



Doubts You Don't Have To Have

For most of 30 years I only went to church at Christmas & Easter...when forced to by family. I wasn't sure how to describe my faith, but believer is not the word I would have used. I couldn't quite call myself an atheist & didn't think I had enough faith to call myself an agnostic. I had way too many questions & not enough answers. I settled for calling myself a skeptic not that I told anyone that. Didn't want to argue.

Now I think calling people atheists & christian or believer & unbeliever is too black & white. I think most of us live in the gray, messy middle between 100% belief & 100% doubt. I used to define faith as the absence of doubt. Now I define faith as belief in spite of doubt. What is doubt really? Isn't it just unanswered questions? Does that mean there aren't any good answers out there? No. I've collected answers to some of the questions that used to bother me here in this simple online FAQ.

Click the question, if you want to see the short answer. There is also often a link for a longer answer. If you prefer to do your own research, a list of my favorite books is at the end.

Why believe in life after death?

If Jesus could come back from the dead, so can we. Valid answer, unless you don't believe in the Resurrection. I address the Resurrection elsewhere, but it's a big topic.

For this question I think a better short answer is verifiable near death experiences. People often have life threatening conditions like heart attacks & experience odd things while they are near death. Sometimes it can be shown that these experiences are not hallucinations. The person hears or sees something that can be confirmed after the person is revived. If they were hallucinations, they would have no basis in reality. [More...](#)

How can we trust the Bible after all that copying & translating over the years?

The short answer on translations is new translations are based on the oldest greek & hebrew text. They are not translations of translations of translations. A difference in wording between modern translations like the Lord's Prayer in Mt. 6:12 (...forgive us our debts vs. trespasses or sins), means translators disagree on what phrase best expresses the original idea. The short answer on copying is that we can compare copies & see where they differ. There are no variations that affect the basic story of Jesus' life, death & resurrection. [More...](#)





How do we know there is any truth in the gospels?

The gospels include embarrassing details like Jesus not acting like the divine Messiah he is proclaimed to be. Women find the empty tomb, but women couldn't be witnesses in Jewish courts of law. Liars making up stories wouldn't make up difficult to explain details like that. The writers were being honest about what they saw & heard. [More...](#)

Why would God become human?

To resolve the conflict between 2 of his greatest promises: Justice & Mercy. We all know it's wrong to involuntarily punish someone else for our sins. Yet we not only desire mercy for ourselves, but also want someone else to pay for the wrongs done to us. God's solution is to voluntarily take on the punishment for us thru Jesus' atoning death on the cross. [More...](#)

Why can't God just forgive our sins?

My mother forgave me for wrecking her car in high school, but the debt didn't go away. Someone still had to pay for the repairs & I didn't have that kind of money. There are consequences to our sin that forgiveness can't fix. Only God can pay for our sins & give us mercy at the same time he gives justice to those wronged.

Why believe Jesus is God?

When we say Jesus Christ, we are saying Jesus is the Christos, Greek for Messiah. Isaiah 7:14 says the Messiah will be known as Immanuel which means God With Us.

Why believe Jesus is the Messiah?

Jesus predicted his own death & resurrection in numerous passages: Mt 16:21, 17:23, Mk 9:31, Lk 9:22, 18:32-33, 24:7. They all say he will be killed & rise again on the 3rd day. Suicidal people can predict their death, but a resurrection is a lot harder to pull off.

Why believe the Resurrection or any miracles are possible?

It all depends on whether or not God exists. If God exists & could create the universe & everything in it, then he knows science way better than we do. He would be capable of amazing feats we could not understand whether he used scientific principles we don't know or his supernatural powers. In short, you can't rule out the possibility of all miracles till you can prove that God does not exist. Science gives us many reasons to suggest that God exists. There are examples below in "*How can any scientist believe in God's existence?*" with book recommendations if this topic is of interest.





Why choose Christianity over Judaism, Islam or any other religion?

Paul himself answers this one in 1 Cor. 15:14 & 17: If Jesus has not been raised from the dead, then you are still in your sins & your faith is futile. 1 Cor. 15:20 contains the quintessential prototype for "He is Risen Indeed". He cites a list of Jesus' appearances earlier in 1 Cor. 15:3-8. Only Christianity makes a claim that you can check out yourself to see if it's true. The others pretty much tell you to live their way for your whole life & if you've been good enough maybe just maybe good things will happen after you die. In Christianity, you are saved by Christ's atoning death on the cross, not by your works.

Why believe in the Resurrection?

