

Was Jesus Really Raised from the Dead?

Overview

- If someone asked why you thought Jesus died on a cross, was buried in a tomb, and then was raised from the dead and started walking around Palestine again, what would you say?
- What if the person you were talking to was skeptical that the Bible is completely true?

Reasons to Believe Jesus Rose from the Dead

1. Historical setting
2. The witness of martyrs
3. The witness of women
4. Sudden change in the Lord's Day
5. Sudden change in the doctrine of God
6. Sudden change in the definition of the Messiah
7. Rapid growth in numbers

Historical Setting

- In Greco-Roman world 2,000 years ago, non-Jewish people did not believe in a bodily resurrection (neither did Sadducees)
- Pharisees did believe in a resurrection, but overwhelming evidence is that they thought it would happen on a mass level at the end of days – not to one person prior to the end times
- Conclusion: Jesus is not a UFO

The Witness of the Apostle Paul

- Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? (1 Cor. 9:1)
- For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Cor. 15:3-8)

The Witness of the Apostle Paul

- Even liberal scholars agree that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians
- Legal concept of a dying declaration
 - Clement of Rome (95 A.D.): Paul “suffered martyrdom under the prefects”
 - Dionysius of Corinth (170 A.D.): Peter and Paul “suffered martyrdom at the same time”
 - Tertullian (200 A.D.): Paul was decapitated in Rome

The Witness of the Apostle Peter

- God “has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3)
- “When you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go. (This he said to show by what kind of death [Peter] was to glorify God.)” (John 21:18-19)
- Clement of Rome (95 A.D.): Peter “suffered martyrdom”
- Dionysius of Corinth (170 A.D.): Peter and Paul “suffered martyrdom at the same time”

Witness of the Apostle Peter

- Tertullian (200 A.D.): “Peter endured a passion like his Lord’s” and did so in Rome

The Witness of Women

- Ancient Palestine had deep-seated sexism – women could not even testify as witnesses in court
- Gospel of Matthew: on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and another woman named Mary saw the resurrected Jesus before any of the apostles
- Gospel of John: on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene saw the resurrected Jesus before any of the apostles
- No one would ever invent a story with women as the first witnesses

Sudden Change in the Sabbath

- A Sabbath on the seventh day of the week was an essential part of Jewish culture
- “[T]he seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work[.]” (Exodus 20:10)
- Yet Jesus’ followers, who grew up being taught to set aside the seventh day of the week, began to honor the first day of the week

Sudden Change in the Sabbath

- “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them [and gave a sermon].” (Acts 20:7)
- “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.” (1 Cor. 16:2)
- Why would a group of Jews suddenly change their day of worship?

Sudden Change in the Doctrine of God

- 2000 years ago, Jews were fiercely monotheistic
- “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” (Deut. 6:4)
- Yet, the Apostle John, who grew up as Jew, wrote: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....All things were made through him....And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”
- How could a Jewish person believe that a human was divine?

Sudden Change in the Doctrine of the Messiah

- Jesus was crucified
 - Tacitus, a Roman politician and historian, writing the *Annals* in 115 A.D. and talking about Christians: “Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate.”
- N.T. Wright: “the Messiah was supposed to win the decisive victory over the pagans.”

Sudden Change in the Doctrine of the Messiah

- Yet Christians believed that a crucified Jesus was the Messiah
 - “God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2:36)
 - Josephus, a Jewish historian writing in 93 A.D.: Jesus “was called the Christ”
- Why would anyone believe that a crucified person was the Messiah?

Rapid Growth in Numbers

- Tacitus (writing in 115 A.D.): “vast numbers” of Christians were martyred in Rome in 64 A.D., about 30 years after Jesus died
- Rome is nearly 1500 miles from Jerusalem
- Pliny, a Roman governor in modern-day Turkey writing in 110 A.D.: “many persons of all ages and ranks,” in both the cities and countryside, a “multitude of people,” had become Christians
- How could a small group with no political influence or military power quickly draw large numbers of converts in places like Turkey and Rome?