

WHAT'S THE EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION

by Mark Austin

Austin's apologetic examination of the historical evidence for the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, evaluating the testimony of eyewitnesses, the empty tomb, and the transformation of the early disciples as evidence for the central event of the Christian faith.

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Study By: Mark Austin It's Important: Christianity without the resurrection is useless

“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is useless; you are still in your sins. Furthermore, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished” 1 Corinthians 15:17-18. [NET]1.

Those are the Apostle Paul's words in which he is making an extraordinary claim to the people in Corinth that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is what Christianity stands or falls on, and it's the single most important fact that one should believe to be a Christian, and without this truth he follows on to say;

“If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die (1 Corinthians 15:32).....”

Those are strong matter-of-fact words, and it makes one wonder what the evidences really are for such an exorbitant claim. Indeed this is a big test, raising from the dead is certainly a miraculous claim that if false one would think quite easy to refute. As a comparison, the claims of Christianity are quite a bit different than the test of authenticity in Islam, where the proof test of the Quran is to see if one can produce a set of verses as eloquent as those in the Quran;

“Sura 2:23. And if ye are in doubt as to what We have revealed from time to time to Our servant, then produce a Sura like thereunto; and call your witnesses or helpers (if there are any) besides Allah, if your (doubts) are true,”

Similarly, in Mormonism, the test of authenticity is whether or not the Holy Ghost tells one it is the truth after reading it. And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye ask of God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things” Moroni 10:4-5

Nevertheless, just because a claim is miraculous, doesn't mean that it is true, so what exactly are the evidences for the resurrection? Did Paul have good reason to believe in the resurrection? Did he have good reason to tell others that they needed to confess that Jesus is Lord, and to believe that God raised him from the dead? because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9.

Likewise, what is the basis that Peter has in stating that we have hope in the resurrection;

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, that is, into an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. It is reserved in heaven for you, 1 Peter 1:3-4 and it is this hope that Peter says one should be able to explain why they have it; But set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the

hope you possess. 1 Peter 3:15

However, is this hope a baseless wish, or are there good reasons and evidences for the resurrection? The rest of this paper examines 9 key evidences towards the resurrection which can easily be remembered from the acrostic "GODS POWER" standing for the evidences of the; Gospels, Old Testament, Disciples, Skeptics, Paul, Oral Tradition, Written Tradition, Empty Tomb, Rabinnacal and Jewish Writings, as shown in Fig. 1.

Figure 1 GOD'S POWER Acrostic as Evidences for the Resurrection

Gospels The gospels are a written account of the good news of Jesus Christ by his disciples (Matthew, John) and their close companions (Mark of Peter, Luke of Paul). Whether or not one believes that they were inspired by God, or a perfect account of all of the life of Jesus, it is clear that each gospel records the death of Jesus by crucifixion. As we will see, Jesus' crucifixion is accepted as a "minimal fact" by all, skeptic, enemy and followers alike, as in this all agree. Understanding what are the minimally accepted facts is an important point to understand in any debate as it forms the framework around what a skeptic would have to believe should they still want to dispute the claim.

Now is it possible that the resurrection accounts were made up as they developed over a long period of time? While there will be other supporting evidences in subsequent sections, consider the following;

- The Gospels were all written in the lifetime of the eyewitnesses, with a likely latest being AD 60. This can be inferred from the fact that Acts ends abruptly with Paul in jail, coupled with the fact that Paul dies in AD 62 [habe04]. Additional supporting evidence that they are written before 70 AD is that there is no mention of the destruction of the temple which happened in AD 70. Consequently, the gospels are likely in circulation within 30 years of Jesus' death AD 33 (per Wikipedia "several analyses...agree on the date Friday April 3, 33 AD").
- There are over 200 complete copies of the new testament from 200 AD [habe04], and a section of John from AD 100-150 [John 1:1-51].
- If the gospels were a forgery, it is unlikely that they would have attributed them to names such as Mark (who was a companion of Peter, and not a direct disciple of Jesus), and Luke, who was a gentile and companion of Paul. Additionally, it is unlikely that we would have a gospel written by a tax collector which was considered near treason from most Jews at the time.

