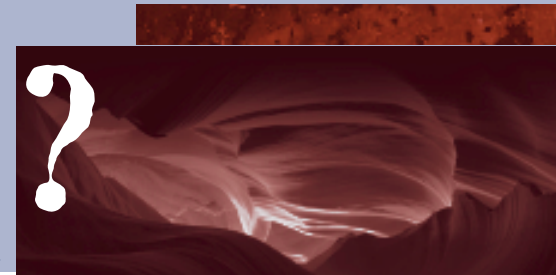


Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?

—Michael Horner



**Christianity stands
or falls on the
event of the
Resurrection!**

If Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead, even the apostle Paul admitted that the Christian faith is worthless. Since they are not really forgiven by God, millions of Christians have been living under a delusion for almost 2000 years and should be pitied more than all people.

On the other hand, if Jesus *did* rise from the dead, it substantiates his claims to being God. We can know for sure that there is life after death. We can be confident that God has visited this planet and proven His love for us and that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life, the bridge between us and our Creator.

The case for the historicity of the resurrection rests upon the evidence for three independently established facts. If it can be shown that the tomb of Jesus was found empty, that he did physically and bodily appear to many people after his death and that the origin of the Christian faith is inexplicable apart from his resurrection, then, if there is no plausible natural explanation that fits the data, one can rationally conclude that Jesus rose from the dead.¹

One cannot rule out the resurrection because of a prior assumption that miracles are impossible. When a skeptic proposes that the resurrection accounts are legendary *because* they describe something miraculous, the naturalistic presupposition has become a part of the argumentation for the hypothesis, and the argument is circular.² He has assumed the very conclusion he is trying to make, that a miracle like a resurrection is impossible. In point of fact, as long as it is even possible that God exists, miracles are possible. As philosopher W.L. Craig remarks, “That miracles are possible is... neutral ground between the opposing claims that miracles are necessary and miracles are impossible.”³

What one should do then is try to honestly answer the question, “What does the evidence suggest is the most plausible explanation for the data?” *Clearly something happened* in first century Palestine that has had a remarkable impact on the world. The issue is what is the best explanation for what happened. Which explanation or hypothesis is best supported by the evidence and best explains the data? It is easy to just criticize an existing hypothesis, like the resurrection, but what is needed is an alternative hypothesis that accounts for *all* the data with equal force. It is a comparison of hypotheses that must be done.

Now, even though we are going to be discussing the historical grounds for believing in the resurrection, grounds that I think are very good, I would not want to imply that there are not other grounds for believing in the resurrection, like one’s personal experience of the risen Christ.

The Empty Tomb

There are at least six lines of evidence that support the tomb being empty on that first Easter morning.

First, the origin of the Christian movement in Jerusalem would have been impossible without the empty tomb. If the tomb still contained the body, no one would have believed the disciples’ story of the resurrection. But thousands did believe. The founding of Christianity in the same city where Jesus was publicly killed and buried demands that the tomb was empty.

Second, the written account describing the burial is widely recognized as being historically credible. The inclusion of Joseph of Arimethea as the one who buried Jesus in his own tomb is one of the many reasons most scholars accept the

accuracy of the burial story. It is highly unlikely that fictitious stories about a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling class, could have been pulled off.

The absence of competing burial stories further enhances the credibility of the biblical account of the burial. If the gospel tradition were legendary, one would expect to find conflicting traditions, especially in Jewish literature, but there are none. Moreover, the burial and empty tomb story are a continuous narrative linked grammatically and linguistically. If the burial account is reliable, then the empty tomb account is likely also reliable.

Now if the burial account was accurate, then the grave site (Joseph's Garden tomb) would have been well known. And if the grave site was well known, no one would have believed that Jesus had risen, not the disciples, nor any of the thousands of others, unless the tomb was in fact empty. And you can be sure that if the body had still been in the tomb, the Jewish authorities would have exhumed it and exposed the whole charade. But in fact, even though they had every reason to want to refute Christianity, they could never produce the body of Jesus — inside or outside the tomb.

Third, the earliest anti-Christian propaganda confirms the tomb was empty. The Jewish religious leaders claimed the disciples stole the body. The fact that they never denied that Jesus' tomb was empty, but only tried to explain it away is persuasive evidence that the tomb was in fact empty. Historically, this is evidence of the highest quality because it comes from the opponents of Christianity.

