

## WHY IT IS SPECULATION IS AT THE ROOT OF THE CLAIM THAT JESUS WAS RESTORED TO LIFE AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION

The New Testament 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.

Jesus says that the miracles that follow him were not done by him but the people themselves did them with faith and by faith. He felt he was helping people arouse their own supernatural ability through faith to help themselves. Read Luke 17:19. Jesus cures ten lepers and sends them away with a message they are to take with them forever, "Rise and go, your faith has made you whole." He said that instead of telling them to worship him or anything or to believe in him. The road is opened then to hold that faith somehow appeared in the apostles and witnesses of the resurrection to cause the appearances of the risen Jesus. They witnessed Jesus through the eyes of faith. The road is opened for a denial of clearly supernatural appearances.

The way Jesus was a pure Jew may have been a problem for early Christianity. So to make him the founder of a brand new faith very different from Judaism they had to talk about not Jesus the Jew but Jesus the risen one who is founding Christianity. Jesus the Jew had to be eclipsed by Jesus the Christian. And as Jesus the Christian was only experienced in visions that made it handy for those who wanted to invent new doctrines some of which were hateful towards Jews.

The New Testament contains all the evidence that Jesus rose from the dead. The evidence is largely a product of people thinking the accounts all agree and contradictions are not contradictions but just different information. The gospels need to be made to agree even by force for it is obvious that any evidence for such a stupendous thing needs to be excellent.

One harmonisation needed is for how Jesus said he would rise after three days and yet he only rose on the third day. The first gospel, Mark, at 8:31 states that "the Son of man must suffer many things...and be killed and after three days rise again". Believers take the "after three days" loosely which is very neat. They say the author did not mean it strictly. Matthew says people were raised from the dead when Jesus died. The resurrected people in Matthew came out to visit people after Jesus rose. But even the New Testament only guesses WHEN Jesus rose. It gives no evidence that he really rose on Sunday morning. It is merely assumed. Thus you have Jesus predicting the future as a sign when there are problems with the fulfilment.

Back to the resurrection accounts. Though it is doubtful that the accounts are anything but legends let us for the sake of argument forget this and treat them as reports.

Despite the valiant efforts of lying Christian defenders of the faith, the resurrection of Jesus cannot be proved by a missing body or disciples having apparitions and having changed lives. Suppose these things help. Then we wonder if the missing body is as important as the changing of lives? In fact without the changed lives - whether it is a real change or a manufactured one - there would be no interest in the missing body or the apparitions! It would be a good story maybe but one good story among thousands. To believe Jesus rose because some people supposedly had changed lives through meeting the risen Jesus is odd. It is letting man's claims to have been spiritually transformed be the centre of your faith. Man is not entitled to that degree of trust. You cannot let man tell you how to see God and if man is authorised to speak for God you will know it. The changed lives things surprisingly interests the Christians very little. It only gets a brief mention in their books and then they try to act like historians to argue that Jesus' tomb was empty and he appeared. It does not interest them for it is more of an assumption than anything else. We do not have much information on any apostle. And there is no evidence that the resurrection changed the lives of the women who supposedly seen the risen Jesus.

The attempts to prove the resurrection centre around the missing body and the allegedly changed lives. Suppose the body just vanished by a miracle and wasn't raised and some kind of clumsy supernatural force affected the apostles' minds like radiation making them imagine they all had apparitions of Jesus and changed their lives. False beliefs do change lives. A belief by its nature can be wrong but that does not stop it changing lives. There is in fact no evidence at all that Jesus rose from the dead even if the other miracles can be proven. This is the problem we face with all alleged apparitions, Lourdes, Medjugorje and so on. Because the religious world is full of vision stories that can't all be true, the Christians tend to hold that the resurrection would be dubious if it depended on vision stories but they say we have the empty tomb of Jesus and the change in the apostles and the fact that they met a risen Jesus they could touch and who could eat meaning he was more than a vision to justify belief. The Handbook of Christian Apologetics page 180, says that the resurrection is not a vision because a vision is spiritual and subjective and can be caused by the hidden powers of your mind or something else. The tangibility of the risen Jesus would then have to be the main argument for the resurrection but the evidence for it is very

weak and in vision stories people think they touch ghosts and ghosts touch people and ghosts manipulate items just like Jesus manipulated things and allegedly ate fish after his resurrection. So they are stuck with the weak vision argument for the resurrection. So were the oldest resurrection accounts which never mentioned the tangibility of the risen Christ! The accounts of the tangible Christ were too late and were not stressed enough as the writings and gospels that considered them unimportant or didn't know of them show!

