Part Two of a Five-Part Series: Questions Answered by Herb Silverman

The following Part-Two questions are about Religion and Jesus:

If God doesn't exist, why do most scholars believe Jesus was an actual person and was crucified?
Lots of people were once crucified, but none were turned into gods or resurrected.

Where did the people go who died before Jesus came?
The same place we all go — nowhere. They are just dead.

Why don't you believe in Jesus? Don't you want everlasting life?
Believing something does not make it true.

How do you explain the Trinity?
By saying that 3=1.

What about the Holy Ghost?
He reminds me of a comic book character worthy of laughter and derision.

Have you heard that Jesus desires you?
I've heard that from Christians but not from Jesus, because Jesus (if he existed) died a couple thousand years ago.

Isn't Jesus a positive force for good?
More people have been killed in the name of Jesus than any other person in the history of the world.

How do priests get assigned to different churches?
Some may be good people, but sometimes they are sent where there is no evidence they molested anyone.

Are there any advantages to celibate clergy?
Yes, it might suppress any hereditary propensity toward fanaticism.

How has gay marriage affected the Church for the better?
It made it less likely that gay men would join the priesthood to have sex with children.

Does it make sense to you that Jesus died to save the world?
According to the story, God is one of the biggest child abusers because he killed his son, who accepts the abuse silently as a form of love. If the Church can't see God as a child abuser, it is no wonder that they don't see priests as perpetrators of child abuse.

Have you been born again?
I was born once and will eventually die once. Why be born again when you can just grow up?

Do you know that Jesus died for your sins?
Then I better get busy committing them so his martyrdom is not meaningless.

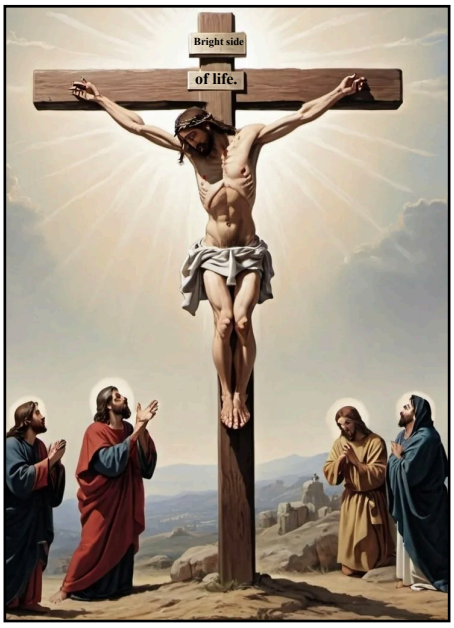
Are you a typical atheist who just refuses to believe in Jesus?
Disbelief in gods doesn't describe typical atheists any more than disbelief in the divinity of Muhammad, Krishna, and Zeus describes typical Christians. Everybody disbelieves in some gods. I just disbelieve in one more than you do.

With wars and famine, as the Bible predicted, the end times are near. Are you prepared for Jesus's return and the rapture?
According to your Bible, Jesus should have returned a couple thousand years ago. See Mark 9:1: "Verily, I say unto you. There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."

Do people really receive the gift of speaking in tongues when receiving the Holy Ghost?
Yes, if you consider gibberish speaking.

Can you mention a part of the New Testament that you like?
1 Corinthians 13:11: "When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things." One of the childish things I put away was a belief in God.

When you did a good deed, why did you get upset when I said it was a Christian thing to do?
I know you meant well, and I thank you for that. But you falsely equated goodness with Christianity. It was also an atheist thing to do.



Why do Jews hate Jesus?
We don't hate a person who died a couple thousand years ago.

What are the Jewish beliefs about Jesus?
That Jesus might have existed as a human, but he had no special powers and wasn't resurrected.

Do Jews have free will?
The Nazis had free will to decide whether to do what they were instructed, but the Jews put in the gas chambers did not have free will.

As a Jew, why aren't you happy to be one of God's chosen people?
What were Jews chosen for, to die in the Holocaust? Even when I believed in God, I didn't understand what it meant to be made

in God's image. Was God male? Was God a Jew like me, since I was one of the "chosen"?