Fourth, the fact that Jesus' tomb was never venerated as a shrine in the first century indicates that it was empty. It was customary to set up a shrine where a holy man's bones lay. There were at least 50 such sites in Palestine at that time. The absence of such a shrine for Jesus suggests the bones weren't there.

Fifth, the testimony of the Apostle Paul implies the tomb was empty. Writing in about AD 55, Paul quotes an old Christian saying that Jesus died, was buried and rose on the third day. The idea that a person could be raised from the dead while the body remained in the grave would

have been nonsense to Paul's Jewish mind. The Jewish concept of resurrection was extremely physical. Paul is clearly assuming and implying an empty tomb here. As Craig points out, "Were this not so, then Pauline theology would have taken an entirely different route, trying to explain how resurrection could be possible, though the body remained in the grave."⁴

Moreover, this saying concerning the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is too early to be legendary. Paul would have learned it in his first two years as a convert, or at least no later than AD 36 when he visited Peter and James in Jerusalem. Thus, this formula is no later than five or six years after the resurrection, not enough time for legend to dominate over the facts.

Sixth, the burial and empty tomb accounts in Mark are based on a very early source. The high priest is mentioned without using his name, which implies that Caiaphas was still high priest when this story began circulating. If it had been written after Caiaphas' term of office, his name would have been used to distinguish him from the next high priest. Since we know from the Jewish historian Josephus, that Caiaphas was high priest from AD 18-37, this story began circulating no later than AD 37, within the first seven years after the events.

These six points are among many that provide a powerful case for the tomb being empty the Sunday morning after Jesus' death. The move in scholarly circles in recent years has been toward the acceptance of the empty tomb, since it is very difficult to refute on historical grounds.

"The historian cannot justifiably deny the empty tomb...the evidence necessitates the conclusion that the tomb was indeed found empty." — Michael Grant

Historian Michael Grant concludes, "The historian cannot justifiably deny the empty tomb... if we apply the same sort of criteria that we would apply to any other ancient sources, then the evidence is firm and plausible enough to necessitate the conclusion that the tomb was indeed found empty."⁵

Most people who reject the empty tomb do so because of philosophical assumptions and prejudices such as, "miracles are impossible." But this type of assumption may simply have to be changed in light of historical fact.

The Conspiracy Theory

What about the claim that the disciples stole the body? Although this theory may seem plausible at first, biblical scholars have universally rejected it for nearly 200 years. However, since it is often still offered as an explanation for the empty tomb at a popular level, a brief response is in order.

The conspiracy theory is morally, psychologically and physically impossible. It is hard to deny that the disciples were at least sincerely devout men who tried to pursue the righteousness that Jesus taught them. The conspiracy hypothesis forces us to regard them as cheap frauds and cunning deceivers, quite inconsistent with the ethics of their own writings. And what did they gain from this deception: power, wealth, prestige? No. Rejection, contempt, torture, and ultimately, martyr's deaths!

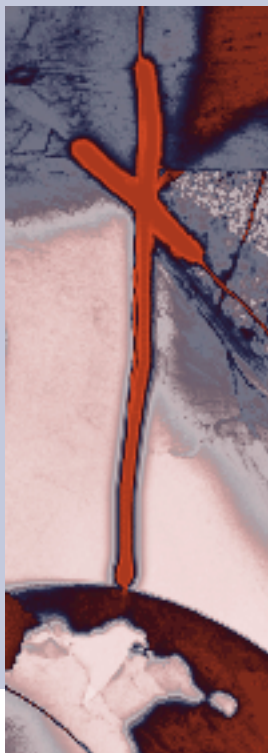
Remember that the disciples were defeated, despondent and afraid after Jesus' death, hardly in the frame of mind to plan a daring heist. In addition, it is psychologically impossible that one of the disciples could have convinced all the others to follow such a scheme without someone breaking rank or spilling the beans sometime in the next 50 years. People don't die for a lie when they know it's a lie!


Then there is the problem of the guards at the tomb making it physically impossible to steal the body. It cannot be emphasized enough that no modern biblical scholar would for a moment entertain the conspiracy hypothesis.

The empty tomb itself did not produce a belief in the resurrected Jesus. For most of the followers it was Jesus physically appearing to them that led them to conclude that Jesus had risen.

The Appearances

Most scholars agree that, even though there is interdependence between much of the gospel accounts, the appearance accounts are independent of one another. The evidence from five independent historical sources indicates that on 12 separate occasions various individuals and groups in various locations and circumstances saw Jesus alive after his death.⁶ The four gospels tell us about appearances to:





«Two full generations (50-80 years) are not long enough for legend to wipe out the hard core of historical fact»

1. Mary Magdalene
(*John 20:11-17*)
2. The women returning from the tomb
(*Matt 28:9-10*)
3. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus
(*Luke 24:13-35*)
4. Peter
(*Luke 24:34; cf. I Cor 15:5*)
5. The disciples with Thomas absent
(*Luke 24:33, 36-43; John 20:19-23; cf. I Cor 15:5*)
6. The disciples with Thomas present a week later
(*John 20:26-29*)
7. The seven disciples at the Lake of Tiberius in Galilee (*John 21:1-22*)
8. The eleven and others on a mountain in Galilee
(*Matt 28:16-20*)
9. The disciples at the ascension
(*Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:6-11; cf. I Cor 15:7*)

Paul, besides repeating the appearances to Peter, the twelve and to all the apostles (probably the larger group of followers on the mountain in Galilee), also mentions appearances to James, Saul (himself), and to over 500 people at one time. (*I Cor 15:5-8*)

Legends?

Paul's accounts of the appearances are likely not legendary because of his listing of this appearance to more than 500 people. Paul is using the accepted method of his day to prove a historical event: the appeal to witnesses. He specifically states that most of these people are still alive, thereby inviting cross-examination of his witnesses. He would not likely have done this unless these were real people who would back up his claims.

The gospel accounts of the appearances are more likely historical than legendary. The legend theory rests heavily on the premise that the gospels were written after AD 70. But even the liberal critic John A.T. Robinson challenges this late dating as largely the result of scholarly laziness, unexamined presuppositions and almost wilful blindness on the part of critics. In fact, a growing number of scholars would argue for dating at least Acts, Luke, Mark and Matthew before AD 70. One of the reasons is that Acts makes no mention of known historical events which took place between AD 60-70, such as the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70), the persecution of Christians by Nero (AD 64), the death of James (AD 62) and the death of Paul (AD 64). The best explanation for these significant events going unmentioned by the writer Luke is that they hadn't yet occurred when Acts was completed. Hence, Acts was likely written before AD 62-64, and the Gospel of Luke, being part one of Luke's writings was even earlier, possibly AD 57-62. Most scholars believe Mark was one of Luke's sources, so it would be earlier still, somewhere between AD 45-56.

This pushes the gospel accounts of the appearances of the risen Jesus to within 15-32 years after the events or roughly one generation. More importantly, these gospels are based on earlier written and oral sources that are dated much closer to the events. Those sources contain sayings, statements, and hymns that are highly Semitic and translate nicely from Greek (in which they are written) back into Aramaic (the language Jesus and the disciples spoke). That points to an early Jerusalem origin, within the first few years and weeks after Christ's death! There was simply not enough time for the basic set of facts to be replaced by legend or myth.

Professor A.N. Sherwin-White, an eminent historian of Roman and Greek history, has studied the rate at which myths were formed in the ancient Near East. He chides New Testament critics for not recognizing the quality of the New Testament documents compared to the sources he must work with in Roman and Greek history. Those sources are usually removed from the

events they describe by generations or even centuries. Despite when they were written and the typically biased approach of the writers, he says historians can confidently reconstruct what actually happened.

In stark contrast, Professor Sherwin-White tells us that for the gospels to be legendary, more generations would have been needed between the events and their compilation. He has found that even the span of two full generations (50-80 years) is not long enough for legend to wipe out the hard core of historical fact.⁷ Even the late dating of the gospels meets that criteria, let alone the early dating! In addition, there is no example in history where legendary stories supplanted the historical core in the same geographical location in less than two generations. The legends about Jesus the critics are looking for do exist, but they arose in the second century—consistent with the two-generation time frame discovered by Professor Sherwin-White—when all the eyewitnesses had died off. Thus, the trustworthiness of the gospel accounts is highly probable because there just wasn't enough time for mythical tendencies to creep in and prevail over historical fact.

The fact that women, and not the male disciples, are listed as the first witnesses of the appearances and the empty tomb, also lends powerful credibility to these incidents. Women were of such low status in first-century Jewish society that their testimony in court was considered worthless. It would have been purposeless, even counter-productive, to the credibility of the story in that culture to record the incidents in this manner if it were not the way it actually happened.

