

Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?

The gospel or “good news” proclaimed since the beginning of Christianity is essentially the news of Christ’s Resurrection. This “good news” is that a man who claimed to be the Son of God and the Savior of the world has indeed risen from the dead. For if Jesus really rose from the dead, then that validates everything he said and did, including his claim to also be divine and not merely human, because rising from the dead is beyond human power. Given the centrality of the Resurrection in Christian belief, how can we know the Resurrection really happened? The best way to discover the truth about Jesus’ Resurrection is to rationally examine the alternatives. There are five possible alternatives: swoon, conspiracy, myth, hallucination, and the “good news” of Christianity.

First, the “swoon theory” is that Jesus did not die on the cross, but that he revived while in the tomb. However, it is highly unlikely that Jesus could have survived the crucifixion. Roman execution procedures just didn’t allow that to happen. Roman law even proscribed death to any soldier who bungled a crucifixion and allowed a capital prisoner to

escape death. The soldiers confirmed that Jesus was dead by piercing his side with a spear. Thus, they did not break his legs, which was done to hasten death by asphyxiation. However, even if Jesus did revive in the tomb and get past the Roman guards, he would have been a battered, bleeding pulp of a man who would have been pitied by his followers, not worshiped. It is impossible for Jesus’ disciples to have been so transformed if he had merely revived out of a swoon, badly in need of medical treatment. A half-dead, staggering man who had narrowly escaped death would not be fearlessly worshipped as divine and the conqueror of death!

Second, the Apostles’ proclamation of Jesus’ Resurrection could not have been a deliberate lie or conspiracy, based on stealing his body from the tomb, because what would the Apostles have to gain by promoting such a lie? What could possibly have been their motive? By claiming that Jesus rose from the dead, they all faced persecution and death. However, not one of them ever denied their claim of Jesus’ Resurrection, even when faced with death. People just don’t give their lives for what they know is a lie.

Third, the Resurrection could not be a myth because there was not enough time after the actual event for a myth to have developed. There is not a single example in recorded history of where a great myth or legend based on a historical figure has been written so soon after that person’s death. Several generations need to pass before added mythological elements can be mistakenly taken as fact.

Fourth, the Resurrection could not have been a hallucination because hallucinations happen privately and only to individuals. Numerous people do not simultaneously experience the same hallucina-

tion. Furthermore, if the Resurrection was merely a hallucination of the Apostles, why didn’t the Jewish leaders just produce the corpse of Jesus to refute their claim that he had risen?

By far, the most compelling evidence of the truth of the Resurrection is the radically transformed lives of Jesus’ followers afterwards. After Jesus was crucified, his followers were discouraged and disheartened. So, they dispersed. Then, after a short time they abandoned their occupations, gathered back together and committed themselves to spreading the “good news” that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who after dying on a cross, returned to life and was seen alive by all of them. They spent the rest of their lives proclaiming this, without anything to gain from a human perspective. They faced a life of hardship and were ridiculed, beaten and imprisoned. They knew that torture and death would be their fate if they didn’t stop preaching about Jesus Christ. But, they couldn’t stop. They kept talking about Jesus’ life, death, and Resurrection. Eventually, most of them were executed in torturous ways. All of them, however, maintained to the very end that Jesus had risen from the dead. Why didn’t they recant? The only plausible explanation is they were absolutely certain they had seen Jesus Christ alive from the dead. Their bold courage and steadfast witness prove their testimony about the Resurrection is true.