

Atheism and Agnosticism

By Charles Carpenter

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, three participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read the comments related to Jeremiah 2:28 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to write and share a definition of *atheism*.

Assignment Two

Read the comments related to Job 12:1–25 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to write and share a definition of *agnosticism*. Also share an answer to this question: What could be one reason for severe trials?

Assignment Three

Read Psalms 14:1; 53:1; and Romans 1:20; then read the comments related to Romans 1:28–32 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share the characteristics of the new form of atheism.

Scripture to Memorize

For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. Romans 1:20

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will see that the Old and New Testaments acknowledge atheism as an argument and will understand how the Bible addresses the atheistic position.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

You find yourself wanting to respond to friends who have rejected any kind of belief in God. They do not believe God created the world, and they certainly do not believe that He sustains all things. They have come to the conclusion that God is only an imagined figure or a psychological projection from man.

How do you respond compassionately? In what way can you, a thoughtful Christian, answer their claims and offer a defense for the hope that is in you?

Atheism

The word *atheism* is a compound word consisting of “a” and “*theism*.” Taken together, *atheism* (a-theism) means “there is no god.” The Bible assumes God’s existence, but does not assume all people believe in Him. The Old and New Testaments give reasons and results for such a belief.

Read Jeremiah 1:16; 2:11, 28 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 1:16. works of their own hands. When people reject God, they create alternatives which elevate their own ego and desires. The alternative to belief in God is fashioning a god made by their own hands.

Verse 2:11. Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? The Bible proclaims that there is no God except the one true God, the Creator and Sustainer of all life.

Verse 2:28. where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you, in the time of your trouble. When difficulties come and chaos rules, the question of God becomes more important than ever. When people abandon God, they have no hope of salvation when troubles come.

Even Job, after all his striving, declared that God’s ways are higher than man’s ways (see Job 42:3–6). Mankind must elevate God and question man’s wisdom, not the other way around.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week may now share a report.

Discussion Question

When man rejects God, what does he have to replace Him? How would you respond to someone who said: “God is only the construction of man’s mind, a projection of man’s greatest need or greatest imagination?”

Agnosticism

The word *agnosticism* is a compound word that means “God is unknowable.”

Read Job 12:1–25 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 2. wisdom will die. Concerning man, Job recognized that all human wisdom will die even if a person is brilliant and blameless. Man should depend on God for his wisdom, knowing that only He is eternal.

Verse 13. With God are wisdom and might; He has counsel and understanding. Job said that in God are wisdom, might, counsel, and understanding.

Verse 16. With Him are strength and sound wisdom. Job amplified the ultimate qualities of God and questioned his own wisdom.

Even though many solid biblical and revelatory proofs support God's existence, cognitive proofs are not what make our faith secure. Beyond intellectual arguments, we must declare with Job, "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You" (Job 42:5). Job's suffering was without personal cause and without perceivable benefit, but he stood firm in his faith toward God. Such faith is one of the valuable lessons of the story of Job.

Severe trials neither disprove God's existence, nor distance man from his ability to know God. Severe trials prove that there is something greater than our personal comfort and our ability to explain man's ways and God's ways. After all of Job's severe trials, he argued with God and God answered him with great comfort and grace. As a result of Job's severe trial, great richness came to him. In the end Job declared, "I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (Job 42:3).

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week may now share a report.

Discussion Questions

How does belief in God confront life's meaning? How can a severe trial provide a way to observe the existence and even the presence of God? How would you answer someone who said:

1. "God cannot exist because I feel abandoned in this severe trial and I can only depend on myself for an escape."
2. "God cannot exist because I have prayed to Him and I do not see or feel any assistance."

New Atheism

Read Romans 1:28–32 out loud.

Studying the Passage

The mission of the new atheists is to reject every reference to God and devalue any knowledge above man's empirical experience. Their goal is to create doctrines that declare God to be a primitive reference and that man is the root and branch of all wisdom.

In the late nineteenth century, the philosopher Nietzsche declared God to be dead. Nietzsche

further declared that since God is dead, now is the time to create new ways of thinking that erase God from the mind.

Verse 29. all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. The new atheists put their faith in society, universal reason, and morality only to realize that understanding, fidelity, love, and mercy become replaced by every kind of wickedness and depravity.

Verse 30. inventors of evil. In the twentieth century man invented new ways of doing wrong and living without the knowledge of God. Atrocities arose, including two world wars, the holocaust, totalitarianism, abortion, homosexuality, terrorism and even nuclear disaster.

Verse 32. give approval to those who practice. The new atheists are hardened in their belief and are convinced of only one thing: God is dead, and a new horizon must be created. New atheists are not reasoning and thoughtful scholars questioning propositions made by theists. Rather, they are fundamentalists who approve of those who retell stories rejecting God. They are the fools of Psalms 14:1 and 53:1. For them, God can never be an answer - even if all of their systems fail.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week may now share a report.

Discussion Question

How would you answer someone who says:

1. "There is nothing beyond the here and now."
2. "Any kind of God talk is meaningless chatter."

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

At Home: Nail It Down

Disciples need to prepare to answer the questions of three groups of people: atheists, agnostics and new atheists. The Bible offers disciples a way to address each type of questioner, while giving heed to their expressions and offering a defense for the hope that is in the followers of Christ.

Atheist—those who desire to elevate man, making God irrelevant, and then fashion a new god.

A thoughtful disciple ought to respond to atheists by acknowledging that man has always sought to replace God so that man can act with impunity. A disciple should encourage an atheist to humble himself and recognize God as the Creator, Sustainer and Lawgiver who will judge all.

Agnostic—those who are searching to know God but believe He is unknowable.

A Christian should respond to the agnostic by telling his friend that man's comfort is not a way to disprove God's existence; rather it is a way to cling to Him more ardently.

New atheist—those who believe God does not exist and who create new stories to support atheism, rejecting every reference to God.

A disciple should realize that "the wise lay up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool brings ruin near." (Proverbs 10:14).

Follow up Question

In what ways can you respond to people who are truly questioning God's existence and rebuff those whose goal is to reject God as a possible answer?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.