

## The Challenge of Easter – Fact or Hoax?

As Easter comes and goes, we should take a moment away from Easter bunnies and colored eggs to reflect on the real meaning of the holiday: the claim that Jesus Christ rose from the dead after his crucifixion.

There is no middle ground on this question. Either it is history's greatest miracle, which confirms the claims of Jesus, or it's history's cruellest hoax, because millions have died through the ages trusting in the claims of Christ, to his followers, that they also would be raised from the dead. (John 14:1-3)

Some claim Christianity can be a valid "good works" philosophy without belief in the resurrection. The early believers never saw it that way. Paul stated very clearly

"If there is no resurrection of the dead then Christ is not risen, and if Christ is not risen then our preaching is empty, and your faith is also empty... If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men, the most pitiable" (I Corinthians 15:13,14,19).

The resurrection is the centerpiece of Christianity. Take it away and Christianity it becomes just one more philosophy in the supermarket them! To deny the resurrection is to take yourself out of the historic Christian faith!

The real question then is: Did it really happen? Is there enough evidence to put our faith in it? Has the claim been logically examined, the evidence shifted through, making the belief in the resurrection of Jesus is a reasonable faith?

Through the ages different skeptics have tried to produce theories to replace the resurrection. It is conceded by most scholars that Jesus's tomb was empty that first Easter morning. That the disciples did claim to have seen the resurrected Jesus. There is also no doubt in the remarkable growth of Christianity, first in a Jewish providence, then throughout the Roman empire and later the world. That calls for an explanation.

When I first examined the alternate explanations, I found them adding weight in favor of the resurrection because every nationalistic theory crumbles when we examine the evidence for them compared to that of the resurrection. Let's look at some of them:

- 1) The Hallucination Theory says that followers of Jesus hallucinated the appearances. However, hallucination is not a mass phenomenon- it comes upon individual people, masses do not hallucinate the same thing at the same time all at once. And this has no way of explaining the empty tomb.
- 2) Swoon theory, states that Jesus never really died on the cross, was revived in the tomb, moved to boulder then came back to his disciples claiming to have risen from the dead. This theory can be put to death quickly just by watching the movie "The Passion of the Christ." No

one survived Roman crucifixion, many crucified are half dead from beatings before even getting to the cross. How reasonable is it to believe that a crucified man with all the wounds Jesus had, including a spear hole in his side could pull this off?

3) The Wrong Tomb Theory attempts to say that the woman and the disciples went to the wrong tomb. Common sense alone says that anyone who objected to this "resurrection" talk could have produced the body at the right tomb and squashed Christianity right in its cradle! If the body was in another tomb, it be easy to stop such nonsense. But this is never attempted.

4) Did the Jews or Romans take the body? No one has ever presented any reason either would. Both just wanted to be done with the "Jesus problem" and especially the Jewish leaders would have produced the body to end the preaching of the disciples once and for all if they had it.

5) Is the resurrection account a legend added many years later? Legend develops over a great period of time. The writings of Paul, with the very strong words telling us that Jesus rosed from the dead that I listed above are dated approx. A.D. 53 but his wording of what he passed on about the resurrection in I Cor. 15:1-4 is clearly a creed that goes back much earlier, some scholars think to the late 30's A.D. which would have been with a few years of Jesus's crucifixion. Likewise, I would argue for an early writing of the Gospels and the book of Acts. The book of Acts, which gives the history of the early church, is primarily centered on Peter and Paul. Despite the fact the book mentions the death of other leaders of the church (James & Stephen), it ends with both Peter and Paul still alive. We know from history that both were killed under Nero somewhere between A.D. 62-68. Luke who is the same author of the gospel of Luke (as he states at the beginning of Acts), would have had to written Luke before the book of Acts, and we also know that Matthew and Mark were written before Luke. Lastly there is no mention in any of the New Testament books, of what would have been a major event in the Jewish mind, the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in A.D. 70! Jesus predicts this in Luke 21:20-24 & Mark 13:1-2, yet no mention is made of this event which certainly should have happened if the New Testament writings were after because they would have been able to tell how Jesus was a true prophet! Lastly the New Testament books can clearly be shown to be written early by their accuracy of information. Acts alone has been called one of the most historically accurate books in the first century. In the first 16 chapters alone Luke records 84 facts that have been confirmed by historical and archaeological research. This is clearly the writings of an eyewitness, no one writings 100 years later (with no computer research!) would have been this accurate. It is too early to be legend.

In addition, there are at least 18 non-Christian, extra biblical sources from secular history mentioning beliefs and teachings, from the life of Christ and early Christianity, 100- 150 years after the birth of Jesus. Included in this is the belief by early Christians and the resurrection.

What it comes down to, in the end, is one of two things. Either the disciples stole the body and invented the story, or the resurrection of Jesus really did occur. Now it's a fact people will die for something they think is true even if it is a lie. But where in history do we find people

dying for what they know is a lie? We are supposed to believe that simple fishermen who could have been fishing peacefully in the sea of Galilee the rest of their lives, traded that in so they could get beaten, stoned, beheaded, crucified, and tossed to lions! And they did it for a deliberate lie which paid them nothing? This makes absolutely no sense!

The disciples had to have seen something that turned them from the cowards they were as Jesus was crucified to the martyrs, they would all become. What If we could examine them all in a court of law, could we find the truth?

Irwin Linton, a Washington DC Lawyer made this noteworthy statement in his book "A Lawyer Examines the Bible".

"True, we cannot now cross examine the eyewitnesses to the words and events they narrated in the Gospels, but they were cross-examined at the time as no other witnesses ever have been examined since the world began, by interrogatory, by fire, sword, cross, and scourge. This was their heroic part in the "Holy War" and doubtless it was to afford us of later generations the costly assurance of the truth and sincerity that those early Christian were all Christian martyrs."

Former German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, once said, "if Jesus Christ is not risen from the dead, there is not one glimmer of hope for the human race."

He was right, a lot of religions, and philosophies a good enough to live by, but only if the resurrection of Jesus is true does Christianity go beyond that. It promises something much more.

It is good enough to die by!