

"In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice" (Romans 11:5)

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How Can We Know that God is Actually Alive?

by Galen Peterson

In 1882 the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche coined the phrase, "God is dead." As an atheist, it was a way of saying that the concept of deity was no longer valid.

Since that time, there have been a number of attempts to fabricate systems based on godless morality—most notably communism in which values are determined by the state, not religious convictions. Today, while echoes of these godless systems remain, the "God is dead" philosophy is more widely absorbed into all Western nations.

This is particularly true among the Jewish community, where, according to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (2013), 23% of Jews in America do not believe in God whatsoever, which is over three times greater than the non-Jewish population. The survey also found that another 38% of Jews are agnostic, meaning they are not sure if God exists. So it is a very significant issue that has made its way into the Jewish community.

Many atheist Jews affiliate

with a movement called Humanistic Judaism. Their synagogues are very much like other branches of Judaism in terms of structure and meetings. But the belief system omits God altogether. It is humanistic because values are focused on social causes and ethics, not things of a spiritual nature. Yet they still practice cultural traditions with biblical origins like holidays. So each year at the time of Passover, for example, the *seder* is observed without mentioning God at all.

It is important to ask why Jewish people are three times more likely than non-Jews to have no belief in God whatsoever. In biblical times, that was not the problem. The Bible makes it clear that the issue in those days was the tendency to believe in false gods (cf. Deut 11:16; Jer 16:11-13).

What is different now? I believe that the Holocaust is the driving factor behind this change. When I began my doctoral studies many years ago, I spent a summer at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, participating in a course for educators on the

Holocaust. The sessions were taught by the leading historians on the Holocaust and we were given many opportunities to spend time talking to survivors who came to tell their stories.

One story in particular stands out. It was told by a man who lived in Warsaw as a young boy when the Nazis turned his part of the city into a ghetto. His home was near the place where gallows were set up for hanging Jews who violated the rules of their captors. Prior to their deaths, many Jews would recite the *Shema*, the prayer that declares the oneness of God (from Deut 6:4-9). It was a frequent occurrence for this boy to hear those words through the window of his room. Later, he became one of the few survivors of that ghetto, and after the war, he went to Israel.

He then told about his experience attending synagogue services, and when the time came to say the *Shema* while covering his eyes according to custom, he said that he could not get the image of people hanging from the gallows out of his mind. So he

decided to abandon his faith and thus not have to cope with his memories any longer.

When I returned home, I then completed my seminary studies, with a dissertation on communicating the gospel in light of the Holocaust. I showed how great the impact of the Holocaust has been on Jews coming to the conclusion that God does not exist, or if He does exist, how indifferent He must be to the suffering of the Jewish people.

Since that time I have been privileged to share the Good News with a number of survivors. One of them had the profound experience of being in a camp at the end of the war and then was forced to walk back to Germany, as the Nazis retreated and tried to cover up their crimes. But by the grace of God, she survived and eventually made her way to the United States.

One day, she sat across a table from me and told her story. I asked her if she had ever been to a church. She said yes, but “I don’t like fire and brimstone kind of preaching, because I cannot imagine a loving God putting His children in the ovens.” I told her that I understood very much what she was saying. So I honored her pain and we spent the rest of the time talking about what the Good News of Yeshua (Jesus) was all about. And she affirmed her faith in Yeshua that very day.

The point is that the Holocaust is what has been termed a *tremendum*—a shock wave that has swept through the Jewish community and continues to influence thinking today. I understand how so many people have concluded that God does not exist or doesn’t care after such a tragedy of unparalleled proportions. But I also know that there is more to the story.

There is an overlooked explanation for the Holocaust that goes beyond God’s supposed inadequacies or anti-Semitism merely being an extreme form of man’s inhumanity to man. We know from the Holy Scriptures that Satan, the Adversary, is attempting to destroy the Jewish people and thus prevent God from keeping His covenant promises. This would mean giving Satan the victory in the battle for rule over the universe. And in my conversations with other Jewish people, it is very apparent that this is something they have never thought about. Yet it is right there in the Hebrew Bible in Isaiah 14. So it is important to make that known in our conversations.

