9. Did Jesus rise from the dead?

Sunday, March 24, 2013, 10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor

Leader: David Monyak
“Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.”

- 1 Peter 3:15-16 (NSRV)
Reference


- Audio excerpts from: *The Listener’s NIV MP3 Audio Bible*, narrated by Max McLean
Series Outline
On Guard. Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision

■ **Week 1**: Feb 17
  ■ 1. What is apologetics?
  ■ 2. What difference does it make if God exists?

■ **Week 2**: Feb 24
  ■ 3. Why does anything at all exist?
  ■ 4. Why did the universe begin?
  ■ 5. Why is the universe fine-tuned for life?

■ **Week 3**: Mar 3
  ■ 6. Can we be good without God?
Series Outline

On Guard. Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision

- **Week 4: Mar 10**
  - 7. What about suffering?

- **Week 5: Mar 17**
  - 8. Who was Jesus?

- **Week 6: Mar 24**
  - 9. Did Jesus rise from the dead?

- **Not covered:**
  - 10. Is Jesus the only way to God?
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

From 1 Peter 1: 3-5 (NRSV)
Today:
Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?
Introduction
Introduction

The Self-Understanding of Jesus

- Jesus of Nazareth’s self-understanding was that he was:
  - the Messiah, the Christ,
  - The only Son of God, the only Son of the Blessed One,
  - Daniel’s Son of Man to whom all dominion and authority would be given.

- As such, he had the power:
  - To speak with divine authority, changing divine laws handed down from Moses,
  - To overcome the forces of spiritual darkness,
  - To forgive sins,
  - To work miracles.

- He believed that acknowledgement of Him was necessary to be acknowledged before the angels of God.
Introduction

Jesus of Nazareth

- This Jesus of Nazareth was:
  - condemned by the Jewish Sanhedrin as a blasphemer of God, and
  - condemned by the Romans as a traitor claiming, as the Jewish “Messiah,” to be “King of the Jews.”
- He was crucified by the Romans, and he died and was buried.
Introduction
The Jesus Movement

- Within 20 years of his death, ancient sources describe a “Jesus movement” spreading within and outside the Roman Empire, its followers sincerely regarding and worshiping Jesus as God incarnate.

- What happened historically to explain this?
Introduction

The Resurrection of Jesus

- The Christian explanation of course is that God raised Jesus from the dead, and the resurrected Jesus appeared in bodily form to his disciples, empowering them to preach the gospel to the ends of earth.

- How do we know Jesus was indeed raised from the dead?
  - Many, perhaps most Christians believe this purely on an existential or experiential basis. They know Jesus is alive because they can feel him in their hearts.
  - A second way is to make a historical case for Jesus’ resurrection.

- Our goal today is to make this historical case for the Resurrection of Jesus, arguing that the Resurrection is the best explanation for the historical evidence.
Introduction

Overview of the Argument

- There are four facts that most biblical scholars agree upon:
  - 1. **Jesus’s Burial.** After his crucifixion, Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in his personal tomb.
  - 2. **Empty Tomb.** Jesus’ tomb was found *empty* by a group of His women followers on the first day of the week following His crucifixion.
  - 3. **Postmortem Appearances.** Various individuals and groups on different occasions and under varying circumstances experienced appearances of Jesus alive.
  - 4. **Disciple’s Sincere Belief.** The first disciples came to sincerely believe in Jesus’ resurrection, despite having every reason not to.
- The *best* explanation for these four widely agreed upon facts is that **God raised Jesus from the dead**.
Fact #1
Jesus’ Burial
Four Facts:

1. **Jesus’s Burial.** After his crucifixion, Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in his personal tomb.

2. **Empty Tomb.** Jesus’ tomb was found *empty* by a group of His women followers on the first day of the week following His crucifixion.

3. **Postmortem Appearances.** Various individuals and groups on different occasions and under varying circumstances experienced appearances of Jesus alive.

4. **Disciple’s Sincere Belief.** The first disciples came to sincerely believe in Jesus’ resurrection, despite having every reason not to.

