



# The Gospels and the Resurrection

# Historicity of the Gospels

- Are the Gospels historically reliable?
- The notion of history as an exact science began in the mid-19th cent., 1800 years after Gospels
- But we can submit them to the five tests of historicity:
  1. Do they contain direct eyewitness testimony?
  2. Were they written within living memory of the events described (subject to criticism)?
  3. Are they not fabulous, legendary or mythical?
  4. Do they meet the criteria of embarrassment and unexpectedness?
  5. Are they corroborated by multiple independent sources?

# Eyewitness Testimony

- Matthew and John were apostles, Mark and Luke gathered testimony of other eyewitnesses (Peter, Mary, witnesses of the Risen Christ)
- John explicitly calls himself a witness to assert his credibility (cf. John 19:35, 21:24)
- Apparent conflicts between Gospel passages are minor (order of temptations, number and order of Beatitudes, words of the Our Father, order of miracles)
- The four accounts are easy to harmonize

# Date of Writing

- If a text is written within living memory of the events described, it may be contested by other witnesses who remember the same events
- 50-100 AD – Gospels of Mark, Luke, Matthew, and John (in chronological order) were written
- 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. AD – First known heretical group was the Ebionite sect of Christian Jews who denied Christ's divinity

# Not Legendary or Mythical

- The non- or anti-Christian historian frequently assumes *a priori* that any inexplicable event is mythical. But Christ's miracles were described as facts recognized by both believers & critics.
- The miracles & resurrection seemed incredible even to witnesses; fact is stranger than fiction
- If the apostles had wanted to invent the resurrection account, how would they have known that Jesus would be unrecognizable?
- The doctrine of the Eucharist cannot be mythical language, since Christ did not interpret it as such (unlike the parables)

# Embarrassment & Unexpectedness

- Criterion of embarrassment – if the Gospels were fictional, they wouldn't include details that could embarrass or discredit early Christians: Peter's denial, apostles' flight, Christ's baptism by John, Joseph's plan to divorce Mary, Christ's death on the cross, and the apostles' doubt even after the Ascension
- Criterion of unexpectedness – if the Gospels were fictional, they wouldn't portray Jesus doing things that no one could reasonably expect: Sabbath work, love of enemies, not hand-washing, eating his flesh & blood, calling Yahweh "*Abba*," silence in the face of accusations, and often breaking social norms (friend of pagans, prostitutes, lepers, and Samaritans)

# Independent Verification

- Many other sources mention facts about Jesus:
  - Flavius Josephus (1<sup>st</sup> cent. Jewish historian)
  - Publius Cornelius Tacitus (1<sup>st</sup> cent. Roman historian)
  - Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (1<sup>st</sup> cent. Roman historian)
  - Pliny the Younger (early 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. Roman governor)
  - Mara Bar Serapion (1<sup>st</sup> cent. Stoic philosopher)
  - Lucian of Samosata (2<sup>nd</sup> cent. Greek satirist)
  - The Babylonian Talmud (2<sup>nd</sup> cent. Jewish compilation)
- Many writings of Tacitus are the only source in which certain ancient events are mentioned, yet no one doubts their authenticity

The Gospels pass all five tests of  
historicity.

Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose  
that they are factual.



# Conclusions

- With great certainty, history tells us: “Jesus was a religious teacher who lived in Palestine and sought to purify and reform the worship of Judaism.
- He was followed by a group of intimate disciples, mostly from Galilee.
- The crowds looked upon him as a wonder-worker and even hailed him as the promised Messiah.
- His increasing influence aroused bitter opposition from the priests and Pharisees, and led to his trial and crucifixion under Pontius Pilate.
- His followers affirmed his bodily resurrection, and no remains of Jesus’ body have ever been found.”
- Well-informed, reasonable faith tells us: “Jesus was the incarnate Son of God & Savior of Man.”

# The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?

- The Incarnation is the central truth of Christianity. The Birth, Hidden Life, Public Life, Passion, Death and Resurrection are included in it.
- But only the Resurrection has the power to convert hearts. If there is no Resurrection, there is nothing to live or die for. If the Resurrection is true, life and death are worth it.
- We need solid proofs for the Resurrection, not only for our own faith but also to combat our enemies.
- What are we up against?
  1. A society opposed to whatever science can't explain. (Gennaro, incorruptibles, healings, dreams)
  2. Four BOGUS theories.

# The Swoon Theory

This theory claims that Jesus didn't actually die.

1. Romans were expert executioners, and could be executed themselves for botching an execution.
2. Why did the soldiers not break his legs?
3. A mixture of blood and water can come only from a heart that is already dead.
4. The body was totally encased and entombed.
5. How could the Roman guards at the tomb have been overpowered by a staggering wounded man? How could such a man move a 2000-lb stone from inside?
6. If Jesus didn't die in the crucifixion, then where is his body now? Certainly his enemies would have hunted for it and his followers would have venerated it.

# The Conspiracy Theory

This theory claims that the apostles lied.

1. No one has ever admitted this, even under torture.
2. The apostles were simple fishermen, not sophisticated storytellers.
3. The story circulated by the Jewish authorities is unbelievable. First, the soldiers wouldn't have fallen asleep, due to fear of execution; second, even if they had, the noise would have awoken them.
4. Disciples wanting to steal the body would have killed the soldiers; many Jews were experts in guerrilla warfare. But they were all paralyzed by fear.
5. Martyrs wouldn't be capable of dying for a lie; what would they stand to gain?

6. It is highly unlikely that more than 500 people could all tell the same lie, and that no one has ever confessed.
7. The enemies of Christ were sophisticated and powerful enough to defeat any hoax.

# The Hallucination Theory

This theory claims that the Christians hallucinated.

1. Hallucinations are subjective incidents, not events witnessed simultaneously by 500 people.
2. Hallucinations are short-lived, not 40 days long.
3. Hallucinations come from images that the mind has previously stored, not from unrecognized people.
4. Hallucinations cannot be touched, and do not eat.
5. If the Risen Christ was a hallucination, then where is the body now? Certainly his enemies would have hunted for it and his followers would have venerated it.

# The Myth Theory

This theory claims that the Resurrection is a myth.

1. The literary style of the Gospels is factual, not mythical. A strong indication of this is the presence of details that are somewhat irrelevant.

- Examples: Jesus was writing on the ground
- It was 4 o'clock in the afternoon
- Judas was treasurer, not Matthew
- A naked young man ran out of the garden
- 153 fish were caught by the disciples

2. Myths about St. Patrick (snakes and shamrocks), Buddha, Mohammed, and Nero arose after many generations had passed, not while the generation of witnesses was still alive.

3. The inventors of a myth would not have portrayed women as the first witnesses of the Resurrection, because female testimony was never accepted in courts of law.
4. Why would the “invented” Risen Christ still have scars, yet not be recognized easily?



# Additional Points

- What about St. Thomas? He refused to believe for a whole week. The gospels record this realistic but embarrassing detail.
- What about St. Paul? His complete turnaround could not have been caused by a dead man.
- If Christ could raise Lazarus, the daughter of Jairus, and the son of the widow of Naim, why couldn't he come back from the dead himself? Clearly he had power over death.

The accounts of the Resurrection are credible, and appear in a reliable source (as already proven).  
Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that the Resurrection actually happened.