

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.** An 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 not objectively accepting the truth of the existence of a theistic God.
 - iv. Therefore, theism is the only worldview that is consistent with the objective lines of evidence.
 - v. Theologians call this General Revelation because it testifies to God's existence without any required appeal to a "religious text".
 - vi. Viable theistic worldviews:
 1. Judaism
 2. Christianity
 3. Islam
 - vii. 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, each must differ from the other in some meaningful way.
 3. Differences between beings can only mean both beings lack something the other has. Thus, neither would meet the definition of an infinite being.
 4. General revelation has already demonstrated that an infinite being must exist, as such an infinite being is the only valid explanation for the observable evidence.
 5. Therefore, polytheism in any form, including Mormonism, is false.
 6. Monotheism does not preclude the existence of other limited beings. This would include humans, angels, and demons.
 - viii. 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.

- ix. Further investigation is required concerning these three theistic worldviews matches the evidence.
- b. How does God communicate?
 - i. Possible divine communication systems:
 - 1. General revelation?
 - 2. Special revelation?
 - 3. Direct, personal communication? This method is not likely as it counters 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 override 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 His specific message using Special Revelation. This method allows God to manifest Himself to a select group of people and inspire them to write what they have witnessed or heard.
 - 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 King's Seal
 - 1. In ancient times, kings would have a special, unique seal that they would use to confirm their messages. This helped remote recipients to know and accept that the messages were authentic.
 - 2. Hypothesis: God uses miracles to authenticate His messages much like a signet ring authenticated a king's message to his people.
 - a. Miracles are unusual and unique.
 - b. Miracles can be easily recognized.
 - c. Only a theistic God, or someone under His power, can do miracles.
 - d. Even skeptics demand miracles from God to prove them wrong; they know that an authentic miracle would be sufficient proof of God.
 - 3. A miracle is a special act of God that interrupts the normal course of events.
 - 4. Miracles are an effect that could never occur by adherence to the known laws of nature.
 - 5. By definition, miracles are rare compared to naturally occurring events.
 - 6. Hypothetically at least, God could use miracles to confirm which books were authored by Him.
 - 7. Likewise, the absence of miracles could reveal which ones were not from Him.
 - 8. If this premise is true, then miracles can confirm the authenticity of the message.
 - 9. The working hypothesis is that a miracle is an act of God used to confirm the word of God through a messenger of God.
 - 10. Does God actually work this way?
 - iii. Is the box (the universe) 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 (“In the beginning God created the heaven’s and the earth.”), all other miraculous accounts are easy to accept.
 3. After creation out of nothing, all other miracles would require less of God’s power than one that began everything.
 4. Accepting the reality of an all-powerful, all-knowing and eternally existent God means also accepting that He can perform miracles whenever He chooses.
- iv. Objections to miracles by skeptics
1. Objection #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 a faulty logical premise:
 - 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 when compared to an all-powerful God?
 - d. Creation itself demonstrates that natural laws are not immutable.
 - i. Something doesn’t come from nothing.
 - ii. When God created the heavens and the earth, He suspended the natural laws of the universe.
 - iii. 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.
 - iv. This is why atheists have countered creation accounts by hypothesizing panspermia, multiverses, and dark matter/dark energy.
 - v. However, these materialistic views still require an unimaginably powerful means of overcoming “immutable” natural laws.
 - e. Natural laws can be described intellectually, but they cannot dictate how the universe works (descriptive, not prescriptive).
 - f. Intelligent beings have proven that natural laws can be overpowered. Gravity is regularly overpowered by planes or rockets to name just a few.
 2. Objection #2: the assumption that reported 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 iii above is the main failure of Hume’s premise and 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 rather than reject it.
- ii. The origin of life, according to Darwinists, was a rare event that has only happened once in the past 4.5 billion years on their clock. Many who claim to be wise and intelligent believe in this rare event that has never been repeated.
 - 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 surely even Hume knew that he was born only once.
- c. Exposing the problems with naturalistic thinking.
- i. It confuses believability with possibility. If we are eyewitnesses to a rare event, even a verifiable miracle, should we not believe it?
 - 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 of their empirical verifiability.
 - 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.
 1. He admits that miracles are rare,
 2. Then he rules them out precisely because they are rare.
 3. He then refuses to evaluate miracles based on the evidence.
 4. 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 intellectual 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 in the first place.
 - viii. Ultimately, disbelief in miracles is purely a matter of the will to not to accept them.
 - ix. Refusing to look at evidence is not a defensible intellectual position.
 - x. Rejecting even the possibility of miracles is just another means of denying God.
 - xi. If God exists, then He can perform supernatural acts (miracles), and we know that He already has (In the beginning...).
- c. What is a miracle (and what is not)?
- i. Miracles are acts of God that only He can do.
 - ii. Miracles are the results of His actions which cannot be explained by natural laws, natural forces, or anything else in the physical universe.
 - iii. The specific criteria for a miracle, based on General Revelation, are:

1. Supernatural power (Cosmological Argument).
2. Intelligence and purposeful (Teleological Argument).
3. The promotion of good behavior over bad (Moral Law).
- iv. 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 (fog at Normandy).
- v. 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 they are not a suspension of natural laws.
- vi. Psychosomatic
 1. Based on the psychological health of a person, not a supernatural act of God.
 2. The mind can trick the body into greater health, but this is part of nature.
- vii. Anomalies
 1. Unexplained freaks 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 (publicly 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 General Revelation is complete.
 - v. God is not revealing new truths through new messengers today as He did during the 1,500 years when Scripture was being written and confirmed by miracles.
- e. Conclusion: since a theistic God is the most probable explanation for the existence of everything, then miracles, though rare, are possible.

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

- a. Historical references to Christ
 - i. Flavius Josephus (37-100 A.D.), considered the greatest Jewish historian of all time.
 - ii. Josephus served as a historian for the Roman emperor Domitian.
 - iii. He authored the *Antiquities of the Jews* about 93AD.
 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. He 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 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 four times as often as Tiberius Caesar.
- 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 these anti-Christian ancient authors confirm about Jesus:
 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 in less than half a century.
 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 of the first century originals?
 - 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 complete copies.
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. Statistically there is only a minor variance between all of the source evidence, making reconstruction of the original text a simple process for most of the New Testament.
 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 are significant to any degree).
 - b. We can objectively 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 the 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 New Testament storyline 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 the completed texts from 95-100 A.D. and the original writings had to precede the quotations (table 9.1, pg. 236).
- ii. Most, if not all, New Testament writings were written prior to 70AD. None of the authors mention 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! Surely this fact would have been mentioned if they were written later.
- 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. This necessitates that all fourteen of his epistles, Luke, Acts, Mark, and Matthew were completed before his death.
- iv. Some of the New Testament books were written in the 40's and used sources from the 30's meaning they were composed in the same decade that 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. Specifically, Paul told his audience to go ask other known eyewitnesses who would confirm his account of the facts.
- vi. Scholars have identified approximately 40 creeds that began as oral accounts of the Christian faith which would have pre-dated their inclusion in the New Testament writings. These creeds were considered the best means of learning and communicating Christian truth in a predominantly illiterate culture.