Did the New Testament witnesses think they seen Jesus and did somebody convey to them that belief in the resurrection made emotional or philosophical sense? If so, did they promote the resurrection account not because they seen Jesus but because they were motivated by the emotional and philosophical baggage it had got? If so the quest for evidence for the resurrection ignores the fact that the believers might not have cared about it. Also, the gospel accounts are fragmentary and thus not concerned about evidence. Putting material in a work that seems to have evidential value does not mean it is in it for evidence. Even the most outrageous work of fiction has to draw on some truth.

Richard Swinburne said we must get as much evidence as we can for a miracle for that increases the chance that a miracle really occurred (page 91, OCR Philosophy of Religion for AS and A2, Matthew Taylor, Editor Jon Mayled, Routledge, Oxon, New York, 2007). Apply this rule to the resurrection of Jesus and you find it has very poor evidence in its favour indeed. For religion, miracles may happen but they don't count - it is the religious experience of the love of God and the desire to live a holy life that comes with them that counts. The miracle is just a curiosity without that element. And it is an element that doesn't need miracle which raises the problem of what use are miracles supposed to be? Just because the apostles reported a religious experience doesn't mean we have to accept anything they claim. Such an experience is so private and personal.

Also only Paul spoke of his religious experience in relation to the resurrection and even then it was the cross not the resurrection miracle that was his focus. The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is worse than the evidence of religious experience in favour of spiritualism that is reported so often. The weakness proves that Christianity is unlikely to be true.

We need really good evidence for supernatural claims. We need great evidence that the apostles saw Jesus and it needs to be better than the evidence that the tomb being empty was a miracle (something even the New Testament is silent on for it doesn't exclude the idea that Jesus was stolen and rose again in the thief's lair) and the alleged miraculous change in the apostles (no need to assume a miracle here at all). And we have nothing at all!

Extraordinary claims that seem unnatural or supernatural require exceptionally good evidence. To be clear, this amounts to asking for merely hard evidence. We have hard evidence for many things so it is not an unreasonable request. Miracle believers deny this when it comes to claims they wish to believe. They lower the standard. Murders happen and yet we demand a huge pile of evidence before jailing killers for murders are out of the ordinary. Miracles are more uncommon than murders and the same quantity of evidence would be no good for verifying them. Believers demand extraordinary evidence for extraordinary miracles they don't like such as Buddha's enlightenment but they don't for the miracles that suit their religious preferences! The evidence they present is only an excuse for belief. They would believe without it. Miracles invariably induce bigotry and dishonesty and blindness. Not very godly are they? The evidence for the resurrection is not impressive if you assume for the sake of argument that it exists which it doesn't. Jesus then cannot expect us to believe in it. If he was able to rise from the dead he would have been able to look after the evidence. He didn't so he didn't rise.

Some say that to say, "I must see evidence that God has done miracles before I believe" as saying, "I have no knowledge of God and how good he is and I am not taking inspiration for a living a good life from him. If I were, I would not search for miracles but if they happened I would see them not as evidence for faith but as what helps me see his goodness better." The way this works is, if you see a healing, you see it not as evidence for God but as something that says, "Do you see what I am like? I care." This understanding has some dignity. It keeps faith based on the knowledge of the kind of person God is not on miracles. Anything else would show an intolerably bigoted and superstitious and uncharitable mindset. Miracles of God then would not be about helping faith but helping understanding. They are for people who already believe. Thus they would be rational and dignified. They would call us to use our minds. Telling anybody else about the miracle would be unfair for if we claim a miracle happens the burden of proof is on us and we are cheating them if we hope they will believe our story.

