

Christ is Risen: Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus

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The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the most important event of all time. Whew! That is quite a statement. Is it really *the* most important event ever? Yes! 1 Corinthians 15:17 says that, “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” If faith doesn’t justify us, then still being in those sins means that we are all doomed. But, if Christ has been raised, then all who believe in him are saved because he died on the cross to cancel our debt and was resurrected to justify us. Without the resurrection, the cross means nothing—Jesus lost. Thanks to the resurrection, Jesus is victorious over the grave, our sins are paid for, and we can look forward to our own resurrection bodies.

It is clear, then, that the resurrection matters. It is a matter of life and death. The whole Christian faith is based on this miracle. Fortunately for us, this is the one miracle that God invites us to investigate. The Gospels say, “You are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He is risen! *Come see* where they laid him.”

It is this invitation to look that makes the Christian faith so powerful. It is testable. You can come and look at the evidence, check to see if this stuff is real, and if you do not experience God’s grace or if you do not buy the evidence, then you can go try something else. Ours is the only faith like that. Buddhism, for example, takes a lifetime of devotion and you never really figure out if you’re doing it right. God wants us to figure this faith thing out. But how? How can we really know that Jesus rose from the dead? How do we know this isn’t fake, just a cleverly invented story? We can decide if the resurrection is real based on the evidence.

There is a tremendous amount of evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus. Can it be proven, though? Proof is tricky concept. If proof means “100% mathematical certainty,” then almost nothing can be proven, except some mathematical concepts and other self-evident truths (like $1+1=2$, “There is such thing as truth,” etc.) If someone were to deny that there is such a thing as truth, then that person’s statement would either be true or false. If true, then only that statement is true and thus there is such a thing as truth. If that statement is false, then other things are true, and thus there is such a thing as truth. One cannot deny truth without assuming the concept of truth. That is what is meant by self-evident truth.

Most things are not self-evidently true. We usually have to weigh the evidence and make a decision as to whether or not something is true. So it is with the Resurrection. A skeptic could always claim that it is possible that we are wrong. But it is also possible that you are wrong in thinking that other people exist. It is possible that an evil scientist has your brain in a vat and is deceiving your brain into thinking that other people exist. Just because something is logically possible does not make it probable.

We live in world of probability. Did the Nationals win the World Series last year? Yes. But how do you know? Couldn’t you be mistaken about that? Even though you watched the games, maybe you are wrong. Even though MLB.com says the Nationals won, maybe it is mistaken? Even though everyone accepts it, maybe everyone is wrong? Isn’t that logically possible? Yes, but it is also ridiculous. The Nationals won the World Series last year. People look at the evidence and choose to accept that evidence and thus to believe something, or they choose not to accept that evidence and not to believe that thing.

Baseball is one thing, but what about something even more important? And what about stuff that happened before we could witness it, or even before any currently living witnesses could tell us about it?

What about stuff that happened before cameras and recording devices? Are we just out of luck? Of course not. We believe all sorts of thing about past events.

People believe all sorts of things about religious issues, too. Many religions claim things about the past, but if those things never really happened, most of those religions would carry on with business as usual. Not Christianity, though. Christianity is entirely based on one historical event—the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. If it did not happen, then Christianity is wrong. If it did happen, then Jesus is Lord and God, Christianity is true, and every person should commit to following Jesus.

So what is the evidence for Jesus' Resurrection? There are three main lines of evidence: Scripture, Transformed Lives, and History.

Scripture—The Bible says that Jesus was raised from the dead. Jesus predicted his own death and Resurrection, the OT predicts it, the NT mentions it all over the place, it is the heart of every sermon in the NT, each Gospel records it, Acts details how it was proclaimed and how it transformed people, the Epistles mention it over and over, etc.

It is the main event in the NT. It is claimed to be an actual historical event. Witness are mentioned, evidence is given. The Bible is the Word of God. We can believe in the Resurrection because it is in Scripture. But some people do not accept the Bible as an infallible, inspired book. Some people will not accept it. Rather than get into a long drawn-out discussion about the nature of the Bible and the reasons to accept it as God's Word, we will just say this: The Resurrection is in the Bible. If you accept the Bible as God's Word, then you have ample reason to accept the Resurrection as a verified historical event.

Transformed Lives—Some of the most powerful evidence for the Resurrection is the evidence of transformed lives. If you witnessed a murderer of Christians become a Christian himself because of the Resurrection, you would have good evidence. If you have been transformed because of the Resurrection, you have enough evidence to believe, even if you cannot prove it to other people. The difficulty with our first-person experiences, however, is that they cannot be transferred to other people or even be observed by other people. Others can only experience the result, not the cause. We must bring them to the cause.

Some people will claim that other things have transformed people, too, not just the Resurrection. I cannot deny that people can be changed—their experience is not visible to me, only the effect of that experience. I know the power of transformation that comes from the Resurrection. If you are a Christian and you have experienced the transformative power of the Resurrection and you have read about it in the Bible, you have enough evidence to stand secure in the Resurrection. But those things may not be enough to convince someone *else* that Christ is risen. Fortunately, we can look to history.

History—If people believe things about history at all, they should believe in the Resurrection of Jesus. There is more and better evidence for it than there is for George Washington being the first President of the United States of America. The way that historians go about studying a supposed event of history is called Scientific Historiography.

Scientific Historiography is the scientific approach to history. Science is the study of the observable and the repeatable, which means that history is beyond the scope of scientific inquiry. History is not scientific, but the study of history is scientific. We can observe how people study history and we can repeat that process.

Scientific Historiography is a three-step process:

1. Ask the right questions:
 - Why does the Christian faith exist?
 - How did the Christian faith start?
 - What is the reason that the early Christians claimed for their faith?

2. Gather the evidence:
 - Assemble all the conceivable evidence.
 - Parse that evidence down to only that which most historians agree upon.

3. Employ the “Inference to the Most Likely Hypothesis (MLH)” method:
 - Generate a list of possible hypotheses that might explain the evidence.
 - See which hypothesis best explains the evidence.
 - Use the tools of necessary and sufficient conditions to help determine the MLH.
 - Nec. Cond.—must happen for the thing in question to obtain
(electricity must flow to my t.v. for it to work, but other conditions must also obtain for the t.v. to work)
 - Suf. Cond.—is enough for the thing in question to obtain
(splashing cold water on my face will wake me up, but it is not the only thing that can wake me up)
 - If more than one hypothesis is sufficient, then none are necessary.
 - If only one is sufficient, and thus necessary, that is the MLH.
 - This means that for the Resurrection to be actual, it must be the only hypothesis that explains all the evidence.

Here is the evidence that is attested to by the vast majority of scholars, Christian and skeptic alike. The renowned scholar, Gary Habermas, compiled this list while researching the views of historical scholars from the past 35 years.

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. Jesus was buried.
3. Jesus’ death caused the disciples to despair and lose hope, believing that his life had ended.
4. Jesus’ tomb was found to be empty just a few days later.
5. The disciples had experiences that they actually believed to be literal appearances of the risen Jesus.
6. The disciples were transformed from doubters afraid to identify with Jesus to bold proclaimers of his death and resurrection.
7. The message of resurrection was central to the preaching of the early church.
8. It was especially proclaimed in Jerusalem, where Jesus died and was buried only a short time before.
9. As a result of the preaching, the church was born and grew.
10. Sunday became the primary day of worship.
11. James, formerly a skeptic, was converted to faith when he also saw what he believed to be the resurrected Jesus.
12. A few years later, Paul likewise was converted by what he believed to be an appearance of the resurrected Jesus.
13. Bring in reliable evidence from other fields of study if needed. This category includes things from other historical inquires, accepted medical facts, etc.

What follows is a seven-step argument for the Resurrection developed by renowned scholar N.T. Wright. It employs Scientific Historiography, the accepted facts from above, and other reliable evidence from other fields of study (like Jewish studies).

1. Judaism supplied the concept of resurrection, but striking and consistent differences within the Jewish resurrection belief rule out any possibility that the Christian belief could have generated spontaneously from this Jewish system of thought. The Jews who believed in resurrection believed that it would happen at the end of time and that it would be corporate. Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus (an individual resurrection prior to the final judgment) is based on two things: accounts about Jesus' tomb being empty, and accounts about him appearing to people alive again.

2. Neither the empty tomb by itself, nor the appearances by themselves could have generated the Christian belief in Jesus' bodily resurrection. That is, neither one taken separately is sufficient to explain how belief in Jesus' bodily resurrection started. An empty tomb by itself is puzzle or a tragedy, and sightings of an apparently alive Jesus by themselves would have been classified as visions or hallucinations.

3. However, the empty tomb and the appearances taken together present a powerful reason for the emergence of the belief in Jesus' resurrection. That is, taken together they are sufficient to believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

4. The meaning of the word “resurrection” within Judaism makes it impossible to conceive of this reshaped belief in resurrection emerging without it being known that (1) a body had disappeared and (2) that the person had been discovered to be thoroughly alive again. That is, the empty tomb and the appearances together are necessary to believe in Jesus’ resurrection. Any theory that is both necessary and sufficient to explain the effect is plausibly taken to be the cause. If two (or more) theories are both demonstrated to be sufficient to bring about the effect, then neither one is necessarily the cause.

5. The other explanations offered for the emergence of belief in Jesus' resurrection do not possess the same explanatory power as the resurrection. No other argument can account for all the accepted facts. No other theory is sufficient or necessary to cause belief in the resurrection.

6. Therefore, because of the uniformed belief in Jesus’ resurrection shared by all the early Christians, it is highly historically probable that Jesus' tomb was indeed empty on the third day and that the disciples did indeed encounter Jesus seeming truly alive because of the resurrection. It is highly historically probable that Jesus resurrected from the dead. “Highly Historically Probable” here is being used the way historians engaged in scientific historiography use the term. Any alleged historical event can be judged on a scale of:

Extremely Unlikely-----Possible-----Plausible-----Probable-----Highly Probable

7. The early Christians explained the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus and thus the reason for the emergence of the church with the resurrection. The last and most important question: Is there any alternative to the explanation given by the early Christians that is both necessary and sufficient to explain these facts? No. Because there is not, the Christian can confidently and accurately say, “The resurrection is a historical fact.”

Digging Deeper: the rest of this document will flesh out this argument in greater detail.

1. Today many think that resurrection is just a spiritual feeling of Jesus being alive. That is wrong. Jesus lived in the 1st century. During the first century and before, the word “resurrection” never meant an existential, spiritual feeling of someone being alive; it always meant a physical body coming back to life after being very dead. The two major groups of people of the 1st century, the Pagans and the Jews both agreed on this issue. The Pagans held a wide variety of views of the afterlife. They conceived of many post-mortem states, most of them spiritual. They had many words for those states of existence. “Resurrection” was never one of them. When the Pagan referred to resurrection, he was referring to a bodily coming back to real and actual life after being quite dead.

In Judaism there was also a spectrum of belief about what happened to dead people. A group of Jews called the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. However, when they referred to it, they meant the same thing as was meant when the Pharisees, who did believe in resurrection, spoke of it. For the Jew, resurrection meant the corporate bodily coming back to life at the end of time. The righteous Jews would be given new bodily life when God came with the final judgment. Their belief was also that resurrection would be corporate, never involving just one man.

Therefore, in the Jewish conception, resurrection was always social and at the end of time, never an individual thing before God's final judgment. The concept of resurrection was a well-known doctrine of the 1st century, not something that the early Christians just made up. Yet, all the early Christians believed in the resurrection of Jesus, not just the corporate resurrection at the end of time.

Early Christian beliefs were formulated within the context of Judaism. Note that although there were hundreds of Messianic groups before and after Jesus, no other messianic group came up with anything even remotely like the idea of resurrection. It was the hope of the Jews that the Messiah would lead the Jews to a military victory over the Romans, so of course his death would pose a problem. At the death of these supposed Messiahs, his followers had two choices: give up the revolution or find a new Messiah. Christianity is different. Because of the resurrection, Jesus' followers continued to believe in him. When asked how this belief sprang up, the Christians always said it was the empty tomb, noting that it was certainly the right tomb, and that they saw him alive, they talked with him, ate with him, and drank with him.

2. An empty tomb without any appearances of the victim would have been a distressing puzzle, but not a long-term problem. A vanished corpse is not a resurrection. An empty tomb proves nothing, except that the common practice of grave robbery was still in vogue. Tombs were often robbed. Nobody in the Pagan world would have interpreted the empty tomb as a resurrection; they knew that such a thing was out of the question because dead people do not come back to life. Neither would the Jews have interpreted an empty tomb as resurrection, for resurrection was not something that happened to a single individual while the rest of the world went on as normal. The disciples certainly did not expect this to happen to Jesus; they ran off scared after the crucifixion.

The empty tomb with no other unusual occurrences would not have led people to believe that Jesus was the Messiah or to imagine that the Kingdom had been inaugurated. Certainly no one would have developed so quickly and consistently a reshaped version of the Jewish hope for the resurrection of the body. Therefore, the empty tomb by itself is an insufficient condition for the early Christian belief in resurrection.

The meetings with Jesus, likewise, can be interpreted in many ways. The ancient world knew visions or appearances of recently dead people occurred. Such visions, however, did not usually involve physical contact, let alone eating or drinking. Visions are heartwarming only. What would be *our* response to this

type of report? We would question the mental balance or recent diet of the witness. People can tell visions from physical things in the real world. Just ask a former hippie. Visions are an insufficient condition for this belief. The more normal these visions were, the less chance there is that anyone would have said that the person had actually been raised from the dead. The appearances of Jesus were not normal visions; they were sustained and physical. Even if hundreds of people had the same visions or saw the same appearances, if the tomb was occupied, people would just chalk it up to grieving. Clearly, appearances by themselves are insufficient to cause belief in Jesus' resurrection.

3. Two insufficient conditions can sometimes make a sufficient one. Knowing the context of Jewish belief and the beliefs of the disciples about Jesus' mission, it is clear that if they discovered an empty tomb and if they kept meeting Jesus in ways which gave every appearance that he was no longer dead but truly alive, the belief in resurrection certainly would emerge. Not everyone in the 1st century had to believe in the resurrection when confronted with this evidence, but the empty tomb and appearances are clearly a sufficient cause for such belief to emerge.

4. Sufficient—yes, but are the empty tomb and the appearances necessary for belief in Jesus resurrection? This is more difficult to prove. People believe many strange things for many strange reasons. All that is required to demonstrate that the empty tomb plus the appearances are not a necessary condition for the rise of early Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection is the possibility that some other circumstance was equally capable of generating belief in the resurrection of Jesus. That's it. People can try to (and have tried to) invent reasons for Christianity, but remember that the meaning of resurrection within the ancient world, and within Judaism in particular, deny most of these possibilities. In addition, the biggest alternative theories proposed are, as we will see, insufficient and unnecessary to cause belief in Jesus' resurrection when laid alongside the accepted facts.

4a. Resurrection does not mean “gone to heaven” or “exalted in some way which did not involve new bodily life.” At the time of early Christianity resurrection meant embodiment, this was true for the Pagan and for the Jew. So to believe in a resurrection, the tomb must have been empty, i.e. it is a necessary condition. If the body remained in the tomb there'd be no early Christian belief of this sort since the word “resurrection” meant embodiment. The empty tomb is clearly necessary but is also insufficient by itself (see point 2 above).

4b. Is this the same with the appearances? Many have tried to conjure up different scenarios that, when added to the empty tomb, produce a sufficient condition but that do not involve actual appearances of the risen Jesus. Dreams are one such suggestion. Maybe the disciples had dreams so vivid that Jesus seemed to be thoroughly alive so the early Christians began to speak of him as alive, not dead, and little by little the language of resurrection was adopted.

