

David Hamstra :: God Series

Question God Series. Part 2

How can you believe the Bible and did Jesus really raise from the dead?

I could cite historical verifications from obscure journals, and the insights gleaned from the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were 1,000 years older than any other previously known texts show the faithfulness of the Bible.

But people aren't really challenging the historical accurateness of the Bible, if we were to be honest authority is the issue no history.

"Why do you submit to the Bible?" or "Why do you allow it to dictate how you live?"

We let the Scriptures authenticate themselves rather than trust our extrabiblical arguments to seal the deal.

Instead of defending its historicity, we need to encourage literacy.

The sooner we declare what the Bible says than defend how the Bible says it, the more powerful our case will be.

The Bible's story connects with our story at our point of deepest need.

"What I love about the Bible is that its story connects with our story at our point of deepest need."

Martin Luther once said that the Bible is like a lion. If people criticize it, you don't defend it, - you let it out of its cage. Even in these skeptical times, when the Bible is tossed into a pile of irrelevant books written by dead white males, the lion still roars and the cage still must be opened.

Resurrection

Source N.T. Wright The Resurrection of the Son of God

I was taught that the resurrection of Jesus was a major historical problem, no matter how you looked at it. Most modern historians made the philosophical assumption that miracles simply cannot happen, and that made the claim of the resurrection highly problematic.

To disbelieve the resurrection you then have the difficulty of explaining how the Christian church got started at all.

If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all he said, if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead.

It is not enough to simply believe Jesus did not rise from the dead. You must then come up with a historically feasible alternate explanation for the birth of the church.

Alternate explanations: "magical and supernatural instead of scientific" Jesus followers were heart-

broken when he was killed, sensed he was still with them, guiding them, some maybe thought they had visions, developed into stories over years and the resurrection account was made.

First account of Jesus' resurrection, the empty tomb and eyewitnesses are not found in the gospels but in the letters of Paul. 15 years after the death of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 15:3-6

3For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.

"Third Day" signifies a historical event not a symbol or metaphor.

This was a public document for the church to read out loud. If anyone challenged this claim they could talk to the eyewitnesses themselves. He could not make the challenge if eyewitnesses did not exist.

Fictional stories and Historical accounts were clearly distinguished in ancient cultures. Historical accounts were not allowed to be changed.

Accounts of the resurrection in the Bible were too problematic to be fabrications.

1. First eyewitnesses to the resurrection were women. No possible advantage to the church to included them. Women's testimony wasn't even permissible in court. Enormous pressure on the early proclaimers to remove the woman, the only possible explanation is that they really had.

2. Empty tomb and the accounts of personal meeting with Jesus are even more historically certain when you realize they must be taken together.

Paul's letters show that Christian proclaimed Jesus's bodily resurrection from the very beginning. No one in Jerusalem would have believed the preaching for a minute if the tomb was not empty. Skeptics could have easily produced Jesus's rotted corpse.

Public document that there were scores of eyewitnesses alive if there were not.

What if someone stole the body and many sincere people could have thought they'd seen him, and others went along for a good cause?

C.S. Lewis has called "chronological snobbery" We imagine that we modern people take claims of a bodily resurrection with skepticism, while the ancients, full of credulity about the supernatural, would have immediately accepted it. That is not the case. To all the dominant worldviews of the time, an individual bodily resurrection was almost inconceivable.

Non-Jewish first century Mediterranean world, both east and west, the universal view of the people of that time was that a bodily resurrection was impossible.

Greco-Roman the soul or spirit was good and the physical and material world was weak, corrupt, and defiling. Salvation was liberation from the body. Resurrection was not only impossible, but totally undesirable. No soul, from the body would ever want it back. Goal was to be free of the body forever.

Jewish thinking would have stated that Jesus's resurrection was unthinkable. Jews saw the material and physical world as good. Death was a tragedy. Many Jews hoped that in the future there would be a bodily resurrection of all the righteous, when God restored all things in the end. The very idea of an individual resurrection would have been as impossible to imagine to a Jew as to a Greek.

Skeptics argue: "followers had hallucinations or may have imagined him appearing." This assumes that their master's resurrection was imaginable for his Jewish followers, that it was an option in their worldview. It was not.

Conspiracy theory that the disciples stole the body and claimed he was alive to others. Assumes the disciples expected other Jews to be open to the belief that an individual could be raised from the dead. None of this is possible.

In the first century there were many other messianic movements whose would-be messiahs were executed. However,

"In not one single case do we hear the slightest mention of the disappointed followers claiming that their hero had been raised from the dead. They knew better. Resurrection was not a private event. Jewish revolutionaries whose leader had been executed by the authorities, and who managed to escape arrest themselves, had two options: give up the revolution, or find another leader. Claiming that the original leader was alive again was simply not an option. Unless, of course, he was.

Worldview

Change only happens to a group of people over a period of time. Takes years of discussion and argument and debate "nature of resurrection" until one side wins.

After the death of Jesus the entire Christian community suddenly adopted a set of beliefs that were brand-new and until that point had been unthinkable.

The Christian view of resurrection, absolutely unprecedented in history, sprang up full-blown immediately after the death of Jesus. There was no process or development.

Never would have gotten a movement of Jews to believe it unless there were multiple, inexplicable, plausible, repeated encounters with Jesus.

How could first century Jews worship a human being as divine?

As Pascal puts it, "I believe those witnesses that get their throats cut." Virtually all early leaders died for their faith, how could it be done to support a hoax.

Skeptics must face and answer all these historical questions:

Why did Christianity emerge so rapidly, with such power?

No other band messianic followers in that era concluded their leader was raised from the dead- why did this group do so?

No group of Jews ever worshipped a human being as God. What led them to do it?

Jews did not believe in divine men or individual resurrections. What changed their world view virtually overnight?

How do you account for the hundreds of eyewitnesses to the resurrection who lived on for decades and publicly maintained their testimony, eventually giving their lives for their belief?

The resurrection of Jesus is a historical fact much more fully attested to than most other events of

ancient history we take for granted.

Every other effort to account for the birth of the church apart from Jesus's resurrection flies in the face of what we know about first-century history and culture.

N.T. Wright:

The message of the resurrection is that this world matters! That the injustices and pains of this present world must now be addressed with the news that healing, justice, and love have won....If Easter means Jesus Christ is only raised in a spiritual sense- then it is only about me, and finding a new dimension in my personal spiritual life. But if Jesus Christ is truly risen from the dead, Christianity becomes good news for the whole world – news which warms our hearts precisely because it isn't just about warming hearts. Easter means that in a world where injustice, violence and degradation are endemic, God is not prepared to tolerate such things – and that we will work and plan, with all the energy of God, to implement victory of Jesus over them all. Take away Easter and Karl Marx was probably right to accuse Christianity of ignoring problems of the material world. Take it away and Freud was probably right to say Christianity is wish-fulfillment. Take it away and Nietzsche probably was right to say it was for wimps.