

Debating Bart Ehrman About the Gospels with Jimmy Akin

(May 31, 2024)

FRANK:

Ladies and gentlemen, are the gospels historically reliable or unreliable? And what do we mean by reliable? Are there different levels of reliability? And how does reliability differ from inerrancy? And what ways could we discover if the gospels are reliable? What should we know about the accepted standards of writing in the first century? And if we conclude the gospels are reliable, how do we deal with the apparent contradictions between the gospel accounts of the resurrection? You know, who got to the tomb first? Where did they go after the resurrection? All that. And can we conclude from history that Jesus rose from the dead?

Well, you know, University of North Carolina professor at Chapel Hill, Bart Ehrman, who says he was a Christian at one point, but is now an atheist, claims that we can't conclude that Jesus rose from the dead, not from history, anyway. He also says we can't conclude the gospels are reliable. He says they're unreliable, although he will admit the gospels have a lot of truth in them. Well, is Bart wrong about the gospels?

And if so, why is he wrong? Well, what we're going to do today is ask the man who debated Bart recently, who, by most accounts, did so very well. His name is Jimmy Akin. Jimmy is the author of several books, hundreds of articles and videos. He's a very skilled debater. He is a senior apologist with Catholic Answers and does a wonderful job of explaining the Catholic position on so many issues.

Now, I'm going to have Jimmy on another time to discuss the differences between Protestants and Catholics. But today we're going to focus in on this excellent debate he had with Bart Ehrman. I think it's going to be very edifying. He's done a wonderful job, and you can see the debate on YouTube. In fact, we'll put it in the show notes. So, here he is, ladies and gentlemen, Jimmy Akin, who gets a round of applause for so calmly debating somebody who really is a good debater. Bart's a good debater. I think you'd admit that, wouldn't you, Jimmy?



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JIMMY:

Oh, yeah, he's a good debater. I watched multiple debates that Bart did in preparation for debating him myself, and he comes across very well. So, I thought strategically about, you know, what I was going to do, and it seemed to come off well. And thank you so much for having me on, Frank. It's a pleasure to be here.

FRANK:

Oh, absolutely. Now, how did this debate come about, and how did you decide on the title?

JIMMY:

Well, so, I work for an organization called Catholic Answers in San Diego. I don't live in San Diego, but that's where they're based. And the chief of operations asked me, he's an apologetics fan. He's read Bart's books, as have I. And he said, do you think you'd ever be interested debating Bart? And I said, sure. And so, he took the lead and made contact with Bart and found out what fees were involved and stuff like that, and we arranged it. In terms of deciding on the topic, I, you know, I wanted to debate gospel reliability, and I proposed that the resolution be the gospels are unreliable because.

FRANK:

Why did you decide that? It's interesting.

JIMMY:

Well, normally skeptics want to debate it the other way around. They wanted to debate, are the gospels reliable? And they want to put the burden on the believer to show that they are reliable. Because in a debate, in a formal debate, whoever takes the affirmative position has the burden of proof. And so, they want to put the burden of proof on the believer. But I think it's healthy to look at issues from both perspectives. It shouldn't always be one way.

And so, I thought, well, we've done the are they the resolution, the gospels are reliable, dozens of times. Let's turn it around for once and put the burden on the skeptic. And so, I wanted him to take the affirmative with the gospels are unreliable just to see how well the skeptic can make their case when it's under cross examination from a believer. It seems only fair to me.

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FRANK:

Right. Right. Now, I guess the question for some is, what do we mean by reliable? And I thought you did a very good job in your opening statement on defining that. We can't go through the whole thing here. Obviously, it's a 20 minute opening statement, but give us the gist of what reliability is. I think you gave it in three levels.

JIMMY:

Yeah. So, one of the things that Bart often does in his debates on this subject is he comes from a fundamentalist background, and so he tends to think in terms not of reliability, but inerrancy. And if you're focused on, is every single thing literally, exactly what happened? You know, what you'd see if you had a video recorder on the events. Then it makes it very easy for the skeptic to pick things apart, because the gospels do include things like paraphrases. You know, Jesus is saying the same thing in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but the words are a little bit different, but it's the same message.

And so, ancient authors were allowed to paraphrase that because they didn't have tape recorders back in the day. So, paraphrase was expected. It's not a sign of unreliability. But if you define reliability in terms of a literal inerrancy on that level, it's easy for the skeptic to say, oh, well, here we've got different words. This is a contradiction. Therefore, they must not be reliable. And, okay, that's not the right way to measure it. Now, I'm a believer in inerrancy in the sense that the Catholic Church understands it, which is that everything that the inspired authors assert is also asserted by the Holy Spirit.