*Best Explanation:* **God raised Jesus from the dead.**
1. Jesus’ Burial

Lines of Evidence

- We will look at two lines of evidence that support the historical reliability of the fact that after his crucifixion, Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in his personal tomb:
  - 1.1. Jesus burial is attested in extremely early, independent sources.
  - 1.2. As a member of the Jewish court that condemned Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea is unlikely to be a Christian invention.
1. Jesus’ Burial

1.1. Jesus burial is attested in extremely early, independent sources

- Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 quotes from an old Christian tradition he had received from the earliest disciples.

- Paul probably received this tradition:
  - During his visit to Jerusalem in 36 AD (Galatians 1:18)
  - Or even earlier in Damascus.

- It thus dates to within 5 years of the crucifixion.
1. Jesus’ Burial

1.1. Jesus burial is attested in extremely early, independent sources

1 Corinthians 15:3-5 (NRSV):

1. … Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that
2. he was buried, and that
3. he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that
4. he appeared to Ce'phas (Peter), then to the twelve.
1. Jesus’ Burial

1.1. Jesus burial is attested in extremely early, independent sources

- Comparison of this very early tradition cited by Paul in 1 Corinthians with early accounts from:
  - The pre-Markan passion narrative (felt by some scholars to also date to the 30’s) used by Mark in his gospel.
  - One of Paul’s sermon quoted in Acts of the Apostles,
  - Clearly connect the burial in 1 Corinthians to the burial by Joseph of Arimathea.
1. Jesus’ Burial

1.1. Jesus burial is attested in extremely early, independent sources

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<td>1. Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures</td>
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<td>2. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb</td>
<td>2. <strong>Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock</strong></td>
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<td>4. he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve</td>
<td>4. for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem</td>
<td>4. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.</td>
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1. Jesus’ Burial

- 1.1. Jesus burial is attested in extremely early, independent sources

- Independent testimony to Jesus’ burial by Joseph is also found in:
  - The additional passion narrative source used by Matthew and Luke,
  - the Gospel of John.
1. Jesus’ Burial

1.2. As a member of the Jewish court that condemned Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea is unlikely to be a Christian invention.

- The Sanhedrin was a sort of Jewish high court, made up of 70 leading men of Judaism.
- In Christian eyes, they had just engineered a judicial murder of Jesus.
- It is thus unlikely early Christians would make up a story that a Jewish Sanhedrist provided Jesus with an honorable burial.
- It is more likely it’s in the Gospel because it was true and well known and could not be ignored or denied.
1. Jesus’ Burial

Summary

On the basis of:

1.1. Jesus’ burial is attested in extremely early, independent sources.
1.2. As a member of the Jewish court that condemned Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea is unlikely to be a Christian invention.

we can conclude that it is historically reliable to say:

after his crucifixion, Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in his personal tomb.
Fact #2
The Empty Tomb
Four Facts:

1. **Jesus’s Burial.** After his crucifixion, Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in his personal tomb.

2. **Empty Tomb.** Jesus’ tomb was found *empty* by a group of His women followers on the first day of the week following His crucifixion.

3. **Postmortem Appearances.** Various individuals and groups on different occasions and under varying circumstances experienced appearances of Jesus alive.

4. **Disciple’s Sincere Belief.** The first disciples came to sincerely believe in Jesus’ resurrection, despite having every reason not to.

*Best Explanation:* **God raised Jesus from the dead.**
2. The Empty Tomb

Five Lines of Evidence

- We will look at 5 lines of evidence that support the historical reliability of the fact that several of Jesus’ women followers found his tomb empty on the Sunday after the crucifixion:
  - 2.1. The evidence he was buried.
  - 2.2. The discovery of the empty tomb is independently reported in very early sources.
  - 2.3. Mark’s story of the empty tomb is simple and lacks legendary development.
  - 2.4. Women discovered the empty tomb.
  - 2.5. The earliest Jewish response presupposes an empty tomb.
2. Empty Tomb