While there still may be some doubt in parts of the gospels, it is clear that early copies of the gospels existed, and that they all proclaim the death, crucifixion, and resurrection.

Old Testament

There are hundreds Old Testament prophecies (e.g. [mes01]) that predict that a "Messiah" (in Hebrew Mashiach, in Greek Christos meaning Anointed One) would come. Some of the most known and prominent ones are that the Messiah would be from the tribe of David (2 Samuel 7:12-12, Jesus fulfilled Matthew 1:1), would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2, Jesus fulfilled Matthew 2:1-2), however, those that pertain directly towards predicting how the Messiah would die and the resurrection are of particular interest here, such as those below [mes01]

Prophecy

O.T. Ref.

Fulfillment

The Messiah's back would be whipped.

Isaiah 53:5

Matthew 27:26

The Messiah would be silent before his accusers.

Isaiah 53:7

Matthew 27:12-14

The Messiah would be confined and persecuted.

Isaiah 53:8

Matthew 26:55

The Messiah would be judged.

Isaiah 53:8

John 18:13-22

The Messiah would be killed.

Isaiah 53:8

Matthew 27:35

The Messiah would be buried in a rich man's grave.

Isaiah 53:9

Matthew 27:57

The Messiah would be resurrected and live forever.

Isaiah 53:10

Mark 16:16

The Messiah would prosper.

Isaiah 53:10

John 17:1-5

Because of his sacrifice, the Messiah would be greatly exalted by God.

Isaiah 53:12

Matthew 28:18

The Messiah would give up his life to save mankind.

above

Luke 23:46

The Messiah would be grouped with criminals.

Above

Luke 23:32

The Messiah's body would be pierced

Zechariah 12:10

John 19:34-37

The Messiah would be resurrected

Psalms 16:8-10

Matthew 28:6, Acts 13:35

An additional prophecy of noteworthiness is the prophecy of the timing of the when the killing of the Messiah would happen as recorded in Daniel's 70 weeks (Daniel 9:20-27), for which John Macarthur [mac01] comments;

"Some scholars consider Daniel 9:20-27 the single greatest defense of the divine inspiration of the Bible, for it precisely states when the Messiah would come to earth. Sir Isaac Newton, who wrote a discourse on the topic, said we could stake the truth of Christianity on that prophecy alone, made five centuries before Christ." The account in Daniel is as follows,

Daniel 9:20 While I was still speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and presenting my request before the LORD my God concerning his holy mountain Daniel 9:21 yes, while I was still praying, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen previously in a vision, was approaching me in my state of extreme weariness, around the time of the evening offering. Daniel 9:22 He spoke with me, instructing me as follows: "Daniel, I have now come to impart understanding to you. Daniel 9:23 At the beginning of your requests a message went out, and I have come to convey it to you, for you are of great value in God's sight. Therefore consider the message and understand the vision:

Daniel 9:24 "Seventy weeks have been determined concerning your people and your holy city to put an end to rebellion, to bring sin to completion, to atone for iniquity, to bring in perpetual righteousness, to seal up the prophetic vision, and to anoint a most holy place. Daniel 9:25 So know and understand: From the issuing of the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until an anointed one, a prince arrives, there will be a period of seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. It will again be built, with plaza and moat, but in distressful times. Daniel 9:26 Now after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one will be cut off and have nothing. As for the city and the sanctuary, the people of the coming prince will destroy them. But his end will come speedily like a flood. Until the

end of the war that has been decreed there will be destruction. Daniel 9:27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one week. But in the middle of that week he will bring sacrifices and offerings to a halt. On the wing of abominations will come one who destroys, until the decreed end is poured out on the one who destroys.” For ease of understanding, Daniel’s 70 weeks (weeks of years) can be illustrated as shown in Figure 2, where we see · The issuing of the command to rebuild Jerusalem (ref. Daniel 9:25) is recorded in Nehemiah in 444 BC

Nehemiah 2:1 Then in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, . . . , Nehemiah 2:5 and said to the king, “If the king is so inclined and if your servant has found favor in your sight, dispatch me to Judah, to the city with the graves of my ancestors, so that I can rebuild it. . . . So the king granted me these requests, for the good hand of my God was on me”

· Where the anointed one, would be cutoff after the 7 weeks of years, and the 62 weeks of years passed (ref. Daniel 9:26). This then implies a total of $69 \times 7 = 483$ years would pass on the Jewish calendar. However, the Jewish calendar was based on the lunar calendar, having 360 days, this is equivalent to $483 \times 360 / 365.25 = 476$ solar calendar years, which results in AD 33 as the time when the anointed one would be “cut-off” (killed).

Figure 2 Daniels 70 weeks

While some may claim that some of the Messianic prophecies could be fulfilled by arranging ahead of time for some events to happen (e.g. Zechariah’s prophecy (Zechariah 9:9) that the Messiah would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey (fulfilled Matthew 21:6-9)), it is hard to explain how one could arrange where one would be born (Bethlehem) and an exact date of their own crucifixion as it was fulfilled in Daniel’s prophecy. Thus, Daniel’s prophecies of the timing of the crucifixion, and the other prophecies of the Old Testament that suggest that the Messiah would be raised present important evidence to the resurrection.

Disciples As mentioned before, the disciples of Jesus recorded the resurrection as fact in the gospels and their further writings, however, there is an important aspect of their story surrounding the time of Jesus’ arrest, crucifixion and thereafter that lends evidence to the resurrection. The transformation of the disciples from defeated cowards to bold witnesses who died for their testimony lends evidence to the resurrection

In Luke 22:54-62 we see Peter when he is scared to be associated with Jesus and he denies being considered a companion of Jesus

Luke 22:54 Then they arrested Jesus, led him away, and brought him into the high priest’s house. But Peter was following at a distance. Luke 22:55 When they had made a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Luke 22:56 Then a slave girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight, stared at him and said, “This man was with him too!” Luke 22:57 But Peter denied it: “Woman, I don’t know him!” Luke 22:58 Then a little later someone else saw him and said, “You are one of them too.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not!” Luke 22:59 And after about an hour still another insisted, “Certainly this man was with him, because he too is a Galilean.” Luke 22:60 But Peter said, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” At that moment, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. Luke 22:61 Then the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter, and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before a rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” Luke 22:62 And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Additionally, we see after the crucifixion that they were in hiding, still scared to be associated with Jesus (John 20:19);

John 20:19a On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the disciples had gathered together and locked the doors of the place because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders.

While we then see totally transformed lives, after they had seen Jesus risen,

John 20:19b Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." John 20:20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. into people without fear of the Jews or retaliation, and they began boldly proclaiming the resurrection as recorded in Acts 4:1-20

Acts 4:1 While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests and the commander of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, Acts 4:2 angry because they were teaching the people and announcing in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. Acts 4:3 So they seized them and put them in jail until the next day (for it was already evening)...

Acts 4:18 And they called them in and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Acts 4:19 But Peter and John replied, "Whether it is right before God to obey you rather than God, you decide, Acts 4:20 for it is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard." The fact that the disciples paid for their testimony with their lives is an evidence for the resurrection

Indeed, the transformation was so strong that we see the Apostles, and disciples continually proclaiming the resurrection despite being imprisoned, tortured, beaten and ultimately killed for their testimony · Peter and John arrested and imprisoned , Acts 4:1-37 · Peter and John imprisoned and flogged, Acts 5:1-42 · Stephen (an early follower of Jesus) pays for his belief with this life in Acts 7:1-60, · James, the brother of John, pays for his testimony with his life in Acts 12:1-25 · Paul, imprisoned, stoned 3 times, etc. , 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 This is also supported in some of the early writings of the first believers, such as;