But what about the bigger question? How can we know that God is not dead, and that He is very much the Living God?

The universe testifies about God as the omnipotent Creator

The term “living God” is used 28 times in Scripture. The various ways that this term is used helps us to understand how God is alive and active in this world.

In the first part of Jeremiah chapter 10, he calls believing in false gods a delusion. Then, he contrasts that with these words:

“Adonai (the LORD) is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. . . It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom; and by His understanding He has stretched out the heavens” (Jer 10:10-12).

Atheists, of course, are dedicated proponents of evolution. They can explain many things through the use of mutations and immense amounts of time. But

they fail miserably at answering the question, where did the universe come from?

Scientists estimate that the total mass spread throughout the universe today is 1.5×10^{53} kg. That is a really big number. And the atheistic scientist will tell you that initially it didn’t exist. Suddenly about 14 billion years ago, all of that mass came into being on its own. It just created itself. As the theory goes, initially it was compressed into a very dense volume, perhaps as small as a soccer ball. Every star, every planet, every atom that exists today, was at first packed together that tightly. Then, in a tiny fraction of a second, all of this mass exploded in a big bang and began expanding rapidly, until it has reached vast distances today, and it continues to expand.

Now, we do know with great certainty, based on observable facts, that the universe is indeed expanding. But that does not tell you *how* it all began. Atheists cannot explain how such an immense concept as the universe could simply come into existence *ex nihilo*—out of nothing, independently. They can only claim that after an infinite amount of time when nothing existed, this massive universe just created itself, and we human beings eventually came into existence as a result of random chance. And yet *they* claim to be the rational ones who do not rely on faith.

God’s Word does not shy away from the question. It tells us plainly what happened. Adonai, (the LORD) created the universe by His great power. And Jeremiah 10:12 even agrees with the evidence for the expanding universe by declaring that God “stretched out the heavens.”

When we look up at the stars of heaven and when we are

privileged to behold the wonders of this world, they serve as reminders that an omnipotent Creator brought them into existence. Unlike those who imagine God as being flawed and limited at best, and non-existent at the worst, trusting in randomness and themselves alone, and without having a believable explanation how everything began, I am fully convinced that Adonai exceeds anything we could ever imagine in terms of power, and the universe itself testifies about Him as being the Living God.

Fulfilled prophecy reveals God's eternity

The Bible is loaded with declarations made in advance that have come to pass exactly as foretold. In addition to prophecies about the exile to Babylon and the return of the people to their land, plus exact descriptions of rulers and kingdoms before their time, a great number of prophecies involve the Messiah. They foretold:

- How He would be the Son of God and have divine attributes (Isa 9:6).
- What His lineage would be (Gen 49:10; Jer 23:5; Isa 11:1).
- When He would come (Gen 49:10; Dan 9:24-25).
- Where He would be born (Mic 5:2).
- Where He would live and what He would do (Isa 9:1-2; 35:3-6; Ps 78:2).
- How He would be rejected and betrayed (Isa 53:3; Ps 41:9).
- How He would die (Ps 22:16; Zech 12:10).
- How His death would bring atonement for the sins of other people (Isa 53:5-6).
- How He would be raised from

the dead (Isa 53:11; Ps 16:10).

- And how He would be seated afterward at the right hand of the Father (Ps 68:18).

Not only did Yeshua fulfill all of these things perfectly, but the timing and circumstances present today mean that it is now impossible for anyone else to fulfill them. Only Yeshua could ever have done so. Thus the perfection of fulfilled biblical prophecy is a sure sign that Adonai is the Living God who causes these things to occur just as He wills.

It also reveals His eternity. Since God is outside of time, He knows with absolute certainty what will take place in what appears to be the future from our perspective. But for Him, as one with unlimited power, time has ceased, which science has shown to be possible. Only a Living God could bring about such things, not the random chance claimed by atheists.

The possession of the promised land by the Jewish people shows that God is alive

As the nation of Israel was about to take possession of the land promised to them by the Lord through the Abrahamic Covenant, Joshua 3:10 tells us:

“By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will assuredly dispossess from before you the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Hivite, the Perizzite, the Girgashite, the Amorite, and the Jebusite.”

You can see how it required the direct involvement of God for an untrained, poorly armed nation of former slaves to conquer

multiple armies throughout the land of Canaan. That reality is confirmed in Psalm 44:3 –

“For by their own sword they did not possess the land, and their own arm did not save them, but Your right hand and Your arm and the light of Your presence, for You favored them.”

It truly was a miracle for this to occur. But since God swore an unbreakable oath regarding the covenant (Gen 22:16-17; Heb 6:17), this miracle was necessary.

It was no less a miracle for a poorly armed and outnumbered band of Jews, many of them who had been enslaved under a modern pharaoh named Hitler, to be victorious for that very same plot of land in 1948. So in spite of the naysayers who claim it was just a coincidence with no spiritual significance for the modern nation of Israel to rise from the ashes, the Bible declares otherwise. The possession by the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob of the land promised to them by the Lord is an indication that He *is* the true and living God.

The resurrection of Yeshua proves His mastery over life and death

The atheist will tell you that Yeshua was just an ordinary man who died like everyone else and then ceased to exist forever. Any claim that Yeshua rose from the grave is a myth. But there is a real problem with that way of thinking.

The Bible tells us that after His resurrection, Yeshua appeared to Peter and the other Apostles. In response they continually testified about it as eye-witnesses. For example, Peter declared: “This Yeshua God raised up again, to

which we are all witnesses” (Acts 2:32). After being thrown in jail, Peter and John stated that “we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

Put yourself in their position. If you knew it was a lie or a legend, would you be willing to risk your life by defending it? But if you have actually experienced something like that, your motivation to testify regarding the truthfulness of the matter would be enhanced exponentially.

Because of their message, they endured persecution and traveled about while facing physical hardship. They were beaten and imprisoned, even to the point of being willing to die for the truth (2 Pet 1:14,15; Jn 21:18,19). A short time later, that is what happened. We are told that Peter was crucified upside down because he believed he was unworthy to die in the same manner as Yeshua. The other disciples met similar fates. Some were crucified, while others were stoned or speared or decapitated.

The point is that these men were all willing to give up their own lives because they knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that everything they were saying about Yeshua was true, especially His resurrection from the dead.

Paul tells us that there were 500 eye-witnesses that saw

Yeshua after His resurrection, and that most of them were still alive at the time of writing (1 Cor 15:6). So they could have easily refuted what he was saying if it was not true. It makes sense that Paul would never even have mentioned these eye-witnesses if they did not share the same personal conviction of having seen the risen Messiah Yeshua with their own eyes. But this declaration was never challenged.

All this to say that the evidence cannot be refuted in any reasonable manner. The resurrection of Yeshua is proof that Adonai is the Lord and Master over death itself. And that makes Him very much alive.

The transformed lives of believers verifies God’s reality

God has declared that those who reject Him are devoid of knowledge (Jer 10:14). The irony here is that even the brightest people in other areas can be very uninformed about matters related to the reality of God. In fact, those who reject God are actually incapable of understanding things of a spiritual nature (1 Cor 2:14).

This kind of understanding only comes when we believe in Yeshua and make Him Lord over our lives, because, at that moment,

God changes our inner way of thinking. Scripture describes this change in several related ways:

- Our way of thinking becomes **transformed** (Rom 12:2).
- We become a “**new creature**” (2 Cor 5:17).
- We must be **born again** in order to enter the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3-5).

Upon belief in Yeshua, the Holy Spirit indwells us and begins teaching us (Jn 14:26) and empowering us with spiritual gifts that we did not have before (1 Cor 12:1-11). Thus believers gain the ability to discern things spiritually and to understand God’s message in Scripture clearly.

So it is only the spiritually regenerated person who has the assurance of God’s presence in our lives, and that magnifies our conviction that Adonai surely is the living God. That should serve as a motivation for all of us to believe in Yeshua as the Messiah and to ask Him to cover our sins with the blood that He shed as our atonement, and to be Lord over our lives.

By doing so, it not only secures everlasting life for us in the world to come, it also gives us the most significant reason of all for knowing that God is alive and involved in this present world.

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