In addition, the gospels are not written in a legendary style. The style of the gospels lacks the legendary

embellishments that are clearly part of the later writings. C.S. Lewis, one of the great literary experts on ancient myths, commenting on the gospels, writes, "I have been reading poems, romances, vision literature, legends, myths all my life. I know that not one of them is like this."⁸

Moreover, where external verification *is* possible the New Testament has demonstrated reliability, thus supporting its credibility. In 1961 there was the discovery of inscription referring to Pilate in Caesarea during the time of Tiberius. There was the discovery of an ossuary (bone-box) of a crucified man from first century Palestine

The fact that women are listed as the first witnesses of the empty tomb and of the appearances lends powerful credibility to these incidents.

confirming the practice of driving nails into ankles. In 1992 the burial grounds of Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest were found. We have the discoveries of the pool of Bethesda, the pool of Siloam, Jacob's well and the GABBATHA (pavement) where Pilate pronounced judgment on Jesus. The book of Acts had been shown to be full of reliable historical information.⁹

As R.T. France, the British New Testament scholar reasons, "Again and again, where it is possible to check their accounts against 'hard' external data, they are found to ring true. Where no such external check is available... it therefore seems responsible to treat their record as factual rather than imaginary."¹⁰

Another New Testament scholar, Craig Blomberg, argues that, "as investigation proceeds, the evidence becomes sufficient for one to declare that what can be checked is accurate, so that it is entirely proper to believe that what cannot be checked is probably accurate as well. Other conclusions, widespread though they are, seem not to stem from evenhanded historical analysis but from religious or philosophical prejudice."¹¹

It is hard to deny on historical grounds that numerous people had experiences that they interpreted as appearances of the risen Jesus. Some suggest that these incidents are not to be understood as physical, bodily appearances, but merely as visions or hallucinations. They argue that Paul refers to the resurrection body as a "spiritual body" and that the physicalism of the gospel appearances is an anti-Gnostic¹² apologetic.

Visions?

Some contend that Paul's experience of the risen Christ was a mere vision, and that since Paul adds his experience to the list in I Cor. 15, they all must have been non-physical visions. But Paul's experience involved extra-mental phenomena. It did not all happen in the mind of Paul. This is in stark contrast to the vision Stephen had in Acts 7. Stephen's experience was purely subjective; no one else saw or heard anything. But in Paul's experience, his companions heard sound and saw light. We know that some people were suspicious of Paul's encounter with the risen Lord, so he was adding his expe-

rience to the list of other appearances in order to *raise* his experience up to the level of objectivity the others were known for, not to drag those others down to some non-physical, subjective level.

A Spiritual Body?

When Paul refers to the resurrection body as a "spiritual body" he cannot be meaning a body made out of spirit. That would be a contradiction in terms, for a spirit is precisely the absence of a body. The idea of seeing a non-physical body is incoherent, since sight apprehends its object by means of light waves reflected from it and a non-physical body cannot reflect light waves. Paul is not talking about the substance the body is made of, but its orientation. When we say, "The Bible is a spiritual book," or "Betty is a spiritual person," we don't mean that they are made out of spirit, but that they are orientated toward the spiritual.

This is not to say that Paul teaches the resurrection body is ordinary, the same as before. On the contrary, he explicitly states that it's glorious, imperishable, immortal, and powerful. It is transformed - but not from physical to non-physical, rather from perishable to imperishable in order to inhabit a renewed creation!¹³ Virtually all New Testament scholars admit that Paul did not teach immortality of the soul alone, but this position is intelligible only if he also taught a physical, bodily resurrection. A better translation of the Greek term Paul uses for "spiritual body" would be "supernatural body," since the term is used in contrast to a natural body.

Anti-Gnostic Argument?

Every appearance of Jesus in the gospels is physical. Since the gospel appearance stories are widely accepted as independent, this multiple attestation provides strong support for the historical credibility of a physical, bodily resurrection. This could not have happened if all the appearances were really only visions. And since for a Jew the term "resurrection" meant the physical resurrection of a dead man from a tomb, the early believers must have understood the resurrection of Jesus as physical. This means that the physicalism of the gospel appearances was not likely a response to the anti-physicalism of the Gnostics. It is more likely that the Gnostics de-materialized the gospels' material appearances, than the gospels materialized non-physical Gnostic accounts.