2.1. The fact Jesus was buried.

- How does the fact of Jesus’ burial support the empty tomb?
  - If Jesus was buried, then the location of Jesus’ tomb would be known to Christians and Jews alike.
  - The tomb must then have been empty when the disciples began to preach that Jesus was risen.
- Otherwise, if the corpse still lay in the tomb:
  - The disciples would not have believed that Jesus had risen.
  - No one listening to them would have believed that Jesus had risen.
  - The Jewish authorities could have simply squelched the budding Jesus movement by displaying the body.
2. Empty Tomb

2.2. The discovery of the empty tomb is independently reported in very early sources.

- Comparison of the very early tradition cited by Paul in 1 Corinthians with early accounts from:
  - The pre-Markan passion narrative (felt by some scholars to also date to the 30’s) used by Mark in his gospel.
  - One of Paul’s sermon quoted in Acts of the Apostles,

- connect the burial and raising from dead in 1 Corinthians to an empty tomb.
2. Empty Tomb

2.2. The discovery of the empty tomb is independently reported in very early sources

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2. Empty Tomb

2.2. The discovery of the empty tomb is independently reported in very early sources

- Two further features of the very early tradition cited by Paul in 1 Corinthians imply an empty tomb:
  - Expression “he was buried” followed by “he was raised” implies an empty tomb:
    - the idea that a man could be buried and then be raised from the dead and yet his body still remain in the grave is a peculiarly modern notion!
    - For a first century Jew, if he was buried and then raised, his tomb of course would have to be empty.
  - Expression “on the third day” implies an empty tomb:
    - No one saw Jesus rise from dead.
    - The phrase “on the third day” derives from and assumes the discovery of the empty tomb by the women disciples on the third day.
2. Empty Tomb

2.2. The discovery of the empty tomb is independently reported in very early sources.

Independent accounts of the “empty tomb” are found in the other gospels and the Acts of the Apostles.
2. Empty Tomb

2.3. Mark’s story of the empty tomb is simple and lacks legendary development.

Mark’s account of the empty tomb is remarkably simple and unembellished by theological motifs likely to characterize a later legendary account. There is:

- no description of the resurrection itself,
- no reflection on Jesus’ triumph over sin and death,
- no use of divine titles,
- no quotation of fulfilled prophecy,
- no description of the risen Lord.
2. Empty Tomb

2.3. Mark’s story of the empty tomb is simple and lacks legendary development.

Mark 16:1-8 (NIV): When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.
2. Empty Tomb

2.3. Mark’s story of the empty tomb is simple and lacks legendary development.

Apocryphal Gospel of Peter 34-42: Early in the morning, as the Sabbath dawned, a crowd came from Jerusalem and the surrounding area to see the sealed crypt. But during the night on which the Lord's day dawned, while the soldiers stood guard two by two on their watch, a great voice came from the sky. They saw the skies open and two men descend from there; they were very bright and drew near to the tomb. The stone cast before the entrance rolled away by itself and moved to one side; the tomb was open and both young men entered. When the solders saw these things, they woke up the centurion and the elders — for they were also there on guard. As they were explaining what they had seen, they saw three men emerge from the tomb, two of them supporting the other, with a cross following behind them. The heads of the two reached up to the sky, but the head of the one they were leading went up above the skies. And they heard a voice from the skies, "Have you preached to those who are asleep?" And a reply came from the cross, "Yes."

From: *Lost Scriptures*, Bart D. Ehrman, Oxford University 2003, p. 33
2. Empty Tomb

2.4. Women discovered the empty tomb.

- Women were not regarded as credible witnesses in first-century Judaism.
  - Josephus: “Let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex” (*Antiquities* IV. 8.15)
- Women were second class citizens. Consider the rabbinical texts:
  - “Sooner let the words of the Law be burnt than delivered to women!” (Sotah 19a)
  - “Happy is he whose children are male, but unhappy is he whose children are female!” (Kiddushin 82b).
  - The daily prayer of every Jewish man included the blessing, “Blessed are you, Lord our God, ruler of the universe, who has not created me a Gentile, a slave, or a woman” (Berachos 60b).
2. Empty Tomb

2.4. Women discovered the empty tomb.

- Given women’s lack of legal credibility and lack of social standing, no first century Jew would *make up* an account of the empty tomb with women as the discoverers and principal witnesses.

