

PROVING THE CLAIMS OF JESUS

The Christian religion stands or falls with the person of Jesus Christ. Judaism could survive without Moses, Buddhism without Buddha, Islam without Mohammed; but Christianity could not survive without Christ. This is because unlike most other world religions, Christianity is belief in a person, a genuine historical individual . but at the same time a special individual, whom the Church regards as not only human, but divine.+ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*+

Without the resurrection, Christianity crumbles. *“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.”*(1 Corinthians 15:17)

Proof of his claims . Jesus Christ is God and proved through the undeniable fact of His resurrection. As we have seen God’s existence is provable and logical, and the Bible is the word of God and is fundamentally unchanged since its writing. That leaves us with the burden of proof that Jesus was the Christ. His resurrection is the key, but we will also look at His humanity and His deity.

Evidence – Christ’s Resurrection:

For detailed descriptions see William Lane Craig’s *Reasonable Faith*+

The Empty Tomb

1. The historical reliability of the story of the burial of Jesus
Dr. Simon Greenleaf, Royall Professor of Law at Harvard . *“the greatest authority on legal evidence of the nineteenth century.”* *The Testimony of the Evangelists* . overwhelming evidence for Jesus’ resurrection
2. Paul’s eyewitness testimony
1 Corinthians 15 . *“He was buried – He was raised.”*
3. The phrase *“first day of the week”* is quite ancient
This refutes the legend theory. If it were a later legend it would have been written *“on the third day”* as we Christians know it today.
4. The story is simple and lacks legendary development. When compared with later, embellished accounts the difference is astonishing. The forgery, *“Gospel of Peter,”* from A.D. 125 is a great example.
5. Women, who held the lowest social station at that time, discovered the tomb.
6. The disciples could not have preached the resurrection in Jerusalem if the tomb had not been empty. The religious rulers would have simply produced the body.
7. Jewish propaganda from the time did not deny the empty tomb
Matthew 28:11-15, *“His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep”*

The Resurrection Appearances

1. Paul’s testimony proves the disciples saw Jesus (1 Corinthians 15)
 - A. Mary Magdalene (John 20:11)
 - B. Other women (Matt 28:9-10)
 - C. Peter (Luke 24:34)
 - D. Two disciples (Luke 24:13-32)
 - E. Ten apostles (Luke 24:33-49)
 - F. Thomas and other apostles (John 20:26-30)
 - G. Seven apostles (John 21)
 - H. All apostles (Matt 28:16-20) and again (Acts 1:4-9)
 - I. To 500 brethren (1 Cor 15:6)
 - J. James (1 Cor 15:7)
Significant because none of Jesus’ brothers believed in Him. But after the resurrection they appeared in the upper room in Jerusalem. In Galatians 1:19 Paul counts James among the apostles. How do we explain this?
 - K. Saul of Tarsus (Paul) (Acts 9:1-9 and retold twice)

2. The Gospel accounts are historically reliable
3. The resurrection appearances were physical

What was it that changed a band of frightened, cowardly disciples into men of courage and conviction? What was it that changed Peter from one who, the night before the Crucifixion, was so afraid for his own skin that he three times denied he even knew Jesus, into a roaring lion of the faith? Some fifty days later Peter risked his life by saying he had seen Jesus risen from the dead. It must be remembered that Peter preached his electric Pentecost sermon in Jerusalem, where the events took place and his life was in danger. He was not in Galilee, miles away, where no one could verify the facts and where his ringing statements might go unchallenged. Only the bodily resurrection of Christ could have produced this change.+ Paul Little, *Know Why You Believe*

Alternate Theories:

1. Conspiracy theory

- A. Morally implausible
- B. Psychologically impossible
- C. Can't account for sincerity of the disciples

Would men in such circumstances pretend to have seen what they never saw; assert facts which they had not knowledge of, go about lying to teach virtue; and, though not only convinced Christ's being an imposter, but having seen the success of his imposture in his crucifixion, yet persist in carrying on; and so persist, as to bring upon themselves, for nothing, and with full knowledge of the consequences, enmity and hatred, danger and death?+William Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*+

2. Wrong tomb theory

- A. Treats the evidence selectively and arbitrarily
- B. A later check would have revealed the error

3. Swoon theory

The swoon theory is that He did not die on the cross, but merely swooned and came to in the tomb. The disciples hid Him away made the rest up. A few problems:

- A. Roman Centurions are pretty good at deciding who's dead and who's not.
- B. Honest, simple men would not be compelled to preach morality based on a lie.
- C. If the disciples were in on it why did they willingly die for what they knew to be a lie?
- D. How do you explain the natural signs that occurred at His death (veil being torn in the temple, the unnatural darkness, & earthquakes) all reported by eyewitnesses?
- E. How do you explain the radical change Christianity made on human history if it is based on a lie?

4. Legend theory

The legend theory is based on the idea that Jesus never existed or was greatly embellished becoming a legend. This also has more than a few problems:

- A. Legends take time to develop. The Gospels were written within 40 years of the actual events. That's not enough time for a legend to come about and many of those mentioned would still be alive to refute those claims.
- B. The Bible contains at least four separate accounts of the events.
- C. The Bible has been shown to be historically accurate. This theory opens up so many doors that it falls apart:
 - 1) What about Paul's experience?
 - 2) What about the martyrdom of the Apostles?
 - 3) How do you explain the radical change Christianity has made?

5. Prophetic coincidence

The statistical odds of Jesus being in the right place at the right time+and just happening to fulfill even some of the prophecies are off the scale (10^{157} for just 48 of the prophecies). He fulfilled them all. Norman Geisler stated that what rules out this theory is the moral impossibility of an all-powerful and all-knowing God letting things get so out of control so that all His plans for prophetic fulfillment are ruined by someone who just happens to be in the right place at the right time.+