The fact is both Paul and the gospels view the resurrection body as both physical and transformed. The resurrected Jesus ate, cooked, and invited touch, but also displayed super human capabilities in his ability to appear and disappear at will without regard to spatial distances. It was not a body made out of spirit, but a body that had been transformed from mortal to immortal. Moreover, the recognition of the risen Jesus prompted worship. Both the women and disciples knew that this was no mere resuscitation of a corpse. After all, Lazarus' resuscitation had not evoked worship!¹⁴

Hallucinations?

Could the appearances have been hallucinations? Very unlikely! Hallucinations usually happen to one person at a time. But gatherings of two, seven, 11+, 12+, and more than 500 witnessed appearances of the resurrected Jesus! Hallucinations usually take place under very specific and favourable circumstances. The appearances of Jesus were in a variety of locations and circumstances. Hallucinations involve an expectancy on the part of the person hallucinating. The women went to the tomb to complete the anointing of a *dead body* with spices. Hallucinations can't exceed the content of the mind. But the disciples were devastated, defeated and discouraged after the crucifixion. Even though Jesus had predicted both his death and resurrection, they had never caught on. It was too radically different from what they had been taught by the rabbis from their youth. They had absolutely no concept of a dying, much less rising Messiah. Hallucinations don't eat fish or invite touch. Jesus did both!

Furthermore, hallucinations never would have led to the belief in a Jesus who rose *physically and bodily* and besides, hallucinations cannot account for the empty tomb.

Only Apparent Death?

Is it possible that Jesus never really died? New Testament scholars have universally rejected this theory for over 100 years because it is physically impossible and religiously inadequate.

This apparent death theory is asking us to believe that after Jesus' torturous beating with fists, sticks and a Roman flagrum (a whip with pieces of sharp rock and metal embedded in the leather) that would have opened up his back so badly as to have exposed his inner organs, after carrying a wooden beam up a mountain on that back, after being attached to a wooden cross with spikes through the wrists and ankles, after hanging on that cross for six hours, breathing only by pulling himself up and down to relieve the asphyxiating pressure on his diaphragm, after having professional Roman executioners pronounce him dead and thrusting a spear in his side to make absolutely sure, and after being wrapped up in nearly 100 lbs. of linen and spices and laid in a cold dark tomb, Jesus never really died, woke up on Sunday morning feeling great, nudged a 2-ton stone uphill, quietly slipped past the guards, found where the disciples were hiding and appeared to them as Lord of life and conqueror of death.

Not only is this clearly physically impossible but it is religiously inadequate. Even if he had somehow survived, he would have appeared to them not as Lord of life and conqueror of death, but as someone in desperate need of medical attention! This would never have

evoked the worship of Jesus as one who had risen triumphantly from the grave.

Theories like the apparent death and hallucination theories do not provide a complete explanation for the facts; they only attempt to explain one small portion and require other speculations to account for the rest. This is in contrast to the resurrection hypothesis that explains all the facts without distorting them, and therefore remains the best explanation.

Thus, the evidence is that Jesus made multiple appearances after his death.

The Origin of the Christian Movement

Even the most skeptical of scholars admit to the existence of the *belief* that Jesus rose from the dead. That is, the Christian movement began based on the belief in a resurrected Jesus. Something must have happened to create this belief. Where did this belief come from? There must be an adequate cause!

The disciples' Jewish background was not adequate to explain their belief in a resurrected Jesus. In Jewish thinking the resurrection would take place at the end of the world, and would be a general resurrection of all people, all the righteous, or all Israel.¹⁵ Nowhere in Jewish thinking was there

the concept of a resurrection of one individual in the middle of history. Examples of people coming back to life in the Old Testament and Lazarus in the New Testament are examples of resuscitations, not resurrections. These people were revived only to die again. Jesus' resurrection was to a new immortal, imperishable, glorious existence, never to die again.

Pagan Sources?

In the first half of the 20th century it was common for scholars to suggest that the disciples borrowed the concept of Jesus' resurrection from pagan sources. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that experts no longer consider this position tenable. The alleged parallels are spurious. Any similarities are far outweighed by the differences. The legends are not about historical personages, they are just symbols for the seasons. There is no text prior to the late second century of a mythical deity who rose from the dead.

