

Evidence for the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus

Brett Bruster

Why Study the Evidence for the Resurrection?

- 1 Peter 3:15 says that we are to be ready to give a defense for the hope that we have.
- **Resurrection is key to the Christian worldview.** Paul: “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain... (1 Cor. 15:14).” And, “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15: 17).
- Jesus Himself says the resurrection is *the sign* given to the world (Matt. 12:39-40).
- The resurrection was *the central message* proclaimed by the early church in the book of Acts (1:21-22; 2:22, 24, 32; and many others).

Minimal Facts Approach

- The “minimal facts approach” considers only data that meet two criteria:
 1. The data are strongly evidenced.
 2. The data are granted by virtually all scholars on the subject, even the skeptical ones.
- The “minimal facts approach” builds a case using facts with a high degree of certainty.
- The “minimal facts approach” is easy to learn and to share.

Data Is Well-Evidenced

Historical claims are strong when:

- Supported by multiple, independent sources;
- Attested to by an enemy are more likely to be authentic since enemies are unsympathetic, and often hostile witnesses;

Data Is Well-Evidenced

- When they include embarrassing admissions reflect honest reporting rather than creative storytelling;
- They are supported by eyewitness testimony;
- They are supported by early testimony.

Minimal Facts Approach

- Developed by Dr. Gary Habermas and Dr. Mike Licona in their book, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*.
- Dr. Habermas is one of the leading scholars in the world on the historicity of Jesus resurrection.
- Dr. Habermas (PhD, History and Philosophy of Religion, Michigan State). His dissertation demonstrated that the bodily resurrection of Jesus was a historical fact without using “faith-based” arguments.

What is the Minimal Facts Approach?

Four facts that demonstrate the historicity of the resurrection:

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. Jesus' disciples believed that he rose and appeared to them.
3. The church persecutor Paul was suddenly changed.
4. The skeptic James, the brother of Jesus, was suddenly changed.

First Fact: Jesus Died by Crucifixion

- Crucifixion was a commonly used by Romans.
- Jesus execution by crucifixion is reported in all four gospels.
- A number of non-Christian sources of the period report the event.
(Josephus, Tacitus, Lucian of Samosata, Mara Bar-Serapion, the Talmud)
- The highly critical scholar, John Dominic Crossan, writes, “That he was crucified is as sure as anything historical can ever be.”

Second Fact: Jesus' Disciples Believed that He Rose and Appeared to Them

- Whatever may have happened, it is a fact that Jesus' disciples claimed He rose from the dead and appeared to them.
- There are multiple early and independent sources of these claims.
- They not only claimed it, they believed it.
- 7 ancient sources attest to their willingness to suffer and even die for their claim. (Luke, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Ignatius, Dionysius of Corinth via Eusebius, Tertullian, and Origen).

Third Fact: The Church Persecutor Paul Was Suddenly Changed

- Paul (Saul) was a self-admitted persecutor of the church (Gal. 1:13).
- Paul mentioned how Christians were afraid of him before being certain of his conversion (Gal. 1:22-23).
- He changed from Christian persecutor to suffering missionary willing to die for his claim, as witnessed in multiple early testimonies (Paul, Luke, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Tertullian, Dionysius of Corinth, and Origen).

Fourth Fact: The Skeptic James, Brother of Jesus, Was Suddenly Changed

- The gospels report that Jesus' brothers, including James, were unbelievers during his ministry (Mark 3:21, 31; 6:3-4; John 7:5).
- The ancient creedal material in 1 Cor. 15:3-7 mentions Jesus' appearance to James.
- After the resurrection appearance to James, he becomes a leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:12-21; Gal. 1:19).
- James later died as a martyr for his claim and beliefs (attested by Josephus, Hegesippus, and Clement of Alexandria).

Conclusion from Four Facts

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. Jesus' disciples believed that he rose and appeared to them.
3. The church persecutor Paul was suddenly changed.
4. The skeptic James, the brother of Jesus, was suddenly changed.

No skeptical account of what happened can account for these four facts. Therefore, the only explanation for these four facts is that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead.

Additional Fact: The Empty Tomb

- The “corpse” of Jesus was not found. Had it been, all stories of resurrection would have stopped.
- This fact was not mentioned because only about 75% of critical scholars will acknowledge this fact.
- But, it is further evidence of the historicity of the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

Conclusion

- The Minimal Facts Approach is a quick and easy way to give historical evidence for the resurrection.
- It is academically rigorous.
- There are many other evidences for the resurrection.

Additional Resources

- Basic:
 - *More Than a Carpenter* - Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell
 - *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* - Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona
- Academic:
 - *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* - Michael R. Licona
 - *The Resurrection of the Son of God* – N.T. Wright