

THE RESURRECTION OF
JESUS

The Resurrection of Jesus

- The resurrection of Jesus is the core tenant of Christianity. There is no more important doctrine than the belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus.
- “because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, *having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.*” **Acts 17:31** NASB95

Questions That Need An Answer

- Did the disciples have to believe in the resurrection by faith?
- Does the story of “doubting Thomas” imply that it is more blessed to believe in the resurrection with no proof at all?
- What historical evidence is there supporting the resurrection of Jesus?

QUESTION ONE:

DID THE DISCIPLES HAVE TO BELIEVE IN
THE RESURRECTION BY FAITH?

Define Faith!

“But in the overwhelming majority of cases, ‘faith,’ as rendering *pistis*, means ‘**reliance**,’ ‘**trust**.’ To illustrate would be to quote many scores of passages. It may be enough here to call attention to the recorded use of the word by Our Lord. Of about twenty passages in the Gospels where *pistis* occurs as coming from His lips, only one (**Mt 23:23**) presents it in the apparent sense of ‘fidelity.’ All the others conspicuously demand the sense of ‘reliance,’ ‘trust.’ The same is true of the apostolic writings. In them, with rarest exceptions, the words ‘reliance,’ ‘trust,’ precisely fit the context as alternatives to ‘faith.’”

Define Faith!

- I argue that the disciples **did not have faith** in Jesus' resurrection in the sense of "*blind faith*", they had a **trust** rooted in knowledge because they saw him, ate with him, and even touched him.
- "To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God." **Acts 1:3**, NASB95
- What they had faith (trusted) in Him was that *He died for their **sins** and had a hope (expectation) they too would **raise** in His likeness.*

QUESTION TWO:

DOES THE STORY OF '*DOUBTING THOMAS*' IMPLY THAT
IT IS MORE BLESSED TO BELIEVE IN THE
RESURRECTION WITH NO PROOF AT ALL?

Doubting Thomas

- A common example used to show that the Bible denigrates evidence is the story of doubting Thomas.
- Richard Dawkins writes, “Thomas demanded evidence. . . . The other apostles, whose faith was so strong that they did not need evidence, are held up to us as worthy of imitation.” (Dawkins, SG, 198)

Doubting Thomas

Was Jesus repudiating an evidence-based faith?

In the book, *Is God Just a Human Invention?*, Jonathan Morrow and Sean McDowell list three problems with this claim:

1. Jesus **predicted** his resurrection on multiple occasions in the presence of the disciples. Thomas should not have been surprised at the **return** of Jesus.
2. Thomas heard **eyewitness testimony** (evidence) from the rest of the disciples and yet still refused to believe. (The vast majority of scientific knowledge we possess depends upon trusting the conclusions of other scientists, which is true for virtually all disciplines.)
3. Jesus did many miracles during his ministry **as proof of** his identity. In fact, right after the story of Jesus scolding Thomas, John said the miracles of Jesus were recorded “so that you may believe Jesus is the **Messiah**, the **Son of God**, and by believing you may have **life** in His name.

Doubting Thomas

- Despite what Dawkins claims, Christianity **values** the role of the mind, which includes the proper use of reason and argumentation.
- Jesus said to love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and *mind* (**Mark 12: 30**).
- The Lord said to the nation of Israel, “Come now, let us reason together” (**Isaiah 1: 18** ESV).
- Scripture and church history emphasize the importance of the role of the mind in **discipleship** and **evangelism**.

QUESTION THREE:

WHAT HISTORICAL EVIDENCE IS THERE
SUPPORTING THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS?

Framing the Argument

There are steps that we need to take in framing our argument for the resurrection of Jesus.