So, if they're making a genuine assertion and claiming this is true, then it is true. But they're, what they're claiming is not that Jesus used these exact words in making the point. You know, you look at the Lord's Prayer in Matthew and Luke, and it's a little different, but the message is the same. And so, that's what the sacred authors are really asserting. Not the particular words, but the message. So, what I did was I, there's also no way to, you know, make a numerical count of every claim in the gospels and verify them, you know, absent having a time machine.

So, what I did was I divided the claims in the gospels into three classes: major claims, intermediate claims, and minor claims. So, major claims are things like, there was this guy named Jesus of Nazareth, and he was the Messiah, and he was crucified, and he rose from the

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dead. Those are all major claims in the gospels. Intermediate claims are a step down from that. So, like, he grew up in Galilee, let's say. That's not as important as he was the messiah. And then minor claims would be like, oh, he had a disciple named Peter. That's lesser.

So, what I then did, so I said, basically, if you get a whole bunch of major claims that are accurate and a whole bunch of intermediate claims that are accurate, and a whole bunch of minor claims that are accurate, then you can conclude that the gospels are reliable unless you can find a comparable number or at least a significant number of counterclaims that you can verify as inaccurate. And so, I knew Bart was going to pick on certain minor claims and say he thinks these are inaccurate. But what I decided to do strategically, because I have no time in this to prove every single point I want to make.

So, I said, I'm going to let Bart prove them for me. So, I got one of his books and actually several of his resources I went through and looked for where he agreed that the gospels are reliable on all these major claims, and all these intermediate claims, and all these minor claims. And I ended up presenting 63 different claims that Bart agreed the gospels were reliable on. And they were in all these different categories. Like there were eleven major claims. He agreed with them.

And so, I said, okay, Bart has proposed a small number of lesser issues that he thinks are inaccurate, but that doesn't compete with the 63 claims. And that wasn't even all of them. But the 63 claims I documented where Bart himself says that the gospels are accurate.

And of course I knew I'm throwing his own words back in his face because that means he can't, it's going to put him in a very difficult spot as a debater because he either has to say I agree, in which he's just conceded the core of my case, or he has to say I've retracted all those views, in which case I get to make Bart fight with himself. So, I put him in this really tough spot, and I did something to compensate for that. But I'll tell you about that on the other side of the break.

FRANK:

All right, we're talking to Jimmy Akin, who had a great debate with Bart Ehrman that you can see on YouTube. It'll be in the show notes. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be

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an Atheist, with me, Frank Turek on the American Family Radio network. We're back in just two minutes. Don't go anywhere, ladies and gentlemen.

I'm up in Brighton, Michigan this weekend at Community Bible Church. We'll be there in the morning services and then in the evening as well to continue I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist and answer your questions. Then the final archaeology session we're doing called 'Digging Up the Bible.' Lesson 22 is going to be streamed live on our YouTube channel and website at 7:30 on this Monday, June 3.

Then I'll be out near Atlanta at Midway Church, a little bit to the east, sorry, west of Atlanta. All the details on our website, that's June 9, same thing. And then Jack Hibbs and myself will be speaking to Calvary Chapel, Chino Hills, Wednesday night, June 12. And I'll be speaking, Lord willing, at the Sunday services on Father's Day, June 16. All the details on the website. Check it out today. Website CrossExamined.org.

Today we're talking to Jimmy Akin, who has had a great exchange with Dr. Bart Ehrman from UNC Chapel Hill, probably the most prominent skeptic on the New Testament out there. And the debate you can see on YouTube. It's on Jimmy's YouTube channel, and we'll also put it in the show notes. And, Jimmy, before the break, we were talking about how you, I thought, skillfully put together all these different aspects of the New Testament that Bart agreed with. How did he react to that during the debate? Do you think it caught him a little bit off guard?

JIMMY:

I think it definitely caught him off guard, because it's the first time I've ever seen that happen to him. I watched multiple debates where he was debating other people on the same topic, and none of them took that approach. So he, I don't think he was expecting to have his own words thrown back in his face. And I was concerned about what his reaction would be, because I've seen Bart in some debates go cold and really viciously grilled his opponent. And I didn't want this debate to go that way. I wanted this to be a friendly debate.

So, what I did was I made a point of being as friendly as possible with Bart both before the debate and during the debate. I even planned to do things to be nice to him during the debate. Like, for example, I noted that he's not a Jesus mythicist. You know, he believes Jesus really

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existed. He wrote a whole book about that. And so, I pointed that out to the audience, and I said, let's give Bart Ehrman a big round of applause for, you know, defending the existence of Jesus. So, I got him a round of applause, and then I crossed the stage, and I said, Bart Ehrman, Jesus exists. High five. And I gave him a high five. And so, I was going out of my way to be nice, to keep this friendly.