- Clement of Rome (c. 30-100), a contemporary of the Apostles writes in I Clement 5:2-7 "Because of envy and jealousy, the greatest and most righteous pillars have been persecuted and contend unto death. Let us set the good apostles before our eyes...." [habe04]

- Ignatius, who was bishop of the church in Antioch in Syria writes on the way to his martyrdom in AD 110 "And when [Jesus] came to those with Peter, he said to them: 'Take, handle me and see that I am not a bodiless demon'. And immediately they handled him and believed, having known his flesh and blood. Because of this they also despised death; but beyond death they were found" To the Smyrnaens 3:2." [habe04]

Additionally, it is recorded that 11 of the 12 Apostles paid for their testimony with their lives, as did many other early believers as recorded in later works such as Fox's book of Martyrs [Fox].

While one can find people today that will die a martyr's death, as we see some in Islam do, what is an important distinction here, is that those that die today as believed martyrs are basing their faith on second hand knowledge, whereas the disciples all personally knew Jesus, and personally saw the resurrected Jesus. Thus, it is unlikely that they would all "die for a lie" knowing it was a lie if

that had been the case.

It's clear that the Apostles believed that Jesus had risen, and this is a minimally accepted fact by skeptics and believers alike.

Skeptics

If there was a testimony of a close person to Jesus, that wasn't a believer before the resurrection, but became a believer after witnessing the resurrection, that would be additional evidence towards the resurrection. In fact, this is exactly what we have in Jesus' brother, James, who along with his other brothers and family members didn't believe in Jesus before the resurrection as is recorded in Mark 3:20-21, Mark 3:31, Mark 6:3-7

Mark 3:20 Now Jesus went home, and a crowd gathered so that they were not able to eat. Mark 3:21 When his family heard this they went out to restrain him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."....

Mark 6:3 Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And aren't his sisters here with us?" And so they took offense at him. Mark 6:4 Then Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown, and among his relatives, and in his own house."

However, after the resurrection, it is recorded that Jesus appeared to James (1 Corinthians 15:3-7)

1 Corinthians 15:3 For I passed on to you as of first importance what I also received – that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, 1 Corinthians 15:4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, 1 Corinthians 15:5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 1 Corinthians 15:6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 1 Corinthians 15:7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. and afterwards we see James as the leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:1-41, Galatians 1:1-24)

Acts 15:2 When Paul and Barnabas had a major argument and debate with them, the church appointed Paul and Barnabas and some others from among them to go up to meet with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this point of disagreement

Acts 15:12 The whole group kept quiet and listened to Barnabas and Paul while they explained all the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. Acts 15:13 After they stopped speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me.

Galatians 1:18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and get information from him, and I stayed with him fifteen days. Galatians 1:19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

It is also commonly accepted that James is the author of the epistle of James [wikijames]. Certainly, conversions of skeptics to believers was a growing trend as early Christianity took root, however, in the case of James it is important to point out that James had "inside knowledge" being the brother of Jesus, and the changing event in his life was the resurrection. According to

Josephus (1st century Jewish historian), and Fox's book of Martyrs (called their "James the Less", [Fox]), James was martyred in AD 62 [wikijames] for his faith in Jesus and the resurrection.

James' conversion from skeptic to believer is a minimally accepted fact.

Paul

Paul, like James, was not only a skeptic, but was an avid persecutor of early Christians to the point of murder. What was it that changed Paul to go from Jewish zealot attempting to squelch early Christianity and put Christians to death, to becoming not only an avid supporter but the author of thirteen of 19 of the books [wikipaul] of the New Testament today? Acts 26:1-32 (see also Acts 9:1-43) provides Paul's testimonial account of his life, from his original jealousy for Judaism;

Acts 26:1 So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul held out his hand and began his defense:

Acts 26:2 "Regarding all the things I have been accused of by the Jews, King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate that I am about to make my defense before you today, Acts 26:3 because you are especially familiar with all the customs and controversial issues of the Jews. Therefore I ask you to listen to me patiently.

