

EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION

Matthew, Mark, Luke & John

According to all four Gospels, women were the first witnesses of the resurrection, a fact that no conspirator in the first century would have invented. Jewish courts did not even accept the testimony of female witnesses. A deliberate cover-up would have put Peter or John or, better yet, Nicodemus in the spotlight, not built its case around reports from women. Since the Gospels were written several decades after the events, the authors had plenty of time to straighten out such an anomaly—unless, of course, they were not concocting a legend but recording the plain facts.

(Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*)

In his book, *The Resurrection Factor*, Josh McDowell explains the logical possibilities for what could have happened to the crucified Christ. The New Testament accounts of the crucifixion, burial, resurrection, and appearances of Jesus are found in Matthew 27:27-28:15; Mark 15:16-16:14; Luke 23:26-24:53; John 19:1-21:14.

I. Christ's tomb was either OCCUPIED or EMPTY

A. If it was OCCUPIED, then possibly:

1. His tomb was unknown (probably because Christ was actually buried in a common grave)
2. The disciples went to the wrong tomb
3. The resurrection accounts were just legends that arose years after the crucifixion
4. Christ merely experienced a “spiritual” resurrection, not a bodily one
5. Those who thought they saw the risen Christ were simply hallucinating

B. If you can answer each of the above explanations, you must conclude the tomb was EMPTY

The Gospels do not present the resurrection of Jesus in the manner of apologetics, with arguments arranged to prove each main point, but rather as a shocking intrusion that no one was expecting, least of all Jesus' timorous disciples.

(Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*)

II. If the tomb was empty, it must be explained in terms of NATURAL or SUPERNATURAL reasons

A. NATURAL explanations include:

1. The disciples stole the body
2. The authorities stole the body
3. Jesus never died, He only swooned, was revived in the tomb, and emerged under His own power

B. The SUPERNATURAL explanation would be the one given in the Bible, namely that Jesus died when He was crucified, was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and experienced a corporeal (bodily) resurrection from the dead on the third day. Before He ascended into heaven, He appeared to over 500 people, many of whom touched Him, spoke with Him, and ate with Him

We who read the Gospels from the other side of Easter, who have the day printed on our calendars, forget how hard it was for the disciples to believe. In itself the empty tomb did not convince them: that fact only demonstrated “He is not here,” not “He is risen.” Convincing these skeptics would require intimate, personal encounters with the one who had been their Master for three years, and over the next six weeks Jesus provided exactly that.

(Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*)

III. CONCLUSION

Given the reliability of the eyewitness accounts found in the New Testament documents, would you conclude that there is adequate historical evidence that Jesus really did rise bodily from the dead?

If so, why is it that some people reject the consideration of historical evidence when it comes to an issue like the resurrection?

There may be many reasons why a person does not accept historical evidence. They may see the evidence as inadequate or unreliable; they may doubt the accuracy of all human history; it may be a spiritual issue, namely because “*the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving*” (2Cor 4:4). Besides, no one ever gets argued into the kingdom. But one reason you may often encounter without knowing it, is that a person’s presupposition may not even allow them to consider the evidence that you present. In such cases, it is the specific presuppositions or underlying beliefs that need to be addressed first.

That’s next week...