

The Resurrection of Jesus Meets the Questions of the Skeptic

If you've struggled with, or currently struggle with the truthfulness of the bodily resurrection of Jesus (ie. it wasn't a raising of hopes but an actual man who came back to life), join a long list of us. Below are some of the proposals that skeptics have. Two evidences in particular have to be dealt with: 1) the empty tomb, and 2) the appearances of Jesus to various believers after the resurrection. Could that have really happened? Aren't there some better explanations? Let's explore those other possibilities.

They went to the wrong tomb, and it happened to be empty.

Could have been an obvious mistake, right? In the insurmountable loss they felt, those few who actually took part in putting Jesus in the tomb weren't paying enough attention, and actually went to the wrong location on Sunday morning. Honest mistake – led to a whole lot more!

The Problem. This new faith, which Rome and many Jews grew to hate, could have been easily stopped by simply pointing out the correct location. Find the body of Jesus and Christianity crumbles. The Jewish leaders knew precisely where Jesus was buried, so if the women and disciples went to the wrong place on Sunday morning, the Jews would certainly have straightened them out.

The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus were merely hope-filled hallucinations.

They saw what they wanted to see. The theory here is that those appearances of Jesus after the resurrection were actually hallucinations spurred on by a strong desire that Jesus was still alive.

The Problem. Had there only been one or two of these appearances of a risen Jesus, we could stretch and perhaps call them hallucinations. But multiple appearances, many times with multiple witnesses (as many as 500 at one appearance – 1 Corinthians 15:6), rules out that these were hallucinations. 500 people don't hallucinate the same thing!

Jesus had never really died; but was just severely injured.

Some propose that Jesus wasn't truly dead when they put Him in the tomb. Beaten badly and close to death, but not dead. Over the next hours, in a cool environment, he resuscitated and gained strength. He didn't rise from the dead – He never was dead.

The Problem. This "swoon theory" supposes that Jesus, beaten just short of death and having sustained a massive amount of blood loss, would have gained consciousness, regained strength, and was restored to health. By the way, he also would have had to have enough strength to move away the large stone from the grave AND overcome the Jewish soldiers placed there to guard the tomb. Highly unlikely.

The disciples stole the body and made the whole thing up.

Faced with unthinkable loss, and not wanting to admit that it all had ended so badly, the disciples of Jesus figured out a way to steal the body of Jesus and concoct a resurrection myth. They kept this secret intact and succeeded in beginning a powerful movement.

Problem #1. First, they would have had to overcome the Jewish temple guard that was placed at the tomb. These soldiers were highly trained, and the disciples were anything but.

Problem #2. The disciples were notorious cowards at this point. Even though Peter had lashed out at the soldiers who had come earlier to arrest Jesus, the group of disciples were so fearful that they were absent at Jesus' death. It's unlikely that this cowardly group would even dare to pull off this attempt.

Problem #3. Had this been a made-up tale, the truth would certainly have come out later. Add to that the fact that almost all these close followers of Jesus died as a result of their proclamation of the resurrection, WITHOUT EVER MENTIONING IT WAS ALL A LIE, is convincing evidence of its truth. People may live a lie, but hardly anyone would die for one!

Or, perhaps, it's exactly as Jesus had foretold. It's been said by some that to believe Jesus didn't truly physically rise from the dead takes more "faith" than to believe that He did. He had told His closest followers that He would die, and three days later, rise from the dead. If that didn't happen, either He was mistaken, a madman, a liar, or a combination of the three. But the evidence of an empty tomb and His post-resurrection appearances have to be dealt with. The logical conclusion certainly appears that He did in fact physically rise from death into the newness of life.

If that is in fact true, there are some considerations we have to ponder. As Abraham Kuyper says, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, "Mine!" The risen Jesus declare "Mine!" over your and my life as well.