

## **The Reasonableness of the Resurrection**

Based on Paul Copan & Ronald K. Tacelli (editors), *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment? A Debate Between William Lane Craig & Gerd Ludemann* (Intervarsity Press, 2000).

**(1) Any adequate historical hypothesis about the resurrection must explain four established facts:**

- a. Jesus' burial**
- b. The discovery of Jesus' empty tomb**
- c. Jesus' postmortem appearances**
- d. The origin of the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection**

Fact 1: After his crucifixion, Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in the tomb.

1. Jesus' burial is mentioned in the very old information handed on by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. (1 Corinthians 15:3-5)
2. Jesus' burial is part of very old "source" material used by Mark in writing his gospel.
3. Jesus' burial story in the gospel of Mark itself lacks any traces of legendary development.
4. As a member of the Jewish court that condemned Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea is unlikely to be a Christian invention.
5. No other competing burial story exists.

Fact 2: On the Sunday following the crucifixion, Jesus' tomb was found empty by a group of his women followers.

1. The old information transmitted by Paul in 1 Corinthians implies the fact of the empty tomb.
2. The empty tomb story is part of very old "source" material used by Mark.
3. The empty tomb story in Mark is simple and lacks signs of legendary embellishment.
4. The fact that women's testimony was worthless in first-century Palestine counts in favor of the women's role in discovering the empty tomb.
5. The earliest Jewish allegation that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body shows that the body was in fact missing from the tomb.

Fact 3: On multiple occasions and under various circumstances, different individuals and groups of people experienced appearances of Jesus alive from the dead.

1. The list of eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection appearances that is quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians guarantees that such appearances occurred.
2. The appearance traditions in the Gospels provide multiple independent attestations of these appearances.

Fact 4: The original disciples believed that Jesus was risen from the dead despite their having every reason not to.

1. Their leader was dead. And Jews had no belief in a dying, much less rising, Messiah.
2. According to Jewish law, Jesus' execution as a criminal showed him out to be a heretic, a man literally under the curse of God.

3. Jewish beliefs about the afterlife made it unthinkable that anyone could rise from the dead before the general resurrection at the end of the world.

**(2) The best explanation of these facts is that God raised Jesus from the dead.**

Inference to the Best Explanation: In explaining a body of data, first put together a pool of live options. Then pick from the pool, on the basis of certain tests or 'criteria', the explanation which, if true, would best explain the data.

Six tests used by historians to determine the best explanation for given historical facts:

1. It has great explanatory scope.
2. It has great explanatory power.
3. It is plausible.
4. It is not ad hoc or contrived.
5. It is in accord with accepted beliefs.
6. It far outstrips any of its rival theories in meeting conditions 1 through 5.

A. The Conspiracy Theory

1. It is morally hard to believe.
2. It is psychologically hard to believe.
3. It cannot account for the sincerity of the disciples.

B. The Apparent Death Theory

1. It is physically hard to believe.
2. It is religiously hard to believe.
3. It is biographically hard to believe.

C. The Wrong Tomb Theory

1. The women themselves could have corrected any such error.
2. The disciples could have corrected any such error.
3. The Jewish opponents could have corrected any such error.

D. The Hallucination Theory

1. It fails to explain the empty tomb.
2. It cannot account for the number and various circumstances of the appearances.
3. It cannot account for the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection.