

I. There is good historical evidence for the Resurrection

A. The Resurrection accounts pass three major tests for historicity

1. Multiple attestation – the Resurrection is independently attested in Mark, John, Paul and possibly Matthew and Luke.
2. Embarrassment – the discovery of the tomb by women would have been incredibly embarrassing to the early church given the low status of women in 1st century Palestine
3. Dissimilarity – the bodily Resurrection of Jesus did not fit into contemporary Jewish or pagan worldviews

B. Based on the suffering they endured, the apostles must have believed Jesus had been Resurrected

1. All of the apostles suffered immensely for their belief in Jesus
2. Peter, James, and Paul were all killed for their Christian faith. Church tradition holds that 11 out of 12 apostles were martyred and that the remaining apostle (John) died in exile
3. Though someone might undergo torture, suffering, and death for what they wrongly believe to be true, it is extremely unlikely that they would do the same for what they knew to be false

C. There is good evidence that the tomb of Jesus was indeed empty

1. The apostles began publicly proclaiming the Resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem in the face of hostile religious authorities only a month and a half after his death. How were thousands converted if the tomb was not empty?
2. Matthew 28:11-15 includes a fascinating “dialogue” between the Jewish leader and Christians. Why would the Jewish leaders accuse the disciples of stealing the body if the tomb were not empty?

D. Paul converted to Christianity after witnessing an appearance of Jesus

1. Unlike the disciples, Paul was an enemy of Christianity and a persecutor of the church, so he had no desire to believe in the truth of the Resurrection
2. Paul became a Christian after claiming to have encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus
3. As a Jew, Paul faced not only intense persecution but staked his soul on the truth of the gospel. Why would he have done so unless he actually believed he had seen Jesus?

E. In 1 Cor. 15, Paul claims that 500 people saw the risen Jesus at one time

1. Scholars agree that the list of appearances from 1 Cor. 15:3-8 is part of a creedal formula that dates between 6 months to at most 15 years after Jesus’ death.
2. How could Paul make such an outlandish claim –going so far as to say that the witnesses were “yet living” unless there were hundreds of people who actually did claim to have seen Jesus

F. Alternative naturalistic explanations for the evidence are highly implausible

1. Naturalistic explanations of the evidence include
 - a. The stolen body hypothesis: Jesus family steals his body from the tomb, are captured by Roman soldiers, killed, and thrown into an unmarked grave
 - b. The reburial hypothesis: Joseph of Arimathea buries Jesus in his tomb, but later removes the body and reburies it without telling the other disciples
 - c. The twin hypothesis: Jesus had a twin brother –possibly Thomas Didymus.
 - d. The swoon hypothesis: Jesus fainted on the cross and re-awoke in the tomb
 - e. The hypnosis hypothesis: Jesus hypnotized his followers into thinking he would be Resurrected
2. These hypotheses are all very implausible and still only account for a portion of the evidence

II. Our presuppositions will drastically affect how we view the evidence

A. All human beings have certain presuppositions that we hold logically prior to evidence

1. Presuppositions are basic beliefs which we take to be axiomatic
 - a. The proposition ‘The objective universe does/does not exist’ is a presupposition

- b. The proposition 'Other human beings have/do not have minds like my own' is a presupposition
 - c. The proposition 'Evidence is a valid means to truth' is a presupposition
 - d. The proposition 'God exists/does not exist' *can be* a presupposition
2. Presuppositions color the way in which we view all subsequent evidence
 - a. There is no evidence that can rigorously convince us that our presuppositions are true
 - b. There is no evidence that can rigorously convince us that our presuppositions are false
- B. These presuppositions become incredibly important when we examine the evidence for miracles**
1. Consider the claim that a missionary laid his hands on a blind man, whose sight was then restored. How skeptical are you of this claim if you knew: a) no additional details; b) that the missionary was a Christian; c) that the missionary was a Mormon; d) that the missionary was a former Unitarian turned neo-atheist.
 2. Consider the claim that there exist an infinite number of undetectable parallel universes.
- C. Our assessment of the evidence of miracles depends largely on our existing beliefs about the existence and character of God.**
1. If God does not exist, then miracles cannot happen *by definition*. There is no need to consider the evidence at all
 2. If God might exist and might desire to communicate with humanity, then we need to consider the evidence on a case-by-case basis. Two thoughts:
 - a. We need to be sure that we are asking: "Did this event actually happen?" and not "Does the evidence force me to accept that this event actually happened?" There is almost no historical event (the moon landing, the Holocaust) with sufficient evidence to convince a committed skeptic.
 - b. The fact that Jesus was undeniably a 'religious figure' prior to his Resurrection is important. Of all the people in history to whom such an event might have taken place, isn't it odd that it surrounds Jesus of Nazareth?

Closing quotes from non-Christians:

Jeff Lowder, agnostic founder of infidels.org: 'there are strong historical arguments for the Resurrection...but...there are good reasons to reject such arguments.'

Anthony Flew, atheist turned deist (but not Christian): "The evidence for the Resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion. It's outstanding in quality and quantity..."

Pinchas Lapide, orthodox Jewish scholar: "I accept the resurrection of Easter Sunday not as an invention of the community of disciples, but as a historical event."

Suggested discussion questions:

1. Is the evidence for the Resurrection strong enough to convince someone to become a Christian?
2. What is Hume's objection to miracles and what is a good response?
3. Is the Resurrection merely based on earlier pagan myths of dying and rising gods?
4. Are there discrepancies in the different accounts of the Resurrection?

Notes: