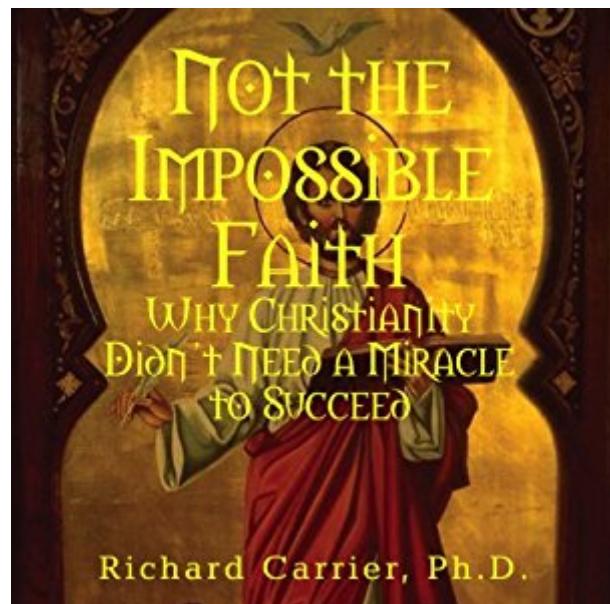


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Not The Impossible Faith



Synopsis

Not the Impossible Faith is a tour de force in that genre, dissecting and refuting the oft-repeated claim that Christianity could not have succeeded in the ancient world unless it was true. Though framed as a detailed rebuttal to Christian apologist J.P. Holding (author of The Impossible Faith), Carrier takes a general approach that educates the listener on the history and sociology of the ancient world, answering many questions like: How did Christians approach evidence? Was there a widespread prejudice against the testimony of women? Was resurrection such a radical idea? Who would worship a crucified criminal? And much more. Written with occasional humor and an easy style, and thoroughly referenced, with many entertaining "gotcha!" moments, Not the Impossible Faith is a must-listen for anyone interested in the origins of Christianity. Richard Carrier, PhD, is an expert in the history of the ancient world and a critic of Christian attempts to distort history in defense of their faith.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a former evangelical fundamentalist Christian I was humbled in reading this book. So many of the 'assumptions' I accepted from popular Christian apologists are based upon nothing more than shoddy historical research. I lost my faith in the bible as 'divinely inspired truth' due to things I learned in Cosmology. However, for a while I still didn't know what to do with Jesus and the resurrection. "How did this belief system just pop out of nowhere?" It just so happens that Richard Carrier is a scholar in the field of history from this time and sees right through these arguments that

once led me captive. I was impressed by his knowledge of the subtleties of thought and customs that would make certain arguments that seem strong by todays standards, completely worthless. But this is what happens when one has a proposition (like the historicity and resurrection of Jesus) that they want to prove and defend; they scour ancient sources, lifting convenient quotes, while ignoring details that would weaken their efforts. I recommend this book to anyone interested in really getting to know the truth about Christian origins. This book has only made me look forward with even greater anticipation toward his forth coming work; 'On the Historicity of Jesus Christ.'

I was not expecting much from this book. In the introduction we learn that this book was the product of an internet debate with J.P. Holding. I typically do not expect much from internet debates, even when I'm one of the debaters. But I was pleasantly surprised. This book is a careful and scholarly consideration of the question of whether the historical truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is at all necessary to explain the growth and ultimate success of Christianity. Carrier takes his lead from points of Holding's argument by heading each chapter with a question raised (e.g., "Was Resurrection Deemed Impossible?" "Did No One Trust Women?"). In the course of responding to these questions we get an erudite examination of many lines of evidence of relevance. Carrier weighs in on the historical reliability of the Gospels, comparing them with the methods of critical historians of antiquity. He considers with considerable care the likely demographics of Christians in the first century. He reveals the prevalence of resurrection stories in ancient times, both within Judaism and within the wider Greco-Roman world. It is regrettable that such scholarship was not published by a more prestigious publisher. It is understandable of course since any of the major publishers would have the same doubts as I did originally. But the scholarship of this volume deserves a wider readership. I hope it might achieve it, and I would wish that Carrier's future projects in this vein would be published more prominently.

Certain thoughts keep occurring over and over while reading this book. One is "Why does J. P. Holding's arguments require a relatively lengthy book to be refuted?" Holding's arguments seem to consist of a series of rhetorical questions which Carrier uses as chapter titles. Rhetorical questions are almost invariably a sign of the lack of sound arguments. Indeed, reduced to the basics Holding's argument reduces to "Who would make up a story like that? Therefore, it must be true." In any event, Carrier makes short work of him. If this had been a boxing match the referee would have stopped it. Holding seems heavily overmatched here, so much so I began to suspect that perhaps Carrier was not being fair. Could Carrier be setting up so many strawmen and just knocking them over? A little

research showed that if anything Carrier was being generous. Despite the rather onesidedness the book is still worthwhile. Carrier is a capable writer and researcher and the picture that emerges of the first century Roman Empire and Christianity is fascinating. Carrier also confines himself to mainstream scholarship but points out that if alternative theories prove out Holdings case is not thereby improved. The Kindle edition is quite good with one glaring shortcoming - the table of contents is not linked. The numerous footnotes are linked (fortunately). The other problems are the minor ones that seem to plague all ebooks like hyphens that shouldn't be there and the like. All in all, a very informative and interesting read which I can recommend without hesitation.

This book has some really good strengths and some really bad weaknesses. Strengthwise, I learned a lot about the early period during which Christianity was being defined and marketed. The overall context shed a lot of light on history and historical context that I had not previously known. Weakness wise, there are two main points. First, the book is written as a rebuttal to another book. (Since I read this on my Kindle, I cannot easily retrieve the name and author of the other book.) At times this can lead to double negative logic that requires careful study to follow. For example, if the original book argued that something wasn't true, Carrier may be arguing that it wasn't true that the (negative point) was not true. Secondly, this book reads like the sort of "blowing off steam" that I occasionally write. Written in a huff at a single sitting after stewing on a topic for a while, which topic is always in reaction to someone else taking a position with which I disagree. Hopefully I never send such tirades to anyone else. Carrier's writing sounds like it was written in just that way and was never edited. It is highly repetitive and redundant. It would be much more effective, with no loss of information or authority, at half the size. Still, there are some worthwhile nuggets and I had no difficulty sticking with the book to the end. I do wish I had read it in hard copy rather than Kindle so that I could easily go back and find the nuggets. That is just too hard to do on the Kindle even with notes. So my 3 stars is a combination of four stars for information content and one star for writing style. J Hudspeth

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