

ONE WRITTEN TESTIMONY TO RESURRECTION?

The gospels say that a miracle healing man called Jesus Christ lived. They say he died by crucifixion and three days later he rose again. The tomb he was placed in was found wide open with the stone that had been across the entrance moved back and the tomb was mysteriously empty. His body was gone. Certain witnesses claimed that Jesus appeared to them as a resurrected being.

The New Testament is alleged to provide evidence that the resurrection of Jesus was a historical event.

The four gospels are the only real attempts at evidence. The rest of the New Testament gives no detail on the resurrection visions that can be used to make a historical evaluation.

BUT WHAT ABOUT REVELATION?

Some would disagree and say the risen Jesus was seen by the author of the Book of Revelation. But these visions occur in a highly symbolical and nightmarish and dreamlike format. However, the detailed visions of Jesus you would expect from the gospel testimonies are not there. You get them in the Book of Revelation. There Jesus has white hair. His eyes are on fire. A deadly sharp sword projects from his mouth. You can make a case for people doing something to themselves to see visions. It has happened in Eastern Religion as well. The other testimonies of Jesus being alive do not claim to be complete so heaven knows what they have left out.

DOES IT MATTER?

What about the view that the return of Jesus from the dead was not a miracle for it was not seen? This makes the visions the miracle not the resurrection. Religion may turn that into a reason for believing the story. It will say, "If somebody was making this up they would not have done that." That turns this into a reason for believing in people not Jesus. And every miracle story has such flaws. You would end up with no reason to take Christianity seriously.

THE LAW OF TESTIMONY

God, in the Law of Moses, decreed that a testimony must only be heeded if it depends on the word of two or more witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Numbers 35:30). And Jesus gave witness to its correctness centuries later (John 8:17). Jesus said that the law declared that what two men testify to is true. Of course this is not good but Jesus was a fraud. But enough digressing. The same commandment was approved in 1 Timothy 5:19 and 2 Corinthians 13:1 by Paul the apostle. So Christians must not say that the commandment was done away by Jesus for it was validated in New Testament times.

Those authorities didn't let the fact that the law of two or three witnesses was written by one person bother them! And they should! They are contradicting the rule by believing in it! The rule was written by a person even said that they were a witness that the rule came from God! I mean it does not claim to be written by Moses or by a person who knew exactly that his data came from the divinely authorised source. Why can't this law have two or more witnesses? It nullifies itself and it demands that people kill for it.

WITNESSES TO DEATH OF JESUS?

If I say that X happened because there are two witnesses to X that infers that if they say nothing or can't say anything that it is just my word that it happened and that they saw it. Their testimony is only as good as my word so it is really just my testimony. As far as my hearers and I are concerned, there is only one testimony – mine. And mine is not as strong as their word for I got it second-hand. If the gospels were true or from God we would have two or more first-hand testimonies for each major claim made by the gospel but we don't.

Not one of the New Testament writers claimed to have witnessed Jesus die. Yes we have people who said that Jesus died but that does not make them witnesses. It would not stand up in a court of law. All Christians say that but it means nothing for they weren't at the crucifixion.

The synoptics, Matthew, Mark and Luke, say that the people who saw Jesus die were at a distance from him and do not say they were sure that it was really Jesus they saw or if they could see very much. But what is important is that they do not say their story came from witnesses.

In John, the man called the disciple Jesus loved was near the cross with Mary and saw Jesus "corpse" being pierced. But he never said that he was sure Jesus was dead and seen the evidence. Not one of the authors of anything else in the New Testament saw Jesus die. We have no evidence that John, the only possible exception, did either. The rest of them were not even there. This gospel says it was written by the beloved disciple (21:24) who is assumed to have been John the apostle. This is a fabrication for the gospel originally ended at 20:31 which says that Jesus did many signs and the signs that are recorded are recorded so that we will believe meaning we are hearing no more. Chapter 21 starts with "after this" which does not follow and relates an episode from Jesus' risen life. The forger claimed that the beloved disciple was the author for the real author would not have been clumsy as his book was the highlight of his spiritual life. To give the gospel authority, the disciple would have to make it known that he wrote it but then he would not describe himself as the disciple Jesus loved for humility is stressed in his book. He was not John the apostle though late tradition maintains he was.

The other gospels which were written to embody the apostolic authority and evidence and evidence required them to say if John or any apostle was present at the death of Jesus. When Peter who was told to strengthen the faith of the brethren during the passion of Jesus (Luke 22:32) was not present then it was not likely that John would have been there either for he was as strong as Peter or stronger and he needed to help the brethren more than Peter did. John says that all the apostles hid from everybody after Jesus' demise in fear for their lives. The gospels give no indication that they needed to be afraid and say that they were allowed to go away in peace when Jesus was arrested. Peter was found out to be a friend of Jesus when Jesus was being tried and nothing bad came of it so they were being paranoid if all that is true. If John had to hide after the death he would not have been at the crucifixion. The John author told lies in his gospel so though it does not prove he was lying when he claimed to have known Jesus it proves we cannot accept this without some independent evidence but there is none. The logic is that we can only believe what we see to be likely. If a person lies in one thing we cannot believe the other things they say but must be agnostic for they would only be likely to be true if the person does not lie. I think the apostles lied about having to hide after Jesus died as an alibi for the missing body and the visions were hoaxes that they themselves were responsible for.

If God wrote the gospel it would be fully correct for inerrancy is needed in a book before we can safely believe it is God's word and put it first and we cannot do that if we have what must be man's word and not the word of God.

THE ENDING OF MARK

Mark ended his gospel with women being told by men in white that Jesus was alive. It does not say they checked to see if the body was there. They ran off and told nobody. At that point the gospel ends. Many believe Mark intended the story to end there.

The book Decoding Mark looks at how chaisms prove what parts of the gospel are Mark's work and which are the work of a possibly dishonest person. Chaisms are poetic word patterns and contrasts.

Page 72 shows how the prologue of Mark is the mirror image of the conclusion. The pattern shows that the abrupt end of Mark at the point where the women being told that Jesus rose go and say nothing to anybody is how Mark meant the gospel to end. His gospel refused to mention resurrection appearances meaning we should decide ourselves how we can hold Jesus rose from the dead. He thought that visions were worthless in that respect. Page 149 says the end was deliberate and was meant to urge you to start reading again from the beginning. This to me would suggest the risen Jesus was not important and the normal and risen Jesus was. Soon after the gospel starts Jesus gets the Holy Spirit. If Jesus were God then, the Holy Spirit could not possibly be given to him for he would have the Spirit with him. Near the end Jesus feels abandoned by God as if the Spirit left him. This is further support for this position about the ending.

THE RESURRECTION

The vast majority of the verses in Mark, the first gospel, are repeated in Matthew and in Luke. Any different information in the latter two is most likely to be embellishment because when they have to use a gospel to do most of the work for them it shows that they were not using witnesses of any kind. We really just have one voice saying that Jesus died and rose in the synoptics and it is a second or third hand voice for the gospels would not miss out on informing us about their unimpeachable sources.

The gospels stole ideas and information from one another and the Old Testament and other sources and never attributed them to their real source. That was dishonest and theft even if they had permission for they never told us. It is theft to give somebody a reason to believe something when they cannot know who first gave that reason because they might believe more if they were told. The goppers could not have got much permission if any at all.

Matthew is sometimes taken to be the work of a witness, the apostle Matthew, but he would say if he was. He would not need to base his gospel on Mark's who was not an apostle if he were an apostle himself. Also Matthew simply says that

Jesus appeared and gave a message and gives no details. His presentation gives us no confidence that Jesus rose. He doesn't mention Jesus being touched or eating. He gives us no indication that the witnesses saw and heard the same thing. Mark mentions no resurrection appearances at all.

In John 8:17 Jesus says we must only believe something when two people say it happened. But John's gospel gives us only one testimony and a questionable one at that!

PAUL

The first writer about the resurrection was St Paul. His writings have full apostolic authority for Christians. They are considered to be co-authored by God and therefore without error.

Paul writes that Jesus made a number of appearances and appeared to him last as if he were an ectroma an aborted fetus or a miscarriage. That is best understood as Paul saying that the others had the best experiences while his own as wonderful as it was was a pittance in comparison. The book of Acts says that when Paul saw Jesus he only saw a light and heard a voice. This means that the only eyewitness account we have fails to be evidence that Jesus rose.

