

A Historical Defense of The Resurrection

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An Argument for The Resurrection



- a. The argument from History i.e. a historical apologetic
 - i. We will be drawing primarily on two works (but I will reference others)
 - ii. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*
 - 1. Wright examines the ancient views of resurrection and compares that to the views that immediately developed as Jesus' resurrection and the historical record of the rise of Christianity in order to ask "What is the best explanation for this?"
 - iii. *The Resurrection of Jesus*
 - 1. Licona takes the tools of historical inquiry and applies them to the ancient texts regarding the resurrection of Jesus. He develops the hypothesis that Jesus being raised from the dead has the most explanatory scope and power.





Argument Outline

1. Establishing the Background
2. Examining the Attestation
3. Summarizing Arguments
4. Rebuttals to Some Skeptical Responses
5. Q&A

Some Comments on History

1. History is a probability argument, it answers “what most likely happened?”
 - a. Licona says “Given the available data, the best explanation indicates that we are warranted in having a reasonable degree of certainty that x occurred...”
2. The author makes the point that if the Gospels (New Testament writings in general) are in the genre of myth, then the claims need to be held as suspect until proven true. On the other hand, if the genre is history, then the burden of proof lies the other way in that the reader has to show it is not true.

Understanding the Broader Culture



1. The cultural/historical framework out of which the resurrection narratives originated
 - a. The ancient pagan mindset regarding death and resurrection
 - i. The New Testament world is ancient Greco Roman.
 1. River Styx, gods/goddesses dying and rising, heroes being glorified/deified, transmigration of souls
 - ii. "A great many things happened to the dead, but resurrection did not"
 - iii. The idea of bodily resurrection did not come from the Greeks/Romans

Understanding Jewish Resurrection Views

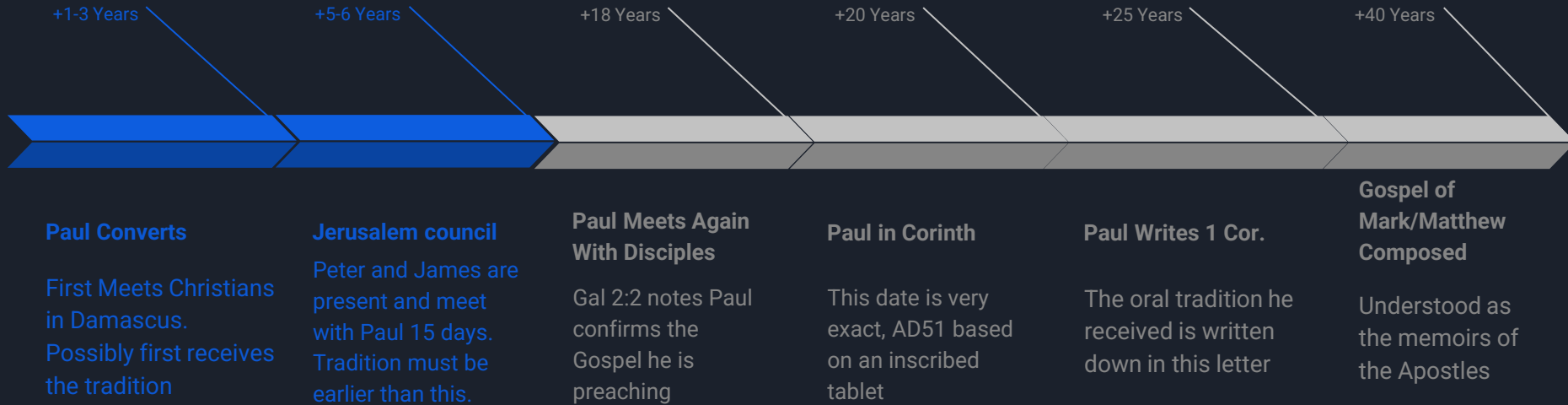
1. Christianity is a Jewish Sect
2. The Jewish mindset regarding resurrection
 - a. There will be a resurrection, but it is eschatological. That is, it comes at the end of all time when everyone is raised. Daniel 12:2-3
 - b. Resurrection in ancient Jewish thought was always a two age physical return from death



Resurrection Attestation: 1 Cor. 15:3-8

- The tradition predates the letter based on the use of specific tradition imparting language--verse 3 “delivered” and “received”
- Paul was a Pharisee for whom imparted tradition was life or death [Gal 1:14, Mark 7:1-5 and Josephus]
- The phraseology is used almost nowhere else in Paul minus single instances also thought to be oral tradition
- The tradition likely came out of Jerusalem based on Paul’s own testimony which notes he is submissive to the Apostles’ authority
- Paul was very careful to distinguish his teaching from tradition (1 Cor 7:10-13, 25)
- Paul had ample opportunities to receive the tradition directly from the Apostles and the Jerusalem church

How Early Is It?



Zooming in on Paul

- Paul a Pharisee and skeptic departs radically from the larger culture and more importantly from his own subculture that he was deeply invested in. The historian has to account for this in some way.
- Wright asks: “What caused these developments from within, these newly articulated resurrection beliefs?”



