

# Session 1 Notes—The Evidence for the Resurrection

Objective: To show that even when we consider the New Testament simply a collection of ancient documents, the known historical facts overwhelmingly support a real, bodily resurrection. No other possible theory of what happened even comes close.

All of Christianity stands or falls on the Resurrection as a real historical event.

“And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless...”

-- 1 Corinthians 15:14-19, 32

Arguments for the best explanation: Historians analyze source data to determine if it is reliable enough that any historical facts can be established beyond doubt. Then, they develop theories that would explain what happened. All of the historical facts must fit any given theory, or the theory must be rejected. Whoever claims a theory bears the burden of proof that all the historical facts fit.

Gary Habermas, Minimal Facts Argument: Analyzed over 2400 of the most critical scholarly works on the resurrection written from 1975 to 2014.

“The approach considers only those data that are so strongly attested historically that they are granted by nearly every scholar who studies the subject, even the rather skeptical ones.” And, “... We simply approach the New Testament as we would any other book in antiquity.”<sup>1</sup> (See end of notes for Gary Habermas’ 12 minimal facts).

Source data is rich and of high integrity. We have the 27 writings that make up the New Testament, along with their 9 writers, but we also have at least 10 additional non-Christian sources to draw from, many of them unfriendly to Christianity.

Five historical facts granted by nearly every scholar:

1. Jesus died by Roman crucifixion.
2. The tomb was found empty just a few days later.
3. The disciples believed that he rose from the dead and appeared to them.
4. Paul, an enemy, was converted due to what he believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.
5. James, a skeptic, was converted due to what he believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004), 44-45.

Possible Theories: (Numbers are the facts that do not fit that theory)

1. Legend (2,3,4,5): The Resurrection is simply a fabrication that was made up and evolved over a long period of time, to try to vindicate a leader long since dead, or validate the teachings of Jesus and his claims.
  - If the resurrection was an embellishment that appeared over time, it would mean that the original story told by the disciples did not include resurrection. But their claims clearly do include it.
2. Disciples lied or stole the body (3,4,5): Conspiracy theory. Jesus' disciples went to his tomb and stole his body, then lied.
  - Doesn't explain appearances. How many would have to be involved in lying about an appearance?
  - James and Paul wouldn't be convinced only by a missing body. They would suspect foul play.
3. Someone other than the disciples stole the body (3,4,5):
  - Jews or Romans? This would not be in their interest if they wanted to stop Christianity.
  - Somebody else? An empty tomb does not account for anybody's belief that they had seen the risen Jesus.
  - Again, a missing body would not have convinced Paul, an enemy, or James, a skeptic. They would have suspected foul play.
4. Wrong or Unknown tomb (3,4,5): The witnesses went to the wrong tomb, or the body of Jesus was thrown into a common pit grave unknown to the disciples. Perhaps his body was eaten by wild dogs.
  - This theory assumes a kind of collective amnesia on the part of all the Jewish and Roman authorities as to what happened to the body.
  - Again, a missing body is not enough to convince anyone of a Resurrection, and does not account for belief that the risen Jesus had been seen.
5. Apparent Death (1,3,4,5): Jesus didn't really die on the cross but fell into a coma and survived. The cold air and spices in the tomb resuscitated him.
  - Not reasonable, considering the nature of a Roman scourging and crucifixion.
  - He would have terribly crippling, mutilating wounds. His disciples would not believe he came back from the dead, but would need to hide him and get medical care.
6. Hallucination (1,2,3, 4,5): When the disciples, James, and Paul claimed they saw the risen Jesus, they had actually only seen hallucinations.
  - Science tells us that multiple people don't hallucinate the same thing.
  - Why would an enemy, Paul, or James, a skeptic, hallucinate Jesus?
  - The answer that "we'll never know" simply walks away, but the evidence demands an explanation.
7. Jesus had a twin, or imposter (2,3,4,5): Jesus died and was buried, but shortly afterwards his long lost identical twin brother or another imposter emerged on scene and was worshiped as the risen Christ.
  - This misses with the empty tomb. The tomb could have been checked.
  - Wouldn't people notice a difference behavior, speech, or dialect?
  - An imposter could be easily tested.
8. A Substitute took Jesus' place on the cross (1,2,3,4,5).
  - Can so many witnesses to the resurrection be wrong?
  - Doesn't explain the empty tomb.