Simplest case in my opinion is based on 2 main reasons:

1. *The disciples 100% believed they had seen the risen Jesus.
Shown by their willingness to suffer & die for their faith.
Liars make poor martyrs & they would have known if they were lying.*
2. *Crucifixion victims die by suffocation when they pass out from exhaustion.
Passing out on the cross is like passing out underwater.
Stop moving, stop breathing, die in the time it takes to drown.*

The many objections are dealt with in other questions. Or read [full post](#).

How do we know Jesus was a real person & not a myth?

- There are close to 40 references to Jesus in early writings outside the Bible.
- Look up the non-christian historians Tacitus & Josephus.
- They write around the end of the 1st & start of the 2nd century.
- ~ Same time period John writes his gospel, the book of Revelation & pastoral letters
- Tacitus was a roman senator who describes Nero torturing & killing Christians
- after Rome burned around 60 AD. Peter & Paul die in these persecutions
- Josephus was a traitorous Jewish general who helped the Romans destroy
- the Jerusalem temple around 70 AD. He reports the death of James the Brother
- of Jesus by the Sanhedrin around 62 AD
- Tacitus & Josephus are not important for confirming the Resurrection.
- *They are important for confirming that Jesus was executed by crucifixion*
- *on the order of Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius.*

Saying Jesus never lived, because we doubt the Resurrection is like saying John F. Kennedy never lived, because we don't like theories about who killed him. [More...](#)





Could the Resurrection be a borrowed myth?

In older myths, no god dies for the sins of mankind & rises on the 3rd day to prove their divinity.

Earlier stories are attempts to explain the seasons & the mystery of plants dying off in the fall & springing back up after winter. The story of Persephone & Demeter or Isis & Osiris are examples of this.

Centuries after the crucifixion, there are myths like the Resurrection of Jesus, but Christianity could not borrow from stories that didn't exist yet. It's like saying the assassination of Abraham Lincoln was a myth based on the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The time order is backwards. [More...](#)

Could the Resurrection be a legend added later to the New Testament?

What is the difference between myths & legends?

- Myths are purely made up.
- Legends based on kernel of truth with embellishments.
- Legends risk being exposed by living eyewitnesses who can contradict them.

Not possible for the Resurrection to be a legend for 2 reasons.

1. Stories occur too soon - within the lifetimes of the eyewitnesses.
2. Too many early written copies in existence for the manuscripts to be altered later.

Crucifixion occurs ~30-33 AD. April 5, 30 AD or April 1, 33 AD from lunar cycles & dates Pontius Pilate in power.¹

Within ~5 years of the Crucifixion, Paul visits Jerusalem to compare notes with the disciples on what they are teaching about Jesus. He meets with Peter & James Brother of Jesus. This produces a list of eyewitnesses to the Risen Jesus & it ends up written down in 1 Cor. 15:3-7.

¹³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ¹⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ¹⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ¹⁶After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ¹⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ¹⁸and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born."

There are individual appearances to Peter, Paul & James along with group appearances to the disciples & also to a crowd 500 or more people. When this was written, many eyewitnesses were still alive that could be questioned about the appearances & deny them if untrue. 1





Corinthians was written before Paul's death in the early 60's AD & the meeting occurred in the late 30's.

Second there are too many early copies (~6000) of the greek New Testament for the stories to have been added centuries later. With early manuscripts in other languages, the number of copies skyrockets to ~25,000. It's way too many manuscripts to find hundreds of year later in order to modify the contents. It's like saying Time Magazine could deny Hitler was the 1938 Man of the Year by replacing the issue today. There are too many old copies to find & fix.

[More...](#)

1. [Colin J. Humphreys & W. G. Waddington, "Dating the Crucifixion", Nature 306, 743-746, 1983.](#) Note dates of 4/7/30 and 4/3/33 in the paper are Julian calendar dates rather than the modern Gregorian dates listed above.

How do we know Jesus claimed to be divine?

How do we know that Jesus wasn't just a good teacher?

- In the Gospels Jesus refers to himself as Son of Man around 75 times.
- Dn 7:13-14 refers to the Messiah as the Son of Man.
- No one else uses this title for Jesus in the New Testament. It's only used about 5 times outside the gospels.
- In Mk 14:61-64, Jesus uses Son of Man coming on the clouds & sitting with God. The high priest tears his clothes, calls it blasphemy & that is why he is sentenced to death.

[More...](#)

How do we know the body was really missing?

- All 4 gospels say Jesus buried in tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.
- Mk 15:43 refers to Joseph as a prominent Sanhedrin member.
- Sanhedrin could easily deny the tomb location or Joseph as a member if untrue.
- The Sanhedrin desperately wanted to stop Christianity from spreading.
- All they needed to do was point out the location of the body. Sanhedrin didn't deny the body was missing or the tomb location.
- Mt 28:11-15, Justin Martyr & Tertullian report the Sanhedrin said the disciples stole the body.

[More...](#)





How do we know the disciples didn't steal the body & lie about Jesus' resurrection?

Just look at their deaths. Liars make poor martyrs:

- Stephen is stoned in Acts 7. Not one of the 12 but shows danger early on before Paul's conversion to Christianity.
- James Brother of John is beheaded by order of Herod Agrippa in Acts 12. No later than 44 AD when Herod Agrippa dies.
- James Brother of Jesus is stoned around 62 AD by order of Sanhedrin council according to Josephus.
- Tacitus reports Nero's persecution of Christians after Rome burns in early 60's AD.
- Paul beheaded in those persecutions according to Eusebius around mid-60's.
- Peter executed then too according to Clement of Rome, Tertullian & Origen.

Why would skeptics like Paul & James Brother of Jesus lie just to die? *Most of us would lie to avoid dying!* Paul gave up power & went from killing Christians to dying as one. Both claimed they had met with the risen Jesus. You can argue Jesus didn't really rise from the dead, but their deaths show they 100% believed they had seen the risen Jesus. *Again liars make poor martyrs martyrs & they would have known if they were lying!* [More...](#)

How do we know the disciples weren't hallucinating or hypnotized?

These explanations don't work for the large group appearances.
Only some are susceptible to hypnosis in a large group.
People don't share hallucinations. Each sees something different.
Plus there would still be a body in the undeniable empty tomb. [More...](#)





How do we know Jesus didn't pass out on the cross & revive in the tomb?

Crucifixion victims have to push/pull upward to get each breath.
Victim dies from suffocation due to exhaustion.¹

***Passing out on the cross is like passing out underwater.
Stop moving, stop breathing, die in the time it takes to drown.***

Jesus 'passes out' first. He's on the cross for hours afterwards.
Jews want burial by sundown to avoid work on sabbath.
They need permission from Pontius Pilate.
Soldiers break the legs of the others later to speed up death.
Jesus already appears dead, so he's speared to verify it.
These soldiers kill for a living & know what death looks like:

- Body gets pale after blood pools in the lowest parts.
- Body gets cold.
- Body stiffens in rigor mortis.

These soldiers died by crucifixion if a victim survived.
It's a great motive not to get sloppy in your job. [More...](#)

1. [William D. Edwards; Wesley J. Gabel; Floyd E. Hosmer, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ", JAMA, 255, 1455-1463, 1986.](#)

What books do you recommend for learning more about Jesus & the Resurrection?

I'd probably recommend #3 if pressed for just one, but here are my top 4 favorites on Jesus & the Resurrection that you can pick from:

1. [Strobel, Lee, "The Case For Christ", Zondervan, 1998.](#)
The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel is the book that helped me learn to doubt my doubts. Reads like a mystery novel & kept me turning pages till ~3am to finish it. Details Strobel's faith journey from atheist to believer. Older, but often listed as a top 10 book in Christian Apologetics.
2. [Strobel, Lee, "The Case For the Real Jesus", Zondervan, 2007.](#) Like Case For Christ updated with some minor material removed & newer stuff added.
3. [Wallace, J Warner, "Cold Case Christianity", David C. Cook, 2013](#) Also a great read. Wallace is an atheist who became a christian by applying his skills as a cold case homicide detective to the gospel stories of the resurrection.
4. [Habermas, Gary R., Licona, Michael R., "The Case For the Resurrection of Jesus", Kregel, 2004](#) Short, dense with lots of details, footnotes & references, but less readable for the casual skeptic. Great book for defenders of the Resurrection, though.





How can any scientist believe in God's existence?

I used to think a scientist like me couldn't believe in God, because there was no evidence for his existence. Now I can point to the Big Bang, the fine tuning of the universe, the complexity of DNA, the origin of life among others as areas that suggest God exists. They don't prove Jesus is God but they do point toward a God as the creator of the universe. [More...](#)

Doesn't the Holocaust prove that God does not exist?

We can apply this argument to anything violent that happens whether it is the Holocaust or someone going postal in a school, mall or workplace. The problem with the logic is that God didn't pull the trigger. A person did. In the case of the Holocaust, it was a group of people. [More...](#)

Is Jesus the only way?

I liked this [column by Steve Ridgell](#) on John 14:6. If I were a pastor, I could preach a whole sermon on it. Most people seem to think we have to fall down on our knees and accept Jesus get to heaven. I prefer to think of it as the best way, but not the only way. [More...](#)

*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.
For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

Matthew 7:7-8

