

Resurrection Skeptics

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Resurrection Skeptic Robert Funk



“Jesus did not rise from the dead, except perhaps in some metaphorical sense.”

Why mention Robert Funk?

He sounds like just another grumpy unbeliever. But his career was as an influential Bible scholar.

- Chair, Vanderbilt Religion Department
- President, Society of Biblical Literature
- Founder and Director, Scholars Press
- Founder, The Jesus Seminar

No God, no creation, no fall

“There is not a personal god out there external to human beings and the material world.”

“The demise of a geocentric universe took the doctrine of special creation with it.”

“Death is not punishment for sin, but is entirely natural.”

No miracles, no prayer

“The notion that God interferes with the order of nature from time to time in order to aid or punish is no longer credible, in spite of the fact that most people still believe it. Miracles are an affront to the justice and integrity of God, however understood.”

“Prayer is meaningless when understood as requests addressed to an external God for favor or forgiveness and meaningless if God does not interfere with the laws of nature.”

Demoting Jesus

“We should give Jesus a demotion. It is no longer credible to think of Jesus as divine.”

“A Jesus who drops down out of heaven, performs some magical act that frees human beings from the power of sin, rises from the dead, and returns to heaven is simply no longer credible. The notion that he will return at the end of time and sit in cosmic judgment is equally incredible.”

No virgin birth or atonement

“The virgin birth of Jesus is an insult to modern intelligence and should be abandoned. In addition, it is a pernicious doctrine that denigrates women.”

“The doctrine of the atonement—the claim that God killed his own son in order to satisfy his thirst for satisfaction—is subrational and subethical. This monstrous doctrine is the stepchild of a primitive sacrificial system.”

Jesus did not rise

“Jesus did not rise from the dead, except perhaps in some metaphorical sense. The meaning of the resurrection is that a few of his followers—probably no more than two or three—finally came to understand what he was all about. When the significance of his words and deeds dawned on them, they knew of no other terms in which to express their amazement than to claim that they had seen him alive.”

No final resurrection

“The expectation that Jesus will return and sit in cosmic judgment is part and parcel of the mythological worldview that is now defunct. Furthermore, it undergirds human lust for the punishment of enemies and evildoers and the corresponding hope for rewards for the pious and righteous. All apocalyptic elements should be expunged from the Christian agenda.”

No biblical revelation

“The New Testament is a highly uneven and biased record of orthodox attempts to invent Christianity... The canon should be a collection of scriptures without a fixed text and without either inside or outside limits, like the myth of King Arthur and the knights of the roundtable or the myth of the American West.”

Chicago Methodist Bishop Joseph Sprague

- “God is not a supreme being out there in the beyond. Rather, the word ‘God’ is the sound image we humans employ to point to the very essence of it all.”
- As “the essence of it all,” God infuses everything with the “Jesus power,” “the Christ essence,” which “drives creation’s evolution.”

Chicago Methodist Bishop Joseph Sprague

- “Jesus simply did not preach, teach, or describe himself as John suggests.”
- “Jesus did not possess trans-human, supernatural powers.”
- “I believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but I cannot believe that his resurrection involved the resuscitation of his physical body.”

Sadducee Skeptics

- Sadducees controlled the office of high priest and were a majority of the Jewish ruling council (Sanhedrin). They got rich on temple commerce, and maintained control by cooperating with Roman rulers.
- “Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit.” (Acts 23:8)
- “The doctrine of the Sadducees is this: souls die with bodies.” (Josephus)
- Sadducees rejected all Scriptures except the five books of Moses.

The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, saying, “Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up children for his brother.’ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother. So too the second and third, down to the seventh. After them all, the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her.” (Matthew 22:23-28)

But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.” And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching. (Matthew 22:29-33)

Refuting resurrection skeptics

1. Jesus unmaskes their presuppositions, showing them to be blinded by bias.
2. Jesus crushes their trick question by showing it to be a dumb question in light of heavenly reality.
3. Jesus shows that the Scriptures reveal resurrection, not only in books after Moses, but also in Moses' writings.
4. Jesus rises from the dead!

Unmasking Presuppositions

“You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.” (Matthew 22:29)

- 1. Rationalism:** God’s entire Word is not the final standard of truth.
- 2. Naturalism:** God’s power is not active as the reigning reality.

Jesus knows God’s Word as ultimate truth and God’s power as ultimate reality.

Faith Presupposition #1

God's entire Word is the final standard of truth, and it all testifies to Jesus.

The Scriptures... bear witness about me... There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" (John 5:39-47)

Faith Presupposition #2

God's power is the reigning, ultimate reality, and it is present through Jesus.

If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (Matt 12:28).

...God in whom Abraham believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. (Rom 4:17)

Resurrection power displayed

Jesus went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. (Matthew 9:25)

Jesus said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. (Luke 7:14-15)

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life...” Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” The man who had died came out (John 11:25, 43-44).

Enemies of Resurrection

The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” ... from that day on they made plans to put him to death. (John 11:47-48, 53)

The chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. (John 12:10-11)

Blinded by bias

- Sadducees clung to wrong presuppositions.
- Worldly bias blinded them to God's ruling, resurrecting power in Jesus.
- Worldly bias blinded them to Jesus' words and actions as signs that he was Savior and God, foretold in OT Scriptures.
- Blind bias, rooted in worldliness, made them prefer murder to resurrection.
- Blind bias chose to lie about empty tomb.

Jesus Seminar Presuppositions

- Skeptical professionals know best.
- No prophecy is possible.
- No miracle is possible.
- “Gospels are assumed to be narratives in which the memory of Jesus is embellished by mythic elements.” (Robert Funk)
- Co-founder John Dominic Crossan thinks Jesus' body was buried in a shallow grave and was eaten by wild dogs at some point between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism

The undermining of the old orthodoxy has been mainly the work of divines engaged in New Testament criticism.

These men ask me to believe that they can read between the lines of the old texts; the evidence is their obvious inability to read (in any sense worth discussing) the lines themselves. They claim to see fern-seed and can't see an elephant ten yards away in broad daylight. (C. S. Lewis)

Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism

The idea that any man or writer should be opaque to those who lived in the same culture, spoke the same language, shared the same habitual imagery and unconscious assumptions, and yet be transparent to those who have none of these advantages, is in my opinion preposterous. (C. S. Lewis)

Refuting resurrection skeptics

1. Jesus unmaskes their presuppositions, showing them to be blinded by bias.
2. Jesus crushes their trick question by showing it to be a dumb question in light of heavenly reality.

Heavenly reality

For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. (Matthew 22:30)

- Angels are real. (Take that, Sadducees!) Resurrected people will be like heaven's angels in at least one way: unmarried.
- No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. (John 3:13) Jesus knows firsthand.

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Old Testament Scriptures

The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. (1 Kings 17:22)

When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed... The child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. (2 Kings 4:32, 35)

The man was thrown into the grave of Elisha, and as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet (2 Kings 13:21).

Old Testament Scriptures

If a man dies, shall he live again? I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God. (Job 14:14, 19:25-26)

For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:10-11)

Old Testament Scriptures

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ... They have pierced my hands and feet... I will tell of your name to my brothers... All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord. (Psalm 22)

Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? (Hosea 13:14)

Old Testament Scriptures

Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead. (Isaiah 26:19)

I will open your graves and raise you from your graves... And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. (Ezekiel 37:12-13)

Old Testament Scriptures

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (Daniel 12:2-3)

Even Moses showed this!

But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him. (Luke 22:37-38)
[Jesus had just talked with Moses & Elijah]
If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead. (Luke 16:31)

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Resurrection Reality

“As Jesus showed them real hands and a real side, so he really ate with his disciples... talked with men with a real tongue... with real hands took bread, blessed and broke it, and was offering it to them. Do not put the power of the Lord on a level with the tricks of magicians, so that he may appear to have been what he was not, and may be thought to have eaten without teeth, walked without feet, broken bread without hands, spoken without a tongue, and showed a side which had no ribs.” (Jerome)

Facing facts

1. Jesus' tomb was empty.
2. Eyewitnesses said they saw Jesus alive—more than 500 in all. (1 Cor 15)
3. Eyewitnesses suffered persecution and death rather than change their story.
4. Millions of people have experienced the same power that raised Jesus. We know God's Word and God's power.

Resurrection living

1. **Bible reading:** Immerse yourself in biblical presuppositions.
2. **Prayer:** Depend on God's power
3. **Faith:** Believe the resurrection facts, and trust the living Lord Jesus as the guarantee of your own resurrection.
4. **Focus:** Aim for your resurrection future, not worldly status.