

Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?

Lecture notes by Steve Gregg

I. The known facts (never reasonably doubted, even by skeptics)

- Jesus died
- Jesus was buried
- Jesus' tomb was found empty
- Numerous witnesses claim to have seen Him alive after His resurrection

II. The records:

- 1 Corinthians 15 (the earliest written account of the resurrection appearances)
- Matthew, Mark, Luke, John (four independent, non-colluding, witnesses)
- Acts (the unanimous public testimonies of Peter and the other apostles)

III. The witnesses

- The women at the tomb
- Peter (alone)
- Two men walking to Emmaus
- The twelve (numerous times)
- Five-hundred people together (probably Galileans)
- James (the formerly disbelieving brother of Jesus)
- Paul (the persecutor of Christians)

IV. The credibility of the claims

- Competence to testify—most of these these were people closest to Jesus in His lifetime
- Integrity—none of those who bore witness had anything to gain from testifying, and much to lose.
- Falsifiability—since the tomb that they alleged to be vacated was available for public display, they were making a testable claim (unlike the claims of other world religions).

V. The alternative theories:

1. Jesus was not quite dead when buried

- This casts doubts on the Roman soldiers' abilities to kill a man
- This suggests that an emaciated, nearly dead Jesus, full of infections and drained of blood, escaped from the tomb and convinced many people that He had conquered death.

2. The disciples came to the wrong tomb

- Then why did not the enemies direct them to the remains in the correct tomb?
- The women watched the burial take place
- Joseph of Arimathea owned the tomb. He could have located it for them.

3. The body was stolen by Jesus' enemies

- What would their motives have been for doing this?
- Then why did these enemies not present the remains as a proof that Jesus did not rise?

4. The disciples stole the body

- This is said to be the official view of the Jews
- Did the disciples have the ability to steal and permanently conceal the body?
- Did the disciples have a motive for stealing and concealing the body?
- If this is true, then they lied about seeing and touching Jesus alive after His resurrection
- What kind of persons would a person lie and deceive thousands of people? Not those who were loyal to Christ and His teaching.
- If they were lying, why would they be willing to die before giving up the hoax?
- Why would James and Saul, who were unbelievers, lie about seeing Christ raised?

VI. Conclusion: Jesus rose from the dead

- Jesus had predicted that He would rise on the third day
- The facts are that Jesus' tomb was empty three days after His burial, and many people claimed that they encountered Him alive after that point.
- There is no credible alternative argument to explain the facts of the case
- There is no viable argument rendering the resurrection impossible, nor even unlikely.
- The evidence, then, lies completely on one side of the proposition
- If God was able to raise the dead, and had a reason to want to do so, then the view that He did just that is perfectly reasonable—unlike the alternatives.
- The view that Jesus rose from the dead is supported by the kind of evidence in its favor that would stand up in a court of law, and which would be considered adequate in the judgment of any unprejudiced historian.
- The view that Jesus did not rise from the dead is supported by no testimony and no evidence of any kind.
- Our choice is, thus, to believe either a proposition that is evidentially supported, or one that has no evidence in its favor—only the prejudice of its advocates. It's that simple.