Moreover, there is no causal link between the pagan myths and the Jews. There was very little influence from the pagan religions in first-century Palestine. Jewish and early Christian thought was exclusive. Unlike most of the other religions of the time, they were not open to incorporating the ideas of other religions into their own. Therefore, the lines of influence are more likely to have run the other way. That is, it is much more likely that the 2nd and 3rd century pagan religions borrowed from Christianity, than Christianity borrowed the resurrection from pagan religions. Historian Michael Grant summarizes the scholarly opinion, "Judaism was a milieu to which doctrines of the deaths and rebirths, of mythical gods seemed so entirely foreign that the emergence of such a fabrication from its midst is very hard to credit."¹⁶

Transformation

The disciples were devastated and defeated after the resurrection. They thought that their glorious three years with Jesus had come to a bitter and final end. But something changed them from being frightened and discouraged to being bold, courageous and outspoken. Peter, who denied he even knew Jesus, stood up a few weeks later in downtown Jerusalem proclaiming Jesus was Lord and had risen from the grave. There must be a sufficient explanation for the dramatic changes in these people's lives. History records repeatedly how strife and division among followers usually follow the demise of a great leader. But with the disciples, we see them come together in a unity of spirit and purpose



**“I am the way and the truth and the life.
No one comes to the Father except
through me.”**

for which it is hard to find a parallel anywhere in history.¹⁷

And it was not just followers, but skeptics and enemies who were transformed! James, and Jesus’ other brothers, did not believe Jesus was Lord during his lifetime.¹⁸ What would it take to cause you to believe your brother was the Lord God? They later believed. And James not only believed,¹⁹ but became the leader of the Jerusalem Christian movement and even died a martyr’s death in AD 62.

Saul of Tarsus was the chief prosecutor of the early Christians. He hated the Christian “heresy” even to the point of killing in order to stop it. But something happened that changed him from Saul, the number one persecutor, to Paul, the number one propagator of Christianity. He was totally transformed. He gave up the prestige and comforts of being a respected rabbi and took on the life of a travelling missionary who experienced incredible suffering.²⁰ Something incredible must have happened to change this man.

There must have been a sufficient cause to explain both the origin of this belief in the resurrection and the amazing transformation of frightened followers, skeptics and enemies. There seems to be no plausible explanation that fits the facts apart from the explanation that the earliest Christians have given, that Jesus physically rose from the grave and appeared to these people. These events are inexplicable apart from the resurrection. Thus, the faith of the early Christians did not make up the events; rather the events of Easter produced the faith of the early Christians.

Contradictions?

Many people reject the resurrection of Jesus because they think the gospel accounts of the resurrection are hopelessly contradictory. But the minor differences in the accounts establish their independence, that the information in the different gospels is from different sources, which shows there was no collusion among the writers to produce a carefully scripted hoax. This is a more reasonable hypothesis than the view that the writers borrowed from each other and were so stupid, that they botched all the points they borrowed. And the more sources an historian has that say essentially the same thing, the greater the probability of their veracity. As many scholars have pointed

out, “The confusion between the different accounts in the gospels does not appear to have been contrived. The conflict of testimony is more a mark of the sincerity of those from whom the testimony was derived than a mark against their veracity.”²¹

Moreover, differences in details do not necessarily discredit an entire account. No historian suggests that just because there are differences in the eyewitness accounts of John F. Kennedy’s shooting, that therefore, JFK wasn’t assassinated. The differences in the resurrection accounts are minor and are to be expected since each account is based on different witnesses’ reports, is written by a different author, with slightly different themes and emphases, and to different audiences. Witnesses don’t usually report the details of an event exactly the same. In fact it is when they do that lawyers get suspicious. What is really remarkable is that they are so similar. The gospels are not intended to be exhaustive accounts of Jesus’ life. They are summaries. Only if you presuppose that they are exhaustive can you get contradictions in the resurrection accounts.

Furthermore, many people overlook or are unaware of the work done by the British scholar John Wenham who, by paying careful attention to detail and clues in the accounts, has provided an extremely reasonable and plausible account that harmonizes the superficial differences.²³ The gospel accounts are shown to be complementary not contradictory.

Conclusion

The evidence shows that the tomb was indeed found empty, and that Jesus physically appeared to different people on numerous occasions in a variety of places after his death. Furthermore the very origin of the Christian faith and the transformation of followers, skeptics and enemies is inexplicable apart from a resurrection. There is no plausible natural explanation for any one of these three independently established points, let alone all *three*. Together, they point powerfully to the same unavoidable conclusion: that Jesus *did* rise physically and bodily from the dead. If one denies this conclusion he is rationally obligated to provide a more plausible explanation *that fits the facts*. A rational person can hardly be blamed for believing in the resurrection.