Acts 26:4 Now all the Jews know the way I lived from my youth, spending my life from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem. Acts 26:5 They know, because they have known me from time past, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee. Acts 26:6 And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, Acts 26:7 a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain as they earnestly serve God night and day. Concerning this hope the Jews are accusing me, Your Majesty! Acts 26:8 Why do you people think it is unbelievable that God raises the dead? which he acted out by persecuting and putting Christians to death;

Acts 26:9 Of course, I myself was convinced that it was necessary to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus the Nazarene. Acts 26:10 And that is what I did in Jerusalem: Not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons by the authority I received from the chief priests, but I also cast my vote against them when they were sentenced to death. Acts 26:11 I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to force them to blaspheme. Because I was so furiously enraged at them, I went to persecute them even in foreign cities. to his encounter with the risen Jesus (not by the word of others) on the road to Damascus;

Acts 26:12 "While doing this very thing, as I was going to Damascus with authority and complete power from the chief priests, Acts 26:13 about noon along the road, Your Majesty, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining everywhere around me and those traveling with me. Acts 26:14 When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? You are hurting yourself by kicking against the goads.' Acts 26:15 So I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord replied, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Acts 26:16 But get up and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this reason, to designate you in advance as a servant and witness to the things you have seen and to the things in which I will appear to you. Acts 26:17 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you Acts 26:18 to open their eyes so that they turn from darkness to light and

from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’ and his immediate acceptance of vision, and changed life to proclaiming Jesus’ resurrection.

Acts 26:19“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,Acts 26:20but I declared to those in Damascus first, and then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds consistent with repentance.Acts 26:21For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple courts and were trying to kill me.Acts 26:22I have experienced help from God to this day, and so I stand testifying to both small and great, saying nothing except what the prophets and Moses said was going to happen:Acts 26:23that the Christ was to suffer and be the first to rise from the dead, to proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

While Paul’s sudden conversion was met with initial caution from the Apostles, Paul was later accepted as one of the Apostles himself (Acts 9:26-30)

Acts 9:26When he arrived in Jerusalem, he attempted to associate with the disciples, and they were all afraid of him, because they did not believe that he was a disciple.Acts 9:27But Barnabas took Saul, brought him to the apostles, and related to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.Acts 9:28So he was staying with them, associating openly with them in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.Acts 9:29He was speaking and debating with the Greek-speaking Jews, but they were trying to kill him.Acts 9:30When the brothers found out about this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus. and his writings were also accepted by the Apostles, as Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:15-16

2 Peter 3:15And regard the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as also our dear brother Paul wrote to you, according to the wisdom given to him,2 Peter 3:16speaking of these things in all his letters. Some things in these letters are hard to understand, things the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they also do to the rest of the scriptures.

Ironically, Paul then suffered from the same persecution that he once gave, as he describes in 2 Corinthians 11:23-25.

2 Corinthians 11:23Are they servants of Christ? (I am talking like I am out of my mind!) I am even more so: with much greater labors, with far more imprisonments, with more severe beatings, facing death many times.2 Corinthians 11:24Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes less one.2 Corinthians 11:25Three times I was beaten with a rod. Once I received a stoning. Three times I suffered shipwreck. A night and a day I spent adrift in the open sea.

Ultimately, like James, Paul suffered death for his beliefs after conversion, as recorded by 1st century believers and early church fathers; Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Tertullian, Dionysius of Corinth, and Origen [habe04, chapter 4].

Both the conversion from skeptic (James) and enemy of Jesus/Christianity (Paul), by means of primary contact with the risen Jesus, which they ultimately proclaimed to their death, are significant evidences for the resurrection.

Oral Tradition As with many cultures before the printing press, oral tradition was used to pass on truth to others. The questions one would want to know then are;

- what was the oral tradition after the crucifixion?
- was it consistent with the written scriptures later on, or is there a different early oral tradition which appears to get added to later on when recorded in the written gospels?

How can one find early oral tradition and where would one look? One such evidence of the earliest oral tradition, is actually recorded in the earliest known “church creed” as written in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

1 Corinthians 15:1 Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel that I preached to you, that you received and on which you stand, 1 Corinthians 15:2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message I preached to you – unless you believed in vain.

1 Corinthians 15:3 For I passed on to you as of first importance what I also received – that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, 1 Corinthians 15:4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, 1 Corinthians 15:5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 1 Corinthians 15:6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 1 Corinthians 15:7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 1 Corinthians 15:8 Last of all, as though to one born at the wrong time, he appeared to me also.

There are several evidences that this is an early oral tradition [habe04]

- Paul mentions, “I passed on to you, as of first importance what I also received”, therefore, this was passed on as an oral creed.
- This was originally in Aramaic, dating it earlier · Fourfold use of the Greek term for “that” (hoti) is used.
- Cephas is used instead of Peter, which is the Aramaic name for Peter · It’s style is of a creed, and not typical of Paul’s writing. To understand how significant this early oral tradition is, it needs to be dated. Now it is commonly assumed that Paul’s conversion was sometime between AD 33-36 [wikipaul], and that Paul visited Jerusalem after three years where he traveled to Arabia (Galatians 1:18-19). In taking Paul’s words that “he is passing on what he received” it is logical that he received this while visiting in Jerusalem which would have put the oral tradition between AD 36-39, or meaning that this creed was being widely circulated within 3-6 years of the crucifixion in AD 33. At worst case, the dating of this needs to be before he visited Corinth in AD 51 [habe04]. That the Apostles and early Christians believed in the resurrection as portrayed by the oral tradition is an evidence for the resurrection and a minimally accepted fact.

Written Tradition In addition to the Gospels, Paul’s writings and the other Epistles of the New Testament, several writings of contemporaries of the Apostles and early Christians also provide evidence of early belief in the resurrection (the following from [hab04]). For example, Clement of Rome (c. 30-100), wrote to the church in Corinth in AD 95;

“Therefore, having received orders and complete certainty caused by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and believing in the Word of God, they went with the Holy Spirit’s certainty, preaching the good news that the kingdom of God is about to come”. First Clement 42:3. And in AD 185- Irenaeus, an early church father provides a character witness of Clement.

“Clement was allotted the bishopric. This man, as he has seen the blessed apostles, and had been conversant with them, might be said to have the preaching of the apostles still echoing, and their traditions before his eyes. Nor was he alone, for there were many still remaining who had received instructions from the apostles. In the time of this Clement, no small dissension having occurred among the brothers in Corinth, the church in Rome dispatch a most powerful letter to the Corinthians”.

Polycarp, a disciple of Apostle John also mentions the resurrection in his writings in AD 110 in a letter to Phillippi;

“For they [Paul and the other apostles] did not love the present age, but him who died for our benefit and for our sake was raised by God”. Letter to Phillipians 9:2. And Tertullian, an early African church father, provides the following character witnesses of Polycarp in AD 200,

“For this is the manner in which the apostolic churches transmit their registers: as the church in Smyrna, which records that Polycarp was placed therein by John; as also the church in Rome, which makes Clement to have been ordained in like manner by Peter”.

Irenaeus also mentions Polycarp (c. 69-155)

“But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and when a very old man gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he learned from the apostles” Irenaeus , Against Heresies 3.3.4

Therefore, it is clear that the contemporaries of the Apostles, and early Christians all believed and were proclaiming the resurrection. That the early Christians believed in the resurrection is a minimal fact.