- Women must have *actually been the discoverers* of the empty tomb, and the gospels faithfully recorded what for them was a very embarrassing fact.
2. Empty Tomb

2.5. The earliest Jewish response presupposes an empty tomb.

- In Matthew 28:11-15, we find an account of the earliest Jewish response to the Christian proclamation of the resurrection:
  - While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day. (NIV)
2. Empty Tomb

2.5. The earliest Jewish response presupposes an empty tomb.

- Notice the author’s desire to refute the story the disciples stole the body, a story which “has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.”
- The Jews did not claim “The disciples are full of new wine!”
- The Jewish authorities did not deny the empty tomb but instead entangled themselves in a hopeless series of absurdities trying to explain it away.
2. The Empty Tomb

Summary

In summary, the five lines of evidence that:

- 2.1. Jesus was buried,
- 2.2. The discovery of the empty tomb is independently reported in very early sources,
- 2.3. Mark’s story of the empty tomb is simple and lacks legendary development,
- 2.4. Women discovered the empty tomb,
- 2.5. The earliest Jewish response presupposes an empty tomb,

have convinced most biblical scholars of the reliability of the biblical statements about the empty tomb.

In fact, in a survey of over 2,200 publications on the resurrection in English, French, and German since 1975, Gary Habermas found that 75 percent of scholars accepted the historicity of the discovery of Jesus’ empty tomb.
Fact #3
Postmortem Appearances
Four Facts:

1. **Jesus’s Burial.** After his crucifixion, Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathaea in his personal tomb.

2. **Empty Tomb.** Jesus’ tomb was found *empty* by a group of His women followers on the first day of the week following His crucifixion.

3. **Postmortem Appearances.** Various individuals and groups on different occasions and under varying circumstances experienced appearances of Jesus alive.

4. **Disciples’ Sincere Belief.** The first disciples came to sincerely believe in Jesus’ resurrection, despite having every reason not to.

*Best Explanation:* God raised Jesus from the dead.
3. Postmortem Appearances

Three Lines of Evidence

We will look at three lines of evidence that various individuals and groups on different occasions and under varying circumstances experienced appearances of Jesus alive:

- 3.1. Paul’s long list of eyewitnesses to Jesus’ resurrection appearances nearly guarantees such appearances occurred.
- 3.2. The gospels provide multiple, independent attestations of appearances.
- 3.3. The resurrection appearances were physical, bodily appearances.
3. Postmortem Appearances

3.1. Paul’s long list of eyewitnesses to Jesus’ resurrection appearances nearly guarantees such appearances occurred.

- In 1 Corinthians 15: 3-8, Paul makes a remarkable claim:
- For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (NIV)
3. Postmortem Appearances

3.1. Paul’s long list of eyewitnesses to Jesus’ resurrection appearances nearly guarantees such appearances occurred.

- Appearance to Peter:
  - From Galatians 1:18, 3 years after his conversion, Paul spends two weeks in Jerusalem with Peter, so Peter could have told Paul personally of seeing Jesus.
  - Luke 24:34: cites an early Christian tradition: “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!”

- Appearance to the Twelve: the best attested resurrection appearances of Jesus:
  - We have additional independent stories of the appearance to the Twelve in Luke 24:36-42 and John 20:19-20.
3. Postmortem Appearances

3.1. Paul’s long list of eyewitnesses to Jesus’ resurrection appearances nearly guarantees such appearances occurred.

- Appearance to the five hundred brethren:
  - There is no mention of this elsewhere in the New Testament.
  - By mentioning that most of the 500 are still alive, Paul is saying: “The witnesses are there for you to question.”
  - Why put out that challenge unless you know the witnesses are there?
3. Postmortem Appearances

3.1. Paul’s long list of eyewitnesses to Jesus’ resurrection appearances nearly guarantees such appearances occurred.

- Appearance to James, Jesus’ younger brother.
  - Neither James or any of Jesus’ younger brothers apparently believed in Jesus during his lifetime (Mark 3:21, 31-35; John 7:1-10).
  - James however would become a pillar of the early church, sole head of the Jerusalem Church and the Council of Elders, and would suffer martyrdom by being stoned to death sometime after 60 AD.
  - What would it take to make you believe your brother is the Lord, to believe so strongly that you would die for that belief?
3. Postmortem Appearances

