

1 Resurrection as History

- Module: Resurrection
- Lesson 45

2 Some Recommended Sources

- Gunning for God, John Lennox
- On Guard, William Lane Craig
- The Case for Easter, Lee Strobel
- The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus, Gary Habermas and Michael Licona
- The Resurrection of the Son of God, N. T. Wright
- The Resurrection of Jesus, Michael Licona

3 Given Jesus Death by Crucifixion: Historical Facts That Beg for an Explanation

- Multiple post-mortem appearances of Jesus reported. (I Cor. 15:3-8)
- Empty tomb.
 - 75% of relevant scholars today acknowledge the tomb was empty.
 - Three strong historical reasons to believe the tomb was empty.
 - It was located in Jerusalem where claims could be easily verified or disproved.
 - The testimony of the women. (The element of embarrassment.)
 - The tacit acknowledgement of the enemies of Christianity.
- Belief of the early church in Jesus' bodily resurrection.
 - Physical resurrection was contrary to the nearly universal beliefs of the Hellenistic and Jewish worlds.
 - What caused thousands to so quickly alter their beliefs in this regard?

4 Given Jesus Death by Crucifixion: Historical Facts That Beg for an Explanation

- The tradition or creed quoted in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8
 - "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also."

5 Given Jesus Death by Crucifixion: Historical Facts That Beg for an Explanation

- The tradition or creed quoted in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (cont.)

- Dating:
 - The passage containing the creed was written by Paul in around 54-55 A. D.
 - The creed itself is acknowledged by most scholars to be dated between 6 mos. - 2 yrs of the events.
- Important points about the credal statement:
 - This is what Paul preached to the Corinthians (around 50 A. D.)
 - This is what Paul received during his trip to Jerusalem (mid 30s A. D.)
 - Others also were already preaching this message.
 - The creed states that over 500 people simultaneously witnessed a post-mortem appearance of Jesus. This claim is being recited in Jerusalem within months to two years of the event.

6 **Given Jesus Death by Crucifixion: Historical Facts That Beg for an Explanation**

- The conversion of Paul
 - He had rejected the resurrection claims and persecuted Christians.
 - He had an experience which convinced him of Jesus' resurrection.
 - He claimed that experience was an actual encounter with the resurrected Jesus. (Not a vision, hallucination, dream, etc.)
- The conversion of James, brother of Jesus.
 - Prior to Jesus death he had not been a believer and thought Jesus to be mad.
 - Following Jesus' appearance to him, he became a follower and chief leader in the Jerusalem church.
- Day of worship changed from Saturday to Sunday.

7 **Given Jesus Death by Crucifixion: Historical Facts That Beg for an Explanation**

- The suffering and martyrdom of the apostles.
 - Most or all of the apostles suffered greatly and/or were martyred for the belief in Jesus' bodily resurrection.
 - People may die for something false which they believe to be true, but not for something they know to be false.
- Birth of Christianity.
 - How does one account for the sudden appearance and rapid spread of Christianity in the Jewish and Hellenistic worlds when its central message was crucifixion and resurrection?
 - The eyewitness evidence and testimony must have been profoundly compelling.

8 **Resurrection Apologetics**

- The Traditional Apologetic
 - Argument from the reliability of scriptures.

- The authenticity of the canonical Gospels. (Apostolic authority and eyewitness testimony.)
- The preservation of the text.
- The historical reliability of the Gospels.
- Given these three facts, we have credible reason to believe in the resurrection of Jesus as historical fact.
- Decline of the traditional approach.
 - The onset of biblical criticism undermined in many minds confidence in the reliability of the Gospels.
 - Rise of subjectivism (emphasis on internal experience vs. external objective facts) made historical arguments less "relevant."

9 Resurrection Apologetics

- Late 20th century shift in resurrection scholarship.
 - A new era of resurrection scholarship.
 - Jesus historians increasingly acknowledge the compelling historical data we possess for the resurrection.
 - Those denying the resurrection have been placed on the defensive.
 - Pinchas Lipide, leading Jewish theologian:

"In regard to the future resurrection of the dead, I am and remain a Pharisee. Concerning the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, I was for decades a Sadducee. I am no longer a Sadducee."

10 Resurrection Apologetics

- Two Step Method for an Historical Apologetic
 - Establish the historical facts which serve as evidence for the resurrection.
 - Argue that the resurrection is the best hypothesis to account for the facts established in step 1.
 - Employ Bayes Theorem. (Limited usefulness due to the fact that some background information is difficult to measure quantitatively.)
 - Inference to the Best Explanation. (Explanatory power and scope, plausibility, simplicity, etc.)

11 Minimal Facts Defense

- Pioneered by Gary Habermas (utilized by Michael Licona).
- Good persuaders have a two-step approach to persuasion:
 - Establish the points at which both parties agree.
 - Work from the points of agreement to the points on which they disagree.
- The minimal facts defense employs this method, working from the points of agreement.

12 Minimal Facts Defense

- Employs only the “historical bedrock”: those facts strongly evidenced historically and widely or unanimously acknowledged as historical by scholars in the field (including skeptics).
- Uses New Testament texts even most skeptics acknowledge are Pauline. (1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon)
- IMPORTANT!
 - Using only part of the evidence does not imply or concede that other N. T. claims/evidences are not fully historical.
 - Using only some Pauline epistles does not imply or concede that other N. T. books are not Pauline, fully authentic, historically accurate, or possess textual integrity.

13 12 Facts Most Scholars Accept

- Jesus’ death by crucifixion under Pontus Pilate.
- He was buried in a tomb.
- His death caused his disciples despair.
- His tomb was empty. (Most contested point.)
- The disciples reported having experiences they believed were post-mortem physical appearances.
- The disciples were transformed from fearful doubters to bold proclaimers.

14 12 Facts Most Scholars Accept

- The resurrection was their central message.
- They preached the resurrection in Jerusalem.
- The church was born and grew.
- Devout Jews changed their primary day of worship from Saturday to Sunday.
- Jesus’ brother James became a believer after personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus.
- The conversion of Paul after he saw what he claimed was the resurrected Jesus.

15 Various Implementations of the Minimal Facts Defense

- William Lane Craig in Reasonable Faith
 - Empty tomb.
 - Post mortem appearances
 - Origin of the Christian faith
- Michael Licona in interview w/Lee Strobel
 - Death of Jesus by crucifixion
 - Disciple’s belief in post-mortem appearances
 - Conversion of Paul

- Conversion of James (Jesus' half-brother)
- Empty tomb

16 **Various Implementations of the Minimal Facts Defense**

- Michael Licona citing Gary Habermas (in Resurrection of Jesus) (Licona's "historical bedrock" stipulation that these facts are nearly unanimously accepted by contemporary scholars.)
 - Jesus' death by crucifixion
 - Multiple post-mortem appearances
 - Conversion of Paul
- Note the flexibility of the minimal facts defense. One can use various historical facts depending on which are most persuasive for one's audience.

17 **Michael Licona's Criteria for Judging Alternate Hypotheses**

- Explanatory scope: The quantity of facts accounted for by the explanatory hypothesis.
- Explanatory power: The hypothesis which explains the data (evidence) with the least amount of effort, vagueness, or ambiguity.
- Plausibility: The hypothesis is implied to a greater degree by a greater variety of other accepted truths.
- Less ad hoc: Possesses fewer nonevidenced assumptions.
- Illumination: (For Licona this is a lesser area of consideration.) Sheds more light on other related issues.