FRANK:

And it seems like you're that way anyway. You're not really trying to manipulate him. You're just trying to treat him like you would treat anybody. Right?

JIMMY:

Exactly. And he seemed to receive it well. And so, at the beginning of his rebuttal, he said, well, I wrote all those things. I agree with them. They're true. And so, he acknowledged that I had not misrepresented him, that he had said all these things. And then he tried to find ways to nevertheless defend his position that the gospels are unreliable. So, he would say things like, they disagree on the virgin birth, and they disagree on the resurrection. These are not minor matters.

And then in my rebuttal, I pointed out, no, actually, they don't disagree. Matthew and Luke both agree Jesus is born of a virgin. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all agree Jesus was raised from the dead. So, they're not disagreeing about the virgin birth or about the resurrection. The things that Bart has pointed to that are differences in terms of what different gospels mention, they're all lesser things.

Like, for example, Luke, in describing the virgin birth, mentions that Gabriel appeared to Mary, whereas Matthew has an unnamed angel appearing to Joseph. Well, that's a difference, but it's not a contradiction and it's a lesser matter. They both agree he's born of a virgin, and the same thing is true of the resurrection appearances.

FRANK:

Yeah. And I want to go back to something you said earlier, Jimmy, about Bart's approach on this, and this is true of what I think many people were brought up in Christianity. You know, every single word has to be exact the way it was said by Jesus. If not, it's an error. And I think

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another way of looking at that as well is how many times did Jesus give the same sermon? I suspect not once. I suspect he said the same thing over and over again. Just like we might say a teacher goes to a different town, a different church, like I'm going to do, and I'm going to say basically the same thing. I may word it a little differently.

And so, at what point are these gospel writers referring to, what time are they referring to when Jesus said the Sermon on the Mount in one place? Did he say it in another place, or elements of it in another place? Did he say the Lord's Prayer at several different points? I mean, is it plausible to say that, that these people who wrote this down may have heard it that way and another gospel writer heard it a slightly different way?

JIMMY:

Well, I think there's an element of truth in that. I think we shouldn't overestimate it, though. Jesus undoubtedly gave his same basic teachings on multiple locations in many different places. So, like elements of the Sermon on the Mount, he talked about that everywhere he went. Matthew then has memory, and not necessarily just his own memory. He also had other people who had seen this said. And when he goes to write his gospel, he takes that material and gathers it into one place called the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew is a big organizer. That's what he does. If you look at Matthew compared to Luke, you'll see Luke has teachings of Jesus scattered all over the place, and Matthew gathers them together and puts them in these five major discourses that encapsulate Jesus's teaching in Matthew. But we're in a world where they didn't have tape recorders and most people were not literate. And they also didn't have, you know, stenographers following people around, taking down their exact words. So, they're relying on memories.

Now, they had good memories, but they weren't always word for word. What they would remember is the meaning of what someone said, not necessarily how it was phrased. And so, when you have the gospel authors presenting, here's what Jesus said, they are communicating here's the meaning of what he said.

FRANK:

The gist of what he said, as you put it.

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JIMMY:

Exactly, the gist of it. And the ancient audiences knew that because they read other books by other people, and none of them had stenographers or tape recorders. They expected variability in phrasing, but they expected the gist to be accurate. And so, that's what the Holy Spirit is guaranteeing is accurate in the gospels.

FRANK:

The videographer that travels with me, his name is Clint Boland. We always kind of joke that if I go down on a college campus, he could just pick right up and say what he knows I'm going to say, because he's seen the presentation so many times. So, even if he didn't have a good memory, He would remember it.

JIMMY:

Yeah. And that's how we got Mark's gospel. Mark's gospel is based on the preaching of Peter. Mark was Peter's traveling companion and interpreter for a while, and he based his gospel according to a first century source on his memories of Peter's preaching.

FRANK:

You also point this out, and I think this is important for our audience to understand, in addition to the idea that these writers could give the gist without the exact quotation. You point out that there are other accepted standards of writing in the first century, Jimmy, that a lot of people today don't think about. You talk about the difference between truth and precision. You talk about the idea that you could approximate or give the gist. You also talk about the fact that everything doesn't have to be told in a strict chronological manner. Can you unpack a few of those, or anyone you want to talk about a little bit?