3.1. Paul’s long list of eyewitnesses to Jesus’ resurrection appearances nearly guarantees such appearances occurred.

- Appearance to “all the apostles”
  - Probably refers to a limited group of Christian missionaries somewhat wider than the Twelve.
3. Postmortem Appearances

3.1. Paul’s long list of eyewitnesses to Jesus’ resurrection appearances nearly guarantees such appearances occurred.

- Appearance to Saul of Tarsus:
  - Paul independently refers to it in his own letters.
  - The appearance changed Paul’s life:
    - Before: he was a rabbi, Pharisee, respected Jewish leader, trying to stamp out the new Christian sect, even involved in executing Christians
    - After: became a Christian missionary, entering a life of danger, poverty, labor, suffering. He was whipped, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked 3 times, and ultimately suffered martyrdom in Rome.
3. Postmortem Appearances

3.2. The gospels provide multiple, independent attestations of appearances.

- The gospel accounts provide multiple, independent reports of postmortem appearances of Jesus, even some of the same appearances found in Paul’s list.
  - **Appearance to Peter** is independently mentioned by Paul and Luke (1 Cor. 15: 5; Luke 24: 34).
  - The **appearance to the Twelve** is independently reported by Paul, Luke, and John (1 Cor. 15: 5; Luke 24: 36–53; John 20: 19–31).
  - The **appearance to the women disciples** is independently reported by Matthew and John (Matt. 28: 9–10; John 20: 11–17) and enjoys, as well, ratification by the criterion of embarrassment.
  - The **appearance to the disciples in Galilee** is independently reported by Mark, Matthew, and John (Mark 16; Matt. 28: 16-20; John 21).
3. Postmortem Appearances

3.2. The gospels provide multiple, independent attestations of appearances.

- Taken sequentially, the appearances follow the pattern of:
  - Jerusalem, then
  - Galilee, then
  - Jerusalem again,

- matching the pilgrimages of the disciples as they returned to Galilee following the Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread and then traveled again to Jerusalem two months later for Pentecost.
3. Postmortem Appearances

3.3. The resurrection appearances were physical, bodily appearances.

3.3.1. Paul *implies* that the appearances were physical. He does this in two ways:

- First he conceives of the resurrection body as physical.
- Second, Paul, and indeed all the New Testament, makes a distinction between an appearance of Jesus and a vision of Jesus.
3. Postmortem Appearances

3.3. The resurrection appearances were physical, bodily appearances.

In 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, Paul describes the differences between the present earthly body and our future, resurrected body:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Earthly Body:</th>
<th>Resurrected Body:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mortal</td>
<td>Immortal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishonorable</td>
<td>Glorious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Powerful</td>
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<td><strong>Natural</strong></td>
<td><strong>Spiritual</strong></td>
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3. Postmortem Appearances

3.3. The resurrection appearances were physical, bodily appearances.

- **Natural** = psychikos. **Spiritual** = pneumatikos
- The same words *psychikos* and *pneumatikos* are used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:14-15:
  - The **natural** person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The **spiritual** person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. (ESV)
- That is:
  - the **natural** person is *oriented* to the **things of human nature**.
  - the **spiritual** person is *oriented* to the **things of the Spirit**
3. Postmortem Appearances

3.3. The resurrection appearances were physical, bodily appearances.

- Paul, and indeed all the New Testament, makes a distinction between an appearance of Jesus and a vision of Jesus.

- The appearances of Jesus soon ceased, but visions of Jesus continued in the early church.
  - A vision, though caused by God, is purely in the mind,
  - An appearance took place “out there” in the external world.
3. Postmortem Appearances

3.3. The resurrection appearances were physical, bodily appearances.

3.3.2. Appearances in the Gospel accounts are explicitly physical and bodily:

- *Every* resurrection appearance related in the gospels is a **physical, bodily appearance**.
3. Postmortem Appearances

3.3. The resurrection appearances were physical, bodily appearances.

Two points on the physicality of the gospel’s accounts:

- If in fact *none* of the resurrection appearances were physical, there would have to be a *complete, thoroughgoing corruption of the oral tradition in a very short time* – while the original eyewitnesses were still around.

