

Jesus Predicted and Accomplished His own Resurrection from the Dead

The resurrection of Christ is the sixth premise of our overall argument for the Bible being God’s Word. Many have claimed it is the “capstone in the arch of Christianity, if it is removed all else crumbles.” To confirm His claim to be God, Jesus lived a sinless and miraculous life, fulfilled prophecy, and predicted and accomplished his own resurrection from the dead. It is the very foundation upon which the Christian Faith is built (1 Corinthians 15:1-8; Ephesians 2:19-22; Romans 10:9-10) and without the resurrection there would be no Christianity (Romans 4:25; 1 Cor 15:12-19). It is the distinguishing event that not only confirms *what* Jesus taught (Hebrews 2:1-4; Mark 16:19-20), but *who* he is (Son of God, Romans 1:4).

I. Introduction

A. Definition: Resurrection

The Greek word for “resurrection” is *anastasis* (386) which is derived from another Greek word *anistemi* (450) which literally means “to stand up” or “to rise.”

The resurrection is different than a “resuscitation” such as Lazarus’ in John 11.

<u>Reincarnation</u>	<u>Resuscitation</u>	<u>Resurrection</u>
Change <i>of</i> Body	Same Body	Change <i>in</i> Body
Change in primary qualities (who/what)	No Change (same)	Change in secondary qualities (what you have)
<i>Another mortal</i> body	<i>Same mortal</i> body	<i>Same immortal</i> body
Cyclical deaths	Two deaths	Final State
Liability	Preferred	Perfection
No Scriptural support	John 11- Lazarus	I Corinthians 15

The resurrected body will possess several characteristics that are *distinct* from reincarnation, they are:

1. *Physical* body (Luke 24:39; Jn 20:27-29 cf. Jn 2:19 and 1 Jn 3:2)
2. *Identity* (same genetic code) with the body that died (1 Cor 15:37-38)
3. The *corruptible* will be changed to *incorruption* (1 Cor 15:50-53)
4. Died in *dishonor*, will be raised in *glory* (1 Cor 15:43)
5. Died in *weakness*, but raised in *power* (1 Cor 15:43)
6. Died a *natural body*, raised a *spiritual body* (1 Cor 15:44 cf. 1 Cor 10:1-4)
7. *Mortal body* will take on *immortal body* (1 Cor 15)

B. What are the critics saying about Christ's resurrection?

Rudolph Bultmann (20th century German theologian)

The resurrection “is not an event of past history . . . An historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable. . . . Such a miracle is not otherwise known to mythology”¹

Robert W. Funk (founder of the Jesus Seminar)

“To ask whether the resurrection really took place - is an idle question. Besides, to the modern mind a mythical event like the resuscitation of a corpse is simply incredible”²

John Dominic Crossan (Former Catholic Priest who co-founded the Jesus Seminar and Professor at DePaul University)

“Jesus lived on in the hearts of his followers . . . but he did not physically rise from the dead. Taken down from the cross, his body was probably eaten by wild dogs”³

“With regard to the body of Jesus, by Easter morning, those who cared did not know where it was, and those who knew did not care”⁴

C. Importance of the resurrection

The Apostle Paul lists 7 consequences that follow a denial of Christ's resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:14-19)

1. Our preaching of the gospel is in vain (v 14)
2. Our faith is also in vain (v 14)
3. We are false witnesses of God, namely, for telling others that Christ was raised from the dead when he was not (v 15)
4. Our faith is worthless (v 17)
5. We are still in our sins (v 18)
6. Those who have died believing in Christ have perished (v 18)
7. We are of men most to be pitied (v 19)

¹ Bultmann, Rudolph, *Kerygma and Myth* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 38-40.

² Funk, Robert W., *Honest to Jesus: Jesus For a New Millennium* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 257.

³ *Newsweek*, April 4, 1994.

⁴ Crossan, John Dominic, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 158.

Further consequences are:

1. The Bible is in error
2. Jesus is a liar
3. The prophecies have failed
4. It would be doubtful that Jesus is God and that his teachings were true

D. Resurrected is historical, material, and identical

Historicity

1. Man lost relationship in time/space, thus it needs to be regained in history (Rom 5)
2. The historical and the spiritual are inseparably connected (Jn 3:12; Rom 4:25; 10:9-10).

Materiality

1. Gives empirical verifiability
2. Identity (or it wouldn't be the *same* body - death won!)

Sameness of Body (Identity)

Paul's seed analogy in 1 Corinthians 15:37-38 strongly implies a material and genetic identity with the pre-resurrection body. 1 Corinthians 15:42⁵

II. Critical Theories of the Resurrection⁶

A. 12 Facts all scholars believe to be true about Christ

- Jesus died by crucifixion
- He was buried
- Jesus' death caused the disciples to despair and lose hope, believing that His life had been ended
- The tomb was discovered to be empty just a few days later
- The disciples had experiences which they believed were literal appearances of the risen Jesus

⁵ N.L. Geisler, *Battle for the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books).

⁶ Ibid.

- The disciples were transformed from doubters, afraid to identify themselves as being with Jesus, to bold proclaimers of His death and resurrection
- The message of the resurrection was at the center of preaching in the early church
- Soon after Jesus' death, this message was proclaimed in Jerusalem, where He had been buried
- As a result of this preaching, the church was born and grew
- Sunday became the primary day of worship
- James, who had been a skeptic was converted to the faith when he believed he saw the resurrected Jesus
- A few years later, Paul was converted by an experience which he believed to be an appearance of the risen Jesus

*Each of these facts must be accounted for in any resurrection theory.

B. The Swoon Theory

According to this theory, Jesus did not actually die on the cross, but rather swooned or fainted. Jesus is said to have later revived in the tomb until he was strong enough to leave.

Problems

1. Contrary to science... In 1986, secular medical scholars wrote about the gravity of Jesus' wounds:

“Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side was inflicted and supports the traditional view that the spear, thrust between his right ribs, probably perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and heart and thereby ensured his death. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge”⁷

2. Roman Gov't pronounced Jesus dead (didn't break his legs)
3. Jesus said he died (“into your hands I commit my spirit”)
4. The Roman Historian, Tacitus, said he was put to death (*Annals*)
5. Talmud says Jesus was hung on a tree on the eve of passover.

⁷ *The Journal of the American Medical Society* 255:11 (21 March 1986), 1463.

C. **The Hallucination Theory**

According to the hallucination theory, those who reported seeing Jesus after his death were actually not seeing correctly, but rather were hallucinating and probably seeing what they wanted to see in their psyche.

Problems

1. Over 500 people saw Jesus after the resurrection (1 Cor 15:1-7)
2. Hallucinations don't occur on mass scale, usually individual and short term.
3. Appeared over 40-day period to believers and unbelievers (Thomas)
4. Appeared to all the apostles, ate meals (Lk 24; Jn 21), and was touched (Lk 24; Jn 20)
5. Doesn't explain the empty tomb or the changed lives of the disciples

D. **The Conspiracy Theory**

According to this theory, either Jewish authorities, the Roman guards, or the disciples conspired to steal the body of Jesus.

Problems

1. Romans wouldn't steal the body, their mission was to keep the peace.... Not start a religious riot or war.
2. The Jewish religious authorities wouldn't steal the body, they took measures (went to Pilate) to keep the body secure inside the tomb to prevent any claim of a resurrection. A missing body would play into the hands of the disciples. If they did, why didn't they produce the body to refute the resurrection?
3. Disciples would steal the body, it was contrary to their message of honesty, not fraud. In addition, it is unlikely that the followers of Jesus could overpower the armed guards at the tomb. Further, the disciples later died for their message with any recanting of the story – people don't die for what they know to be a lie!

E. The Wrong Tomb Theory

According to this view, Mary Magdalene and the other women went to the wrong tomb and discovered it empty. This view holds that early morning darkness, emotional trauma, and wishful thinking can account for this mistake.⁸

Problems with this theory:

1. If it was dark, they could have found it in the morning.
2. Could have asked Joseph of Arimathea where it was.
3. Doesn't explain the empty tomb.

III. The Historicity of the Resurrection

In showing that the resurrection of Jesus was a historical event that occurred in time and space, one would do well in presenting reliable eyewitness testimony, empirical verification (i.e. empty tomb and materiality of the body), and evidence indicating it was the same body.

A. Positive Evidence

1. Eyewitnesses (500+) of physical appearances
2. Empty tomb
3. Changed lives of the disciples
4. Earliest records describe the resurrection as fact
5. The divergent perspectives and independence of the gospel writers
6. Credible assessment by authorities on history and law (Greenleaf, Hemer, Sherwin-White)
7. Counterproductive features are present in the gospels

B. Further Considerations

Not only was there an overwhelming number of eyewitnesses to the events contained in the gospels, the nature of their testimony places it beyond reasonable doubt.⁹ Several factors indicate this contention.

1. The witnesses were in most cases independent of each other with at least twelve different appearances occurring over forty days (Acts 1:3).¹⁰

⁸ For a refutation of this theory see Morrison, Frank, *Who Moved the Stone?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 97ff.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 315.

