

Defending the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

”And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile” I Corinthians 15:17

When discussing the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is important to determine what your audience believes about the Bible. There are three ways that people generally view the Scriptures:

- 1) It is the Holy, Inspired, and Infallible Word of God
- 2) It is a document that has some value and truth, but errors are found within its pages. This leaves us with a document that can give us reliable information in some areas and unreliable information in other areas. In other words, it is useful, but not perfect.
- 3) It is a complete myth with no value and no reliable information.

Defending the Resurrection to one who holds the Bible to be infallible:

This would appear to be an easy task at first. A cursory examination of the New Testament reveals statements such as the following:

”But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead...” I Corinthians 15:20

”Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.” Mark 16:6

“...who through the Spirit of holiness was declared to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead.” Romans 1:4

The problem arises when someone claims that Jesus rose from the dead, but not in a bodily state. This is the belief of Jehovah’s Witnesses. They claim that Jesus was raised as a spirit being, a re-created spirit archangel Michael. We answer these claims by noting the following passages [which can also be examined in the Jehovah’s Witness Bible]:

- 1) In John 2:19-21, Jesus said that He Himself would raise His own body from the dead
- 2) In Luke 24:37-39 and John 20:24-28, Jesus goes to long lengths to show that He was raised bodily. “Look at my hands and feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost [greek: spirit] does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” [Luke 24:39]
- 3) What is the significance of the empty tomb? Just that God destroyed Jesus’ body?

Defending the Resurrection to one who believes the Bible to have some value:

Many people believe that the Bible is correct in describing a man named Jesus who lived 2,000 years ago and had a number of followers. They also will note that the early church claimed that Jesus rose from the dead. But they will deny that Jesus of Nazareth miraculously rose bodily from the grave. Several theories have been therefore raised to explain the *apparent* resurrection:

The Conspiracy Theory

This theory proposes that the disciples conspired to steal Jesus’ body and then claim that He rose from the dead. This theory was first used by the Jews who bribed the guards of the tomb into saying that this happened.

Problems:

- 1) The disciples were highly moral men who followed Jesus’ teachings. Is it likely that they would all turn into base liars, thieves, and deceivers immediately upon His death? In fact, these same disciples went on to teach and live the highest system of morals the earth has ever seen.

During their ministry, they performed many miracles, including healing the sick. From where did they get these powers? If these powers came from God, then why would God empower liars and deceivers?

- 2) The disciples carried their testimony to their death. Not one of them ever retracted his story. Despite torture and persecution, all remained true to the account. Such a wide-spread conspiracy lasting torture and death has never happened in the history of the world.
- 3) Would so many men be willing to die for something they knew to be false? Their sudden change from fearful, confused, and defeated to fearless and powerful preachers is unheard of in a conspirist.
- 4) This theory makes a mockery of the Roman military. A band of fishermen and commoners is no match for a sealed tomb with a very large stone in front of it, guarded by highly trained Roman soldiers whose very life depended upon carrying out their commands. A Roman soldier caught sleeping on his watch was put to death. It is inconceivable that the disciples would even get one inch past the guards.
- 5) The events of the resurrection were witnessed by more than 500 other men, as Paul notes in I Corinthians 15. If this fact is not true, then history should record some refutation of Paul's account.
- 6) There is no immediate refuting, or historical case made against the resurrection during the life of the disciples. In other words, no one laid down a case against the resurrection during their lives because there simply was no case to lay down.

Here are the facts during the lives of the disciples:

- 1) Empty Tomb
- 2) No one can find Jesus' body
- 3) Jesus Himself appeared to over 500 people over a 40 day period
- 4) The power of the disciples was obvious in not only preaching, but miracles
- 5) There was no forensic evidence available against the resurrection

Religious Hallucination Theory

This theory states that the disciples did not lie per se because they all indeed believed Jesus to have been risen because they all saw experienced a hallucination or hysteria.

Problems:

- 1) Many people saw Jesus in groups and on several occasions. These encounters involved touching, conversing, and eating together. No other known mass hysteria over a 40 day period involving dozens and even hundreds of people in groups and in normal settings has ever been known to occur. It is just simply impossible for multiple groups of numerous people to hallucinate the exact same thing at the same time. If this could happen, then a modern-day murderer could claim that 10 eyewitnesses to the crime were all merely experiencing mass hallucinations!
- 2) The body of Jesus was never found. This would have put an immediate end to any hysteria.

The Apparent Death Theory [a.k.a. “The Swoon Theory”]

Those who hold to this theory propose that Jesus only appeared to die. He went, therefore, into a coma and a few days later came out of it and emerged from the tomb.

