

I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist

Session 8

1. Chapter 12: Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?

a. The Resurrection: What do the scholars say?

- i. Gary Habermas collected more than 1,400 critical scholarly works on the resurrection written from 1975 to 2003. In his book, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope*, Habermas found that virtually all scholars from across the ideological spectrum – from ultra-liberals to Bible-thumping conservatives – agree on the following points:
 1. Jesus died by Roman crucifixion
 2. He was buried, most likely in a private tomb
 3. Soon afterwards the disciples were discouraged, bereaved, and despondent, having lost hope
 4. Jesus' tomb was found empty very soon after His interment
 5. The disciples had experiences that they believed were actual appearances of the risen Jesus
 6. Due to these experiences, the disciples' lives were thoroughly transformed. They were willing to die for their belief.
 7. The proclamation of the Resurrection took place very early, from the beginning of church history.
 8. The disciples' public testimony and preaching of the Resurrection took place in the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified shortly before.
 9. The gospel message centered on the preaching of the death and resurrection of Jesus.
 10. Sunday became the primary day for gathering and worshiping.
 11. James, the brother of Jesus and a skeptic before this time, was converted when he believed he also saw the risen Jesus.
 12. Just a few years later, Saul of Tarsus (Paul) became a Christian believer, due to an experience that he also believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.
- ii. These accepted facts are in line with the discovery of truth presented thus far:
 1. **The New Testament story is not a legend.** The storyline has been corroborated by multiple non-Christian writers in the same time period. The New Testament stories include more than 30 confirmed historical figures to further authenticate that it is historical fact, not legend.
 2. **The New Testament story is not a lie.** The writers include divergent, but complementary details, along with embarrassing accounts about themselves, among other characteristics that would not be included in a falsified story. They also endured persecution and death for the empirical claim that they had seen, heard, and touched the risen Jesus. Yet, they could have saved themselves by simply denying their testimony about Jesus.
 3. **The New Testament Story is not an embellishment.** The writers were meticulously accurate, as evidenced by well over 140 historically confirmed details. They include accounts of miracles without any embellishment or modifying of their style of writing with the other confirmed facts.

b. Skeptical views of the Resurrection

i. Hallucination Theory – All of the disciples experienced a hallucination

1. Problem 1 – hallucinations are not experienced by groups of people. By contrast, the NT reveals that the resurrected Jesus was witnessed by more than 500 people on twelve different occasions over a forty-day period. He was seen walking, talking and eating. These were not quick, shadowy appearances that might be consistent with a hallucination. (Table 12.1, pg. 303)
2. Problem 2 – The Jewish and Roman authorities never produced Jesus' body to prove the disciples were either lying or hallucinating.

ii. Wrong Tomb Theory

1. As above, the Jewish and Roman authorities never produced Jesus' body to prove the disciples just mistakenly went to the wrong tomb.
2. Since they did not provide evidence of Jesus' dead body, this theory would require that the Jewish and Roman leaders also went to the wrong tomb; everyone involved must have forgotten where Jesus had actually been buried.
3. The empty tomb does not explain the twelve appearances of the risen Jesus.
4. The empty tomb does not explain the dramatic change in the disciples from scared and cowering at the authorities, to then boldly proclaiming the name of Jesus in the face of severe punishment or death.

iii. Swoon Theory (Jesus was still alive when He was buried).

1. All involved believed Jesus was dead
 - a. Soldiers who were charged with executing convicted criminals
 - b. Pilate confirmed that Jesus was dead
 - c. The disciples lost all hope when Jesus died
2. Modern medical analysis of the facts conclude that Jesus would have died. Three Mayo clinic physicians concluded that the spear thrust into Jesus' pericardium and heart ensured His death. The swoon theory cannot be reconciled with modern medical analysis.
3. Jesus was embalmed with 75 pounds of spices and wrapped in burial clothes. Any signs of life would have detected before the embalming.
4. Even if Jesus survived all of the preceding traumas, He would have bled to death in the tomb without medical intervention (though even modern medicine would be unlikely to save a victim of severe scourging followed by crucifixion and a pierced heart).
5. Paul's bright light vision of Jesus cannot be explained by an ordinary man who simply survived death. Paul was exceedingly zealous to destroy the church and the name of Jesus until his conversion experience initiated by Jesus Himself.
6. Several non-Christian writers affirm that Jesus was crucified and that he died.

iv. Stolen Body Theory

1. This theory makes the disciples the deceivers.
2. So, the disciples stole Jesus' body in order to be beaten, tortured and martyred.
3. Who appeared to Paul if Jesus was dead and the body was just stolen?
4. Were all 500 eyewitnesses to the risen Jesus in on the stolen body hoax?
5. Did the non-Christian writers (Phlegon) also lie?
6. The Roman emperor's edict prohibiting grave robbing was at least a tacit admission (confirmed by an archeological find in 1878) that Jesus tomb was in fact empty.

- v. **Substitution theory** (Muslim explanation)
 1. There is no first century evidence to support the theory
 2. Were all those Jews and others witnessing Jesus's crucifixion fooled by a substitute look-alike?
 3. Did the substitute rise from the dead? If not, where is his dead body?
 4. This would imply that everyone was wrong about everything, both Christian and non-Christian writers of history.
- vi. **Grand Deception Theory**
 1. According to the theory, the disciples invented the resurrection story because of their faith in their deceased teacher.
 2. They searched the scriptures after His crucifixion to concoct the resurrection.
 3. Driven by their faith to continue His teachings, the disciples had to invent the resurrection story.
 4. Response. The disciples were despondent and lost after Jesus' death. They immediately went back to their old careers and the lives they had before meeting Jesus. His post resurrection appearances ignited their faith and later their willingness to die for Him.
- vii. **Pagan Resurrection Copying Theory**
 1. According to the theory, the NT writers decided to copy pagan resurrection stories and apply them to Jesus.
 2. The NT accounts provide extensive and independently verifiable facts. They are clearly not a fictionalized account.
 3. The copying theory does not explain the empty tomb
 4. The copying theory does not explain the willingness of Christians to die for their made up story.
 5. In fact, there are few if any actual correlations between the polytheistic Greek and Roman myths about reincarnation, and the actual account of a monotheistic God dying and being resurrected to life into the same body and person.
 6. The first true account of a dying and rising from the dead god, came 150 years after Christ, so the NT accounts could not have been copies of a story not yet written.
- c. **Skeptical Evidence?**
 - i. Reasonable people demand evidence, not merely theories.
 - ii. No one from the ancient world – not even the enemies of Christianity – has offered a plausible alternative explanation for the Resurrection account.
 - iii. Most of the theories have been formulated from an anti-supernatural bias.
 - iv. The bottom line is that there are too many miracles and too much testimony to believe that all of the eyewitnesses got it wrong every time (pg. 314-315)
 - v. The explanation that requires the least amount of faith is to believe is that Jesus really did perform miracles and He really did rise from the dead as He predicted.
 - vi. We don't have enough faith to believe that all of the NT writers were lying or deceived.
- d. **Why don't all scholars belief in the resurrection?**
 - i. They have a philosophical bias against miracles and therefore rule out all miracles whenever they encounter them.
 - ii. They arrive at the wrong conclusion because their bias makes it impossible for them to arrive at the right conclusion.

e. Context!

- i. It's not just that we lack a natural (non-miraculous) explanation for the empty tomb. It's that we have positive eyewitness and corroborating circumstantial evidence for the resurrection miracle itself (pg. 317)
 1. Cosmological (and teleological) argument affirms the existence of miracles
 2. Ancient documents tell us to expect the very miracles that were specifically fulfilled in the New Testament.
 - a. Messiah would be a God-Man
 - b. He would be killed on a specific day, foretold hundreds of years before He was born
 - c. He would be killed, but not for himself because He would be sinless
 - d. After He was killed, He would rise from the dead to offer salvation
 3. Historically confirmed eyewitnesses document actual miracles, and the NT documents all meet the standard criteria of historicity (fact, not fiction):
 - a. Early accounts (15-40 years gap)
 - b. Eyewitness testimony
 - c. Independent testimony from multiple sources
 - d. Written by trustworthy people who lived by the highest ethical standards, and who died refusing to recant their claims
 - e. Describe events, locations, and individuals corroborated by archeology and other period writers
 - f. Describe events that enemies tacitly admit to be true (enemy attestation)
 - g. Describe events that are embarrassing to the authors and to Jesus Himself (from a skeptical viewpoint)
 4. What do the eyewitnesses tell? (pg. 318-319)

f. Extraordinary Claims and Self-Canceling Evidence

- i. Extraordinary claims are presumed false by the skeptics
 1. There is something wrong with a standard of proof that makes it impossible to believe what has actually occurred.
 2. No historical event is scientifically repeatable
 3. We don't need extraordinary evidence to believe the truth. Good, reliable evidence is all that is needed.
 4. We base virtually everything we know about the extraordinary life of Alexander the Great from historians who wrote 300 to 500 years after his death.
 5. In reality, we do not have to witness every event firsthand in order to believe the event actually occurred. We can, and should, believe the testimony of others if they have been proven trustworthy, especially if their testimony is corroborated by other reliable data.
 6. In order to not infringe on our free will to choose faith and belief, God has elected to give us convincing evidence of His existence and His actions, but not compelling evidence. Those who want to follow God can do so with confidence, and those who do not can suppress or ignore the evidence, and then live as if He does not exist. He leaves the choice up to them.
- ii. David Hume (again) argues against miracles and calls them self-canceling because he claimed they are based on biased and poorly constructed testimonies.
 1. The miracles in the New Testament are not based on poor testimony, but are rather well documented and confirmed by multiple sources.

2. No other religion in the world has verified miracles like those found in the NT
3. Hume lacked modern-day confirmation that the universe had a beginning (miracle) and that all life forms at the cellular and microscopic levels display additional evidence of a Creator (miracles).
4. Miracles are not self-canceling. They have abundant supporting evidence that would require substantially more faith to not believe in them than to accept them when presented to us as they are in the New Testament.

g. One Solitary Life (pg. 324)!

2. Chapter 13: Who is Jesus?

a. The Suffering Servant of God – Isaiah

- i. Elected by the Lord, anointed by the Spirit, and promised success in his endeavor (42:1,4)
- ii. Justice is a prime concern of his ministry (42:1,4)
- iii. His ministry has an international scope (42:1,6)
- iv. God predestined him to his calling (49:1)
- v. He is a gifted teacher (49:2)
- vi. He experiences discouragement in his ministry (49:4)
- vii. His ministry extends to the Gentiles (49:6)
- viii. He encounters strong opposition and resistance to his teaching, even of a physically violent nature (50:4-6)
- ix. He is determined to finish what God has called him to do (50:7)
- x. He has humble origins with little outward prospects for success (53:1-2)
- xi. He experiences suffering and affliction (53:3)
- xii. He becomes a vicarious, substitutionary offering on behalf of his people (53:4-6, 12)
- xiii. He is put to death after being condemned (53:7-9)
- xiv. He comes back to life and is exalted above all rulers (53:10-12, 52:13-15)
- xv. He is sinless (53:9)

b. The Suffering Servant cannot be Israel (nation)

- i. Israel is not sinless as it had a system for atonement of their sins
- ii. Israel is not a lamb who submits without any resistance (53:7)
- iii. Israel did not die as a substitute for others (53:4-6, 8, 10-12)

c. Hitting the bullseye - Table 13.1 (pg. 334-5) only Jesus hits the mark

d. Box Top to Prophecy

i. Psalm 22

1. My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me (Ps. 22:1)
2. Scorn, mocking and insults (22:6-7)
3. Thirst (22:15)
4. Pierced hands and feet (22:16)
5. Unbroken bones (22:17)
6. Divided garments (22:18)
7. Casting of lots for garments (22:18)
8. Rescued by the Lord (22:19)
9. Public praise of God after His rescue (22:22)

ii. In all, seventy-one OT messianic prophecies have been fulfilled by Jesus Christ thus demonstrating that the OT foretells of Christ, but in the NT His life is revealed.

e. Is Jesus God?

- i. Born a man, but still God (Isa. 9:6)

- ii. Jesus is the Word; the Word is God and came in the flesh (John 1:1, 14)
- iii. Christ is God over all (Rom 9:5)
- iv. All the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily (Col. 2:9)
- v. Righteousness comes from our God and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:1)
- vi. Matthew applies the “God is With Us” title of Isaiah 7:14 to Jesus (1:23)
- vii. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the expressed image of God in a physical person (Heb. 1:3)
- viii. God the Father speaks to God the Son, saying, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever” (Heb. 1:8)
- ix. Even demons acknowledge Jesus as God (Matt. 8:29, Luke 4:24, 41)
- x. Jesus Himself also claimed to be God
 - 1. Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One? “I AM. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” (Mark 14:61-62) See also Daniel 7:13.
 - 2. “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). I AM is the self-existent One. He has no past or future because He is eternal. He is not in time (He created it), Jesus was clearly claiming to be that eternal, self-existent One who spoke to Moses from the burning bush (ex. 3:14). This led the Jews to pick up stones to stone Him, a clear indication that they understood exactly who He claimed to be.
 - 3. Jesus prays for and receives the same glory as the Father, who will not give His glory to another (created being) John 17:5, Isa. 42:8
 - 4. Jesus declares that He is the First and the Last (Rev. 1:17) quoting from Isaiah 44:6 which is a direct quote from the LORD God.
 - 5. I am the good shepherd, but only God is good and only God can be the “Good Shepherd” of Psalm 23:1
 - 6. Jesus says that He has the authority to judge all nations and people (Matt. 25:21)
 - 7. See Table 13.2 (pg. 343)
 - 8. Jesus is represented as God in some of His own parables
 - a. Lost Sheep
 - b. Lost Coin
 - c. Prodigal Son
 - d. Parable of the Vineyard Workers
 - e. Ten Virgins – Jesus is the Bridegroom (Isa. 62:5, Hos. 2:16)
- xi. Divine Actions
 - 1. Jesus forgave sins
 - 2. Jesus has the authority to institute a new commandment
 - 3. Jesus told His followers to pray in His name
 - 4. Jesus accepted worship on at least nine occasions
 - a. From a leper (Matt. 8:2)
 - b. From a ruler (Matt. 9:18)
 - c. From the disciples after the storm (Matt. 14:33)
 - d. From the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:25)
 - e. From the mother of James and John (Matt. 20:20)
 - f. From the demon-possessed man (Mark 5:6)
 - g. From the blind man (John 9:38)
 - h. From all disciples (Matt. 28:17)