18 **Licona's Assessment of Leading Skeptical Hypotheses**

- Geza Vermes—agnostic re: historical assessment, mystical experiences
(weak in explanatory scope, power, and plausibility)
- Michael Goulder—psychological explanations (hallucinations, delusions, etc.)
(lacks explanatory power and plausibility, ad hoc)
- Gerd Lüdemann (atheist)—hallucinations, ecstasy
(fails in explanatory power and plausibility, ad hoc)
- John Dominic Crossman (Jesus Seminar)—empty tomb invention by Mark, trances & altered states of consciousness
(fails in explanatory power, plausibility, ad hoc)
- Pieter F. Craffert (post-modernist/modernist approach)—altered states of consciousness, corpse still in the grave, doesn't address Paul's conversion
(fails in explanatory scope, explanatory power, plausibility, ad hoc)

19 **Assessing the Skeptical Hypotheses**

- To varying degrees, in explaining the historical data of Licona's three bedrock facts, each alternate explanation is significantly deficient, compared to the explanation of Jesus' physical resurrection.
 - Once the death of Jesus by crucifixion is acknowledged to be historical, in order to dismiss the resurrection hypothesis, one must account for the multiple accounts of post-mortem physical appearances to Jesus.
 - From Pentecost on, the chief evidence cited for the resurrection was no longer the empty tomb, but the multiple eyewitness testimony of post mortem physical appearances to multiple men and women.
 - In varying ways, most of the scholars Licona discusses employ psychological explanations or hallucinations as explanations for the reported appearances to the disciples and Paul.
 - Such explanations rest on large amounts of speculation and ad hoc suggestions about hallucinations and trances which a) have no evidence in the historical data, (b) run counter to the historical data, or (c) which run counter to modern psychological research, or all three.
- Keep in mind, there are other historical facts widely accepted by scholars which Licona does not include in his "historical bedrock," but which many scholars also accept as historical, and which serve as evidence for the resurrection.

20 Did Paul Believe in Physical Resurrection?

- Some liberal theologians and skeptical scholars assert that Paul did not believe in a physical resurrection of the body. They cite two passages:
 - 1 Corinthians 15:44—"it is sown a natural (psychikos) body, it is raised a spiritual (pneumatikos) body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."
 - 2 Corinthians 5:1—"For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."
- However—
 - It is a mistake to take the word spiritual (pneumatikos) in 1 Cor. 15:44 to mean non-physical "body." In 1 Cor. 2:14-15 the word spiritual clearly refers to someone with a body who is controlled by the spirit rather than the flesh.
 - In 2 Cor. 5 the body referred a house made by God in heaven, but this is not a non-material or ethereal existence. In the context Paul clearly states that he does not long for a non-physical state, which he refers to as "naked," but to be clothed with a body.

21 Paul's Affirmation of Physical Resurrection

- Romans 8:11, 23—"The Spirit...will also give life to our mortal bodies..."; "the redemption of our bodies."
- 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:8—"Will no be found naked (w/o a body)..." "...we do not want to be unclothed, but clothed (w/a body from heaven)..."
- Colossians 2:9—"...for in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form."
- 1 Corinthians 15:37, 39—"...but God gives it a body, just as he wished..."

- v. 35 "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?"
- v. 42 "It is sown a perishable body, it is raised a spiritual body." (one not burdened with death, but eternally animated by the spirit)

22 **Did God Raise Jesus From the Dead?**

- The bodily resurrection of Jesus remains undiminished, as it has for 2000 years, as the best explanation to account for all the historical facts.
- Our argument is not that Jesus raised naturally from the dead. Such an explanation would be silly. Our argument is that Jesus was raised by God, supernaturally.
- Remember the "charged religious atmosphere" criteria for identifying a miracle:
 - Jesus' claims to be Messiah and God.
 - Jesus as a miracle worker/exorcist.
 - Jesus' predictions of his death and resurrection.
 - Jesus was crucified for his religious claims.
 - Jesus' claims that the resurrection would be his vindication.
- It was in this charged atmosphere that God supernaturally raised Jesus from the dead, vindicating his claims and validating his message.

23 **Next Week:**

- What Really Happened on Easter?