THERE IS NO DECENT TESTIMONY

Christians like to tell you that the gospels are giving eyewitness testimony to Jesus' resurrection in some form. But they don't claim that anybody was interviewed and could have used material that allegedly came from eyewitnesses. There is another option. They could be presenting themselves as inspired testimonies. They think God is telling them what happened.

A fatal contradiction in the New Testament is how eleven men who never saw Jesus die could be considered to be apostles, that is, chief witnesses to the resurrection. They were impostors and cheats. Jesus had so little magical power that he could not appoint qualified apostles!

Jesus said that his resurrection was his supreme proof of his having divine authority. This implies that it was one miracle the Devil could not duplicate. But the Devil can send illusions or false visions that make it look like a man who never rose. Jesus himself is no good as a witness to the resurrection. He is too biased. He is boasting that he knows it all and him in the wrong. When a man rises from the dead thinking it proves he was not from the Devil when it does not prove that, who does that tell you must have been responsible for raising that man?

Frank Morison in *Who Moved the Stone?* declared that the passion stories must be factual for when they are not gorged with miracles that makes them more credible. But they are full of absurdities that are as bad or worse than miracles. It would have been a miracle if the Jews decided to wait until Jesus had done all the damage he could before acting to thwart him. It would have been a miracle if the Jews wanted Jesus dead so close to the Passover when more people than usual were in Jerusalem and there could have been a clash with his fans. It would have been a miracle if Jesus were publicly killed at all when he could have been discreetly kidnapped and murdered. Morison's argument is useless and not just for these but for many more reasons.

We might have only one witness but what use is that? In reality there are no believable witnesses.

Anybody could write a gospel that gives different details from another one but which does not conflict with it so that the two seem to complement one another. If we believe in the resurrection on account of the three gospels which do not even claim to be based on eyewitness reports then we should believe any gospel written in modern times that fits the New Testament reports or better still one that is revealed by people allegedly having a gift to see what happened when Jesus was alive. But it would seem that a modern gospel would be in a different situation from a first-century one for the latter would be nearer to the time of Jesus and the writer had a chance to know about him. But a first century gospel that does not claim to depend on what was known or does not depend is as bad as a modern one or worse. A modern gospel that was supposedly composed after visions of the life of Jesus would have to be superior to any New Testament gospel. We cannot arbitrarily pick books and say they are God's word, that is not fair on those who disagree with us and is saying that they are bad, mad, stupid or all three. At least we know who wrote the modern gospels.

The resurrection story is tame compared with some supernatural tales but many tamer ghost stories have been refuted. Sobriety is not a certain indication of authenticity. What about ghost stories that have not been refuted and which are more spectacular and persuasive than the resurrection appearances? They testify that spiritism is true and Christianity false and they do not honour Jesus. Christians exalt the lesser evidence over the greater evidence. You would have to debunk every ghost story in the world before you would be entitled to believe in the resurrection or be dogmatic about it. Fair is fair.

TABLE SHOWING THAT KEY GOSPEL EVIDENCE IS UNSATISFACTORY

Matthew by the way gives the first gospel resurrection account not Mark which either lost the ending or just stopped where it stopped. We don't know anything about the ending of Mark that we have except that it is old and nothing changes the fact that it cannot have the same importance as the rest of the gospel for we don't know if somebody made it up. Matthew is problematic for scholars see evidence of exaggeration and legends clearly getting in. An example is how it says Jesus' resurrection was one of many at that time. But the fact remains that we have to class Matthew as giving the first standard account. That is how you work with such texts.

EVIDENCE	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
Jesus seen put into tomb - note no eyewitness claim mentioned. The most critical evidence is missing for hearsay is not evidence.	X	✓	✓	X
Tomb supervised	✓	X	X	X
Stone rolled back supernaturally	✓	X	X	X
Possibility of body being taken when tomb open and unsupervised eliminated	X	X	X	X
Tomb seen to be empty	X - we are not told if women looked in when angel asked them to	✓	✓	✓
An appearance of Jesus corroborated by more than one gospel*	X	✓	✓	✓

* ONLY THE APPEARANCE TO MAGDALENE

FINALLY

We don't have a good enough reason to think that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Jesus complained that unless those around him would see signs and wonders they would not believe. That is not very reassuring about how reliable they are.