1. We are ***not*** assuming the New Testament documents are inspired literature. We are going to treat the New Testament on the basis of its own merits regarding its credibility from a **historical perspective**.
2. We are *not* starting from a bias that miracles are **impossible**. (we may need to remind the skeptic not to do this... we have to follow the evidence where it leads)

Establishing Historicity

1. Multiple independent sources **support** historical claims

When an event or saying is attested by more than one independent source, there is a strong indication of historicity

2. Attestation by an **enemy** supports historical claims

If testimony affirming an event or saying is given by a source who does not sympathize with the person, message, or cause that profits from the account, we have an indication of authenticity.

Establishing Historicity

3. **Embarrassing** admission support historical claims

An indicator that an event or saying is authentic occurs when the source would not be expected to create the story, because it embarrasses his cause and “weakened its position in arguments with opponents.”

4. **Eyewitness** testimony supports historical claims

Eyewitness testimony is usually stronger than a secondhand account.

5. **Early** testimony supports historical claims

The closer the time between the event and testimony about it, the more reliable the witness, since there is less time for exaggeration, and even legend to creep into the account.

Minimal Facts Argument

1. The minimal facts approach seeks evidence with a high degree of certainty.
2. This approach considers only those data that are so strongly attested historically that they are granted by nearly every scholar who studies the subject, even rather skeptical ones.
3. The facts used, meet two criteria: They are well **attested** and nearly **every scholar** accepts them.

Fact #1

Jesus Died by Crucifixion

1. “Crucifixion was a common form of execution employed by **Romans** to punish members of the lower class, slaves, soldiers, the violently rebellious, and those accused of treason.”
2. “That Jesus was executed by crucifixion is recorded in **all 4 Gospels**. However, a number of **non-Christian** sources of the period report the event as well.”

Fact #1

Fact #1 is supported by the following lines of evidence:

- “Josephus writes, “When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified...””
- “Tacitus reports, “Nero fastened the guilt [of the burning of Rome] and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hand of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus.””

Fact #1

Fact #1 is supported by the following lines of evidence:

- “Lucian of Samosata, the Greek Satirist, writes, “The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.”
- “Mara bar Serapion, writing to his son from prison comments, “Or [what advantage came to] the Jews by the murder of their Wise King, seen that from that very time their kingdom was driven away from them?” Although Mara does not mention crucifixion as the mode of Jesus’ execution, he does say that He was killed.”

Fact #1

Fact #1 is supported by the following lines of evidence:

- “The Talmud reports that, “on the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged.”
- “The highly critical scholar of the Jesus Seminar, John Dominic Crossan, writes, “That he was crucified is as sure as anything historical can be.””

Fact #1 Summary

- **Jesus Died Due to Crucifixion**

- All Four Gospels

- Josephus

- Tacitus

- Lucian

- Mara Bar-Serapion

- Talmud

Fact #2

- **Jesus' Disciples Sincerely Believed He Rose from the Dead and Appeared to Them.**
- Habermas, recently completed an overview of more than **1,400** sources on the resurrection of Jesus published since 1975.
- He found **no** fact is more widely recognized than this fact that early Christian believers had **real** experiences that they thought were appearances of the risen Jesus.
- A critic may claim that what they saw were **hallucinations or visions**, but he does **not deny** that they actually experienced something.

Fact #2

Fact #2 is supported by the following lines of evidence:

1. The testimony of Paul *about* the disciples.

1.1. “He claimed that his own authority in the church was equal to that of other apostles. That authority was acknowledged by a number of the apostolic fathers soon after the completion of the N.T. Two of those early writers may have been disciples of the apostles. Paul reported that he knew at least some of the other disciples, even the big three, Peter, James and John. Acts reports that the disciples and Paul knew and fellowshiped with one another. Other early Christian writers within one hundred years of Jesus also seemed to hold that the disciples and Paul were colleagues, since they included Paul in the group called ‘apostles.’”

1.2. “After writing on the resurrection of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, Paul said he worked harder than all of the other apostles (15:10), but that whether “it was I or they, this [i.e., Jesus’ resurrection appearances] is what we preach” (15:11 NIV).

1.3. Thus, Paul knew the apostles personally and reports that they claimed that Jesus rose from the dead.

Fact #2

Fact #2 is supported by the following lines of evidence:

2. The oral tradition that passed through the early church.

2.1. “1 Cor. 15:3-8 is probably the earliest creed found in the New Testament. Many critical scholars believe that Paul received it from the disciples Peter and James while visiting them in Jerusalem three years after his conversion. If so, Paul learned it within five years of Jesus’ crucifixion and from the disciples themselves.”

Fact #2

Fact #2 is supported by the following lines of evidence:

3. The written works of the early church.

3.1. “Sources that cannot be ignored are the Gospels themselves. No matter how skeptical the critic might be concerning the Gospels, it is well-accepted that all four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke/Acts, John) were written during the first century. Each Gospel attests to the resurrection of Jesus, and Acts is the sequel to the third Gospel, Luke. This means that four accounts were written within seventy years of Jesus at the latest, reporting the disciples’ claims that Jesus rose from the dead.”

Fact #2

Fact #2 is supported by the following lines of evidence:

3. The written works of the early church.

3.2. “Clement of Rome writes: 'Therefore, having received orders and complete certainty caused by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and believing in the Word of God, they went with the Holy Spirits certainty, preaching the good news that the kingdom of God is about to come.'”

Fact #2

Fact #2 is supported by the following lines of evidence:

3. The written works of the early church.

3.3. “Irenaeus also reported information regarding Polycarp (c. 69-c. 155): “But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles.”

3.4. “Polycarp mentions the resurrection of Jesus 5 times in his letter to the church in Phillipi.”

Fact #2

Fact #2 is supported by the following lines of evidence:

4. Seven ancient sources give strong evidence that Jesus disciples actually believed that Jesus rose from the dead, even to the point of death:

- Acts
- Dionysius of Corinth (Eusebius)
- Clement of Rome
- Tertullian
- Polycarp
- Origen
- Ignatius

Fact #2 Summary

- **Jesus' Disciples Sincerely Believed He Rose from the Dead and Appeared to Them.**
 - **They claimed it:**
 - *Paul*
 - *Oral Tradition:* (1st Cor. 15:3-7) (Sermon Summaries in Acts 2)
 - *Written Tradition:* Gospels, Apostolic Fathers (Clement, Polycarp)
 - **They Believed it:**
 - *Willingness to Suffer:* Acts, Polycarp, Tertullian, Clement of Rome, Ignatious, Origen, Dionysius of Corinth (Eusebius)

Fact #3

The church persecutor, Paul, was suddenly changed.

- “**Saul of Tarsus**, better known by history as the apostle Paul, changed from being a skeptic, who believed that it was God’s will to **persecute the church** to becoming one of its most influential messengers.”

Fact #3

Fact #3 is reached by the following lines of evidence:

- “In his letters to the churches in Corinth, Galatia, and Philippi, Paul himself writes of his conversion from being a persecutor of the church to one who strongly promoted that Christian message. However, his pre-Christian actions against the church and his conversion are also recorded in Acts. The story of Paul’s conversion from persecutor to promoter of the church also appears to have been going around Judea within three years of his conversion.”
- “We have Paul’s own testimony, Luke’s record in Acts, and a story that was circulating among Christians in Judea.”

Fact #3

Fact #3 is reached by the following lines of evidence:

- “Both Paul himself and Luke report that it was because he believed firmly that he had experienced an encounter with the risen Jesus.”
- **“Thus, Jesus’ resurrection is testified to by friends and also by a foe.”**

Fact #3

Fact #3 is reached by the following lines of evidence:

- “His [Paul’s] belief that he had witnessed the risen Christ was so strong that he, like the original disciples, was willing to suffer continuously for the sake of the Gospel, even to the point of martyrdom. This point is well documented, reported by Paul himself, as well as Luke, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Tertullian, Dionysius of Corinth (Eusebius), and Origen (Eusebius).”