2. There was an initial disinclination to believe what they saw, which would eliminate the possibility of hallucination (cf. John 20:25 f.; Lk 24:15 f.; Mt 28:17 f.).¹¹
3. The divergent perspectives of the authors argues strongly for the independence and integrity of the witnesses. Further, the apostles truthfulness and integrity is reflected in their writings. They did not tolerate lying (Acts 5:1 f.), they refused to be bought with money (Acts 8:18), they remained steadfast in their testimony when facing persecution (2 Cor. 11:23 f.) even to the point of martyrdom.¹²

C. Legal Assessment

Simon Greenleaf (Harvard Law), after examining the evidence, wrote of the testimony given by the gospel authors. Concerning Matthew, he writes,

Matthew must have been familiar with a great variety of forms of fraud, imposture, cunning, and deception, and must have become habitually distrustful, scrutinizing, and cautious; and, of course, much less likely to have been deceived in regard to many of the facts in our Lord's ministry, extraordinary as they were, which fell under his observation. This circumstance shows both the sincerity and the wisdom of Jesus in selecting him for an eyewitness of his conduct, and adds great weight to the testimony of this evangelist.¹³

Concerning the testimony of Mark he records,

Peter's agency in the narrative of Mark is asserted by all ancient writers, and is confirmed by the fact that his humility is conspicuous in every part of it, where anything is or might be related of him; his weakness and fall being fully exposed, while things which might redound to his honor, are either omitted or but slightly mentioned; that scarcely any transaction of Jesus is related, at which Peter was not present, and that all are related with that circumstantial minuteness which belongs to the testimony of an eyewitness. We may, therefore, regard the Gospel of Mark as an original composition, written at the dictation of Peter, and consequently as another original narrative of the life, miracles, and doctrines of our Lord.¹⁴

Concerning the testimony of Luke he adds,

If, therefore, Luke's Gospel were to be regarded only as the work of a contemporary historian, it would be entitled to our confidence. But it is more than this. It is the result of careful inquiry and examination, made by a person of science, intelligence, and education, concerning subjects which he was perfectly competent to investigate, and as

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Greenleaf, *The Testimony of the Evangelists*, 21.

¹⁴ Ibid., 23.

to many of which he was peculiarly skilled . . . and perhaps an eye-witness . . . whom it would not be for the interest nor safety of the writer to deceive or mislead.¹⁵

Elsewhere, Greenleaf writes of Luke,

Such a document certainly possesses all the moral attributes of an inquest of office, or of any other official investigation of facts; and as such is entitled to be adduced as original, competent, and satisfactory evidence of the matters it contains.¹⁶

Concerning John he asserts,

He was the only apostle who followed Jesus to the cross, he was the first of them at the sepulcher, and he was present at the several appearances of our Lord after his resurrection. These circumstances, together with his intimate friendship with the mother of Jesus, especially qualify him to give a circumstantial and authentic account of the life of his master.¹⁷

C. The Evidence that Christ's Body is Physical and Material¹⁸

1. Physically recognized (Mt 28:7, 17; Mk 16:7; Lk 24:24; Jn 20:14, 20; 1 Cor 9:1)
2. Offered it to be touched (Jn 20:17, 27; Mt 28:9)
3. Ate physical food (Lk 24:30, 41-43; Jn 21:12-13)
4. Body was made of "flesh and bones" (Lk 24:39)
5. Could be seen and heard with physical senses (Mt 28:17; Lk 24:31; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:5-8)
6. Will be recognized at the second coming (Rev 1:7; Acts 1:11)
7. Burial clothes were disturbed (i.e. face cloth was folded) (Jn 20:6-7)

D. Grammatical evidence for the materiality of Christ's body

1. *Soma* (see Robert Gundry, *Soma*)
2. 1 Jn 4:2 = perfect tense *elēluthota*; 2 Jn 7 present participle *erchomai*
3. Uses same Greek word (*sarx*) to describe pre and post resurrection body (*sarx*, Jn 1:14; Lk 24:39; Acts 2:31)

¹⁵ Ibid., 25-26.

¹⁶ Ibid., 26.

¹⁷ Ibid., 26-27.

¹⁸ N.L. Geisler, Apologetics class notes, Southern Evangelical Seminary, 1996.

E. The Evidence that Christ's Body was the same body

1. The tomb where Jesus was buried is empty (Mt 28:6)
2. The "stigmata" (crucifixion scars) shows it was the same body (Lk 24:39; Jn 20:25-28)
3. Jesus prophesied that it would be the same body (Jn 2:19-22)
4. Jesus did not see corruption after death (Acts 2:31)
5. Paul's "seed" comparison shows it's the same body (1 Cor 15:35-44) (notice pronouns "it" and "this")

IV. Answering Objections to the Bodily Resurrection¹⁹

- A. "spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:44)
- B. Only appeared to believers
- C. "He Appeared" and "disappeared" (Lk 24:34)
- D. Walked through Closed Doors (Jn 20:19)
- E. "Flesh and Blood Cannot Enter" Heaven (1 Cor 15:50)
- F. Appeared in a "Different Form" (Mk 16:12-13)

¹⁹ See William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises* and Norman Geisler, *Battle for the Resurrection*.