

MY ANSWER TO AN ATHEIST

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If you talk to people about the Lord, eventually, you will meet someone who will bring up the issue of atheism. In my experience, not all of these people are alike. Some have given the subject a lot of thought and are committed atheists. They are “dyed-in-the-wool” atheists. From there, there are varying degrees of atheists. Some say they are atheists, but frankly, they have not really given the subject a lot of thought. Then there are those who are flirting with the idea. Regardless of how much they are involved in atheism, what do you say to an atheist?

The Bible’s Position I have an answer I give to an atheist, but before I discuss that, let me point out that the Bible does not attempt to prove there is a God. It *assumes* there is a God. It begins with that assumption. The first verse of the first book of the Bible simply declares, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1). There is no passage in all of the Scripture that says here is the proof for God. In fact, the Scripture declares, “The fool has said in his heart, there is no God (Psalm 14:1). As far as the Bible is concerned, the fact that there is a God is so self-evident it is foolish not to believe in His existence.

Well, if the Bible doesn’t try to prove there is a God, what do *we* say to an atheist?

My Answer I begin by explaining that I cannot prove there is a God. Proof demands that something can be repeated. For example, suppose I said I could create an explosion in a jar by pouring two different liquids into it and you said, “Prove it.” To prove that, I would simply take a jar, pour two liquids into it, and show you the explosion. I cannot prove God’s existence like that: I cannot pour God into a jar.

My position is that I have two presuppositions. I cannot prove these two presuppositions, but there is evidence for them. The first presupposition is that there is a God, and the second is that He has revealed Himself.

There is a God

Things don’t just happen; they have a cause. There are three cause/effect arguments for the existence of God. These three “effects” demand a cause.

Cosmological Argument The physical universe is an effect that must have had a cause. If there is a painting, there must be a painter. If there is a building, there must be a builder. There is a universe. Thus, there must be a God.

Paul used this argument in Romans 1:20 when he said, “For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead so that they are without excuse.” The invisible things are seen! How can that be? Paul answers, “By the things that are made.” Creation reveals a Creator. Look at the world and see the sun, stars, sea, moon, mountain, and man. That indicates a sun-maker, a star-maker, a sea-maker, a moon-maker, a mountain-maker, and a man-maker (see also Psalm 19:1; Isaiah 40:26; Acts 14:17).

Aristotle used this argument. He said that a given motion must be caused by another motion, which was caused by still another motion, *ad infinitum*, but infinite regression is impossible.

There must be a first cause. There must be a motion that was caused by something that did not move—an unmoved mover or an unmoved first mover. That is God!

If God is the cause of creation, the massiveness of creation indicates just how powerful He is (Romans 1:20). If it were possible to bore a hole in the sun and pour in something to fill it up, it would take 1,200,000 earths and 4,300,000 moons to fill the cavity, and our sun is small! Some are five times larger than ours. Furthermore, there are untold millions of suns in the Milky Way. Alpha Centauri, our closest neighbor, is so far distant that if we could increase the speed of our rockets four times their present breath-taking rate, it would take us nearly 30,000 years to complete the journey. The universe is a big effect that demands a big cause.

Teleological Argument Design is another effect that requires a cause. Order and design do not just happen. Things go from order to disorder. Order and design indicate some mind or intelligence at work. Does your house or office get more or less orderly if you leave it alone? Design indicates a designer.

There is design in the universe. The earth was “designed” for a creature such as humans to inhabit it. That is obvious from the combination of exceptional features contained in it. Its size is perfect for holding a sufficient atmosphere without being too great to exert too strong a gravitational effect upon life. Scientists have estimated that were the diameter of the earth any smaller, the density of the atmospheric blanket would make the air so thin that in the absence of direct sunlight, sufficient heat would not be retained and intense cold would result. Under such conditions, all forms of animal, as well as human life, would perish. The water of the earth would freeze to such depths and even the lowest forms of life would be extinguished. On the other hand, if the diameter of the earth were even the smallest bit greater (a matter of inches), the air would become correspondingly dense. Under these conditions, more solar heat would be absorbed and retained, which would be insufferable. The atmosphere contains enough oxygen to support life, yet not enough to permit excessive oxidation. The distance from the sun is unbelievably perfect for the exacting requirements of life. If the earth were any closer or further from the sun, the temperature on its surface would not allow life.

That is only the beginning. The earth turns over at more than 1,000 miles per hour. The moon, meanwhile, is circling the earth at 365 miles per hour, making one complete circle every 27 $\frac{1}{3}$ days. On top of that, the earth, with the moon revolving around it, is revolving around the sun at the rate of 68,400 miles per hour (19 miles per second). It makes one complete revolution every 24 hours and covers approximately 6,000,000 miles a year. The sun is rotating, in the meantime, around another sun (a star called Halcyone) at the speed of 422,000 miles per day. The circumference of these circles is so great that it takes thousands of years to complete one cycle. Why doesn't something get off track and crash into something? What a “fender-bender” that would be! Sir James Jeans, the great astronomer, declared, after scanning the heavens, “The universe seems to have been designed by a pure mathematician.”

The conditions of the earth and, for that matter, our solar system, is an effect that requires an intelligent cause.

Anthropological Argument There is another effect that demands a cause, namely, human beings. The presence of people on this planet not only requires a cause but requires a personal cause. An atheist might argue that nature produced the universe, including humans. Couldn't the universe be its own cause? In the first place, the universe has never been observed doing that. It has never made something out of nothing. Furthermore, something impersonal has never been observed producing anything personal. Impersonal marble never carved a statue, much less created a living creature.

If the cause was not a person, it could never have produced a person. In other words, in the case of humans, the cause was someone, not something. This complex creature, called humans, can love, trust, and hope. That effect necessitates a personal cause.

The universe, design, and humans are effects that require a powerful, intelligent, and personal cause. The existence of a personal God is the only reasonable cause for what exists in the universe.

When I am talking to the average person about this, I do not go into that much detail. I simply hand them my watch and ask, “What do you know because that watch is in your hand? After they tell me such things as the time, the color, etc., I tell them that because that watch exists, I know two things: there is a watchmaker somewhere and he is smarter than I am. Likewise, because there is an orderly physical universe with people in it, there is a Creator who is powerful, intelligent, and personal.

God has Revealed Himself

My second presupposition is that God has revealed Himself. I cannot prove that, but there is evidence for that. Where would you go to find such evidence? The study of God is not done in English class, math class, or PE class. It is the field of religion.

Most World Religions Of the major religions of the world, most do not claim that there is a Creator who has revealed Himself. Hinduism is more of a philosophy than a common set of beliefs. Within it is atheism, monotheism, polytheism, and pantheism. From it comes the notions of reincarnation and karma, but there is no claim that there is a Creator who has revealed Himself.

Buddhism is also more of a philosophy than a religion. In fact, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (online edition) says it is a “nontheistic religion.” Buddha saw suffering and wanted to eliminate it. So, he came up with Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. The truth of suffering is that everything is suffering (birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not getting what one wants is suffering). The truth of the origin of suffering is craving for sensual pleasures, craving for becoming, craving for dis-becoming. The truth of the cessation of suffering is the cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, and non-reliance on it. The truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering is this noble eightfold path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Confucius (551–479 BC) was a Chinese politician and philosopher. His philosophy was personal morality, social relationships, justice, and sincerity. He taught family loyalty, respect for elders, and ancestor worship.

Three World Religions Only three world religions claim that there is a God who has revealed Himself: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Christianity accepts the revelation of Judaism as valid. That leaves Christianity and Islam. If Christianity is true, Islam is not. So, the question becomes, what is the proof of Christianity? The answer is fulfilled prophecy.

The Old Testament contained predictions of the coming of a Messiah and gave details about Him hundreds and hundreds of years before He arrived. Those predictions were fulfilled in the coming of Christ. Thus, fulfilled prophecy is part of the evidence for the divine, rather than the human, origin of the Bible and for the existence of God.

In 925 BC, the Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would be a descendant of David: Second Samuel 7:12 says, “When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish His kingdom.”

About 725 BC, the Old Testament prophesied that He would be born in Bethlehem: Micah 5:2-5 states, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel. And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God; and they shall abide, for now, He shall be great to the ends of the earth; and this One shall be peace.”

Around 680 BC, the Old Testament foresaw that He would be born of a virgin. Isaiah 7:14 says, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”

About 530 BC, the Old Testament foretold the time of His arrival: Daniel 9:25, 26 states, “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. And after sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined.”

The 70 weeks (490 years) will begin (Danial 9:25) from “the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem” (Danial 9:25). Furthermore, from the beginning, “until Messiah the Prince” will be sixty-nine weeks (483 years; see Danial 9:25). After that “Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself” (Danial 9:26). In other words, *this Old Testament passage is giving a date for the coming of the Messiah* after which time He will be “cut off, but not for Himself,” a reference to His death (The Hebrew word translated “cut off” was used of the death penalty; see Leviticus 7:20, etc.). The only question is, when do the 483 years begin? There are four possibilities for dating the beginning of this time frame.

The Decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1)	539 BC
The Decree of Darius (Ezra 6)	519 BC
The Decree of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7)	458 BC
The Decree of Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2)	445 BC

Each of these has been suggested as the beginning of the seventy weeks. Without going into detail, the Decree of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7) in 458 BC is the one that fits all the perimeters. At first glance, it seems that the Decree of Artaxerxes concerned the Temple (Ezra 7:19-20), but it clearly included much more than that. Artaxerxes said they could do “whatever seems good to you,” “according to the will of God” (Ezra 7:18). Later, Ezra thanked God that He “did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem” (Ezra 9:9). Moreover, it fits the coming of Christ perfectly. Calling this the traditional view, Boutflower dates the decree in 457 AD and concludes that 483 years later is 26 AD, the year the Messiah was made manifest to Israel (Boutflower, *In and Around The Book of Daniel*, pp. 186-191). Archer also dates the decree in 457 BC, but he arrives at 25 AD as the time

of Christ ministry. (Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of the Old Testament Introduction*, Jr. p. 387). Wood says the decree was in 458 BC and the 483 years ended in 26 AD because only one year elapsed between 1 BC and 1 AD (Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, pp. 252-54).

All of these predictions, and more, were fulfilled perfectly in the coming of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament pinpointed the time and place of the birth of Jesus Christ hundreds of years before it occurred! There is nothing like this in the history of the world.

Many have argued that the resurrection of Christ is also evidence for the existence of God. The case for the resurrection has been rehearsed and rewritten many times. It consists of three basic arguments: 1) the tomb was empty; 2) the grave clothes were undisturbed; 3) Christ was seen. All of this is objective proof for the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Years ago, Sir Edward Clark said, "As a lawyer, I have made a prolonged study of the evidence for the events of the first Easter day. To me, the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the high court, I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect. The gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class and, as a lawyer, I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate."

Summary: My answer to an atheist is that there is evidence that there is a God who has revealed Himself and the evidence points to the truthfulness of the claims of Christianity.

Atheists cannot conclusively prove that there is no God. They have no evidence. In fact, atheism is illogical. One of the laws of logic is that one cannot prove a universal negative, and atheism is a universal negative. All an atheist really has is questions, theories, and a great deal of faith, faith, which is not supported by evidence.

Bertrand Russell, the famous atheist, admitted he could not prove his position. He said, "As a philosopher, if I were speaking to a purely philosophic audience, I would say I ought to describe myself as an agnostic because I do not think there is a conclusive argument by which one can prove that there is not a God" (Russell, *American Atheist*, August 1978).

On the other hand, it is reasonable to believe that there is a personal God. While it is readily admitted that there is no conclusive proof that there is a God, at the same time, it can be argued that it is *reasonable* to believe that there is. There is evidence, good evidence. There is logic, excellent logic. There is experience, believable experience.

In the final analysis, one must exercise faith. God designed it that way. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." It is one thing to know that there is a God; it is another thing to know the God who is. To know the God who is, one must believe that He is and trust in His Son Jesus Christ. If you believe that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh who died in your place to pay for your sins and who rose from the dead, you can not only know there is a God, you can know Him personally by trusting His Son for the gift of eternal life. The question is, "Will you trust Jesus Christ?"

Atheists get converted. Perhaps, the most well-known example is C. S. Lewis, an atheist who was a professor at Oxford University and Cambridge University. Madelyn Murray O'Hair got prayer kicked out of the public school using her son Bill as a test case. As an adult, Bill became a Christian. As a philosophy major in college, John Warwick Montgomery investigated the claims of Christianity "to preserve intellectual integrity." As a result, he was converted and became a renowned Christian Apologist and Lutheran theologian. Lee Strobel, who has Law degree from Yale, was an avowed atheist. As a result of his wife's conversion, he began investigating the

biblical claims about Christ and became a Christian. Kirsten Powers, a political liberal, was converted from atheism to Christianity. In a 2008 MSNBC interview, Ted Turner stated that he no longer considers himself atheist or agnostic and prays for sick friends, but keeps it short because “I don’t want to load up the wires.”

I have led two people to the Lord, who at the beginning of the conversation said they were atheist.