- Non-bodily, non-physical appearances would have been *much easier* for both Jew and Gentile to accept:
  - The physical, bodily appearances was just “foolishness” to Gentiles, for the physical body was an impediment to the soul, and death “good riddance” from it.
  - Jewish mentality precluded any physical resurrection to glory and immortality *prior to* the general resurrection at the end of the world.
3. Postmortem Appearances

Summary

On the basis of:

- 3.1. Paul’s long list of eyewitnesses to Jesus’ resurrection appearances, nearly guaranteeing such appearances occurred;
- 3.2. The gospel’s multiple, independent attestations of appearances;
- 3.3. The resurrection appearances being physical, bodily appearances;

we can reasonably conclude that the fact of Jesus’ postmortem appearances to various individuals and groups under a variety of circumstances is firmly established historically and, moreover, that these appearances were bodily and physical.
Fact #4
Disciples’ Sincere Belief
Four Facts:

1. **Jesus’s Burial.** After his crucifixion, Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in his personal tomb.

2. **Empty Tomb.** Jesus’ tomb was found *empty* by a group of His women followers on the first day of the week following His crucifixion.

3. **Postmortem Appearances.** Various individuals and groups on different occasions and under varying circumstances experienced appearances of Jesus alive.

4. **Disciples’ Sincere Belief.** The first disciples came to sincerely believe in Jesus’ resurrection, despite having every reason not to.

*Best Explanation:* God raised Jesus from the dead.
4. Disciples’ Sincere Belief

The Mysterious X

- We cannot overemphasize the *absolute and total disaster* Jesus’ crucifixion would have been for the faith of his disciples.

- Yet a “Jesus movement” – Christianity -- sprang into being sometime midway through the first century AD, led by disciples who sincerely believed Jesus had been resurrected from the dead and was God incarnate.

- Even the most skeptical scholars agree we must posit some “mysterious X” that launched the disciples and the early Christian church.

- What was that “mysterious X”?
4. Disciples’ Sincere Belief

A Disaster to Faith

- Jesus’ crucifixion should have been an absolute and total disaster for the faith of the disciples, because:
  - 4.1. Their leader was dead, and Jews had no belief in a dying, much less a rising Messiah.
  - 4.2. Jesus’ execution as a criminal showed him to be a heretic, a man literally under the curse of God.
  - 4.3. Jewish beliefs about the afterlife precluded anyone’s rising from the dead before the general resurrection at the end of time.
4. Disciples’ Sincere Belief

4.1. Their leader was dead, and Jews had no belief in a dying, much less a rising Messiah.

- Jews had *no* conception of a Messiah who, instead of triumphing over Israel’s enemies, would be shamefully executed by them as a criminal.
- A Messiah was supposed to be a *triumphant* figure who would command the respect of Jew and Gentile alike and who would establish the throne of David in Jerusalem.
- A Messiah who failed to deliver and to reign, who was defeated, humiliated, and slain by His enemies, was a *contradiction* in terms (a “square circle”).
4. Disciples’ Sincere Belief

4.2. Jesus’ execution as a criminal showed him to be a heretic, a man literally under the curse of God.

- The Jewish Sanhedrin had judged Jesus to be a blasphemer of the God.
- Deuteronomy 21:23 declares: “anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse.”
- Jesus was crucified: nailed and hung to a “tree.” His dying on the cross showed:
  - He was indeed cursed by God.
  - The judgment of the Sanhedrin was correct. Jesus had indeed blasphemed God.
4. Disciples’ Sincere Belief

4.3. Jewish beliefs about the afterlife precluded anyone’s rising from the dead before the general resurrection at the end of time.