Problems:

This theory is the most ludicrous of all, because it fails to understand the extent of Christ’s wounds, and the experience of the Roman executioners

- 1) A brief overview of Jesus’ suffering shows a man severely beaten, with massive blood loss and dehydration. After having a spear inserted in his side, with blood and water coming out [which is indicative of a pericardial effusion seen in cardiac failure---water; and either a hemopericardium or cardiac laceration---blood], He is wrapped from head to toe and had 75 pounds of spices placed upon him and then placed in a tomb alone, with no medical care for up to three days behind Roman guard. Could such a man recover from these injuries?
- 2) Would a man who recovered from these injuries be able to convince anyone that He is the Lord of Life? Would He not be in immediate need of medical care? Would He appear to be a gardener to a lady visiting the tomb? Would He not immediately frighten her with His many wounds, blood and tattered condition?
- 3) The Romans were experts in execution. Jesus of Nazareth was a special man. Even the Roman guards noted he was special as they divided his garments and noted how He died. The need to be sure of His death would be critical. To assume that the Romans wouldn’t recognize when a man died is not conceivable.
- 4) How would such a man arising out of a coma be able to roll back a stone and subdue the Roman guards?

The Wrong Tomb Theory

This theory supposes that the finding of an empty tomb is merely the finding of the wrong tomb. This theory states that Jesus’ body was actually in another tomb.

Problems:

- 1) The women noted exactly where the tomb was [Luke 23:55], so it is improbable that every one of the women would make the same mistake
- 2) Peter and John ran also to the tomb. They would also have had to make the same mistake.
- 3) Again, if they went to the wrong tomb, the Romans and Jews would be more than happy to direct them to the correct tomb, with its seal, once the Resurrection was preached!
- 4) The Wrong Tomb theory ignores the latter bodily appearances of Christ to 500 people. Even if they went to the wrong tomb [which they didn’t as history shows], Jesus still rose and appeared to many people over 40 days and convinced everyone He met that He was indeed alive!

The Legend Theory

This theory grants even less reliability to the Biblical text, supposing the Resurrection and appearances of Christ were legendary tales. Thus the Bible cannot be trusted at any point it discusses the Resurrection.

Problems:

- 1) The idea that the accounts are legendary implies a verbal tradition over hundreds of years. Legends arise only long after the time of the events. Modern Biblical scholarship and textual analysis has definitively shown the texts of the gospels to have been written shortly after the life of Jesus Christ on earth. The time is simply not there for a legend to arise.

2) The accounts are those of eyewitnesses, which leads us to either accept them, or reject them as lies, but we cannot claim them to be legends.

3) A non-Christian Jew named Josephus, who is highly acclaimed for his history of the Jewish people said about Jesus:

“Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.” *Josephus:*

Antiquities 18.3.1 [63-64]

This historical quotation by Josephus cannot be claimed to be spurious, because the early historian Eusebius himself referred to, and repeated this very same quote from Josephus.

Defending the Resurrection to one who believes the Bible to be complete fiction:

Someone who believes that the Bible is complete fiction will not be dissuaded by arguments from the Bible. For them, the Bible is of no value from a historical standpoint. Such a person then concludes that the Resurrection is a myth and dismisses the Scriptural accounts.

Problems:

1) The evidence in favor of the reliability of the Bible is colossal. When determining the reliability of any text, we must use three tests; The Bibliographical test, The internal test; and the External test. If we are to be intellectually honest, we shouldn't reject the reliability of the New Testament if it meets or exceeds these tests compared to other pieces of literature that we do indeed consider reliable.

The **Bibliographical test** shows the New Testament to excel. With there being over 6,000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in agreement, compared to 643 of Homer's Iliad and 10 copies of the Gallic Wars, the New Testament soars above the competition.

The **Internal test** shows the New Testament to be consistent in its message despite it containing nine authors and 27 books. No other collection of books from ancient times has such incredible internal harmony.

The **External Test** requires comparing the facts contained in a writing with outside sources. The New Testament and the Bible as a whole has time and again been proven accurate archaeologically. The book of Acts in the NT has been hailed as the best source for accurate historical information of the first century that exists. And outside authors such as Josephus have verified the basic message of the New Testament, and the Resurrection account [see above].

2) If the reliability of the New Testament will still not be accepted, then the Resurrection can still be argued based upon **The Origin of the Christian Faith**. Whatever a person may think about the Resurrection, even the most skeptical admit that the *belief* in the resurrection lies at the heart of the origin of the Christian faith. This belief in the Resurrection is traced to the early disciples as we have church historian records of the early church believing and preaching the resurrection back to the times of the apostles.

So the question becomes: What caused the apostolic belief in the Resurrection? Falling back to a conspiracy theory, empty tomb theory or other explanation will not suffice, as we have explained above.

According to Professor Moule of Cambridge University:

”If the coming into existence of the Nazarenes [Christians], a phenomenon undeniably attested by the New Testament, rips a great hole in history, a hole of the size and shape of the Resurrection, what does the secular historian propose to stop it up with?...the birth and rapid rise of the Christian Church...remain an unsolved enigma for any historian who refuses to take seriously the only explanation offered by the Church itself.” *C.F.D. Moule, The Phenomenon of the New Testament, pp.3, 13*

As we have seen, there is no other explanation for the origin of the Christian faith. There is no other explanation for the empty tomb. There is no other explanation for the witness of the apostles. There is no other explanation for the recorded appearances of Christ after His crucifixion. No matter what one believes about the Bible, there is simply no other explanation for these events than the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead!