



“The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1)



REASONS TO BELIEVE - SEATTLE AREA CHAPTER

NEWS AND VIEWS

APRIL 2003

CHAPTER INFORMATION

Dr. Ross will be visiting the area later this month. Mark your calendar for the exciting events we have planned:

University of Washington

Dr. Ross will present “New Scientific Evidence for God,” 7:00 PM, Wednesday, April 23rd at Kane Hall. This event is being cosponsored by Campus Crusade and is open to the public.

Pastor Luncheon

The chapter is hosting a luncheon with Dr. Ross for local pastors on Thursday, April 24th in west Seattle. If you’re a pastor and would like to attend, please RSVP the chapter by April 18th.

Chapter Dessert/Social

The chapter is hosting a reception with Dr. Ross, 7:00 PM, Thursday, April 24th at Northshore Christian Church in Everett. This is a great opportunity to learn more about RTB. Please RSVP the chapter by April 18 if you plan to attend.

Highlands Community Church

Dr. Ross will present “Putting Creation to the Test” at Highlands Community Church in Renton, 7:00 PM, Friday, April 25rd. This event is open to the public.

To RSVP or for more information email us at seattle@reasons.org. There is also additional information on our chapter webpage www.reasons.org/seattle.

THE RESURRECTION: HOAX, MYTH OR TRUTH?

GARY JENSEN

“Good News” is the name early believers gave their message about Jesus. Their choice of words could not have been better. That God came to our rescue through Jesus is the greatest demonstration of love the world has known. Through His life, death and resurrection, Jesus paid the penalty for sin and broke sin’s power over us (Rom 8:1,2) and anyone who trusts in Him is offered fellowship (Rev 3:20) and everlasting life (John 5:24). What could possibly be better news than sin can be forgiven and we can spend eternity with God?

But, how do we know these claims are true? Jesus provided the answer. He said one “sign” would be given that would establish the truth of His message (Matt 16:4). As the four Gospels describe it, Jesus was raised from the dead *bodily* on the third day following His crucifixion. For nearly two thousand years, Christians from all over the world have professed their faith every Sunday morning based on this extraordinary sign.

The resurrection is either the greatest event or cruelest hoax in history. If it is myth, the Christian message crumbles along with the hopes of those who built their lives on Jesus (1 Cor 15:14-19). But if the resurrection is true, it has earthshaking consequences—it establishes Jesus was God and His testimony is true. Amazingly, while so much depends on the resurrection, few people have bothered to examine the evidence.

Jesus’ Self-Claims

The first issue in the case for the resurrection is Jesus’ claims about who He was. In this regard, Jesus stands apart from every other religious figure in history. Neither Mohammad, Siddhartha Buddha, Ramakrishna or any other person made the lofty claims Jesus did.

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Jesus claimed to be God (John 10:30), accepted worship (Matt 14:33, John 20:28) and claimed the right to forgive sin (Luke 5:20f). In summary, the claim of the New Testament is Jesus is God, the Eternal Son, who became a human being in the fullness of time (Gal 4:4).

Although it is possible Jesus was delusional, it is very difficult to dismiss His claims. Over 300 aspects of His life fulfilled Old Testament prophecy and typological themes. Consider just the eight major prophecies concerning the time and place of His birth, the manner of His entry into Jerusalem and His death. The odds of Jesus fulfilling just these predictions has been calculated as one chance in one-hundred-million-billion.¹ Jesus also publicly performed miracles which even His enemies (past and present) acknowledge.²

Furthermore, the portrait the Gospels paint of Jesus cannot be simply chalked-up to imaginative fervor. Jesus' teachings reveal such astonishing depth and His demeanor was so consistent with His precepts, few question His character. Real holiness is difficult to invent but Jesus is the epitome of genuine holiness and His appeal has reached across every social class and culture (Gal 3:28). In the words of H.G. Wells, a staunch opponent of Christianity, Jesus was a "soaring personality" who was "too great for His disciples."³

So what are we to conclude? According to C. S. Lewis, a former agnostic who became a Christian, the choices are surprisingly few:

"I am trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the sort of thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would be either a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or he would be the devil of hell. You must make a choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse."⁴

The New Testament

The second issue in the case for the resurrection is whether the Bible's accounts of Jesus are reliable. Critics often describe the Gospels as legendary accounts that were designed to convert people to Christianity. While it is true the Gospels were intended to convince people Jesus was "the Son of God" (John 20:31), they can't be simply dismissed as religious propaganda.

One thing that gives immense weight to the historical accuracy of the New Testament is archaeology. Almost all the sites associated with the life and ministry of Jesus have now been identified by archaeological surveys.⁵ This indicates the Bible reveals an intimate knowledge of the Jerusalem of Jesus' generation and such information would not have been accessible to later writers since Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D. The findings of archaeology have, in fact, reversed the opinions of a many former skeptics. One such scholar is Dr. William F. Albright who states:

"The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible [by certain schools of thought] has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of numerous details."⁶

The Gospels also display certain characteristics that mark them as sober history. For example, they describe the disciples' failures (Matt 14:30, Mark 9:33f, Luke 22:54f) which contradict their later role as the moral leaders of the church (Acts 2:22f). They also include harsh words from Jesus (Luke 9:23f, John 8:39f), unpopular challenges (Mark 8:34f, John 12:25f) and threats (Matt 25:31f) that repelled many people. Such things would have been counterproductive for dishonest propagandists and demonstrates the goal of the Gospel writers was to tell the truth no matter how unpopular.

Finally, the New Testament has far better textual support than do other ancient writings that are readily accepted as historical accounts. From the beginning, the New Testament writings were widely disseminated and treated as authoritative scripture (2 Peter 3:15-15). Thus, corruption would have been impossible without causing public outcry in the church. Indeed, Sir Frederic Kenyon, textual critic and former Director of the British Museum concludes:

"The interval between the dates of the original composition and the earliest extant evidence [oldest manuscripts] becomes so small as to be negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed."⁷

When the New Testament is subjected to fair and honest treatment using the same historical-critical standards that classical historians apply to non-biblical literature, the Gospels fully pass the historical test.⁸ There is simply no credible basis, other than prejudice,

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for claiming the New Testament accounts of Jesus are not historical records.

Historical Evidence

The third issue in the case for the resurrection is whether it was an actual, historical event. Some regard the resurrection as superstition. However, a number of things, both direct and circumstantial, indicate Jesus rose from the dead:

- Jesus' tomb was found empty. Since the owner of the tomb was well known and the location public knowledge (Matt. 27:57-60), Jesus' opponents were able to closely monitor the tomb. Yet, Jesus' body inexplicably disappeared from the tomb.
- Jesus was seen alive after His death. Over 500 hundred people saw, heard, and on occasion even touched the risen Jesus (1 Cor 15:6). Such extensive testimony is unparalleled and fulfills one of the major criteria used to establish credibility.⁹
- Jesus' opponents failed to discredit the resurrection. Despite every opportunity and motivation to prove the resurrection was fraudulent and humiliate the early believers, Jesus' opponents could produce no evidence to the contrary.
- Jesus came to be worshipped. Something compelled a vehemently monotheistic people to turn Jesus into the central object of their worship. People do not simply abandon their convictions based on legends or religious propaganda.
- Jesus' crucifixion came to be called victorious death. Initially, Jesus' death was seen as a disappointing failure but something caused people to regard Jesus as the deliverer of mankind (1 Cor 15:21-22) who had conquered death.
- The disciples were transformed. Those who had witnessed Jesus' death left their hiding places (John 20:19f) to boldly and publicly proclaim His resurrection (Acts 4:37f). Something emboldened the disciples to risk their lives to share the Gospel.

So momentous was this single event in the First Century, its effects have been described as a "widening circle of ripples" from "a boulder crashing into the pool of his tory."¹⁰ In one of the most inexplicable turn of events, a message resting on the death of a condemned outcast came to be proclaimed as the basis for "good news" (1 Cor 1:17). Equally amazing was the extent of the transformation of the Mediterranean world follow-

ing its proclamation. The impetus for this movement was the conviction the same Jesus who was crucified and died was seen alive again. These facts are admitted by even knowledgeable skeptics.¹¹

Common Objections

Since day one, the resurrection has had critics and there have been efforts to discredit it. Yet, each new explanation seems even more fantastic than the last while still failing to account for the wide range of indisputable facts.¹² Here are some of the common arguments against the resurrection:

- The resurrection is a myth. The problem is myth requires a number of generations to develop. There are no parallels of a myth developing and being believed among eyewitnesses and within the short timeframe in which the New Testament was formed.¹³ Moreover, Jesus' opponents had the motive and means to disprove it.^{14,15}
- The body was stolen. There is little doubt the tomb was empty.¹⁶ Since it was guarded by Roman soldiers, it would have been impossible for Jesus' followers to have stolen His body. At the same time, Jesus' opponents had nothing to gain from stealing and concealing the body. Knowing Jesus had said He would rise from the dead, they would have done everything in their power to safeguard the body and produce it to prove Him wrong.
- Jesus recovered from His wounds. The Romans were experienced practitioners and they verified He was dead. To claim that Jesus could have survived the ordeal is simply absurd. But, even if He did survive, it is ridiculous to suggest He was able to conceal His bloodied, broken body and convince people He was the Risen Lord. Any such attempt would have incriminated Him as a fraud.
- The witnesses were just seeing things. One point virtually all scholars agree on is the disciples were convinced they had seen the risen Christ.¹⁷ The number and diversity of witnesses indicates it was not a hallucination since hallucinations by definition are not shared experiences. The transformation of the witnesses from frightened to confident disciples also cannot be explained by a mere hallucination.¹⁸

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- The Gospel accounts of the resurrection are contradictory. What is noteworthy about the Gospel accounts is, while appearing contradictory, they can be easily reconciled.²⁰ Separate reporters will see any event a little differently and truthful testimony does not demand consistent testimony.¹⁹ In fact, when separate accounts of the same of event are identical, collaboration or collusion is suspected.
- Miracles are not possible. While the successes of modern science have led some to rule-out miracles, this is an unwarranted philosophical presumption, not a scientific conclusion. The skeptic prejudice behind this objection simply leads to an avoidance of the evidence. Once the existence of a transcendent Creator is granted as possible, miracles deserve serious consideration.

Conclusion

The growth of the early Church against impossible odds cries out for a cause. What other than the resurrection could have persuaded so many Jews who had longed for a military-like deliverer (Zech 9:9-10) to accept this shamefully hung outcast (Gal 3:13) as their promised Messiah? And, what other than the resurrection can account for the change of their worship day from Saturday to Sunday (Acts 20:7, 1Cor 16:2) and the change of their Passover Celebration to the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:7-23)? Something amazing overthrew centuries of deeply entrenched tradition.²¹

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus (Paul) also points to a miraculous event. Having begun as a violent enemy of the Church (Acts 8:3, 9:1), he was a proud and comfortable Pharisaic Jew prior to his conversion (Gal 1:13-15, Phil 3:4-7). Yet, something caused him to abandon this. His new faith was a radical change from Judaism and cannot be explained by a sense of guilt or inadequacy. Nothing short of an actual encounter with the risen Jesus can remotely explain his transformation into a servant of Jesus.

While no single piece of evidence may be sufficient when viewed in isolation, when viewed as a whole, the case for Jesus' resurrection is exceedingly compelling. As A.M. Ramsey states:

“...certain facts are unaccountable apart from the resurrection, and that different lines of historical testimony so converge as to point to the resurrection with overwhelming probability.”²²

Or, as J.N.D. Anderson, late Dean of the School of Law at the University of London states:

“Easter is not primarily a comfort, but a challenge... If it is true, then it is the supreme fact of history, and to fail to adjust one's life to its implications means irreparable loss.”²³

The evidence supporting the resurrection calls for serious consideration and a response. If the resurrection is true, it affirms Jesus is who He claimed to be, that there will be a last judgment (Acts 17:31) and that Jesus is the way to heaven (Acts 4:12) and everlasting salvation (John 11:25-26). This is not something we cannot afford to be indifferent about.

Adapted from “Hoax, Myth or Literally True? The Evidence for Jesus' Historical Resurrection” by Gary Jensen. Gary is a trained apologist and a member of the chapter steering committee. He is pastor of St. Paul's of Shorewood Lutheran Church in west Seattle. For a complete copy of the article or to dialogue with Gary, contact him at 206-244-2112 or gjensen549@hotmail.com.

REFERENCES

1. Louis Lapidés. “Did Jesus—and Jesus Alone—Match the Identity of the Messiah?” in Lee Strobel, ed. The Case for Christ. (Zondervan, 1998), p. 171f.
2. N.T. Wright. The New Testament and the People of God. (Fortress, 1992), p. 187.
3. H.G. Wells. The Outline of History. (Garden City Books, 1920), v.1, p.425,6.
4. C.S. Lewis. Mere Christianity. (Macmillan, 1952), p.55,6.
5. Harry Thomas Frank. Bible Archaeology and Faith. (Abingdon, 1971), p.292.
6. W.F. Albright. The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible. (Revell, 1935), p. 127.
7. F.F. Bruce. The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable? (I.V.P. 1972), p. 14f.
8. Historian Chauncey Sanders lists three tests in his Introduction to Research in English Literary History. (Macmillan, 1952), p. 143f, and seven factors are cited by C. Behan McCullagh in his Justifying Historical Descriptions. (Cambridge, 1984), pr. 19f., as criteria for valid analysis of historical documents. On the basis of these criteria, John Warwick Montgomery in History and Christianity. (Bethany, 1965), and William Lane Craig in “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead,” and M. Wilkens and J.P. Moreland, ed. Jesus Under Fire. (Zondervan, 1995), p. 141f, respectively, vindicate the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Applying the *Federal Rules of Evidence* used in the United States Courts of Law, attorney Pamela Binnings Ewen “proves” the resurrection of Jesus based on a preponderance of evidence. See her Faith on Trial. (Broadman and Holman, 1999). Indeed, in

personal correspondence to me she further stated the evidence would actually prevail under the standard of a *criminal* trial (beyond a reasonable doubt).

9. Even the criteria of the Jesus Seminar is addressed. See Robert Funk. The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus. (Polebridge, 1993).
10. Karl Barth. The Word of God and the Word of Man. (Harper, 1957), p. 63.
11. Will Durant. The Story of Civilization. V.111. (Simon and Schuster, 1972), p. 553f. Arnold Toynbee. The Crucible of Christianity. (World, 1969), p. 234.
12. John Shelby Spong. Resurrection: Myth or Reality? (Harper, 1994), writes that Peter felt so bad about Jesus' death that he *imagined Him back to life* (p.255). ** Gerd Luedemann argues similarly in The Resurrection of Jesus. (Fortress, 1994), p.97f. ** William Lane Craig vs. Robert Greg Cavin. Dead or Alive? A Debate on the Resurrection of Jesus. (Simon Greenleaf University, 1995). Dr. Cavin of U.C. Irvine, argues that Jesus had an *unknown identical twin brother* who began a hoax about the resurrection. ** Barbara Thiering. Jesus The Man: A New Interpretation From the Dead Sea Scrolls. (Doubleday, 1992), argues from a "coded language" that Jesus was drugged, crucified by the Dead Sea, yet He survived. He married Mary Magdalene, and then another, and then died of old age. ** Amazingly, Bertrand Russell's, Why I Am Not a Christian. (Touchstone, 1957), completely overlooks the *historical* question of Jesus. ** Joseph Campbell. Op. cit. (1), virtually avoids Jesus' resurrection. His single, indirect, reference falsely describes the Gospel accounts as poetry (p.68) ** an interpretation Jesus' contemporaries clearly rejected. See Gary Habermas. The Verdict of History. (Nelson, 1988), p. 169.
13. Virgil's 29 B.C.E. mythical account of the founding of Rome (The Aeneid. (Penguin 1990)) was written seven hundred to a thousand years after the events alleged to have taken place. ** By contrast, historical research is on the side of immediate belief in Jesus' resurrection. Dr. Borg, for example, misleads readers when he implies the resurrection stories developed over a period of 100 years (The God... Op. cit. (21), p.95). A creedal summary of the resurrection appearances (1 Corinthians 15:3-11) has been dated to just 3 to 5 years after Jesus' passion, which presupposes a *prior* public belief in it. See R. Fuller. Foundations of New Testament Christology. (Scribner's 1965). p.142. ** Even the Jesus Seminar concedes this early date in Robert Funk. The Acts... Op.cit. (21), p.454. The Apostle Paul's first letters appeared within 25 years, and the Four Gospels, at the outside, within 65 years of Jesus' ministry. See F.F. Bruce. Op.cit. (18), p.11f. ** Indeed John A.T. Robinson argues that the silence of the *Gospels* on the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. implies they had been completed by then. See his Redating the New Testament. (SCM, 1976). For since the Temple's demise would have fueled Christian preaching that Jesus had replaced the Temple sacrificial system (John 1:29, Hebrews 10:11f), the Gospels would have referred to its destruction as a *past* event had it already happened. And they would have distinguished it from the end of the world (contra Luke 21:25-28) had they already witnessed these events alleged to be predicted. The *Book of Acts'*

silence on the deaths of Apostles Peter and Paul also argues for a pre-65 C.E. date. Since *Luke* is part one of a two-volume work (*Luke 1:1-3, Acts 1:1-3*), this would place *Luke* even earlier.

The many who assign a post-70 date to the *Gospels* do so largely on the allegation that Jesus could not have predicted the future. Why not? (see p.8). In either case the predictions of the Temple's destruction are of a general nature that could have arisen merely from noting the signs of the times in light of the destruction of the *first* Temple in 587 B.C.E. See C.H. Dodd's observations in Robinson. *Ibid*, p.27f. ** Yet even dates stretching into the 90's do not allow the time-span required for mythological development. Early critics argued that the *Four Gospels* would have to have been dated after 150 C.E. for their mythological interpretation to even be considered. (Tacelli and Kreeft. Handbook of Christian Apologetics. (I.V.P. 1994), p.163).

John Macquarrie. God Talk: An Examination of the Language and Logic of Theology. (Harper and Row, 1967), writes, "*Myth is usually characterized by a remoteness in time and space...as having taken place long ago.*" The Gospels by contrast concern "*an event that had a particular definite location in Palestine...under Pontius Pilate, only a generation or so before the New Testament account of these happenings*" (p.177,80). ** A.N. Sherwin-White. Op. cit. (2), writes, "*The agnostic type of form-criticism would be much more credible if the compilation of the Gospels were much later in time...than can be the case...Heroditus enables us to test the tempo of myth-making, [showing that] even two generations are too short a span to allow the mythical tendency to prevail over the hard historic core*" (p.189,90).