Examining the Gospel Accounts

1. The accounts differ quite a bit which some skeptics point to as a problem for the validity of the stories, but it is just the opposite
2. Wright notes that several different people were recounting their memories and direct contradiction of contemporaries is unlikely
 - a. "Since the hypothesis of at least some literary relationship seems likely for the synoptic gospels as wholes, we must assume that each of the evangelists had access to ways of telling this story which went back via different, though ultimately related, oral and perhaps written traditions."

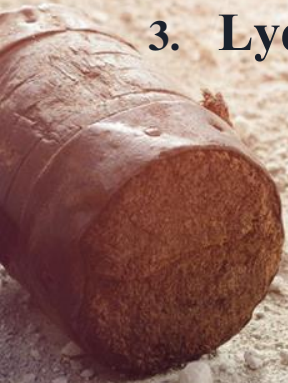
Eyewitness Testimony



1. The idea of independent strands of historical tradition in the Gospels is actually a very powerful apologetic when we consider the importance of testimony for epistemology. As a matter of history, independent sources are vital.
2. The discrepancies are relatively minor and can equally be interpreted as the unedited eyewitness accounts-- "I didn't understand it at the time, and I'm not sure I do now, but this is more or less how it was."

Harmonizing The Accounts

1. **Easily harmonized accounts contribute to the story's evidential quality**
2. **They serve as proof that multiple persons were there witnessing the same event**
3. **Lydia McGrew's Harmonization**





Are They Really Eyewitnesses? A Brief Digression

- Undesigned coincidences: “A notable connection between two or more accounts or texts that doesn’t seem to have been planned...despite their apparent independence, the items fit together like pieces of a puzzle.”
- Give reason to believe these accounts are from eyewitnesses and not contrived
- Example The wedding at Cana (John 2:6-7) and the washing dispute (Mark 7:2-3)

Should I Trust the Gospels? Cont.

- 1st Century witnesses confirmed by archeological data
 - Richard Baucham name frequency study
 - Frequency from archeological remains matches frequency throughout NT and particularly the Gospels



Ossuary Box of Joseph Son of Caiaphas

How About Legendary Development

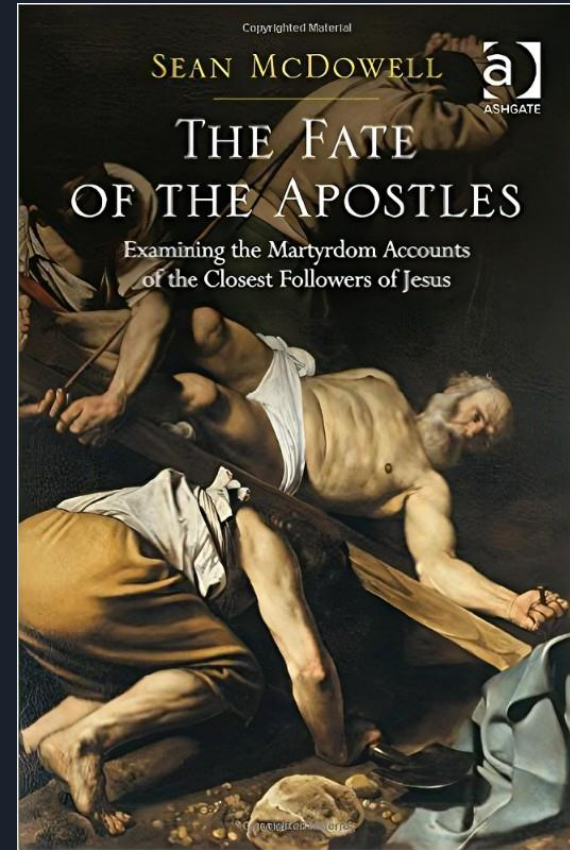
1. There are no Christian texts before the second century that argue for anything other than a physical resurrection.
 - a. "It is, then, remarkable that Christianity...never seems to have developed even the beginnings of a spectrum of belief, either of the pagan variety or of the Jewish variety, but always stuck to one point on the Jewish scale. It is more remarkable, that from within this position it then developed, virtually across the board, new ways of speaking about what resurrection involved and how it would come about which could not have been predicted from the Jewish sources..."
2. The only second century texts are the very ones early Christians most vigorously opposed—
Gnostic texts



Nag Hamadi Codices

Early Persecution

1. Furthermore, primitive Christians were willing to die for this really novel idea.
 - a. “...one of the primary early Christian meanings of Jesus as kyrios: the implicit contrast with Caesar. Precisely on the basis of key texts from Psalms, Isaiah, Daniel and elsewhere, the early Christians declared that Jesus was LORD in such a way as to imply, over and over again, that Caesar was not.”
2. We have strong evidence that Peter, James (Jesus’ Brother), James Son of Zebedee, and Paul were martyred
3. We have consistent traditions that all the remaining of the 12 were martyred, except John
4. Social ostracism is way underestimated, consider 1 Peter and Hebrews



Summary of Argument

- About 6-7 weeks after Jesus was crucified, his closest followers began telling people he was *physically* alive; eating, drinking, able to be touched etc. This was a complete theological innovation, no other culture had ever produced a story like this.
- In this same period, this exclusively Jewish group began referring to Jesus using language and terminology reserved for the God of the Jewish Scriptures.
- Multiple skeptics including a Christian persecutor and Jesus' brothers (who thought he was crazy) attested his appearances and became his followers.
- The tomb was (and still is) empty
- All of the earliest *eyewitnesses* maintained their testimony at great personal cost including social ostracism, exile, and execution
- What is the best explanation for this?