- Belief in the resurrection of the dead became a widespread Jewish hope in the centuries before Jesus.
- In Jesus’ day, belief in the resurrection of the dead was held by Pharisees, although it was denied by Sadducees.
- However, the Jewish conception of the resurrection differed in two fundamental respects from the resurrection of Jesus. For Jews:
  - resurrection always occurred after the end of the world.
  - resurrection was always the resurrection of all the righteous or all the people. They had no conception of the resurrection of an isolated individual.
4. Disciples’ Sincere Belief

4.3. Jewish beliefs about the afterlife precluded anyone’s rising from the dead before the general resurrection at the end of time.

At the very best, Jesus’ disciples could only hope for a resurrection of Jesus at the end of time, when all the righteous would be raised.
4. Disciples’ Sincere Belief

Summary

- Jesus’ crucifixion should have been an absolute and total disaster for the faith of the disciples, because:
  - 4.1. Their leader was dead, and Jews had no belief in a dying, much less rising Messiah.
  - 4.2. Jesus’ execution as a criminal showed him to be a heretic, a man literally under the curse of God.
  - 4.3. Jewish beliefs about the afterlife precluded anyone’s rising from the dead before the general resurrection at the end of time.

- Yet historically, some “mysterious X” launched the disciples to found the early Christian Church.
Best Explanation
What is the “Mysterious X”?

What is the best explanation for these four facts that most biblical scholars agree upon?

1. **Jesus’s Burial.** After his crucifixion, Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in his personal tomb.

2. **Empty Tomb.** Jesus’ tomb was found empty by a group of His women followers on the first day of the week following His crucifixion.

3. **Postmortem Appearances.** Various individuals and groups on different occasions and under varying circumstances experienced appearances of Jesus alive.

4. **Disciple’s Sincere Belief.** The first disciples came to sincerely believe in Jesus’ resurrection, despite having every reason not to.
The only historical explanation that explains all four facts is the **Resurrection Hypothesis**: God raised Jesus from the dead. It:

1. has **great explanatory scope**: explains why tomb was empty, the postmortum appearances, why Christianity came into existence
2. has **great explanatory power**: explains why the tomb was empty, why people repeatedly saw Jesus alive
3. is **plausible**: provides divine confirmation or vindication of those blasphemous claims for which Jesus was crucified
Best Explanation

What is the “Mysterious X”?

The only historical explanation that explains all four facts is the **Resurrection Hypothesis**: God raised Jesus from the dead. It:

- **4. Not Ad Hoc. Not contrived.** It requires only one additional hypothesis: the existence of God
- **5. It is in accord with accepted beliefs.** People still don't rise naturally from the dead.
- **6. It far outstrips any rival hypothesis**
Best Explanation
What is the “Mysterious X”? 

- All of the *rival* hypotheses have serious problems, leaving one or more of the four facts unexplained:
  - **The Conspiracy Hypothesis:** the disciples stole the body of Jesus and lied about His appearances, thus faking the resurrection.
  - **The Apparent Death Hypothesis:** Jesus was not completely dead when He was taken down from the cross. He revived in the tomb and escaped to convince His disciples He had risen from the dead.
Best Explanation
What is the “Mysterious X”? 

- All of the rival hypotheses have serious problems, leaving one or more of the four facts unexplained:
  
  - **The Displaced Body Hypothesis:** Joseph of Arimathea placed Jesus’ body in his tomb temporarily, due to the lateness of the hour and the closeness of his own family tomb to the place of Jesus’ execution. But then he moved the corpse later to the criminals’ common graveyard. Unaware of the displacement of the body, the disciples, upon finding the tomb empty, inferred that Jesus was risen from the dead.
  
  - **The Hallucination Hypothesis:** the resurrection appearances were merely hallucinations on the part of the disciples.
Best Explanation

The “Mysterious X”

- C. F. D. Moule of Cambridge University writes:
- If the coming into existence of the Nazarenes, a phenomenon undeniably attested by the New Testament, rips a great hole in history, a hole the size and shape of the Resurrection, what does the secular historian purpose to stop it up with? . . . the birth and rapid rise of the Christian Church . . . remain an unsolved enigma for any historian who refuses to take seriously the only explanation offered by the Church itself.
Discussion