**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

 **Resurrection & Life Beginning**

 ***Acts 24***

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April 25th In the Year of Our Lord

(Anno Domini A.D.) 2021

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted.)

 Acts 24 is a good look into the Roman legal system at work in 1st century Judea. Obviously, this is taking place because of Paul’s Roman citizenship. Paul would have been killed/executed in Jerusalem, if he had not been a Roman citizen. God knew this when He called Paul to be His witness.

 Once again, we see that the high priest from the Temple in Jerusalem (Ananias) and the elders, along with a professional legal counsel by the name of Tertullus, throw their full weight against Paul.

**Who was Ananias?**

Ananias was appointed by Herod Agrippa II in about 48 A.D. to be High Priest. He was a harsh and cruel man. This is the same Ananias that we see in Acts 23 at Paul’s trial by the Sanhedrin court in Jerusalem. He ordered Paul to be hit on the mouth (Acts 23:1–2). Paul then called Ananias a “whitewashed wall”!

 At that same trial, Paul spoke of the resurrection of the dead—

dividing the opinions between the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Historians tell us that many of the Jews did not like Ananias because of his ruthlessness and corruption under the protection of the Romans. Ananias was assassinated in AD 66, when the Jews rebelled against the Romans. He was seen as a corrupt Roman puppet.

**Who was Felix the Roman Governor?**

Historians tells us that his full name was likely Marcus Antonius Felix. The Emperor Claudius appointed him Judean governor in 52 A.D. Claudius had freed both Felix and his brother Pallas who had been slaves under his mother Antonia. So, Felix had a personal relationship with the Emperor of Rome. However, Felix was one of the reasons the Jews revolted in 66 A.D. Felix is also well-known for taking another man’s wife. He talked Drusilla, a young woman of 20, into leaving her husband to marry him. So, this is the ruler who presides over Paul’s trial in Acts 24. One thing that was in Paul’s favor was that Felix did not like the Jews.

**Acts 24**

1 After five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges to the governor against Paul.

 2 After Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying to the governor,

**Jews Accuse/Charge Paul**

"Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation,

 3 we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness.

 4 "But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing.

 5 "For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

 6 "And he even tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him. We wanted to judge him according to our own Law.

 7 "But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands,

 8 ordering his accusers to come before you. By examining him yourself concerning all these matters you will be able to ascertain the things of which we accuse him."

 9 The Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so.

 10 When the governor had nodded for him to speak, *Paul* responded:

**Paul’s Defense**

"Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense,

 11 since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago, I went up to Jerusalem to worship.

 12 "Neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city itself did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot.

 13 "Nor can they prove to you the charges of which they now accuse me.

 14 "But this I admit to you, that *according to the Way* which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets;

 15 having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

 16 "In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.

 17 "Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings;

 18 in which they found me occupied in the temple, having been purified, without any crowd or uproar. But there were some Jews from Asia--

 19 who ought to have been present before you and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me.

 20 "Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council,

 21 other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, *'For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.'"*

 22 But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case."

 23 Then he gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept in custody and yet have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him.

 24 But some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.

 25 But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you."

 26 At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him.

 27 But after **two years** had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned.

**Resurrection – defining event**

 We see that Paul continues to witness the resurrection of the dead. In fact, Paul makes this point the reason he is on trial. We have noted in recent sermons that this same point is the one that people today find hard to accept. We looked at the historical facts of the Resurrection and the reason God decided to incarnate Himself in order to go to the Cross to walk from a tomb. The historical facts and the reason for the Resurrection can be accepted or denied.

 I watched a debate between the best Christian apologist and a leading voice representing atheism held on April 4, 2009, at Biola University to debate the question of God’s existence. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tYm41hb48o

William Lane Craig and Christopher Hitchens presented their views for over a few hours. Dr. Craig challenged Hitchens to prove that atheism was true. Dr. Craig presented the case that Theism is more plausible to be true than Atheism. At the same time, Hitchens charged that religion has brought death and destruction to mankind. He refused to believe in a God that would send a man to the horrors of the Cross to die for everyone else’s sins. He presented that faith in a God that would do such a thing is monstruous. At that time, Hitchens was touring to promote his book, “God is not Great”. He also wrote a book called, “Morality”. Hitchens was the atheist who challenged Christians that he can be just as moral as they can. His challenge was for a Christian to name one moral act/thought that they can do and he, as an atheist, cannot do. Most Christians are stumped at this challenge. I have noted this previously with the simple answer that Mr. Hitchens, as an atheist, cannot pray to God showing compassion for his fellow human being. Mr. Hitchens cannot seek forgiveness for sin nor lead anyone else to seek forgiveness from God. In denying God exists, Mr. Hitchens cannot love another person with God’s love. These are all moral character traits of a Theist. Unfortunately, Mr. Hitchens died of cancer in 2011.

In the course of this debate, Dr. Craig does present the case for the historical Cross and the Resurrection. Being a leading Christian debater over the last several decades, Dr. Craig presents a list of historical facts and then, as a professional philosopher, presents rational thoughts about the Resurrection. All of this is aimed at making the case that there are more rational reasons to be a Theist as opposed to the failure of the atheist to prove that Atheism is true.

Regarding the Resurrection, Dr. Craig *notes that Judaism rejects the idea or reality of the resurrection of the dead. Yes, the Pharisees believed that at the end of time, God would reunite bodies with their spirit. However, they had no belief in a person being resurrected from the dead as Jesus was. So, for the disciples to make this claim in the face of severe opposition from their own religious culture is only reasonable and rational if it is true.*

We Christians accept the New Testament to be a historical document providing an eyewitness account of Jesus’ death on the Cross to having His body placed in a tomb to subsequently walk from that tomb. The simple explanation to disprove these eyewitness accounts is for the Jews or the Romans to present the body of Jesus. Surely, the Roman soldiers would want to present Jesus’ body that disappeared under their watch. The Jewish rulers had just as compelling a reason to present the body of Jesus, but they could not.

Reviewing Dr. Craig’s reasonable thoughts as compared to what the atheist’s so-called “naturalist” explanation of the matters of life and events as taught in Biblical Christianity - we can ask the question: which explanations are more believable and/or provable? Or do both take a matter of faith? Especially regarding the origins of life. Which takes more faith? God did it, or, through undirected, random meaningless, without purpose process, the universe and life came into being?

At this point in the discussion, both views observe the cosmological evidence, which is - the universe came into being about 13 billion years ago based upon observations in the “red drift light” emissions from stars and planets creating an expanding light trail that can be retraced in time calculations back to a beginning point. This is commonly called the “Big Bang”. This is based upon Hubble’s study of the stars in the 1920’s. Before that time, the prevailing view by scientists was that the universe was static. What can Christians rely upon from this observation? Just like Genesis 1 declares, there was a beginning. However, the time stamp is to be evaluated. This shook the world of science and still does.

From the science that the universe is expanding from a beginning point has presented the question of “who or what started the beginning”? This leads to additional questions:

Why was the universe started?

How did the process start?

What was present in the beginning?

Who was present in the beginning?

Where is the force that started the expansion?

What were the forces that started the expansion?

From the time of the first expansion, how long did it take earth to be in its orbit?

Once earth was formed, how long before life started on earth?

What started life on earth - is the same force that started the expansion the same force that started life on earth?

Why are there so many different kinds of life on earth?

Did life start simply then expand to a more complex form?

Did life start as a complex system?

What is the simplest form of life on earth? How many cells does it take to form the simplest life form?

Was DNA and RNA present when life first started?

From these few questions, we get a teaching from the atheistic scientific Darwinian community that life’s origin hasn’t any reasons to exist. Life is a product of random undirected processes, a cosmic accident that started with nothing from nothing.

**What do we know now in the year 2021?**

Life starts as an extremely complex organism containing RNA and DNA that has to be sequenced to specifications beyond human comprehension, knowledge and ability. We know that 13 billion years is not enough time for a natural random primordial soup environment to come together to form life. Scientists, like Douglas Axe in his book “Undeniable”, present irrefutable mathematical facts of the extreme time needed to form life by random undirected materialistic processes considering the complexities of the cell construction and functions.

1. <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2245256-first-life-on-earth-may-actually-have-been-built-from-both-rna-and-dna/> **2)** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SC9Hx3WpsCk

Life started very complex at the cellular level. The processes in cell life and reproduction are not only fined tuned, but they are *irreducibly complex*. (A term from Dr. Michael Behe to describe the working of a cell.) If you take a part of the cell away, it dies. Dr. Behe compares this to a mouse trap. If you take any of the components away, it does not work. <https://www.discovery.org/b/a-mousetrap-for-darwin/>

**Conclusion**

I could provide additional scientific evidence, but we need to return to the question about faith. Does it take more faith to believe in atheistic evolution, or did God do it? So, the Resurrection – from our understanding of the miracles of the creation, or should we say the unclear understanding of the materialistic theories for the creation – is the Resurrection believable? I observe that power that created the universe and life on earth can surely bring life back to a dead body.

Acts 13:33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.

Acts 2:24 "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

Romans 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

2 Corinthians 13:4 For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you.

Philippians 3:10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

Acts 3:15 but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.

 **Amen**