14. Eta Linnemann. Is There a Synoptic Problem? (Baker, 1992), writes, "*The eyewitnesses did not disappear...in a flash after two decades. Who at the time would have dared to alter the 'first tradition' beyond recognition?*" (p.64).
15. William Lane Craig observes, "*Conflicting traditions [to the empty tomb story] nowhere appear, even in Jewish polemic,*" in Michael Wilkins and J.P. Moreland. Op. cit. (21), p.149.
16. Wolfhart Pannenberg. Jesus-God and Man. (SCM, 1968), quotes Paul Althaus approvingly that the resurrection message "could not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact." (p.100). ** Paul Maier summarizes, "If all the evidence is weighed carefully and fairly, it is indeed justifiable...to conclude that [Jesus' tomb] was actually empty...And no shred of evidence has yet been discovered in literary sources, epigraphy, or archaeology that would disprove this statement." In the Fullness of Time. (Kregel, 1991), p.203. ** Michael Grant concludes, "if we apply the same criteria that we would apply to other ancient literary sources, the evidence is firm and plausible enough to necessitate the conclusion that the tomb was indeed found empty." Op. cit. (31), p.176 ** Dr. Craig cites forty five prominent New Testament scholars who argue for the historicity of Jesus' empty tomb, in his "The Empty Tomb of Jesus." R.T. France and D. Wenham, eds. Gospel Perspectives, v. II, (JSOT, 1981), p.190. ** Crossan's hesitant assertion that Jesus wasn't buried because those who were crucified were left to hang for the birds to eat (Jesus... Op. cit. (21) p.153f.) is rebutted by Raymond Brown in

The Death of the Messiah. v. II. (Doubleday, 1994), p.1205f, where he cites ancient references to the contrary. ** Indeed, archaeology has produced actual remains of a crucified man who had been buried (Borg and Wright. Op. cit. (21), p.89). ** And Crossan notwithstanding, (Who Killed Jesus? (Harper, 1995), p.190.) the Gospels could not have successfully invented either a tomb or an empty tomb out of nothing. ** Neither could they have successfully fabricated the role of Joseph of Arimathea since he was a “respected member of the council” (Mark 15:43), and so a very public figure from a hostile group.

17. Michael Grant. Op.cit. (31), writes, *“These accounts do prove that certain people were utterly convinced that [Jesus had risen.]”* (p.176). ** Even historical skeptic, Rudolf Bultmann, concedes the disciples’ certitude to be a “fact” in Kerygma and Myth. v. I, (SPCK, 1953), p.42. ** Also, John Shelby Spong. Op. cit. (26), who admits, *“The change [in the disciples—Peter in particular] was measurable and objective even if the cause of this change is debated. [It] was part of that first-century explosion of power that cannot be denied by any student of history”* (p.26).
18. Pinchas Lapide. The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective. (Fortress, 1988), p.125. This admission of Jesus’ resurrection is by an Orthodox Jewish Rabbi, and therefore runs counter to his own bias. See p.10 of my essay.
19. Simon Greenleaf. The Testimony of the Evangelists. (Kregal, 1995 reprint from 1847 ed.), p.34.
20. Dorothy Sayers. The Man Born to Be King. (Harper and Brothers, 1943), p.19f. Her comments introduce her radio plays on the life of Christ prepared for B.B.C. Radio. ** See also G. E. Ladd. I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus. (Eerdmans, 1975), p.79f, ** and John Wenham. Easter Enigma: Are the Resurrection Accounts in Conflict? (Baker, 1992).
21. Millar Burrows. More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls. (Viking, 1958), writes, *“Jesus was so unlike what all Jews expected the Son of David to be that His own disciples found it almost impossible to connect the idea of the Messiah with Him”* (p.68). It is as the New Testament states, Jesus’ resurrection, that singly overcame that “impossibility” (Acts 2:24).
22. A.M. Ramsey. The Resurrection of Christ. (Westminster, 1946), p.37.
23. J.N.D. Anderson. The Evidence for the Resurrection. (I.V.P. 1966), p.4.

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