the first 280 years of its existence?
- o. Perhaps there really is some very reliable testimony, accompanied by confirmed miracles, that proves the religion is true. How else can you explain why scared, scattered, skeptical cowards suddenly become the most dedicated, determined, self-sacrificing and peaceful missionary force the world has ever known.