



Isn't the resurrection far-fetched?

The basic historical facts:

- 1) Jesus was crucified and certified dead by the Roman soldiers under Pontius Pilate
- 2) Three days later, the tomb was empty
- 3) A short while later (a few weeks), his disciples were preaching in the city where he had been killed that Jesus had risen from the dead on the third day, and they had seen him- which has been the message of the church ever since

The key questions:

Was Jesus really dead?

How did the body disappear from the guarded tomb?

Why did the disciples claim to see Jesus alive after he had been killed?

Are miracles impossible?

Are any alternative explanations to the Christian one viable?

Was Jesus really dead?

- a) The Jewish, Roman and Christian sources all agree that Jesus was killed on the cross under Pontius Pilate. The Muslim claim (c. 620 AD) that he did not die is not based on historical evidence.
- b) The Roman soldiers responsible for the execution were experienced and disciplined, and risked their own execution if they failed to carry out their duties and kill a convicted criminal. To confirm his death, they stuck a spear through his side (causing an effusion of what looked like blood and water).
- c) He was wrapped up and buried in the tomb. Even if he had survived the cross, to be so severely injured (flogged back, pierced head, torn hands and feet, pierced side) and then left untreated and without water would not lead to recovery.

How did the body disappear from the tomb?

The Christian claim is that he rose from the dead with a resurrection (physical but changed) body and left the tomb. What about alternative explanations?

1) *Swoon*

Jesus didn't actually die on the cross, only fainted. He recovered in the cool tomb, moved the stone, fought the guard, walked into Jerusalem, and then lied to his disciples. BUT

- a) As given above, the evidence strongly supports his death rather than swoon. And there are additional problems with the swoon theory.
- b) How did a man severely beaten, with holes in his hands, feet and side, and suffering massive blood loss, revive, roll away a stone three women couldn't move (Mark 15:3), and get past at least two guards (Matt 27:62-28:4)?
- c) How would a severely disabled and weakened man convince the disciples that he was the risen Lord of all? Why would a man of such integrity as Jesus lie?

2. *Fraud*

The disciples allegedly drugged the guards, moved the stone, took the body, hid it elsewhere, and then told everyone that Jesus had risen from the dead. BUT

- a) When Jesus was arrested, all the disciples fled and Peter publicly denied he was a disciple three times (John 18). What had changed to give the disciples such courage they would risk death to steal a body when they had not risked their lives to save him when arrested?

- b) The early Christians were known, even by their enemies, for their honesty. How could the men who spread Christianity have committed such a fraud?
- c) Preaching Jesus resurrection in Jerusalem must have been tense if the body could have been found at any point. It would have made more sense to talk about a “spiritual” rising from the dead than a physical resurrection.
- d) The disciples were mostly tortured and killed for claiming to be eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ and proclaiming that message. Why would a group of men suffer and die for what they *knew* to be a lie?

3. *Theft*

Someone else stole the body. BUT

- a) If the Jewish or Roman authorities had stolen the body (on what motive we do not know), they could have countered the preaching of the resurrection by showing the body. That they did not do so, despite fiercely opposing the preaching (a few weeks later) about the risen Lord Jesus, strongly suggests they had no idea where the body was.
- b) Grave robbers in those days were not after the body but the things buried with the body. The disappearance of the body, leaving behind the valuable linen and spices, is not consistent with grave robbers. In any case, the guard on the tomb would have discouraged any attempt at plain theft.

4. *Mistake*

The women and disciples mistook the tomb. BUT

- a) The body would still be in a different tomb. When the disciples start preaching about the risen Jesus, someone would have pointed out that his body was still in the actual tomb. Such a revelation would have been devastating to the claims of the disciples, but was never made by their powerful opponents.

Why did the disciples claim to see Jesus alive after he had been killed?

The Christian claim is because they met the risen Lord Jesus. What are the alternative explanations?

1. *Hallucinations*

The grief stricken disciples had mass hallucinations, thinking they saw Jesus when he wasn't really there. BUT

- a) A hallucination is a false perception of something that is not really there. Because it has no external reality, it is not likely that a large number (more than 10 people) would have the *same* hallucination. In fact there are no well documented cases of such an occurrence. But the disciples all agree on what they saw when they are talking to Thomas, for example.

2. *Noble Lie*

The disciples decided that in order to keep Jesus' message alive, they would make up the story of his resurrection. BUT

- a) Jesus' teaching included much about integrity and honesty. To have at the centre of the ongoing teaching a massive lie would contradict Jesus' message.
- b) Jesus message had been centred on himself, as being the true revelation of God, and the one who would put people right with God and conquer death. If he had not risen, then his message was not true, and the disciples would have realised that and given up (as they are tempted to do before meeting the risen Jesus).
- c) The disciples do not only start preaching this story. They all continue to preach this story, in the face of growing opposition and with no personal gain. They continue to tell this lie even when it means they are one by one tortured and killed. Why would these men have died for what they knew to be a lie?

Are miracles impossible?

The Christian claim is a miraculous event- a man rising from the dead after three days. Some people (following Hume) will say that any report of a miracle is so improbable that any other explanation (lie, hallucination etc) no matter how improbably in itself, is more probable than the miracle. BUT

1. This begs the question: How do you know miracles are so improbable. To make that claim, you have to make an assumption about God: either he does not exist, or he does not act in miraculous ways. But how do

you know this? Miracles are impossible, so any claim for miracles must be disbelieved. There are no miracles, so God doesn't act that way. The arguing is circular.

2. The alternative is to admit that miracles are possible, if there is a God who interacts in this world, and then look to see if there is any evidence for miracles. The evidence of the resurrection would then be evidence in favour of God acting in the world.