JIMMY:

Sure. So, I think a key one is understanding the difference between truth and precision. Now, I'm sure, Frank, that when you were in school, you took some mathematics, and probably some geometry, and you probably learned about the number Pi. What is the number Pi, Frank, in decimal form?

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FRANK:

Yeah, it goes on forever. I could tell you 3.14, but then it keeps going, Jimmy.

JIMMY:

Exactly. So, 3.14 is Pi approximated to two decimal points, but it's an irrational number, so it goes on forever. So, you could keep expanding the precision with which you're reporting Pi, but it's accurate within two decimal points to say it's 3.14 and leave it at that. You don't have to give the full infinite number. So, what we're doing is if, when we say Pi is 3.14, or 3.141596 or whatever, we say we're telling a truth within a certain degree of precision. And as you add more decimal points, you're adding more precision. But it's not wrong to just say it's 3.14 or even three.

FRANK:

Or three.

JIMMY:

Or three, yeah.

FRANK:

Close enough, right?

JIMMY:

And so, oftentimes we today expect higher degrees of precision in expressing something, because we have tape recorders and all kinds of things that they didn't in the ancient world. We expect a higher degree of precision today than ancient audiences did. It's kind of like, and I use this in the debate, it's kind of like if you're watching Star Trek and Captain Kirk is approaching a planet on the Enterprise, and he says, how long until we get there, Mister Chekhov? And Mister Chekhov says, we'll be there in two days.

And Mister Spock says, correction, instant Chekhov, we'll be there in one day. 23 hours, 59 minutes, .757, seconds. Okay, well, they're both right, but they're giving different degrees of precision. And oftentimes today, people expect a higher degree of precision than the ancient authors were trying to do. Also, just like they didn't have, you know, tape recorders, they also

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didn't have diaries where they followed people around and wrote down exactly what they did on what day.

So, the ancient audiences, the eyewitnesses, would remember Jesus said this thing, he gave this teaching, but they wouldn't remember exactly what day did he say it? Because that wasn't important. It wasn't considered important. He said this on, you know, Wednesday, April 3, in the year 32 AD. That's not the important part. The important part is Jesus said this, and so they'd remember what he said, but not necessarily the time he said it.

And so, ancient authors also had the flexibility to arrange material in non-chronological ways. Sometimes it is chronological. That's why Jesus gets born at the beginning of the gospels and dies and rises at the end. So, that's chronological. But other things, like you mentioned, Jesus would have given the Sermon on the Mount, or elements of it, repeatedly in many different locations. And so, what Matthew has the flexibility to do, because these are all Jesus's ethical teachings, is he can draw them together and use a topical order instead of a chronological order.

So, Matthew gathers all the material Jesus said on the same topic and puts it in one place, so you know where to find it. It doesn't mean he literally said this, and then a second later he said this, and then a second later he said this third teaching. It just means these are Jesus' teachings on ethics. And I put them all together for you.

FRANK:

And there was a time during the debate that Bart tried to bring up what he sees as a contradiction between what one gospel says happened after the resurrection and what Luke says happened after the resurrection. And that was a fairly lengthy back and forth in the debate. And when we come back from the break here, we'll get into that a little bit. And we're also going to talk about some ways we know the gospels are reliable. And can we really conclude that Jesus rose from the dead, or is Bart Ehrman right? We can't do that.

We're talking to Jimmy Akin, and I'll give you his website right after the break. He has a lot of great articles on this debate on his website, so you can go a lot deeper. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek on the American Family Radio

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network. Don't go anywhere. We're back in just a couple of minutes. Are the gospels reliable? My guest today, Jimmy Akin, who debated Bart Ehrman on this topic, his website, JimmyAkin.com. A lot of great stuff up there. And there's a whole section on this debate, issues that came up during the debate, that one of the problems with any debate is you never have time to really make a case. You can just kind of summarize some points that you want to make.

And so, all the clarification needs to come after the debate, and that's what Jimmy has done on his website. But Jimmy, I do want to ask you about what Bart had said regarding the gospel of Luke. Luke seems to say that everybody stayed in Jerusalem after the resurrection, where Matthew says, oh, no, they went to Galilee and got the great commission up there. And this is supposed to be some contradiction. How do you respond to that?

JIMMY:

Yeah. Oh, first, though, I'll mention, if people want to get directly on my website to where the Bart material is, go to JimmyAkin.com/Bart.

FRANK:

Forward slash Bart.

JIMMY:

And it'll all come up. Yeah. So, yeah, Bart raised this as an objection. And it's true that Luke portrays the disciples staying in Jerusalem. He doesn't mention them going up to Galilee. Matthew, on the other hand, does portray them going up to Galilee. Mark implies in the shorter ending of Mark that they're going to go to Galilee. And so, how do we resolve this? Well, they're just differences. They're not contradictions. They went to both. And you know who confirms that? John.