The Historian's Conclusion



"Perhaps no fact is **more widely recognised** than that early Christian believers had real experiences that they thought were appearances of the risen Jesus... Seldom is the **historical authenticity** of any of these testimonies or the **genuine belief** behind them challenged by respected critical scholars, no matter how skeptical."

– Gary Habermas: *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 74

1. Returning to the idea of the most probable explanation for the sudden development of this resurrection belief in the religio-historical setting of Jesus.
 - a. "The historian is therefore faced with the same kind of puzzle as is posed by the striking adoption, but also transformation, of the Jewish belief in resurrection. We are forced to postulate something which will account for the fact that a group of first-century Jews, who had cherished messianic hopes and centered them on Jesus of Nazareth, claimed after his death that he really was the Messiah despite the crushing evidence to the contrary."

Examining Alternate Hypothesis

1. So everyone believes in the resurrection right?
2. Skeptics have raised alternate explanations to account for the data
3. More serious objections have to contend with the same data
 - a. Arguing nothing happened is difficult to substantiate.
4. We will walk through the most popular

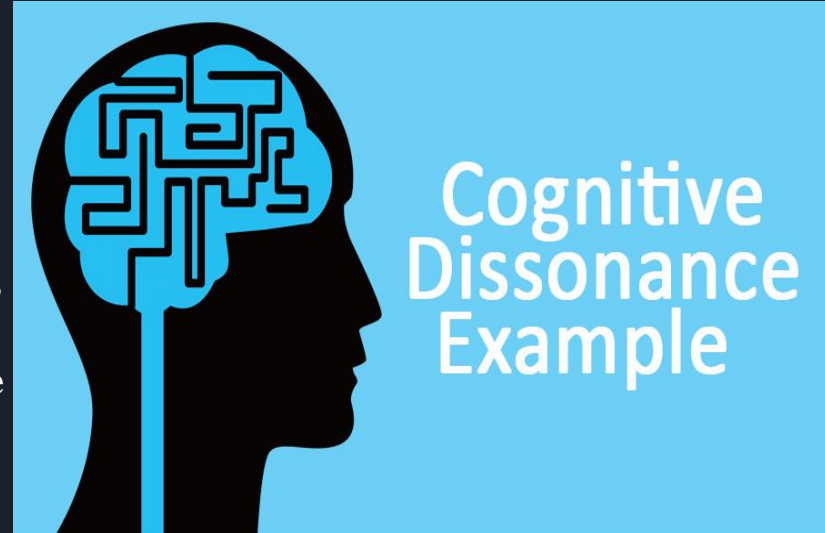


Cognitive Dissonance

Objection: The disciples had a failure to come to terms with reality that Jesus was dead resulting in their fabricating a story and starting a movement

a. Some problems

- i. In the first century, this is not what anyone would have hoped for or expected. Jesus living on in spirit, a successor messiah like Bar-Kochba, etc were in view, but not this.**
- ii. People do not remain in a state of cognitive dissonance**
- iii. Had they been unable to accept his death, they invented the least believable story possible to get people to join up with them**
- iv. The primary witnesses were reported as being women. Women's testimony was not valued in first century Judaism**





Complete Fabrication/Conspiracy

Objection: The disciples made up the entire story and devised a plot to make it believable

1. This explanation is untenable
 - a. The conversion of Paul, James, and possibly Jude
 - i. The conspiracy has to be consistent. Unlike Peter and other heroes of the church, the traditions surrounding Paul/James were negative (attacking your co-conspirators is a bad strategy!)
 - ii. Conversion of skeptics and a sibling (possibly multiple siblings)...they would have incentive to disprove the conspiracy/fabrication or have first hand knowledge of its falsehood.
 - b. The Fate of the Apostles--dying for something you know is false is improbable

Israel Times

**HALLUCINATING
LIVING DEAD
FINALLY ABATES**



**SPOKESMAN PETER ADMITS
DISCIPLES WERE UNDER
DEEP STRESS AND TRAUMA**

Mr. Barsillai: "BUT I SAW ELVIS" P. 6-7

The Disciples Hallucinated (Most Common)

Objection: The disciples had a genuine experience of the risen Jesus, but that experience was a hallucination either individually or en-masse

1. Hallucination is an insufficient explanation
 - a. What they described did not align with the typical hallucination
 - b. People usually recognize they have hallucinated and don't tend to make sustained life threatening decisions based on them
 - c. People do not tend to hallucinate in groups
 - d. The empty tomb
 - a. The tomb is still empty to this day, with a church built over the top of the site.
 - b. Christians began to regard the first day of the week as their special day.
 - c. There is no evidence whatsoever that anyone ever venerated Jesus' tomb
 - d. There was never a question of anyone performing a secondary burial for Jesus