- Doesn't explain the appearances. Jesus had wounds his disciples could see.
9. Existential or Spiritual Resurrection (2,3,4,5): Jesus rose from the dead not really in history, but only in our hearts (Existential). Or, Jesus' physical body did not rise from the dead. Instead, he rose from the dead as a spirit (Spiritual).
- What about the empty tomb? That could have been checked.
  - For existential resurrection, what about the appearances?
  - Jesus was not a non-physical spirit. His disciples were convinced he rose from the dead because they touched him and ate with him.
10. Jesus Was an Alien (all facts fit): Like Star Trek. The body on the cross was a very realistic android or robot. It was later exchanged by transporter or teleportation by a cloaked (or hidden) space ship for the real living alien Jesus after it appeared to be dead. All facts fit.
- By proper definition, Jesus *was* an alien—he had access to the Father's power.
  - But this is too easy. What is the evidence? How do you know *I'm* not an alien. Maybe *all* of us are.
11. Bodily Resurrection (all facts fit): Jesus actually rose physically from the grave as claimed by the disciples and the rest of the early church. All the facts fit.

Only the real bodily Resurrection is the best explanation. In fact, no other theory even comes close. It stands our far and above any other possible theory.

Objection: Science has proven that dead bodies don't come back to life.

Answer: True. Dead bodies don't come back to life *naturally*. But that is not the claim. The claim is that God supernaturally raised Jesus from the dead, in other words, performed a miracle. Every one must admit that if it's possible that God exists, miracles are possible. Why not put the evidence on the table for evaluation?

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Reference: Gary Habermas' 12 historical facts granted by nearly every scholar:

1. Jesus died by Roman crucifixion.
2. Jesus was buried, most likely in a private tomb.
3. After Jesus' death, his disciples were discouraged, bereaved, and despondent, having lost hope.
4. Jesus' tomb was found empty just a few days after his death and burial.
5. The disciples had experiences that they believed were actual appearances of the risen Jesus.
6. Due to their experiences with what they claimed was the risen Jesus, the disciples' lives were transformed. They were even 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 and buried shortly before.
9. The gospel message centered on the preaching of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the church was born and grew.
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 after Jesus' death, Saul of Tarsus (Paul) became a Christian believer due to an experience that he also believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.

# Session 2 Notes—Is the Bible From God?

Objective: To provide evidence that: (1) The New Testament accurately describes events of the first century, and (2) that the Bible is inspired by God. This would mean the Biblical worldview is true, and anything opposed to it is false.

A. Is the Bible historically accurate? To investigate, we'll look at two questions.

1. Is our New Testament an accurate copy of the original documents written down in the first century?

- We don't have the originals anymore, which is the case with all other documents from that period, because the originals were composed with fragile materials.
- Using the science of textual criticism<sup>1</sup> scholars use copies of the originals (called manuscripts) to reconstruct the original writings. The more copies, and copies made soon after the originals, the better, to have higher confidence in accuracy.
- The total number of Greek New Testament manuscripts is over 5000. When including other languages, nearly 25,000. This far and away exceeds the number of manuscripts of any other writing from that timeframe. The closest we have is Homer's Iliad, with 1800 copies.
- Having many copies protects against mistakes or intentional, fraudulent changes.
- Claims of large numbers of errors are not well founded. Most of the "errors" are really variations in spelling or synonyms. Very few involve meaning, and those are noted in our modern Bibles. None affect any Christian doctrine. The result is 99.5% accuracy and alignment among manuscripts.

2. Did the original documents tell the truth?

There are many lines of evidence to support that the original documents told the truth.<sup>2</sup> Here are 3 of them:

- They were written soon after the events, so could not contain legend.
  - Most of the New Testament books were written within 30-40 years of the events. This is significant because it means the narratives and claims could be verified or refuted by many eyewitnesses.

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<sup>1</sup> Textual criticism is not to be confused with so-called "higher criticism," which is the agenda of those who try to undermine the authority of the Bible as God's Word.

<sup>2</sup> This evidence is described well in the book *I Don't Have Enough Faith To Be An Atheist*, by Frank Turek and Norman Geisler.

-- There wasn't enough time for legend to replace real history. That takes 2-3 generations. Those who would desire to revise history cannot get away with it while eyewitnesses are still alive.

- The writers challenge their audiences (some of whom were hostile to Christianity) to verify the writers' claims by checking with eyewitnesses.
- At least 10 non-Christian sources confirm the accounts in the New Testament.

Conclusion: We have excellent evidence that our New Testament accurately describes events of the first century: (1) many early manuscripts, (2) the fact that the originals were written very soon after the events, (3) challenges to audiences, and (4) non-Christian writings that confirm the New Testament accounts.

#### A note on Miracles:

- If God exists then we must admit that miracles are possible. In fact if there is just a *possibility* that God exists, then we must admit that miracles are possible.
- Most people who don't believe that miracles are possible believe this because of an anti-supernatural bias. This bias is a carryover from Enlightenment thinking. But why not allow the evidence on the table and evaluate it in an objective way?

B. Is the Bible from God? There are at least 3 reasons to believe so.

1. The Unity of the Bible. The Bible contains 66 books written by about 40 authors, in 3 languages, over the course of 1500 years, yet contains one unifying theme: The redemption of mankind through Jesus Christ. Could there be something supernatural about this?
2. Old Testament prophecy concerning Jesus. Dozens of prophecies about Jesus concerning the place and manner of his birth, aspects of his life, betrayal, death by crucifixion, etc., were written hundreds of years before his life. How can this be possible?
3. The Bible is from God because Jesus told us that it is. Here is the argument:
  - Jesus claimed to be God and predicted his own resurrection. (We know what he claimed and taught due to the historical reliability of the New Testament). John 8:58, John 2:19, Matt. 12:40.
  - The Resurrection confirms Jesus' claims. (We have an objective investigation into the Resurrection according to the Minimal Facts Argument by Gary Habermas.) Acts 2:22.
  - Whatever Jesus taught is true. (Why would God raise up a liar?)
  - Jesus confirmed authority of the Old Testament, and promised the coming of the New Testament. Matt. 5:17, John 10:35, John 17:17, Matt. 22:29.
  - Therefore, the Bible is from God.

This is an example of inductive reasoning, when we follow the evidence where it leads. Is it a circular argument? No, because we are not starting in the same place we ended.

This leads to the doctrine of Inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16), which is followed by Inerrancy: That the original documents were wholly free from error, because God cannot make a mistake. (Recall that we now know that any copy errors that have been identified in the manuscripts are negligible.)

C. What would this mean?

- It means that everything in the Bible is true, and anything opposed to it is false.
- It puts us on the threshold of a spectacular opportunity to study the Bible, to understand where we came from, and the nature of reality around us. We are given a truthful worldview, and an understanding of God's story, and ours.
- It is also an opportunity to understand who God is. As we study God and his attributes (this is Theology), we find again and again that he is Faithful, Truthful, Merciful, Holy, Loving, and Good, among so many others.
- Why would anyone want to live a life apart from God? Perhaps due, in many cases, to a simple misunderstanding of who God is.

# Session 3 Notes—Why Does God Allow Evil?

Objective: To show that God’s character of goodness, love, justice, etc., survives the problem of evil.

Many through the ages have abandoned their belief in God because of the presence of evil, pain, and suffering in their lives or in the lives of those close to them. Examples: Charles Darwin, Mark Twain, Ted Turner.

