

A Summary of Some Evidences for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Note: It is important to remember that it is most beneficial to allow history to speak for itself and not determine ahead of time that certain events are 'impossible'. It is especially significant to understand that if there is indeed a God, who created the universe, then it is both possible and probable that God would sometimes suspend the natural laws of that universe to do something unique and out of the ordinary within that universe, i.e. perform miracles.

The Church— Sometimes evidence for a thing's truth can be right under one's nose. Christians as individuals and as a whole have *always*, from the year A.D. 30 (or 33) when Jesus died to the year we are in now, believed that Jesus of Nazareth physically died on a cross and physically arose from the dead three days later. Where did this belief come from?

Jesus' disciple Peter had denied his Lord three times the night Jesus was arrested. What changed him from a broken, fearful man (who had gone back to his fishing) to the man who, only months after Christ's death, preached Christ's resurrection to crowds of thousands and who eventually was crucified for his belief?

The man called Paul was the exact *opposite* of a disciple of Jesus. He was obtaining and overseeing the executions and arrests of Christ's followers in the years following Christ's crucifixion. He claims three times in the book of Acts to have been 'arrested' by the risen Lord Jesus Christ while on the road to Damascus. What made him give his entire adult life away, through much suffering and persecution and labour and eventual beheading, in telling the whole Roman world nothing other than that this crucified Nazarene was alive from the dead and Lord of all?

What about Jesus' own 'natural' brother, James, the son of Mary and Joseph? James had disbelieved in Jesus while he was alive, thinking him perhaps good intentioned but mentally ill. James was well known and well spoken of by all in Jerusalem, including the Jews who did not believe in Jesus (they called him 'James the Just'). Why did James wait until his big brother had been disgracefully crucified to put his faith in Him and even be the recognized leader of Christ's followers in Jerusalem? (Also Jude, another brother of Jesus, believed after Jesus' death.)

What emboldened and impassioned each of Christ's original 12 disciples (except John who was exiled, and Judas who hung himself after betraying Jesus) to die a violent martyr's death for their belief in Jesus Christ as the risen Lord and Saviour of the World?

Sunday—The first Christians were Jews, like Jesus. These Jews changed their sacred day of worship (Saturday, the 'Sabbath') to Sunday in order to celebrate Jesus' resurrection on the first day of the week. What caused this remarkable modification of a tradition thousands of years old?

The New Testament—This collection of historical documents has over 6,000 manuscript copies that are in libraries and universities all over the world today. Some of these date back to within a generation of the events they record (which rules out resurrection belief being 'legendary'). There are *no other historical documents* that come even close to this kind of manuscript evidence. The closest one, Homer's *Iliad*, has over 600 manuscript copies extant today and the earliest copies are from *over a thousand years after* the original was written. Other actual histories, like those written by Tacitus or Livy, only have 20 manuscripts extant, which also date to a thousand years after the originals.

Not only are the New Testament documents reliable in regard to manuscript evidence, but they also present four distinctive accounts of the eyewitness testimonies to the resurrection, each with corroborating details. When Paul was writing his letters to large and thriving congregations of Christians all over the Roman Empire only 30 years after Jesus' death, the resurrection can clearly be seen to have been a well-known event accepted as fact among these thousands of believers.

Was it lies and/or delusions that lay behind such widespread and costly belief (remember the mass persecution of Christians during these years)?

The only historical evidence we have of 'famous' Christians like Peter, James, John, Paul, Mary, and Martha, as well as countless unnamed or briefly mentioned Christians of that time is that they were sincere in their faith and held honesty and truthfulness in the highest esteem, practicing it even in the face of imprisonment and death. Nor is there any evidence that they were mentally unstable, but on the contrary were morally and intellectually powerful as individuals and as a community so that they, in the words of their enemies, 'turned the world upside down' (Acts 17:6). This they did, not merely by following the teachings of a religious leader, but by 'preaching' that Jesus had died, and had risen from the grave to die no more. Once again we must ask, what caused that belief among this sane and ethical community?

The Empty Tomb— If the authorities had Jesus' corpse, they could have produced it and paraded it at any time during the first days of Christian preaching, disproving the whole thing. Many of the Jewish authorities very much wanted to discredit the early Christians, but they actually never even argued the point of whether Jesus rose from the dead or not. They attacked the faith on theological, not historical, grounds.

If the disciples had stolen Jesus' body, they would have eventually cracked under the pressure of keeping up such a wicked and wild fabrication. Besides, as we have seen, there is no other evidence that the disciples' character would allow for such deliberate deception.

If the women who visited Jesus' tomb early on Sunday morning had mistakenly come to the wrong tomb, this does not explain Peter and John running to the tomb to see for themselves and even going inside to look at the grave-clothes. Rather, the experience of these men verified the witness of the women.

Finally, it is not conceivable that Jesus was not actually dead (after hours of suffocation and bleeding and being pierced in the side by a spear), but had only fainted and then somehow revived in the damp tomb, broke through the grave-clothes wound about him, rolled back the huge, sealed stone, overcame the guards, walked many miles, and, though in desperate need of medical attention,

was able to convince his disciples that he was the conqueror of death. Frankly, this attempted explanation (known as ‘the Swoon Theory’) has been laughed out of the debate on all sides.

In the final analysis it is easier to believe in the literal, bodily resurrection of the historical man Jesus Christ than to believe attempts to explain away the evidence.

The ‘Appearances’ of Christ—There are 10 distinct appearances recorded in the Gospels. Since the Gospel records were written down so close to the events that they describe (within a generation), this is not enough time for these accounts to be legends. Those who ‘saw’ Christ alive after his crucifixion were sincere and convinced of what they took to be the facts.

Were they sincerely *wrong*? Were they hallucinating? Hallucinations require a number of factors to coincide for them to occur in someone’s perception. Hallucinations happen to persons of nervous and imaginative disposition. Hallucinations are extremely subjective and individual so that no two people have the exact same experience. Hallucinations usually occur only in particular times and places of association. Hallucinations generally happen regularly over a long period of time. And hallucinations, most importantly, happen to people who intensely *want* to believe they are seeing the imagined appearance.

The fact is that *none* of these criteria coincide for this psychological phenomenon to apply to the early followers of Christ who claimed to have seen him alive from the dead. The appearances happened to a wide variety of individuals and groups of all sorts. The appearances happened both indoors and outdoors and in the morning, afternoon, and evening, and they included long periods as well as short periods (the longer periods involving walks, talks, meals, fishing, and teaching). The appearances happened during a period of 40 days and then abruptly stopped. Though no one claimed to see another appearance, the witnesses lived on for many years to be able to testify to the original appearances for anyone who asked. And, most importantly, the disciples were clearly distraught and depressed and disillusioned about their dead master when he appeared to them. The women were going to the tomb to prepare his corpse with spices for final burial, and initially thought Jesus’ corpse had simply been removed. The other disciples wouldn’t believe one another that they had seen Jesus alive. They accused one another of ‘idle tales’. Even when a group of them saw him together they thought he was a ghost until he let them touch him and ate food in front of them. These people in no way *expected* to see Jesus alive from the dead. They were not ‘primed’ to hallucinate. (Nor, it may be added, can these appearances be cases of ‘mistaken identity’—this cannot account for the widespread belief and courage that followed.)

Again, it is easier to believe that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples than it is to believe attempts to explain away the eyewitness testimonies.

So What is the Significance of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ?

If the historical person Jesus Christ rose from the dead three days after he was crucified, then we may accept his testimony to himself that he was the Son of God, that he was indeed God living among us. If he rose from the dead we know for certain that human life exists beyond the grave and we may accept Jesus’ testimony that he himself will be the Judge we stand before when this life is through. If he rose from the dead we may accept his testimony that his death on the cross really does wash away the sins of those who believe in him, and that he gives eternal life to those who call him Lord. If Jesus rose from the dead, then we may finally know what the God who created us is truly like and we may enter into a *relationship* with God. If Jesus rose from the dead, then we have the answer to the ultimate questions of life: Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going?

Seven Stanzas At Easter

By John Updike

Make no mistake: if He rose at all
it was as His body;
if the cells' dissolution did not reverse, the molecules
reknit, the amino acids rekindle,
the Church will fall.

It was not as the flowers,
each soft Spring recurrent;
it was not as His Spirit in the mouths and fuddled
eyes of the eleven apostles;
it was as His flesh: ours.

The same hinged thumbs and toes,
the same valved heart
that—pierced—died, withered, paused, and then
regathered out of enduring Might
new strength to enclose.

Let us not mock God with metaphor,
analogy, sidestepping, transcendence;
making of the event a parable, a sign painted in the
faded credulity of earlier ages:
let us walk through the door.

The stone is rolled back, not papier-maché,
not a stone in a story,
but the vast rock of materiality that in the slow
grinding of time will eclipse for each of us
the wide light of day.

And if we will have an angel at the tomb,
make it a real angel,
weighty with Max Planck's quanta, vivid with hair,
opaque in the dawn light, robed in real linen
spun on a definite loom.

Let us not seek to make it less monstrous,
for our own convenience, our own sense of beauty,
lest, awakened in one unthinkable hour, we are
embarrassed by the miracle,
and crushed by remonstrance.

- From *TELEPHONE POLES AND OTHER POEMS* by John
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