Fact #3 Summary

- **The church persecutor, Paul, was suddenly changed.**
 - **Pauls Conversion:**
 - Paul (his letters)
 - Acts (by Luke)
 - Known by early Christians in Judea (Galatians 1: 22-23)
 - **Suffering and Martyrdom:**
 - Documented by Paul, Luke, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Tertullian, Dionysius of Corinth (Eusebius), and Origen (Eusebius)

Fact #4

The skeptic James, brother of Jesus, was suddenly changed.

- James, a pious Jew, who was an **unbeliever** and a **skeptic** of Jesus, became a **Christian**.

Fact #4

Fact #4 is reached by the following lines of evidence:

- “The Gospels report that Jesus’ brothers, including James, were unbelievers during his ministry (Mark 3:21, 31; 6:3-4; John 7:5)”
- “The ancient creedal material in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7... lists an appearance of the risen Jesus to James: ‘then He appeared to James.’”
- “Subsequent to the alleged event of Jesus’ resurrection, James is identified as a leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:12-21; Gal. 1:19).”

Fact #4

Fact #4 is supported by the following lines of evidence:

- “Not only did James convert to Christianity, his beliefs in Jesus and his resurrection were so strong that he died as a martyr because of them. James’s martyrdom is attested by Josephus, Hegesippus, and Clement of Alexandria. We no longer have any of the works of Hegesippus or the writing of Clement where the event is mentioned. However, sections have been preserved by Eusebius. Therefore his martyrdom is attested by both Christian and non-Christian sources.”

Fact #4 Summary

- **The skeptic James, brother of Jesus, was suddenly changed.**
 - **Conversion:**
 - (Before) Gospels report Jesus' brothers were unbelievers prior to resurrection.
 - Early creed reports appearance of risen Jesus to James.
 - (After) Paul & Acts identify James as a leader in the church.
 - **Martyrdom:**
 - Documented by Josephus, Hegesippus (Eusebius), and Clement of Alexandria (Eusebius)

Fact #5

The tomb was empty.

- Habermas estimates that **75% of scholars** adhere to the empty tomb. The **4 previous** facts are more widely agreed upon.

Fact #5

Fact #5 is reached by the following lines of evidence:

- “Jesus was publicly executed in Jerusalem. His post mortem appearances and empty tomb were first proclaimed publicly there. It would have been impossible for Christianity to get off the ground in Jerusalem if the body had still been in the tomb. His enemies in the Jewish leadership and Roman government would only have had to exhume the corpse and publicly display in for the hoax to be shattered.”

Fact #5

Fact #5 is reached by the following lines of evidence:

- “Rather than point to an occupied tomb, early critics accused Jesus’ disciples of stealing the body (Matthew 28:12-13,; Justin Martyr, *Trypho* 108; Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 30)”
- “If the account of the empty tomb had been invented, it would most likely *not* have listed the women as the primary witnesses, since in that day a woman’s testimony was not nearly as credible as a man’s. Thus, the empty tomb appears to be historically credible in light of principal of embarrassment.”

Fact #5

Fact #5 is reached by the following lines of evidence:

- “The empty tomb is, therefore, well evidenced for historical certainty. Former Oxford University church historian William Wand writes, “All the strictly historical evidence we have is in favor of [the empty tomb], and those scholars who reject it ought to recognize that they do so on some other ground than that of scientific history.”

Fact #5 Summary

The tomb was empty.

- *Jerusalem Factor* (They could have exhumed the body)
- *Enemy Attestation* (They said the disciples stole it.)
- *Testimony of Women* (Criteria of Embarrassment)

Five Facts

Jesus' Death by Crucifixion

Disciples Beliefs that Jesus Appeared

Conversion of the Church Persecutor Paul

Conversion of the Skeptic James

Empty Tomb

Dealing With The Evidence

- **The evidence for the resurrection meets all the requirements mentioned for establishing historicity.**
- However, the reason why many reject the resurrection is not because of the lack of **evidence**, but because of a pre-commitment to **naturalism**.
- In trying to explain away the 5 facts, skeptics have offered the following alternative explanations to the data.

The Resurrection A Legend?

- 4 Reasons to believe that the resurrection was not **embellished** or **legendary**:
 1. Original disciples claimed resurrection from the **beginning**.
 2. **Paul** claimed to have seen Jesus.
 3. **James** claimed to have seen Jesus.
 4. Critics need **evidence** for assertions.

A Retelling of Other Ancient Myths?

- 3 Reasons why the resurrection is not a retelling of other ancient myths:
 1. Accounts are **unclear**:
 - Not considered parallels by today's standards.
 - First clear parallel account is 100+ years after Jesus.
 - Questionable whether resurrection was reported in earliest version of account.
 2. Accounts **lack evidence** and can easily be accounted for by opposing theories.
 3. Accounts **cannot explain** the evidence that exists for Jesus' resurrection.

Did The Disciples Go To The Wrong Tomb?

- 6 problems with the wrong tomb theory:
 1. Does not account for **appearances** to disciples.
 2. **Followers** not convinced by empty tomb, but by appearances.
 3. **Paul** not convinced by empty tomb, but by appearance.
 4. **James** not convinced by empty tomb, but by appearance.
 5. No **sources** suggest wrong tomb.
 6. Burial by Joseph indicated tombs location was **known**.

Did Jesus Actually Die?

(Apparent Death Theory or Swoon Theory)

- 3 problems with the “**Swoon Theory**”:
 1. JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association)
 - Asphyxiation
 - **Spear** Wound
 2. Strauss’ Critique
 3. Paul experienced “**Glorious**” appearance.

Did The Disciples Experience Hallucinations?

- 5 reasons that refute the hallucination hypothesis:
 1. Not **group** occurrences
 2. Empty tomb
 3. Conversion of the **Church Persecutor**, Paul
 4. Conversion of the **Skeptic**, James
 5. A hallucination does not lead to **resurrection**, but to the thought that the person is **dead**.

Does Bias Make The Evidence Disappear?

- 6 responses to biased testimony:
 1. **Paul** unbiased
 2. **James** unbiased
 3. **Eliminates** virtually all of history
 4. Bias does not require **distortion**
 5. **Ad Hominem** fallacy

A Pre-Commitment To Naturalism

- Claim: “Only what science **proves** is **true!**”
- Problems:
 1. Science is **limited**.
 2. **Self-refuting** since this position can't prove itself.
 3. The scientific method can't prove itself.
 4. Historian can deal with **non-supernatural** elements of the resurrection data.

A Pre-Commitment To Naturalism

- Claim: Science **proves** that people don't come back to **life**.
- Problems:
 1. Science proves that people don't rise by **natural causes**.
 2. Jesus' life and claims provide a **context** where his resurrection was right at home.

A Pre-Commitment To Naturalism

- Claim: Science can explain **everything**. We don't need God.
- Problems:
 1. Former "**God of the Gaps**" explanations no more undermine current arguments for God than discarded scientific theories undermine today's science.
 2. **Genetic** Fallacy
 3. Not what we **don't** know, but what we **do** know
 4. **Unjustified** leap to proclaim we'll find a scientific answer for resurrection.

Caring When Sharing

How should we share this information?

1. Be **loving**.
2. Be **humble**.
3. Be a **good listener**.
4. Stay on the subject of the **resurrection**.
5. **Anchor** a conclusion before moving on.

Caring When Sharing

How should we share this information?

6. Learn common objections and be **comfortable** answering them.
7. Be **prepared** to address objections for which you do not know the answer.
8. Don't **be taken** by false information.
9. Prepare for the battle in **prayer**.

Caring When Sharing

How should we share this information?

10. Resist the temptation to **overstate** your case.
11. Always be **calm**.
12. To be proficient, **practice**.