If you look in John, he has both resurrection encounters in Jerusalem and in Galilee. So, the truth is they had resurrection encounters with Jesus in both places. Matthew and Mark mention or imply the ones in Galilee. Luke mentions the ones in Jerusalem, and John confirms that they were, in fact, in both places. Now, we can then ask, well, why is there a difference? Why is Luke portraying them as staying in Galilee? And the answer is because he's setting us up for the book of Acts.

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FRANK:

Staying in Jerusalem.

JIMMY:

I'm sorry, staying in Jerusalem. It's because he's setting us up for the book of Acts. If you look at the book of Acts, it starts with them in Jerusalem at Pentecost, and then the Gospel grows from there. And so, Luke knows there are actually multiple ties between the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts. So, it looks like Luke wrote Acts immediately after writing his gospel. So, he's planning Acts in his head as he's finishing up his gospel. And he decided he wants to keep the focus on Jerusalem so that it'll read smoothly when he gets into Acts.

Now, one thing that we, a lot of people don't realize is books were fantastically expensive in the ancient world because not only there were no printing presses, you had to have every copy handmade. But not only did you need to pay a scribe to make the copy for you, you needed to have every single piece of paper it was written on was also handmade.

So, books were incredibly labor intensive. And based on estimates done by, in part by research by an author named Randall Richards, a single copy of Matthew in the first century would have cost the equivalent of more than \$2,200. And so, just imagine spending \$2,200 for just one gospel. Well, that put price pressure on ancient authors to keep their books short. Because if you write a big, long book, no one's going to be able to afford it. And so, there is price pressure to keep the books to the length of one scroll. And that means that the gospel authors, because they know so much about Jesus, they have to make choices in what they're going to include.

And Luke knew, I'm writing another book where it starts in Jerusalem. I don't want to have confusion about, well, how did they get there? So, he made the choice to only mention the Jerusalem encounters in his gospel in order to keep it of reasonable length. Luke is already the longest of the four gospels in terms of how many words it contains. So Luke, of all of them, had the most pressure to keep his gospel short and not include extra material that could confuse the readers of both his gospel and Acts.

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FRANK:

Ladies and gentlemen, that's another accepted standard in the first century, and also an accepted standard now. In fact, it's impossible not to have this standard that you can't write about everything. You need to select the details you are going to include, because nobody can include every detail. So, Jimmy, in his debate and also on his website, points out that accepted standards of writing in the first century had to do number one with truth versus precision. We covered that.

Number two, approximation or gist. Everything doesn't have to be verbatim. And third, chronology could be flexible because you could put things topically or chronologically. And then here's the fourth one, selection. You can't include everything. By the way, as Jimmy just pointed out, both the gospel of Luke and Acts are written by Luke, and they're both to the same person, Theophilus. And if you watched our previous, our last archaeology show, we've actually discovered the name Theophilus on an ossuary, I believe. Or if it's not an ossuary, it's just an inscription. We don't know if it's the Theophilus, but it's from the first century, so that's just interesting.

Now, Jimmy, I just want to ask you personally, what are the evidences that you think are most persuasive to you personally, that the gospels are historically reliable? We're leaving the Holy Spirit out of it for the sake of academic argument. Just as you look at these texts from an historian's perspective, what causes you to say, I think they're largely historically reliable?

JIMMY:

Well, I actually have a talk, I give on this, and I use kind of the same three categories of major claims, intermediate claims, and minor claims. And we have good evidence from external sources for the major claims, like Jesus existed, and he was this itinerant preacher, and he was crucified, and his followers claimed he rose from the dead. So, we have external attestation from the Jewish historian Josephus and from various Roman writers to the major claims.

When it comes to the intermediate claims, we have multi-source verification from the different gospels where they agree. Yeah, this happened. And particularly when you have the synoptic tradition agreeing with the Johannine tradition. That's John's gospel. They're very different sources. John is clearly independent of the other three gospels.

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And so, when you have these two major strands of tradition agreeing with each other, that provides additional evidence for reliability. Then when you get down to the micro level, there are what are sometimes called undesigned coincidences between the gospels. Now, I think some people make too much of undesigned coincidences and kind of stress or stretch the evidence. But there are some that are just undeniable. Like in one of the gospels it mentions that they had the feeding of the 5000 near Bethsaida.

In another gospel it mentions that Jesus, on that occasion, it doesn't mention Bethsaida, but it does mention Jesus turning to Philip and saying, where can we buy bread for these people? And then in another gospel we find out, oh, Philip is from Bethsaida. So, it makes sense why Jesus would ask him where to buy bread in the location that we know from a different gospel is where they're at for this event. And you don't get any of this from reading just one of the gospels.

You've got to put three of them together to get the full picture. And when you do, these are minor details that nobody would even think about at the time. And that's evidence that they are reliable. Another favorite point of mine is in Mark 7 where, as we know, one of the major controversies in the first century Christian church was, do you need to be circumcised and keep the Jewish law in order to be a Christian? And there were a lot of Jewish Christians who said, yeah, you do. You've got to get circumcised. You've got to keep the Mosaic law. Otherwise, you are burnt toast.

And then you had people like Paul and Peter saying, no, you don't. You can be a gentile. You don't have to be circumcised. You don't have to keep kosher. So, what do we find in Mark 7 when Jesus is discussing the issue with his critics of why his disciples don't wash their hands in keeping with the tradition of the Pharisees? And Jesus explains that what enters a man's mouth is not going to poison him spiritually. It's going to go through the mouth and then come out the other side. And actually, in Greek, they translate it a little delicately.

In English, it like, then passes on from the body. In Greek, it goes into the latrine. But he says, what makes a man unclean is what comes out of his heart. Impure thoughts. And then there's an editorial comment by Mark where he says, thus he declared all foods clean. So, what this

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shows us is Mark did not feel free to make up a saying of Jesus because that would have been the easy thing to do.

You know, he could just say, he could make Jesus saying, and therefore all foods are clean. And he didn't do that. He said it in the third person. So, it's an editorial remark that, you know, Jesus didn't say this. What Mark is doing is drawing out an implication of what Jesus says. And that means Mark does not feel free to just make up stuff and put it on the lips of Jesus. So, that's another sign that the gospel authors are trying to be historically accurate.

FRANK:

Yeah, there is a lot of evidence that they're telling the truth. Undesigned coincidences, I think, are fascinating. I put some of them in my book, 'Stealing from God: Why Atheists Need God to Make Their Case.' But Lydia McGrew wrote a whole book on it called 'Hidden in Plain View.' We had Lydia on the podcast three or four years ago when that book came out. But if you folks are interested in that, you ought to take a look at 'Hidden in Plain View.'

There's just so much evidence that they are telling the truth here. Of course, you also have the question you got to ask yourself, why would these Jews invent all this and then go to their deaths dying for a false story? That's another aspect of this. But one thing Bart brought up that I'd love to get more of your reaction on, or response to Jimmy, is he tries to point out, he doesn't say this is a contradiction, to his credit. But he does say, you know, John seems to be a lot more about Jesus is God than the other synoptics. Or the synoptic gospels, he finds that strange. Any comment on that?

JIMMY:

Well, different authors, because of the book length issue, they have to be selective on what themes they're going to stress, and they have different interests. You know, Matthew is writing for an audience of Jewish Christians. Luke is writing for an audience of gentile Christians. Mark's also writing for gentile Roman Christians. And John has certain interests as well. One of John's interests is actually chronology. If it wasn't for John, we wouldn't know that Jesus's ministry lasted for over three years.

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From the synoptics, you could just think it was a year. But John has an interest in chronology and gives us some very precise dating clues, which I'm fascinated by because I'm a biblical chronology nerd. Another of John's interests is making it explicit that people understand exactly who Jesus is. Because in his own ministry, Jesus was publicly guarded about who he was. And he would give at times evasive answers to the question, like when he's before Pilate.

And Pilate says, are you the messiah, the king of the Jews? He says, you say that I am. Okay, that's an acknowledgement. But he's being evasive. So, he deliberately underplayed who he was on a lot of occasions. And so, John, now that he knows the synoptic gospels are out there, he wants to make sure that people have a correct understanding of who Jesus is. And that's why he put so much focus on Jesus' identity in his gospel.

FRANK:

Can we really conclude, however, that Jesus rose from the dead? That's the big issue. We'll cover it when we come back with Jimmy Akin, who debated Bart Ehrman on the reliability of the gospels. Don't go anywhere. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you want to learn how to defend the Christian faith and be better equipped to answer questions, you want to come to CIA, the CrossExamined Instructor Academy. We've been doing it since 2008. This year it's going to be August 1-3 in Charlotte, North Carolina. We only have three presenting spots left. So, if you want to be a part of that, you need to go to Crossexamined.org. Click on events, look for CIA.

