

DID JESUS REALLY RISE FROM THE DEAD?

1 Cor. 15

INTRODUCTION:

Read 1 Cor. 15

The skeptics are right when they put the burden of proof on our shoulders...

1Pe 3:15 NKJV - (15) But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always [be] ready to [give] a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

2Co 10:4-5 NKJV - (4) For the weapons of our warfare [are] not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, (5) casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

When embarking on a discussion like this, it would be nice to have a starting point...a consensus on what the accepted facts are.

***What do scholars say about the resurrection?

Gary Habermas has completed the most comprehensive investigation to date on what scholars believe about the Resurrection. Habermas collected more than 1400 of the most critical scholarly works on the resurrection written from 1975-2003. In *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope*, Habermas reports that virtually all scholars across the spectrum agree that these following points concerning Jesus and Christianity are actual historic facts.

***1. Jesus died by Roman crucifixion

2. He was buried, most likely in a private tomb

3. Soon afterwards the disciples were discouraged, bereaved, and despondent, having lost hope.

4. Jesus' tomb was found empty very soon after his interment.

5. The disciples had experiences that they *believed* were actual appearances of the risen Jesus.

6. Due to these experiences, the disciples' lives were thoroughly transformed. They were even willing to die for their belief.

***7. The proclamation of the resurrection took place very early, from the beginning of church history.

8. The disciples' public testimony and preaching of the resurrection took place in the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus was crucified and buried shortly before.

9. The gospel message centered on the preaching of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

10. James, the brother of Jesus and a skeptic before this time, was converted when he *believed* he also saw the risen Jesus.

11. Just a few years later, Saul of Tarsus (Paul) became a Christian believer, due to an experience that he also believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.

In light of these facts...

****The New Testament is not a Legend*: It was written within 2 generations of the event by eyewitnesses or their contemporaries. The NT is corroborated by several non-Christian writers. NT mentions 30 historical figures who have been confirmed by sources outside of the NT.

The New Testament is not a Lie: The NT writers included divergent and embarrassing details difficult and demanding sayings, and the carefully distinguished Jesus' sayings from their own. They referenced facts and eyewitnesses that their readers already knew or could verify. They encouraged their readers to check out what they said.

These eye witnesses endured persecution and martyrdom, yet they could have saved themselves simply by denying their testimony.

*****So is the New Testament true?**—If most scholars agree in the previous 11 facts stated above because the evidence shows that the NT story is not a legend, a lie, or embellishment, then we know beyond reasonable doubt that the NT writers accurately recorded what they saw.

BUT...does that mean that all of the events of the NT are true? Not necessarily. The skeptic still has one last out.

The last possible out for the skeptic is that the NT writers were deceived...they were wrong about what they saw.

Were the NT writers deceived about miraculous events like the Resurrection? Perhaps they really *believed* the Jesus had risen—and that's why they paid with their lives—but they were mistaken or fooled. Perhaps there are natural explanations for the miracles they think they saw.

Critical scholars leave themselves this out. Consider #5

*****Fact #5:** The disciples had experiences that they *believed* were actual appearances of the risen Jesus.

Scholars are not saying the Jesus actually rose from the dead (although many do think He did). The minimal consensus of nearly all scholars is that the disciples *believed* that Jesus rise from the dead.

For the eyewitnesses and contemporaries of the events to be wrong, there must be some other explanation for the Resurrection....

*****HOW DO SKEPTICS EXPLAIN AWAY THE RESURRECTION?**

*****I. Hallucination Theory**—Were the disciples deceived by hallucinations? This theory has a number of fatal flaws, but here are just two of them:

A. Hallucinations are not experienced by groups but only individuals.

1. They are a lot like dreams.

2. If rare psychological conditions exist, an individual may have hallucinations, but his friends will not. Even if they do, they will not have the same one.

3. This theory doesn't work. Jesus didn't just appear to one person—He appeared on a dozen separate occasions, in a variety of settings to different people over a 40-day period.

a. by men and women; a total of more than 500

b. seen walking, talking, eating; inside, outside

c. not a ghost, because 6 of the 12 appearances Jesus was touched or He ate real food.

B. Hallucinations do not explain the empty tomb. (Fact #4)

1. Even if the 500+ eyewitnesses shared in a hallucination at 12 different times, then why didn't the Romans and Jews get Jesus' body and parade it around the end of Christianity once and forever.

2. They would have loved to do so, but they could not, because the tomb was empty.

*****II. Wrong Tomb Theory**—Maybe the disciples went to the wrong tomb and then assumed He had risen. This theory also has two flaws:

A. If the disciples would have gone to the wrong tomb, the Romans and the Jews would have gone to the right one to expose the body of Jesus.

1. The tomb was known by the Jews. It belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin)

2. The Romans knew the right tomb, because they put 2 guards there.

3. In order for the wrong tomb theory to be true, all of the Jews, Romans, and followers of Jesus had to have suffered a permanent kind of "collective amnesia" about what happened to the body of Jesus.

B. Second, even if the disciples went to the wrong tomb, it doesn't explain the appearances of the risen Jesus.

1. The empty tomb didn't convince most of the disciples that Jesus had risen.

2. It was the appearances that turned them from scared, skeptical, scattered cowards into the greatest peaceful missionary force in history. (Fact #3, 6)

3. Especially true with Saul of Tarsus. (Fact #11)

C. The bottom line is this: even if one would explain the empty tomb naturally, this would not be enough to disprove the resurrection. Any alternative theory MUST also explain away the appearances of Jesus. The wrong tomb theory explains neither.

*****III. Apparent Death Theory**—Did Jesus really die, or just go into a 3-day coma? In other words, He was alive when He was put in the tomb, escaped, and convinced His disciples that He had risen from the dead.

A. First, enemies and friends alike believed that Jesus was dead.

1. The Romans were professional executioners. (scourging, crucifixion, and spear)

2. Pilate confirmed that He was dead before turning the body over to Joseph of Arimathea. Mark 15:44

3. Jesus' death is the cause of the disciples losing all hope. (Fact #3)

B. Second, Jesus was embalmed with over 75lbs. of spices and bandages by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. (John 19:40)

C. Third, even if everyone was wrong about Jesus being dead, He would have never survived 3 days in the tomb considering the injuries He had sustained.

D. Fourth, even if He did survive that 36 hours, how could He unwrap Himself, move the stone from inside, get by the elite Roman soldiers and convince the skeptical disciple that He had risen.

Even if this happened, He would have been a battered, bleeding pulp of a man whom the disciples would pity, not worship. They'd say, "You may be alive, but you're certainly not risen. Let's get you to a doctor!"

E. Fifth, this theory doesn't explain the bright light appearance to Saul of Tarsus.

1. This coma theory cannot explain the conversion of Paul. (Fact #11)

2. Think about it...the post-coma Jesus waving a torch and using His "God-voice" from the bushes.

3. This was an exercise of divine power in broad daylight that changed a man, and the world, forever.

F. Sixth, several non-Christian writers affirmed that Jesus had died: Josephus, Tacitus, Thallus, and the Jewish Talmud.

It is said that that death of Jesus is an undisputable fact of history.

*****IV. The Disciples Stole the Body Theory**

A. This does not support nor get support from anything we have already covered. If this is true, then all of the NT writers were NOT deceived.

B. This theory says that the NT writers were not deceived by hallucinations, wrong tomb, nor His apparent death, but they are not the ones who are causing the deception. This position says that ALL NT writers are liars.

C. Why would anyone embark on such a self-defeating conspiracy? It got them beaten, tortured, and martyred!

1. They continued to say Jesus was resurrected

2. Even in the face of persecution and death, there is no record of any of them recanting (which would have saved their life).

D. This theory carries various absurdities: disciples getting past the Roman guards, appearances to Paul, James, and other eyewitnesses, and all non-Christian writers were also lying.

E. The only record of this stolen body theory is the one in Matthew, where the Jews paid off the Romans soldiers to say the disciples stole the body and then promised to protect them.

F. The main point here is that the theft hypothesis was a tacit admission that the tomb was really empty!!!

*****V. There Are Other Theories**

A. A substitute took Jesus' place; Muslim belief; means that they had the wrong guy from the time of the arrest; This theory comes 600 years after the events and contradicts most of the 11 facts virtually all scholars believe. Mere speculation without a shred of evidence.

B. The disciple's faith lead to their belief in the resurrection. The NT writers did not create the resurrection...the resurrection created the NT writers.

CONCLUSION:

***"Skeptics must provide *more* than alternative theories to the Resurrection; they must provide *first-century evidence* for those theories."

--Gary Habermas

*****DID JESUS REALLY RISE FROM THE DEAD?**

With regard to the resurrection of Jesus, all alternative theories have fatal flaws. The resurrection is the only explanation that unifies the facts listed in the beginning without contradictions.