The Christian religion is unable to give adequate verification of any of its claims. It claims that the followers of Jesus Christ following his crucifixion left evidence that he rose bodily from the dead leaving an empty tomb and appeared to his friends and now reigns as our king in Heaven and from there he administers the salvation he won for us. We know we have to accept the simplest explanation we can find. The gospels record the alleged evidence for the empty tomb and the visitations of the risen Jesus. If the gospels are convincing (they are not - an empty tomb and apparitions afterwards of the person who had been in the tomb still does not prove a resurrection) in relation to their claim that Jesus Christ rose from the dead then where is the miracle? It is easier to believe that the miracle is in the credibility of the records and not in the miracle of resurrection. The plausibility of the records only means that the records are plausible not that they are correct. They could be plausible to me but not to anybody else. Something rather different from an actual resurrection could have been what

really happened. Then some psychic or supernatural forces set to work to guide writers to tell a story that supported a resurrection story and was believable. The lesser miracle of psychic guidance of the writers is what should be accepted not the huge miracle of resurrection. The fact that the (fragile but let us put that out of our mind) plausibility of the records only means that the records are plausible not that they are correct suffices to show that the resurrection is false. Had Jesus really risen he would not have made the mistake of guiding his followers to present evidence that is useless never mind insufficient.

There are loads of explanations for the thought that Jesus did rise, which fit the biblical data. The Bible would not like these explanations for it seeks to interpret the evidence supernaturally and as containing miracles. The Gospels merely say that Jesus' tomb was found empty and that he appeared to some people later. The gospels interpret all this as meaning that Jesus rose from the dead. In fact, they give no evidence for this but only an interpretation because they are full of gaps and several other interpretations can be made of their reporting. The persons that said that Jesus rose were untrustworthy. Books that set out to prove the resurrection as understood by Christians are fraudulent for they use the Bible to do it which is unfair and they pervert the meaning of the Bible to assist in this. The sceptics are not saying the Bible is true and Jesus did not rise, as the Christians seem to think. Sceptics are saying the Bible is wrong therefore Jesus probably did not rise. No good God would raise Jesus from the dead for Jesus approved of the brutal laws given by Moses.

## BURDEN OF PROOF

There are alternatives to the traditional interpretation of the gospel that Jesus rose from the dead supernaturally. And these interpretations of it all fit biblical data whether it is right or wrong. When we can manage that it is sufficient proof that the Bible gives no evidence for Jesus saving us by his death and rising from the dead. It gives us an interpretation but what use is that? Interpretation and evidence are two different things.

We must stress alternative interpretations and provide evidence for them from the Christian texts. The refutation of the text takes second place.

The Christians throw down the challenge: "Prove that the resurrection never happened and we will agree with you". But in actual fact the truth is that if you assert something then it is up to you to prove it happened and that the contrary evidence fails. The Christians then have to prove that the resurrection happened and if they cannot do that then we are entitled to disregard the alleged miracle. They are the ones saying it happened not us so it is not up to us to give them the evidence that it didn't but it is up to them to give it to us along with the proof that it happened. This they never do. We are not saying it never happened but we are saying nobody sensible would believe in it for the evidence is terrible. This book shows they cannot prove it and that the evidence is nothing short of appalling. Their attitude to evidence is just as appalling.

The Christians try to refute those who deny the resurrection of Jesus by using the gospel accounts to prove that the resurrection of Jesus happened which is pure deception because anyone who denies the resurrection of Jesus is saying the resurrection accounts are wrong or not infallible and you can't refute anybody who sees the resurrection as impossible. Reason says that the Christians are assuming and the anti-resurrection brigade are both assuming when it comes to these accounts. If so the anti-resurrection assumption is the most reasonable for it is not everyday that somebody rises from the dead.

It is conveniently forgotten by the Church that though the resurrection of Christ has great importance in the New Testament, it is not important by itself. It is important in that Jesus was found alive after his death TO GO UP TO HEAVEN! The resurrection was Jesus' salvation. However, we know that Jesus ascending into Heaven is nonsense for if he went up is he living in a cloud or did he go to the moon or to Mars? It is totally ridiculous to believe in the resurrection and to deny that Jesus is up in the clouds. If one is not true then why trust the other?

There is a dishonesty in making out the resurrection is so certain that it is worth having Easter celebrations for. Intelligent people have a problem with the concept. Let the true light of Easter lighten your heart for it cannot be the light of resurrection for us for even if it did happen we have no grounds for accepting it.