The problem of evil has two elements to it:

- The intellectual problem—when Skeptics debate Christians over the character of God.
- The personal problem—when people have been hurt by tragedy and ask why.

The intellectual problem of evil—This is often a family of different questions<sup>1</sup>:

1. Why would a good God allow evil and suffering if he has the power to stop it?
  - Skeptics claim a contradiction in the character of God. If evil and suffering occur, then either God is not all good, or he does not have enough power to stop it.
  - God loves us, and desires that we love him, and each other. But a forced love is no love at all, so he gave us a very good but powerful gift—the freedom to choose. That is, free will.
  - Much of the suffering we see around the world is a result of people making choices out of their own free will that terribly harm other people, and even themselves.
  - God knew what could happen but it was a risk he was willing to take, because our freedom is that important to him.
  - God didn’t create evil, but he created the potential for it when he gave us free will. The evil that we create out of our own actions is called Moral Evil.
2. What about diseases and natural disasters, when it isn’t somebody’s fault?
  - God warned Adam and Eve that if they ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die.
  - When Adam and Eve did this, sin and all of its consequences – disease, violence, death – entered into all of creation. This is known as The Fall, and is the cause of what is called “Natural Evil.” (Rom. 5:12).
  - God cursed the ground and banished Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden, ensuring that they and their descendants would die. (Gen. 3:17, Rom. 8:20). There was no specification given on how they would die. I could be from any kind of accident or disease.
  - So most Natural Evil is a result of the Fall, when God cursed the ground. Some natural evil can be caused by Satan and his demons, as seen in Job when Satan kills Job’s children with strong winds.
3. Why would God let a child die?
  - God is not happy with anybody’s death, including children. But he needs to let natural laws and the consequences of the actions of free creatures play out.
  - God cares greatly for children. Scripture indicates they are part of the Kingdom, and there seems to be an age of accountability. (Matt. 18:6, 10, Luke 18:16-17, Deut. 1:39).
  - We can rest in God’s character, which we know includes love and mercy, regarding the fate of children.

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<sup>1</sup> An excellent treatment of this subject and the different questions can be found in the new book *Why Does God Allow Evil?* by Dr. Clay Jones, Associate Professor of Christian Apologetics at Biola University.

4. Why doesn't God just stop the car crash or the cancer?
  - Sometimes he does. When he doesn't, we can't know why.
  - But we can rest in God's character: He is good, and he is sovereign over all things. This means that if he allows us to enter into a period of suffering, it is because he has a purpose to it, for the good.
  - Sometimes the purpose may be because God has a plan for us help others in the future who will through the same thing. (2 Cor. 1:4).
  - Sometimes God may allow suffering for the purpose of getting our attention.
5. Why do bad things happen to good people?
  - We need to understand the extent of human depravity due to sin. All of us have a sin nature inherited from Adam and Eve. We confuse "good" with "nice."
  - The difficult truth is that there really are *no* good people.
  - Nobody ever asks why bad things happen to bad people. When we realize that there are no truly good people, the question goes away.
6. Why is eternity in hell fair?
  - Nowhere does scripture tell us that the occupants of hell will be repentant. (Rev. 16: 8-11).
  - Those who ultimately seek their will over God's, will prefer hell over God's Kingdom.
  - If many go to hell, it should be a reminder of the horrors of sin.
7. What about the person who hasn't heard of Jesus?
  - God has revealed himself to all people through nature, and through our consciences, a built-in moral compass. (Rom. 1:20, Rom. 2:15).
  - God will ensure that those who would repent will have the opportunity to hear the gospel. (Deut. 4:29).
  - Christianity has spread throughout the world more than many people realize.<sup>2</sup>
8. Why doesn't God just destroy evil?
  - We know that one day God will *defeat* evil—the Bible tells us the end of the story.
  - Why he hasn't done it yet, we do not know. Probably because there are more people yet to live whom he intends to save. (2 Pet. 3:9, 15).
9. Why doesn't God make himself more real?
  - If God revealed himself too clearly, then it would interfere with our freedom to choose.
  - It would compel some people toward an unwanted belief and result in feigned love all over the world.
10. In the end, why does God allow evil?
  - He is preparing us for the Kingdom by teaching us the horror of rebellion against him.
  - What better way to teach free creatures the horror of sin, but to allow them to experience the consequences of their actions? (Ez. 20:39-44).

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<sup>2</sup> Interesting data regarding the spread of Christianity around the world throughout history can be found in *Their Blood Cries Out: The Worldwide Tragedy of Modern Christians Who Are Dying for Their Faith*, by Paul Marshall and Lela Gilbert.

Conclusion: God's character of goodness, love, and mercy survives the problem of evil.

What then do we as Christians do about evil? We're called to fight evil with good. We pray for each other, and we help one another through times of suffering. (Rom. 12:21, 9, Eph. 6:13, Rom 12:17, Micah 6:8, 1 Tim. 2:1-2, Rom 12:14).

### The personal problem of evil

When people are grieving:

- Very often the first essential needs include: hugs, and meals.
- They do *not* need us to provide "the answers." They already know the answers, or it doesn't matter.
- They do *not* need us to tell them we know how they feel. We don't know how they feel.
- It is *not* all right, nor should they try to believe it is all right. The suffering on earth, and death, was never meant to be a part of God's original creation.
- Real compassion and caring is what matters. It isn't necessary to say much of anything if there isn't anything to say. Simply being with a person in pain can mean a great deal to them.

Final Conclusion: Our response to the pain and suffering we see in the world should be to *hate sin*.

Evil, pain, suffering, and even death are *not* okay. They were never meant to be a part of God's creation. But we know that one day God will restore all of creation back to the way it was always meant to be—a place completely absent of sin and all of its consequences. We know that those who trust Jesus will be made right with God, and will be there. Our hope is in our destiny in heaven with God who loves us. And eternity in heaven will dwarf into insignificance all of the suffering we experience here on earth.

## Recommended Resources

### Books:

*When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook of Christian Evidences.* Norman Geisler and Ronald Brooks.  
*I Don't Have Enough Faith To Be An Atheist.* Norman Geisler and Frank Turek.  
*The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus.* Gary Habermas and Michael Licona.  
*The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict.* Josh McDowell.  
*77 FAQs About God And The Bible, Your Toughest Questions Answered.* Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell.  
*Questioning the Bible: 11 Major challenges o the Bible's Authority.* Jonathan Morrow.  
*The Case for Easter: A Journalist Investigate the Evidence for the Resurrection.* Lee Strobel.  
*The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus.* Lee Strobel.  
*The Case for the Real Jesus: A Journalist Investigates Current Attacks on the Identity of Christ.* Lee Strobel.  
*Why Does God Allow Evil?* Clay Jones. (New, and available on Amazon August 2017.)  
*Miracles, The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts.* Craig Keener.

### DVD movies:

*The Case for Faith and The Case for Christ* (with Lee Strobel)  
*God's Not Dead, God's Not Dead 2*

### Free Home Study Materials:

Apologetics Press: <https://www.apologeticspress.org/homestudycourses.aspx>

### Blog:

Dr. Clay Jones, Professor, Biola University, on why God allows evil (and other topics):  
<http://www.clayjones.net>

### Web Sites:

Sean McDowell: <http://seanmcdowell.org>  
William Lane Craig: <http://www.reasonablefaith.org>  
Greg Koukl: <http://www.str.org>  
The One Minute Apologist: <http://www.videos.oneminuteapologist.com>  
Frank Turek: <http://crossexamined.org>  
Apologetics Press: <https://www.apologeticspress.org>  
Christian Research Institute: <http://www.equip.org>  
Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry: <https://carm.org>  
Creation Ministries International: <http://creation.com>