We have a handful of non-presenting spots. That means you can come to CIA, hang out with Greg Koukl, Allen Parr, Natasha Crain, Alisa Childers, Jorge Gil, myself, many others, and learn. Get all the teaching, but you just won't present. You can be a part of that. We're opening that up to non-presenters this year for the first time so people can take advantage of all the great teaching that will go on.

But you've got to sign up soon because we're going to run out of room quite quickly. Go to CrossExamined.org. Click on events. You'll see CIA. I also want to mention in December we're going to Egypt and Saudi Arabia. You say, why Saudi Arabia? Because we think that's where the real Mount Sinai is. All the details on the website. That trip is going to fill up quickly. We're only

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taking one bus, ladies and gentlemen. So, if you want to see all the insights in Egypt, the great sites, including where Moses was and the Exodus and all that, and then you want to see where he went, then you want to be a part of that trip. Again, go to CrossExamined.org. Click on events. You'll see Saudi Arabia, Egypt trip. Check it out. I'm talking to Jimmy Akin today, who did a wonderful job debating Bart Ehrman. And the debate is in the show notes.

You can also see it on the YouTube channel of Jimmy Akin. We'll give all of Jimmy's contact information here at the end of this segment. Jimmy, let's talk about the resurrection. I just find it odd that someone who is as wise as Bart Ehrman is always talking about what seemed to be minor issues in the text rather than the fact that everybody agrees Jesus rose from the dead. He seems to want to just discount that. Why do you think he's doing that, and how would you respond to that kind of approach?

JIMMY:

Well, so I think now Bart had a background as a very conservative Christian. He was protestant. I think he describes himself as having been a fundamentalist, and he then had his faith eroded by looking at these minor issues. And that led him to question the major issues like the resurrection. So, my understanding of Bart's position is he doesn't have a firm alternative theory of how do you explain Christianity without a resurrection. My impression is he's like, well, I don't know how to explain it, but it's got to be more probable that there was no miracle than that there was a miracle.

And this is kind of a naturalistic objection that was popularized a few centuries ago by the Scottish philosopher David Hume. And Hume has gotten a lot of pushback for that, and I think rightly so, because what Hume is doing is confusing. And I'll pull out my philosophy hat for just a second because I am an analytic philosopher. But he's confusing the prior probability of a miracle with the or any unusual event with what you do after it's been reported prior to there being a miracle or some other unusual activity. Like, let's say you and your wife learn that you're going to have a new baby. Okay?

Probably you're not going to have identical twins, because identical twins only occur in three and a thousand births. So, if before you have any evidence, you were to ask, are we likely to have identical twins? No, you're not. But then once things get to a stage where you can do an

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ultrasound and you can look and see is there evidence for just one baby, or is there evidence for more than one, then you don't look at the prior probability anymore. You look at what the evidence actually says.

So, and say, yes, we are having twins, or no, we're not. Well, the same thing happens with miracles. Before, if you were going to predict, oh, there's going to be a miracle tomorrow at noon on the city square. Well, the odds of that are probably pretty low. But after that time has passed and people come and say, there was a miracle on the city square at noon today, well, then you can't look at the prior probability.

You need to look at what's the evidence for the actual miracle. And in the same way, if you were before the resurrection, even the disciples would have said, I don't think he's going to rise from the dead. They weren't expecting it. When they're told that the tomb is empty, their first thought is, someone stole the body. And then when Jesus appears to them, their second thought is, we're seeing a ghost. It wasn't until he invited them to handle him, and touch him to see, no, I'm physically alive. That was their third interpretation.

So, even they were, before the fact, expecting this not to be a resurrection. And then when he showed them the actual evidence, they concluded, yes, it is a resurrection. And that's what you've got to do. You've got to look at the after the fact evidence for do we have evidence of a miracle here?

And if you make a systematic list of all the alternatives to this being a resurrection, then, and you go down them one by one, you find out, yeah, none of the alternatives work good. The best explanation for the data we have is that Jesus was resurrected. To give you just one example, some folks have said, oh, it wasn't Jesus who was crucified. It was his twin. It was his identical twin.

Well, I already mentioned that's three in a thousand births. And so, the odds that Jesus would have an identical twin are very low, and it should be mentioned in the birth narratives of, okay, here comes Jesus. Oh, and here comes his brother Bob. You know? And we don't have any record of a twin. And even if he had a twin, the disciples would have known about it. And so,

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before concluding Jesus is raised from the dead, they would have concluded, oh, you're the twin.

So, it might have gone, stole the body. Oh, you're the twin. Oh, you're not. You're a ghost. Oh, you're not. Then you've been raised. So, they would have gone through that possibility, too. And when you systematically go through all the different explanations that are alternatives to the resurrection, they just don't work well, including the idea that the disciples were a bunch of liars. Now, sometimes people exaggerate and will say things like all of them but John were martyred. Yeah, not really.