Significance

What is the significance of Jesus of Nazareth rising from the dead? As we noted at the outset, it provides substantiation for Jesus’ divine self-conception. As Wolfhart Pannenberg explains, “The resurrection can only be understood as the divine vindication of the man whom the Jews had rejected as a blasphemer.”²⁴

But more than that, the resurrection offers hope. Jesus holds the key that unlocks the door to eternal life. He said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”²⁵ This points to the incontrovertible evidence for the resurrection that is available to every honest seeker, that is a personal experience of the risen Christ, and if you haven’t already come to know him personally, may I encourage you to do so.

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Notes

1. The outline and much of the content of this article have been derived from the writings and lectures of Dr. W.L. Craig. See especially *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus During the Deist Controversy*, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985; *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989; *The Son Rises*, Moody Press, 1981; *Knowing the Truth About the Resurrection*, Servant Books, 1988.
2. W.L. Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989, pp. xv-xvii.
3. W.L. Craig, *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus During the Deist Controversy*, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985, p. 541.
4. W.L. Craig, *Assessing the New Testament...* p.359.
5. Michael Grant, *Jesus: An Historian’s Review of the Gospels*, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1977, p. 176.
6. The 5 Sources are the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke/Acts, and Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. It is largely accepted that even though the gospels are interdependent in large sections, the appearance stories are independent traditions.
7. A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 189-191.
8. C.S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, Walter Hooper ed., Eerdmans, 1967, p. 155.
9. Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, Eisenbrauns, 1990.
10. R.T. France, *The Evidence for Jesus*, IVP, 1986, p.133.
11. Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, IVP, 1987, p. 254
12. Docetism was a particular Gnostic heresy that matter was evil and that therefore God could not really have become incarnate in Jesus.

Knowing God Personally

1 God's perspective:

God loves you and created you to know Him personally. He has a wonderful plan for your life.

God created you. Not only that, he loves you so much that he wants you to spend eternity with him. Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Jesus came so that each of us could know and understand God in a personal way. Jesus alone can bring meaning and purpose to life.

Q What keeps us from knowing God? ...

13. I Corinthians 15:35-55.
14. Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament*, Eerdman's, 1985, p. 20.
15. John 11:23,24.
16. Michael Grant, *Jesus: An Historian's Review of the Gospels*, p. 199.
17. John Wenham, *Easter Enigma: Are the Resurrection Accounts in Conflict?*, Zondervan, 1984, p. 123.
18. See Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3, John 7:5.
19. See Acts 1:14.
20. II Corinthians 11:23-29.
21. James D.G. Dunn, *The Evidence For Jesus*, SCM Press, 1985, p. 65
22. For example, see Dan Barker, "Easter Challenge: Leave No Stone Unturned", *Freethought Today*, Madison Wisconsin, March 1990, pp. 4-5.
23. John Wenham, *Easter Enigma: Are the Resurrection Accounts in Conflict?*, Zondervan, 1984.
24. Cited in Craig, *Assessing the New Testament...* p. 420.
25. John 11:25,26.



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2 Our Condition:

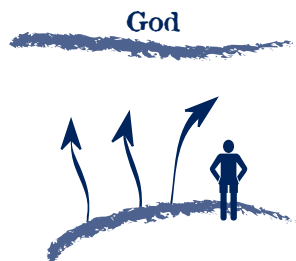
People are sinful and separated from God, so we cannot know Him personally or experience His love and plan.

The fact is, we need Jesus. The Bible says, "...all fall short of God's glorious standard" (Romans 3:23). Though God intended for us to have a relationship with him, we naturally want to do things our own way.

Deep down, our attitude may be one of active rebellion toward God or passive indifference, but it's all evidence of what the Bible calls sin. The Bible tells us that "All of us like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6).

The result of sin in our lives is death—spiritual separation from God (Romans 6:23). Although we may try to reach God through our own effort, we inevitably fail.

This diagram shows the great gap that exists between us and God. The arrows illustrate that we might try to reach God through our own efforts. We may try to do good things, or earn God's acceptance through a good life or a moral philosophy. But our good efforts are insufficient to cover up our sin.



Q How can we bridge this gulf?..