What are the different sects within Judaism?
They run from most religious (ultra-orthodox) to not-at-all religious (Humanistic Jews), all attempting to preserve Judaism in different ways. The ultra-orthodox frequently form insular communities devoted to studying the Torah all the time, and take seriously the commandment to be fruitful and multiply. Their many children are likely to adopt the same religious practices as their parents. The ultra-orthodox have minimal contact with gentiles, and intermarriage is considered shameful. Fortunately, only a small percentage of Jews have religious views compatible with these traditionalists. The majority of Jews are inclusive secularists interested in preserving Jewish culture, with outreach to the increasing numbers of Jews with no religious beliefs. Humanistic Jews frequently marry outside Judaism, and their children often abandon or lose interest in the Jewish culture.

If you don't believe in God, why do you want to remain a Jew?
All Jewish traditions consider me a Jew because I have Jewish parents. Adolph Hitler would have considered me a Jew, and I don't want to give him a posthumous victory by abandoning Judaism.

Why did the Jews kill Jesus?
Because Jesus became a carpenter instead of a doctor or a lawyer. (Just kidding, of course.)

Who do atheists believe created humans if there is no God?
Humans came about gradually through evolution. The first creatures who can be called human inherited their DNA from creatures who could not be called human. The first mammals got their DNA from their reptilian ancestors. And so it goes, back to the first single-celled organism. Humans are just fish plus time. I leave it for religious people to explain where a "soul" enters this picture, and whether they want to accept DNA evidence.

Doesn't the universe being fine-tuned for intelligent life prove that God exists?
Humans are fine-tuned for the universe, not the other way around, which is how we evolved.

What do you think about creationism?
Creationism is the theory that Rome WAS built in a day.

Why should I learn science instead of staying with creationism?
An educated person should understand the rudiments of the scientific method. Science shows us the wonders of the world every day. Creationism should no more be taught as an alternative to the theory of evolution by natural selection than should the "stork theory" be taught as an alternative to reproduction. Creationism is an alternative to Zeus or Krishna, not to Darwinism.

Do you really believe humans descended from apes?
Humans are apes. We share 98.6 percent of our DNA with chimpanzees.

Did modern humans interbreed with other species?
I have more than 3% Neanderthal genes. Just about all humans have some Neanderthal genes.

If you accept the existence of dinosaurs without evidence, why not God?
Fossils provide evidence for dinosaurs. There are no god fossils.

Isn't evolution just a theory?
A theory may be incomplete, but it is based on verifiable facts. Think "Theory of Gravity."

Don't you think the religious right has a point in opposing evolution?
No. The religious right opposes the teaching of evolution, or any scientific and social view that conflicts with a literal interpretation of the Bible. The religious right thinks we should be governed by the laws of an imaginary god. We are not one nation under God, but we are becoming one nation undereducated.

If humans weren't here, would anything else survive?
Lots of species survived and prospered before there were humans. Humans destroyed more species than they helped.

How does our understanding of cosmology affect the probability of God's existence?
Cosmology and evolution show that no gods were necessary for the universe and for us to exist.

Why are so many theists threatened by evolution?
Because evolution flatly contradicts a biblical worldview.

Did God evolve from being mean in the Old Testament to being kind in the New Testament?
The God of the Old Testament just kills people. The God of the New Testament tortures some people in hell for eternity for incorrect beliefs while on Earth. Which is kinder?

How has your mathematics influenced your religious beliefs?
My mathematical research area, complex geometric function theory, has absolutely nothing to do with the theory of evolution, except for the word "theory." The religious right doesn't find geometric function theory the least controversial because it bears no relationship to a biblical worldview, unlike the theory of evolution. And we know that the alleged "controversy" about evolution is religious and political, not scientific.

A mathematics argument starts with assumptions, called axioms, and then draws conclusions from the axioms. Mathematicians usually begin with axioms that seem "self-evident" because they are more likely to guide us to real-world truths, including scientific discoveries and accurate predictions of physical phenomena. But here's a playful axiom from the 19th century mathematician ***Leopold Kronecker****, a Jew and probably an atheist: "God created the integers. All else is the work of man."*

In my Orthodox Jewish background, we took as an axiom that God inspired the Torah (the Hebrew Bible, which Christians call the Old Testament). I enjoyed studying the Torah, and the Talmud was even more fun. The Torah is the foundation for religious Jews. The Talmud is a collection of writings by rabbinical scholars who attempted to clarify scriptural passages and biblical law. Clever and logically reasoned commentaries by different sages presented arguments to justify their points of view, even though they often came to opposite conclusions. Perhaps such Talmudic study might explain why so many Jews grow up to become lawyers.

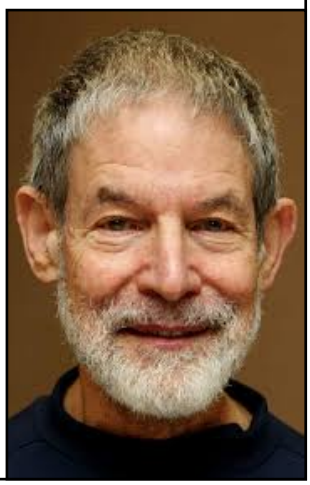
In Talmudic speak, I give credit to God for leading me to mathematics and then turning me into an atheist. You see, I was fascinated by the idea of an infinite God with infinite power who lived an infinite amount of time. I felt that studying "infinity" would better help me understand God. When I learned that many paradoxes of the infinite could be resolved mathematically, I began to equate the mysteries of "infinity" with the mysteries of "God."

I discovered that infinity is not sensible (known through the senses) and that there is no real number called "infinity." If finite man created infinity, perhaps finite man created "God" and gave him infinite attributes. Since infinity is a useful concept to help solve math problems, was God merely a useful concept to help solve human problems?

Believers assume that their god is real and infinite because a finite god would be limited and could be replaced by a better god. However, I learned mathematically that it is impossible to have a largest infinity, which would mean that any infinite god could theoretically be replaced by a more powerful infinite god. Since the standard God axioms appear contradictory, I wondered if there was a way to believe in a God with all those attributes. I suppose so, but it would require an infinite amount of faith. ♦

Herb Silverman is a regular contributor to the quarterly publication *The Freethought Society News*. The editors thank Silverman for all of his excellent submissions. His past submissions can be found at the following Freethought Society website page:

https://www.ftsociety.org/herb-silverman-articles/



Silverman is the author of two books, *Candidate Without a Prayer* and *An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land*. Both books are available online and at your local bookstores.

Silverman is available for local, national, and international speaking engagements and he welcomes communication from readers. Please contact him at the following email address:

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Thinking Your Way Through the 2024 September Friday the Thirteenth

While neither an in-person nor an online Freethought Society (FS) Anti-Superstition event will take place this year, the Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Center team offers the following suggestions for a rational and skeptical approach to what some people call an "unlucky day:"

Read a book
If you are an adult the following books are recommended:

The Answer is Never Magic
By **Robert S. Porter**, **MD**

Rethinking the Anthropology of Magic and Witchcraft — Inherently Human
By **Phillips Stevens**, **Jr**.

Superstition: A Very Short Introduction
By **Steward Vyse**

It's never too early to start teaching children about superstitions and how to develop critical thinking skills. The following books are highly recommended for children:

Don't Be Mean to Thirteen
By **Doug Harris**

All About Superstition for Kids
By **Josephine Madden**

View Anti-Superstition Videos
FS has produced and recorded the following online anti-superstition programs.

The Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Center's International Educational Seminar:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRYOkpaApv4

Hosted by **Margaret Downey** and **Dave Rice**, this event focuses on the danger of superstitions through humor, speeches, and personal accounts. Speakers include comedian **Ian Harris**, humanist activist **Babu Gogineni**, FS board member and humanist activist **Norm Allen, Jr**., and **Vyse**, author of *Believing Magic: The Psychology of Superstition.*

Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Center Online:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqKc8lgkUyI

This event was sponsored by the Center for Inquiry (CFI) and the Freethought Society (FS). The event starts with music by **Nick DeSimone.** Speakers include **Margaret Downey** as the Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Nurse, **Glen Loev** as a Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Doctor, **Benjamin Radford** portraying a resident educator, and **Christina Magallanes-Jones** as Miss Fortune Teller. Singer **James Klueh** performs a song he specifically wrote for FS about silly Friday the Thirteenth superstitions. ♦