There's actually some evidence John was martyred, but we don't know how, with reliability, how many of them died. But we do know several of them were martyred. And we also know all of them suffered. So, even if they didn't all get martyred, some of them did get martyred rather than deny their faith. And all of them suffered rather than deny their faith. And that's a sign they were serious.

FRANK:

Yes, we know people will die for a lie they think is the truth. But we've never seen anyone die for a lie they know is a lie. And these people were in a position to know whether it was a lie or not, and they went to their deaths anyway. So, yeah, other faiths will have martyrs, but they think it's true. But they don't know it's true. In Christianity, we have people who saw an empirical claim, Jesus had risen from the dead.

Also, William Lane Craig brought this up, Jimmy, that when you look at probability theory on something like this, you also have to look at sort of it from the opposite perspective. And the opposite perspective is what are the odds we would have the evidence we have if the resurrection did not occur? That's interesting, too. Why are all these Jews claiming that this guy rose from the dead when they weren't predisposed to do so?

Why do we have these writings from the first century? Why do we have the explosion of the Church out of Jerusalem if the tomb was full? If Jesus was in the tomb, they could have squashed it. Why do we have evidence? Why do we have all this evidence?

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JIMMY:

Why do we have them worshiping on Sunday instead of simply keeping the Jewish Sabbath? Something had to change to make that happen. By the way, I want to mention a really good book. It's by an evangelical scholar named Sean McDowell, the son of Josh McDowell.

FRANK:

Yes. 'Fate of the Apostles.'

JIMMY:

'Fate of the Apostles.' That's the best book on this subject.

FRANK:

Yeah. On the martyrdom of the apostles. Yeah. In fact, I'm writing in a section of chapter in a book right now. I just quoted that one today because it is very good. He's reasonable about it. He says, look, we've got really good evidence that four from the first century died as martyrs. Paul, Peter, James the brother of John, and James the brother of Jesus.

So, we've got all that and then we have lesser evidence for the next four or so, and then not as good evidence for the final four, final three. But he's very fair on that. Jimmy, we're getting close to the end of the program, and I want people to be able to dive into this debate and dive into the details that you couldn't say in the debate because you don't have time. Where do they go to learn all of that?

JIMMY:

Well, so they can watch the debate itself on my YouTube channel, which is [YouTube.com/JimmyAkin](https://www.youtube.com/JimmyAkin). And they can read the auxiliary papers, the extra helper paper that I wrote for the debate, if they go to [JimmyAkin.com/Bart](https://www.JimmyAkin.com/Bart). And so, those are the basic places to get the details on the debate.

FRANK:

Okay. And then, so your website is [jimmyakin.com](https://www.jimmyakin.com), and you also do work at Catholic Answers. And we're going to have a show talking about the differences between Catholics and Protestants coming up. But tell us about that website. What's there?

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JIMMY:

So, that website is catholic.com because we thought ahead. And so, it's very easy to find. We've got thousands of resources online for free, including our radio show, which is called Catholic Answers Live, where I and others answer questions. We're on, like, over between 300 and 400 terrestrial radio stations, and people call in and ask us questions on ask me anything shows. Also, I have a podcast I'd like to mention. I'm actually on a bunch of podcasts, but the most popular one is called Jimmy Akin's Mysterious World.

FRANK:

Yeah. What's that about?

JIMMY:

Well, we look at mysteries every week. It could be a natural mystery, a supernatural mystery, a paranormal mystery. We cover historical mysteries, scientific mysteries, biblical mysteries, religious mysteries, psychics, Bigfoot, UFO's, everything.

FRANK:

You know, you are like the Catholic version of Michael Heiser on that.

JIMMY:

I made that point recently on one episode of Mysterious World where I was talking about Mike because I knew him, and I said he's kind of the evangelical Jimmy Akin, and I'm kind of the Catholic Michael Heiser. And unlike other mystery shows, what we try to do, we don't just want to generate wonder and imagine what if. We want to solve the mysteries. And so, we look at every mystery from the twin perspectives of faith and reason.

We say, what would reason tell us about this mystery? And what would the Christian faith tell us about it? And if you want to find that, it's also at my YouTube channel. But you can also go to Mysterious.FM, and it's on all the standard podcast directories.

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FRANK:

Mysterious.FM. Jimmy, thanks for the show. We're going to have to do another one soon on Catholics and Protestants. So, check out jimmyakin.com ladies and gentlemen. And Lord willing, I will see you here next week. God bless.

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