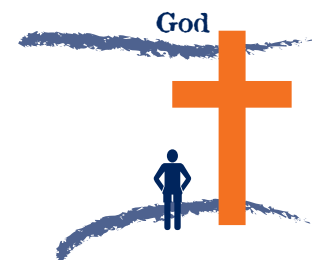
3 God's Response:

Jesus Christ is God's only provision for our sin. Through Him alone we can know God personally and experience God's love and plan.

Jesus Christ is God's solution to the problem of human imperfection and evil. Because of Jesus' death on the cross, we don't have to be separated from God any longer. Jesus paid the price for our sin and in so doing, bridged the gap between us and God. "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:8).

Instead of trying harder to reach God, we simply need to accept Jesus and his sacrifice as the one way to God. "I am the way, the truth and the life," Jesus said. "No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). He also said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again. They are given eternal life for believing in me and will never perish" (John 11:25-26).

But not only did Jesus die for our sin, he rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:3-6). When he did, he proved beyond doubt that he can rightfully promise eternal life—that he is the Son of God and the only means by which we can know God. He said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).



Yet just having knowledge about God's plans and purposes isn't enough. We need to consciously accept Jesus Christ as the payment for our sin and welcome him into our life.

! It is not enough just to know these three truths....

4 Our Response:

We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord; then we can know God personally and experience His love and plan.

The Bible says, "But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

We accept Jesus by faith. The Bible says, "God saved you by his special favour when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it" (Ephesians 2:8,9).

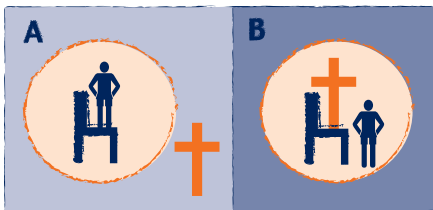
Accepting Jesus means believing that Jesus is the Son of God, who he claimed to be, then inviting him to guide and direct our lives and make us into new people (John 3:1-8).

Jesus said, "I'm standing at the door and I'm knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in" (Revelation 3:20).

Q How will you respond to God's invitation?

Q What will you do with the claims of Jesus Christ?

Consider these two circles.



A- Self-Directed Life

- Self is on the throne
- Jesus is outside the life
- Interests are directed by self, often resulting in frustration

B- Christ-Directed Life

- Jesus is in the life and on the throne
- Self is yielding to Jesus
- Interests are directed by Jesus, resulting in harmony with God

Q Which circle best represents your life?

Q Which circle would you like to have represent your life?

Begin a relationship with Jesus...

You can receive Christ right now. Remember that Jesus says, "I'm standing at the door and I'm knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in" (Revelation 3:20). Would you like to respond to his invitation? Here's how.

The precise words you use to commit yourself to God are not important. He knows the intentions of your heart. If you are unsure of what to pray, this might help you put it into words:

"Jesus, I want to know you. I want you to come into my life. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sin so that I could be fully accepted by you. Only you can give me the power to change and become the person you created me to be. Thank you for forgiving me and giving me eternal life with God. I give my life to you. Please do with it as you wish. Amen."

If you sincerely asked Jesus into your life just now, then he has come into your life as he promised. You have begun a personal relationship with God.

What follows is a lifelong journey of change and growth as you get to know God better through Bible reading, prayer and interaction with other Christians...

If I asked Jesus into my life, how do I know that He is now really there?

Only you know if you sincerely asked Jesus to come into your life, to forgive you and take up residence as God in your life. However, assuming that you did make that decision and invited Him into your life, then did God hear you? Yes. I John 5:14 says, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." Jesus promised that He would enter our lives, if we ask Him.

In Revelation 3:20 Jesus makes this offer, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." Did you open the door of your heart to God? If so, what did He say He would do? Would God mislead you?

In John 6:37, Jesus said, "All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out." And in John 10:27-29 Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

Jesus died on the cross for our sins, so that we could be in relationship with Him. He's not indifferent to the issue. He went to great lengths to bring us into relationship with Him. Jesus took our sins on Himself and covered us with His righteousness, making us fully forgiven and fully accepted by Him. We don't have to first live good lives, or perform religious rituals, or spend years begging Him. He is the one who made it possible for us to have a relationship with Him. And we come to Him based on what He did for us, rather than what we can do. He paid for our sins, so He now offers to forgive us and come into our lives. I Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."

