

He Is Risen: Evidence for The Resurrection

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The foundation of Christian belief is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Jesus was raised from the dead, we must evaluate our lives and follow Jesus in every way we can. It also goes without saying that if he was not raised from the dead, there is no significance to be found in his life or death, and we can safely ignore him. Which is it?

Because the Bible is a foundational book of Christianity, we should first look at what the Scripture says about the resurrection.

Bible verses that directly relate to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 28:5-6 - "But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.'"

Mark 16:6 - "But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him.'"

Luke 24:5-6 - "The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.'"

John 20:11-18 - In this passage, Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Jesus outside of the tomb.

Acts 2:24 - "But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power."

Romans 6:4 - "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 - "For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures."

How important is the resurrection?"

We should recognize that the resurrection is essential to Christianity, and it is the single event that confirms that Jesus was divine and was the son of God and the Son of Man from Daniel chapter 7.

The resurrection of Jesus provides hope of eternal life and resurrection to all believers. Paul said, "if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain" 1 Corinthians 15:14.

The impact of the resurrection must be considered. The resurrection has impacted millions, if not billions, of lives and has influenced our history and culture. The resurrection has inspired art, music, literature, and films. In addition, it is brought hope and comfort to millions of people.

Does a metaphorical or spiritual interpretation of the resurrection (denying a physical resurrection) eviscerate Christianity?

Neo-orthodox theologians have long talked about the spiritual resurrection of Jesus. By this, they imply that Jesus was not physically raised from the dead but raised in our hearts through the life experience of Scripture. Many liberal theologians argue that this is compatible with Christianity. However, conservative Christians maintain that an understanding and belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus is essential to Christianity.

There are several reasons why conservative Christians understand that a belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus is necessary.

First, we recognize that the Scriptures contain multiple accounts of Jesus's physical resurrection, including descriptions of the empty tomb and Jesus appearing to the disciples in bodily form. Those accounts are presented as historical events and are accepted by conservative Christians as having occurred. To reject the physical resurrection of Jesus is to reject a large portion of Scripture.

Second, Christian theologians generally understand that a physical body is part of human existence. If the physical body were unimportant, the incarnation would lose its significance, and Paul cannot conceive of a disembodied existence.

Third, the bodily resurrection is central to Christian eschatology. The Christian hope for the future includes the bodily resurrection of believers. This resurrection is seen as a fulfillment of God's promise and a restoration of the created order.

Fourth, the resurrection involves physical suffering and death, and this physical death is not incidental but brings salvation. If the resurrection was only metaphorical or spiritual, the significance of the suffering and death is diminished or lost.

Against the idea of a spiritual resurrection, bodily resurrection recognizes the essential nature of the human body and that the bodily resurrection is central to Christian belief and practice.

Was Jesus raised in his original body, or was it glorified as Paul suggests in 1 Corinthians 15?

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul discusses the nature of the resurrection body. He uses the analogy of a seed sown in the ground and then growing into a plant with a different kind of body. He writes, "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

Based on this passage, some theologians argue that Jesus was raised in a glorified body, rather than his original physical body. They point to the fact that after his resurrection, Jesus appeared and disappeared suddenly, and his body could pass through walls and doors (John 20:19, 26; Luke 24:36-43). Other theologians, however, argue that Jesus was raised in his original physical body but that it was transformed and glorified. They point to the fact that Jesus invited his disciples to touch him and see that he was not a ghost, but had flesh and bones (Luke 24:39-43).

As a result, the nature of Jesus' body remains a mystery. What is not a mystery is that he was raised from the dead and that resurrection is the basis of Christianity.

There are some apparent discrepancies between the accounts of John and those of the synoptic Gospels.

One of the apparent discrepancies between the Gospel of John and the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) is the timing of the resurrection and other vital events surrounding it. The Synoptic Gospels place the resurrection on the first day of the week, while John places it on the day following the Sabbath.

Scholars and theologians have suggested the following solutions.

First, the difficulties may be in the differences in the Jewish reckoning of time: In the Synoptic Gospels, the first day of the week begins at sunset on what we would consider Saturday, while in John's Gospel, the day following the Sabbath starts at sunrise on Sunday. Thus, both accounts may be accurate, but using different reckoning time systems.

Second, the Gospels were written for different audiences and other purposes. The Synoptic Gospels emphasize the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy, emphasizing the Sabbath and the first day of the week as significant times. On the other hand, John emphasizes the new creation brought about by the resurrection and places the resurrection on the day following the Sabbath as a symbol of the new creation.

Third, there were different sources. It is possible that some of the witnesses to the resurrection gave other accounts of the timing of events, and the Gospel writers chose to include the accounts that were most relevant to their purposes.

Regardless, the overall message and significance of the resurrection remains the same despite any apparent discrepancies and timing.

Why is the claim of an empty tomb such a strong argument for resurrection?

The claim of an empty tomb is considered a strong argument for the resurrection of Jesus because it suggests that something extraordinary happened to Jesus' body after his crucifixion. The empty tomb is evidence that Jesus did not simply die and remain dead but was resurrected from the dead. William Lane Craig, a Christian philosopher and theologian, has written about the importance of the empty tomb. The empty tomb is a critical piece of evidence supporting the resurrection of Jesus.

Craig notes three factors supporting the empty tomb. The first is the gospel account; the second is that women discovered the empty tomb, and the third is that there are no plausible alternative explanations.

The reason that it is important that the women discovered the empty tomb is their lack of credibility. Were this a legendary account, the women would have never been made part of it. They are an embarrassment. This goes to their credibility; if someone had decided to make up an account, they certainly would have had the empty tomb discovered by one of the primary apostles, such as Peter or John. One can be reasonably sure that the account of the women was reported reluctantly and reflects on the accuracy of the recording.

Craig discusses possible alternative scenarios that would have produced an empty tomb, but they all fall short. The only hypothesis that addresses all the facts is that Jesus was raised from the dead.

Gary Habermas has developed a minimal facts argument which is quite helpful for discussing the resurrection.

Gary Habermas, a Christian philosopher, and theologian, has developed a minimal facts argument for the resurrection of Jesus. This argument is based on a few historical facts widely accepted by scholars, even those skeptical about the resurrection.

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. Jesus' tomb was found empty on the third day after his crucifixion.
3. The disciples of Jesus claimed to have seen him alive after he died in various group and individual appearances.

4. The apostle Paul, a former persecutor of Christians, converted after an encounter with the risen Jesus.

According to Habermas, these facts are supported by a broad consensus of scholars, including both Christian and non-Christian researchers. He argues that the most reasonable explanation for these facts is that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. These four facts are helpful because they don't depend on Christian beliefs or assumptions and are generally well-respected historical facts. This allows discussion with non-Christians and provides common ground for discussion. A persuasive case can be built starting with those facts.

Arguments against the resurrection.

The swoon theory proposes that Jesus did not die on the cross, but he fainted and later revived from his swoon.

Sources:

Friedrich Schleiermacher, a German philosopher, and theologian, in his book "The Life of Jesus" (1835)

Hugh Schonfield, a British author, in his book "The Passover Plot" (1965)

Quote: "The suggestion that Jesus did not die on the cross but revived from his swoon is unconvincing. The Roman soldiers were expert executioners, and it is doubtful that they would have made a mistake in verifying Jesus' death." (N.T. Wright, Christian theologian)

This theory is often proposed as an alternative explanation for the resurrection of Jesus, suggesting that Jesus was not dead when he was placed in the tomb and therefore did not need to be resurrected. However, this argument is implausible and is unsupported by evidence. Reasons to reject it follow:

Jesus' injuries were severe. Roman crucifixion was designed to maximize suffering and bring a painful death. The victim was beaten and scourged during the crucifixion, finally being nailed to a cross. Both external and internal injuries occurred. Survival from crucifixion was considered highly unlikely.

Following his death, a spear punctured his thorax, which would have been a fatal wound had he been alive. This, again, makes it unlikely that Jesus could have survived the crucifixion.

Jewish burial was not known for being therapeutic, and bodies were wrapped in cloths and placed in tombs where they were left to decompose. No evidence suggests that dying or injured unconscious individuals were placed in tombs where they would ultimately succumb to trauma or dehydration.

On the one hand, the appearance of Jesus to his disciples was evidence that he had been resurrected. Had he succumbed, he would still be in the tomb, and he certainly would not have made much of an impression on the disciples if he had just been severely and almost mortally wounded.

On the other hand, the fact that there is no evidence from any contemporary source that Jesus was ever seen elsewhere following his crucifixion is a testimony to the fact that he was dead and resurrected. Had he survived, based on the swoon theory, it is doubtful that his disciples would have died for him, knowing that he had just swooned and was not resurrected.

The hallucination theory:

This theory suggests that the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection resulted from collective hallucinations or visions.

Sources:

David Strauss, a German theologian, in his book "The Life of Jesus Critically Examined" (1835)

Gerd Ludemann, a German New Testament scholar, in his book "The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Inquiry" (1994)

Quote: "It is unlikely that a group of people would have shared the same hallucination, particularly when hallucinations are usually subjective experiences." (Michael Shermer, American science writer)

There are those who teach that the resurrection of Jesus resulted from a group hallucination. It is suggested that the disciples were grief-stricken, and this was a natural result of their grief. This solution fails. At the outset, it is essential to point out that no known group hallucinations exist.

Psychiatrists and psychologists point out that hallucinations are individual experiences not shared with other people simultaneously, and it is doubtful that the resurrection appearances were multiple personal hallucinations.

Additionally, the experiences of the resurrected Jesus that the disciples and others had took place in several different settings and times. They occurred to both believers and nonbelievers. (neither Paul nor Jesus' brother James were believers up to that point.) This is not the mark of a hallucination.

Those who met with the resurrected Jesus had their lives radically transformed. They abandoned their fear and boldly proclaimed the message of Jesus, and they faced persecution and went on to be martyred. That sort of radical transformation is not likely to be the result of a hallucination.

If the resurrected Jesus had been a hallucination, those who saw him would have still confronted a tomb with the body in it, and that should have provided a reason to doubt the hallucination. However, the tomb was empty, and the hallucination theory did nothing to resolve the empty tomb.

There is no record of any of the disciples experiencing psychological problems or of anyone accusing them of having had a hallucination. If there were concerns about hallucinations, they should have appeared in some literature somewhere, and the Jews would have used them to discredit the Christians.

There is no evidence to support the hallucination theory.

The legend theory:

This theory claims that the early Christian community later invented the resurrection story to promote their beliefs.

Sources:

Bruno Bauer, a German philosopher, and theologian, in his book "Criticism of the Gospel History of the Synoptics" (1841)

Rudolf Bultmann, a German Lutheran theologian, in his book "Kerygma and Myth" (1953)

Quote: "The resurrection accounts in the Gospels are not reliable historical records, but rather they are legends that evolved." (Bart Ehrman, American New Testament scholar)

The legend hypothesis is a hypothesis that suggests that the story of Jesus' resurrection was a legendary development over time rather than a historical event. According to this theory, Jesus' resurrection began as a simple story of his followers experiencing his presence after his death. It gradually developed into the more detailed and miraculous account we have today.

The idea in the legend hypothesis is not well accepted among conservative scholars and theologians, and they believe the arguments to be implausible and not supported by any evidence we have. Some of the problems with the hypothesis follow:

The New Testament documents, including the Gospels and letters of Paul, were written within decades of the events. This means the story of Jesus' resurrection was well-established and widely believed shortly after the event, and legends do not spread or develop so quickly.

In the Gospels and letters of Paul, we are provided eyewitness testimony. This suggests that the writers knew Jesus personally and experienced his resurrection. In addition, the disciples were willing to suffer and die for Jesus. This also indicates that the resurrection was an authentic thing. It is safe to assume that the belief in the resurrection did not develop over time.

The accounts of Jesus' resurrection in the New Testament are consistent and show little development over time. The story of the empty tomb, the appearance of Jesus to his disciples, and the transformation of their lives are all consistent across the Gospels and the letters of Paul, suggesting that they are based on historical events rather than a legendary development.

There does not appear to be a motive for legendary development: The early Christians were persecuted and faced significant opposition from Jewish and Roman authorities. There is no clear benefit to creating a legendary story of Jesus' resurrection.

Miscellaneous attempts to discredit the resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus was based on prior mythological beliefs, particularly those related to dying and rising gods. This theory suggests that the early Christian story of the resurrection was influenced by pagan myths of gods who died and were reborn. However, scholars do not widely accept this claim, as there needs to be more concrete evidence to support it.

The body of Jesus was either lost or eaten by dogs, and the resurrection story was invented to cover up this fact. However, this theory is also unsupported by historical evidence, as there is no credible record of the body of Jesus being lost or consumed by animals.

The body was stolen. However, the disciples would not have died for something they knew to be a lie. Additionally, the tomb was sealed.

The body was put in the wrong tomb. We note that Mary found the right grave and met Jesus there, and John and Peter found the burial wrappings and headcloth. If the body had been misplaced, the Jews would have quickly found it to quash any possible rumors.