



Figtreewatchers Podcast Episode 146: Apologetics: Defending the Resurrection of Jesus (Part 1)

What is apologetics?

Apologetics comes from the Greek word “apologia” which means “verbal defence, speech in defence” or “a reasoned statement or argument”. Peter uses “apologia” in 1 Peter 3:15 when saying we should give a defense of the hope that is in us.

The bible tells us we should be ready to give an answer to people for the hope that is in us, **“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear,” (1 Peter 3:15).**

We’re also told to “contend earnestly for the faith”, **“Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints,” (Jude 1:3).**

6 Arguments for the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus

1. Multiple Sources Attest to Crucifixion
2. Multiple Sources Attest to Burial
3. Empty Tomb

4. Appearances of the Risen Christ
5. Disciples Willing to Suffer
6. Conversion of Non-believers

Multiple Sources Attest to Crucifixion

The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus - ...is attested to by several sources throughout the NT as well as non-Christian sources (Josephus, Tacitus, et al.) and Christian sources outside of the NT (Clement of Rome, Ignatius, et al).

When there are multiple independent sources that attest to an event, historians believe that this increases the likelihood that the event has occurred. Thus, these multiple independent sources that report Jesus's death by crucifixion adds to its greater probability.

Embarrassing Details

The event is embarrassing and not something that the earliest disciples would likely have invented. For the Jews, one who was crucified was considered to be under a curse (Deut. 21:22–23; Gal. 3:13). The Romans too would have seen the cross as a “folly” since it was considered a punishment reserved for slaves (1 Cor. 2:3).

Multiple Sources Attest to Burial

The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus - There are multiple sources reporting Jesus's burial. The earliest tradition comes from a creed that Paul recounts in 1 Corinthians 15:4, which many scholars have dated to the early 30s AD.

...the only positive evidence we have regarding Jesus' burial is unanimous that Jesus was, in fact, buried. No competing burial accounts exist. Additionally, archeology provides evidence that crucified victims received a proper burial.

In 1968, a crucifixion victim named Yehohanan was found in an ossuary (housed the bones of the deceased) that has been dated to the 30s AD, the exact same decade Jesus was crucified and buried.

Empty Tomb

The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus - The opponents of Jesus inadvertently acknowledge that the tomb was empty when they claim that the disciples stole Jesus's body (Matt. 28:11–15). This claim seeks to explain why the tomb was empty rather than denying that it was actually empty.

The early message of the resurrection was proclaimed in Jerusalem, thus making the earliest apostles' claim easily verifiable since the tomb was in that very city. Since it was proclaimed in Jerusalem, anyone who was interested could have gone and investigated the tomb themselves.

Jewish response assumes empty tomb

Evidence That Demands a Verdict (pgs 262-263): The earliest Jewish response to the resurrection assumes the tomb was found empty: The only polemic offered by the Jews for which we have any historical evidence is the one recorded in Matthew 28:11-15... This text could not have been written if, at the time of writing, there was not a Jewish counterargument to the Christian understanding of the empty tomb.

But the Jewish polemic does not dispute that the tomb was empty; it gives an alternate explanation. This is a significant historical fact. This is strong evidence that the tomb was in fact empty.

Moreland adds, "The presence of just one account of Jesus' burial points to the fact that it must have been known to be accurate. No other account was made which could rival the true account."

Appearances of the Risen Christ

The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus - The earliest list of appearances is found in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8. Appearances are listed to both individuals (Peter, James, and Paul) as well as groups (the twelve, five hundred, all the apostles).

Of course, appearances are also reported in Matthew, Luke, and John (as well as non-canonical material). Importantly, in the early creed, there are three group appearances mentioned.

The group appearances are important because they argue very strongly against the possibility of hallucinations.

What Skeptical Scholars Admit about the Resurrection Appearances of Jesus - New Testament scholar Paula Frederiksen in the 2000 ABC documentary *The Search for Jesus* noted on the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus:

I know in their own terms what they saw was the raised Jesus. That's what they say, and then all the historic evidence we have afterwards attest to their conviction that that's what they saw. I'm not saying that they really did see the raised Jesus. I wasn't there. I don't know what they saw. But I do know that as a historian that they must have seen something.

Fredriksen is not alone in supposing that these followers must have seen something. Virtually every Bible scholar across the Western world, regardless of religious background, agrees that Jesus' earliest followers believed he appeared to them alive.

That Jesus appeared to more than 500 men and women at the same time is a truly remarkable claim. Paul boldly puts his credibility on the line when he mentions that most of them are still alive. After all, he is essentially inviting members of the Corinthian church to travel to Jerusalem and speak to these witnesses, investigating for themselves what it was like to see the risen Jesus.

We can see, then, that solid eyewitness testimony to the risen Jesus was readily available in the decades following his resurrection. As G. K. Chesterton observed in *The Everlasting Man*, "This is the sort of truth that is hard to explain because it is a fact; but it is a fact to which we can call witnesses."

Woman were first

Evidence That Demands a Verdict (pg 261): The first people to experience and proclaim the empty tomb were the women followers. If one were to fabricate an empty tomb and risen Jesus in first-century Mediterranean culture, one would not cite women as eyewitnesses, given their low status as credible witnesses in the eyes of the people and the courts.

It is therefore reasonable to think that what is recorded actually happened. Scripture's identification of women as the first witnesses of the empty tomb thus supports the historical veracity of the accounts.

That type of resurrection went against Jewish thought at the time

Evidence That Demands a Verdict (pgs 263-264): The disciples' claim that they encountered a physical, resurrected Jesus was not an idea they would have borrowed from anyone else; it did not arise from within their own belief system.

Groothuis summarizes this point well: [The] Second Temple Judaism of Jesus' day had no concept of disembodied resurrection. Those Jews who believed in the afterlife (unlike the Sadducees, see Mark 12:18) believed in a general resurrection of all people at the end of history...Therefore, Jesus resurrection differed from the prevailing view in that (1) it happened in history, not at the end of history, and (2) it happened to one individual, not to the entire human race.

Given this, the early church could not have derived their idea of Jesus' singular resurrection in history from prevailing Jewish ideas. Thus if Jesus' followers (or others) had only visionary or apparitional experiences of Jesus, these would not have supported the claim that he was alive. They could at best claim that Jesus' disembodied spirit was making various appearances on

earth. But the New Testament nowhere makes this claim, since it emphasizes the physical resurrection of Jesus and the empty tomb.

Disciples Willing to Suffer

The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus - While many have died for something they believed to be true (including Christians today), the earliest Christians were willing to suffer and die for what they knew to be true.

Thus, the willingness of the earliest Christians to suffer and die for their beliefs highlights their sincerity in a way unique to them since they knew what they were willing to suffer for was either true or false (in contrast to Christian martyrs today who may base their beliefs off the claims of the apostles).

What Skeptical Scholars Admit about the Resurrection Appearances of Jesus - We also possess strong historical evidence that certain key eyewitnesses were martyred for their faith. Peter, for instance, was crucified. James was stoned. Paul was beheaded. Whatever they saw, it was worth giving their lives for. They sealed their testimonies with their blood.

Conversion of Non-believers

The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus - Paul provides his own account of his conversion from being a persecutor of the church to a follower of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:8–10; Gal. 1:12–16; Phil. 3:6–7; 1Tim. 1:12–17). James, the brother of the Lord, was considered a skeptic during Jesus ministry (Mark 3:21; 6:2–4, 6; John 7:5).

He, however, then became the leader of the early church (Acts 15:13ff.) and was a “pillar” of the church that Paul met with while on his trips to Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18–19; 2:9). Paul also specifically identifies James as having seen the risen Lord (1 Cor. 15:7; Acts 1:14).

Summary

The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus - These six facts are well-attested historically, and naturalistic theories have been unable to account for them. For example, take the claim noted above that the disciples stole the body. First, they were willing to suffer and die for this belief. Liars promote lies in order to make their lives more comfortable but not to encounter greater suffering.

Second, if the disciples stole the body it would not explain the conversion of Paul or James. Prior to his conversion, Paul might have initially thought the disciples did steal the body! Yet, for Paul it was the encounter with Jesus that converted him.

The hallucination theory is another example of how naturalistic theories are challenged by these facts. As noted above, there are multiple group appearances which strongly argue against the hallucination theory. Additionally, Paul would not have been likely to hallucinate as a persecutor of the church.

Lastly, the tomb would not have been empty if the disciples had hallucinated. The disciple's friends and family or the authorities themselves would have pointed out that the body was still in the tomb! Yet this did not happen. Thus, we see again how these few facts can argue against naturalistic theories.

Sources

1. The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus ([The Gospel Coalition](#))
2. What Skeptical Scholars Admit about the Resurrection Appearances of Jesus ([Christianity Today](#))
3. Evidence That Demands a Verdict by Josh McDowell & Sean McDowell