Empty Tomb

Certainly, the proclamation of the resurrection without an empty tomb would be impossible and preposterous. When one examines the evidence for the empty tomb claim itself, there are several important clues which lend credence to this claim. Habermas [Haber04] and Craig [Craig] cite the following clues towards believing the empty tomb;

Jerusalem factor confirms an empty tomb: The first clue towards reality is that the claim of the resurrection was made within days of the crucifixion, and if tomb wasn’t really empty all one would need to do would be to visit the tomb and show the body. Indeed, one would think that the reigning Jews of the time (Sanhedrin) who were actively opposing the early Christians (as recorded in Acts) could have easily shut them down if the tomb wasn’t indeed empty.

Enemy attestation confirms the empty tomb: The second clue is that we never see an argument put forth by anyone, even those opposing the early Christians, that the tomb was not empty. Indeed, we see stories circulated by the Jews that someone stole the body (Matthew 28:11-15), but never that the tomb was not empty.

Matthew 28:11 While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. Matthew 28:12 After they had assembled with the elders and formed a plan, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, Matthew 28:13 telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came at night and stole his body while we were asleep.' Matthew 28:14 If this matter is heard before the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." Matthew 28:15 So they took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story is told among the Jews to this day. The women discovering the body is an inconvenient truth that lends evidence to reality: Two of the four gospels mention the women finding the empty tomb first. This is somewhat an inconvenient truth, that lends evidence in itself towards the authenticity of the empty tomb and resurrection for the following reason. In the first century, the testimony of a woman was not worth as much as a man in both Jewish and Roman culture, and if someone was inventing a story, it is unlikely that they would have used women in their stories to find the empty tomb, and they would have more likely attributed it to one of the more prominent disciples, such as Peter, James or John.

While some may dispute the empty tomb, even early opposing views support an empty tomb, and this should indeed also be a minimally supported fact, although some still dispute it.

Rabbinical and Jewish Writings

Perhaps the most prominent Jewish writings that record Jesus, are those of Josephus, a Jewish historian from the late first century. In the Antiquities of the Jews 18.63-64 it is written; [wikiJosephus]

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.

Eusebius in AD 324, quotes the above passage attributed to Josephus. However, several critics (e.g. John Dominic Crossan of the Jesus Seminar) have cited that it is "too good to be true", and they claim it has likely been altered, as Josephus a Jew would not proclaim that "He was the Christ", but possibly that "He claimed to be the Christ". Some of this claim is based on the conspicuous absence of this passage being quoted by other writers of early times, (e.g. Origen in AD 240) didn't quote this passage. Nevertheless, there is evidence from an Arabic version of Josephus from the tenth century which reads [wikiJosephus] For he says in the treatises that he has written in the governance of the Jews: "At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus, and his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified

and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon their loyalty to him. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive. Accordingly they believed that he was the Messiah, concerning whom the Prophets have recounted wonders" - Shlomo Pines' translation, quoted by J. D. Crossan in which using the intersection of the two the following truths remain;

- Jesus was crucified, under the hand of Pilate
- Jesus was claimed to have risen from the dead and appeared to the disciples, and they remained loyal
- The disciples believed he was the Messiah

While it is not entirely clear whether the Jesus (Yeshua in Hebrew) mentioned in the Talmud is the same as the Jesus of the Gospels, we do see that a person named Yeshu was hung on the Passover.

It is taught: On the eve of Passover they hung Yeshu and the crier went forth for forty days beforehand declaring that "[Yeshu] is going to be stoned for practicing witchcraft, for enticing and leading Israel astray. Anyone who knows something to clear him should come forth and exonerate him." But no one had anything exonerating for him and they hung him on the eve of Passover. Ulla said: Would one think that we should look for exonerating evidence for him? He was an enticer and G-d said (Deuteronomy 13:9) "Show him no pity or compassion, and do not shield him." Yeshu was different because he was close to the government. Sanhedrin 43a.

Conclusion While it is always the case that faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) is ultimately what brings one to belief,

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; Ephesians 2:9 it is not from works, so that no one can boast. and to be saved (a Christian), it is clear that there are some powerful minimally accepted facts that form the basis for the likelihood of the resurrection. May the Lord guide us all in the further discovery of the truth.

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