Dreams of recently dead people were as common as grief itself, but the gospel stories speak of transformation and describe a physical Jesus whose body had unprecedented properties, like being able to walk through a locked door. This resurrection belief could only have been generated if the disciples believed they witnessed actual appearances of an alive Jesus. Being awake and seeing Jesus alive is clearly necessary to believe in a bodily resurrection, but it is also insufficient without an empty tomb.

When combined, however, the empty tomb and the appearances are both necessary (you can't just invent the resurrection without them) and sufficient (they are the minimum you need) for the rise of early Christianity because without them we cannot explain why this belief came into existence and took the shape it did. With them, we can explain it precisely.

5. What accounts for the empty tomb and the appearances? The early Christians said that the resurrection of Jesus accounts for these facts. Is the resurrection only one event of many that accounts for the empty tomb and the appearances and thus the emergence of Christianity, or is it the only event? To test this, we must inquire if anything else could have explained this Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection. Remember, if any alternative argument is shown to be necessary and sufficient, thus sustainable, Jesus' resurrection is not historically provable. Let's look at the possible alternatives:

One theory is called *Cognitive Dissonance*. Cognitive dissonance is the hypothetical state in which individuals or groups fail to come to terms with reality, but live in a fantasy which corresponds to their own deep longings. Its implicit force in the Easter discussion is obvious: the disciples wanted so badly to believe in Jesus that they, instead of dealing with his death, claimed that he was alive. This is probably the most commonly held position among lay thinkers because the argument makes sense in a vacuum. A terrific example of this dissonance was in the Japanese people who refused to believe that they had lost World War II and insisted, in their minds, and subsequently their lives, that they had won the war. The problem with cognitive dissonance as it relates to the resurrection is that it totally disregards the entire historical context of this debate.

No one thought a person would come back from the dead, at least not until the end of time, and certainly not just one guy, but the whole world. People did not expect this sort of thing to happen to the Messiah. The Japanese *did* think they would win the war. The disciples thought they lost! They were scarred and never figured Jesus would come to life again. This theory of course does nothing to explain the empty tomb (4), which if proven to be occupied by Jesus' body would end this fantasy world instantly. Neither does it answer numbers, 5, 10, 11, or 12—the later conversion of skeptics who were not disciples but claimed to see the risen Jesus.

The New Experience of Grace theory. It says that when Jesus died, a phenomenal feeling of forgiveness washed over the disciples which gave rise to the language of a bodily resurrection. This argument works in complete opposition to the facts. The disciples were depressed at the death of their leader. Surely this depression would not flip totally around and replace their feelings of guilt and shame with the nice feelings of forgiveness. It is similar to the first theory, but different in regard to its being actual feelings within the framework of reality. Of course, the weakness of this theory is that people usually have intensified feelings of sadness and guilt at the death of their beloved, not happiness and forgiveness for letting him die (3, 6). It, too, fails to answer the fact of the empty tomb (4) or the actual appearance conversions of others who were not Christian (11, 12).

The Unknown Tomb theory says that the body was thrown in a common pit grave unknown to the disciples, so they invented an “empty tomb” story and “created” the resurrection. This theory may solve the tomb business to those who were in on the conspiracy, but what about all the others who claimed they went to the tomb and found it empty? This theory really falls short because it runs contrary to all we know about burial practices of the 1st century (see Lavoie's *Resurrected—Tangible Evidence that Jesus Rose from the Dead*, 2000, especially chapter 4). The Jews did not want the body hanging on the cross; all scholars know it is a violation of festival etiquette to leave a dead Jew hanging on the most holy of celebrations. Even if you grant that Jesus was thrown in a common shallow grave, it still does not account for the appearances. Don't you think one of the authorities who hated Jesus would have said, “Oh, yeah, I tossed the body in a pit over there”? Yet, there are zero accounts of this sort anywhere in existence.

Also, many others, i.e. James and Paul, who were not disciples claimed to have seen the risen Jesus. This theory cannot explain that. In addition to not making sense, violating all we know about 1st century

Jewish burial, and not accounting for the appearances of Jesus to people other than the disciples, this theory also misses on the expanded counts 4-12. No one actually looking at the evidence would draw this kind of inference from the data that even the skeptical and non-Christian scholars agree with. It also violates what we know about how Romans ensured marked burial for victims of capital punishment (13).

The Wrong Tomb theory says that the women who found the empty tomb were confused and went to the wrong place. This theory would explain the supposedly empty tomb, but again fails to explain the meetings with Jesus. The arguments against this theory are the same as the ones against the unknown tomb theory, except this one only misses on counts 5-12.

The Legend theory says that the resurrection was simply a fabrication that evolved over a long period of time to vindicate a leader long since dead. This theory sounds great, but it is impossible since it takes longer than a few decades to get a legend going, and belief in the resurrection was widespread within years. Imagine if I said that JFK was miraculously raised from the dead. This cannot work since there are people still alive now who saw the president die. And JFK was 45 years ago. No one would believe such a legend could arise in just 5-20 years! Also, it fails to deal with either of the pieces of data the early church claimed as its reason for belief in the resurrection. It does not explain the empty tomb or the meetings with the risen Jesus. It misses on all 12 points of fact.

The Twin theory says that Jesus died and was buried, but shortly thereafter his long-lost identical twin brother emerged on the scene and he was worshipped as the risen Christ. This theory sounds dumb, but it actually answers more than most other theories. But what about the empty tomb? That's testable, just go find the body. What about James, the brother of Jesus converted sometime later, could he not detect subtle differences? And wouldn't Jesus' followers have noticed some differences in speech and dialect? This theory would have to entail a conspiracy to get the twin on the scene at the right time, involve an orchestrated plot to steal the body, be big enough to involve all of his followers, have the imposter be willing to hide 50 days later for 3 years, emerge from hiding all those years later to convert Paul, and hide again forever. Unlikely. Also, this conspiracy violates all we know about 1st century resurrection beliefs, entails a mad genius who could develop the greatest conspiracy of all time, and convince the disciples to die for what they knew was a lie. Many will die for what they think is the truth, but no one dies for a lie! The grand conspiracy misses on #s 4, 5, 12, and violates the facts of historical Judaism and requires its adherents to die for the lie and the star of the show to live the remainder of his life in absolute obscurity.

The Look-alike theory is the same as the Twin theory, but with a non-related imposter.

The Hallucination theory says that all those who saw Jesus were just hallucinating, either out of grief or because of drugs. Yet, people generally do not hallucinate the same thing—which James and Paul did, not to mention all the disciples and the crowds who claimed to have seen him. A hallucination can contain nothing that is not already in the mind. So, because Jewish thought did not allow for a singular resurrection before the end of time, they could not hallucinate Jesus rising from the grave. Also, hallucinations are testable and personal. People who have been high know when they are on a trip. This theory cannot hold water, because it doesn't make sense that different people at different times would have the same hallucination, and it does not explain the empty tomb (4). To shut the tripped-out disciples up, all you need is a body. Go get it and they'll know they are wrong. It also misses on 11 and 12.

The Existential Resurrection theory says that Jesus did rise, but not in history, just in our hearts. “You ask me how I know my Jesus lives, he lives within my heart.” That's nice, and true. I believe that, but I also believe that he actually rose in history, too. This is one of those theories that does not look at any of the historical facts and just decides beforehand that Jesus did not really rise from the dead. To subscribe

to this theory is to stop doing history and to close your eyes to the data and just believe something that gets you out of changing your life. How do you know he did not rise? “Oh, well, um, I, I just...He didn't.” Have you looked at the historical evidence that says he did rise? “No, I just don't think he did.” Nothing is left then to explain any of the 12 facts.

The Spiritual Resurrection theory says that only Jesus' spirit was resurrected. This is false because when 1st century people spoke of resurrection, it was always a bodily resurrection. It does not explain the empty tomb (4), the meetings (5, 11, 12), or the physical encounters Jesus had after he rose.

The Stolen Body theory says that the disciples stole the body. This violates what we know about history, mainly that the tomb was guarded, but even if it was not, this theory cannot explain the appearances of Jesus to non-disciples, or people opposed to the disciples—James and Paul (11, 12). Also, since the church was born, by this "lie," why did the disciples die for it? Many people die for what they believe in, but no one dies for what they know to be a lie. To even get this theory off the ground it must be accompanied by an even larger conspiracy which only makes the theory less likely. It also violates what we know about Roman-guarded tombs and the soldiers who guarded them.

The Authorities Hid the Body theory. Why? Especially when the church was born and false stories were going around about an empty tomb and a risen Jesus meeting with people. Why not just go take out the body and squash all this nonsense? Did they lose it once they hid it? This is very dumb. It does not explain any of the meetings (5, 11, 12) and is totally illogical.

The Swoon theory says that Jesus never really died (This is why fact # 1 is to the left of 2-12). He only fainted. The cold air of the tomb and the spices resuscitated him. So, he revives, unwraps himself, sits up, and moves the stone. Then he manages to either overpower or sneak past the guards to make his way to the disciples. And he does all this after being beaten, whipped, flogged, punched, nailed, and speared. I don't think so. There are no reputable scholars that still hold to this position.

The Passover Plot. This was a book made popular in the 1970s back about how Jesus planned to fulfill the OT prophecies of the Suffering Servant and the Ruling King through a mock death and resurrection, along with co-conspirators Joseph of Arimathea and a mysterious young man. The plan went awry when the Roman soldier speared Jesus and he actually died. So a quick substitution, and the mysterious man becomes the risen Lord. This is completely a work of fiction by a man who did not study the thought of the day, or the evidence. It is just another way to frame the conspiracy theory which has already been refuted above. It misses facts # 3, 5, 6, 11, 12.

The Jesus was an alien theory. This is, by proper definition, true. He had access to the Father's power and was an alien in a supernatural way. This sort of Star Trek argument is actually very compelling and fits all the data. I cannot disprove this theory, except to say that it was never proposed, and the resurrection was, and therefore the alien theory is less likely. Plus, I can give better arguments for the existence of the personal Christian God, than someone can give for the existence of aliens, and especially aliens who would want to dupe humanity in this way. In the end, this is just foolishness proposed to try and show that resurrection does not need to be the only solution left. But to the reasonable, thinking mind, resurrection is the only solution left, because it is the only one that fits the data, and does not require bringing into the mix new and outlandish presuppositions. Jesus was an alien of sorts, but he was also fully human.

Some may think themselves clever and say, “Well, of course any one of these alternative solutions is false, the answer is a combination.” This is not a wise strategy, however, because the likelihood of two or

more faulty alternatives working together decreases the odds exponentially of that new hybrid argument becoming the inference to the most likely position. This is because it decreases the likelihood of this hybrid being necessary, even if in some convoluted sense it is sufficient.

Any combination (which requires a conspiracy) cannot be more likely than the resurrection because of the meaning of the word and concept of resurrection during the 1st century. In addition to violating the known data, changing some of the 12 facts into possible lies, requiring the conspirators to be murdered for the lie, the combination theories can never be the inference to the most likely hypothesis because they are entirely circumstantial, having no positive evidence at all. Only the resurrection of Jesus has positive evidence for it and only the resurrection fits data. The combination theories are not necessary because the resurrection accounts for all the data, without changing any of it, and no one can show that the resurrection does not fit all the facts. To believe in any other theory besides the bodily resurrection of Jesus requires more faith than believing that God exists and that He raised Jesus from the dead.

The most likely explanation of the facts is the resurrection because it fits all the data perfectly, even if you do not believe the biblical account. No other alternative has the necessary and sufficient explanatory power as that of the resurrection. Add to all this the fact that earliest Christians say that it was the resurrection that explains the empty tomb, the appearances and their new faith, and the inference to the most likely position becomes crystal clear.

6. The resurrection is indeed a sufficient and a necessary condition for the explanation of the empty tomb and the appearances, and the rise of Christian belief. Nothing else has the power to explain the two phenomena of the empty tomb and the appearances or the other facts. True, the resurrection is improvable in mathematical sense, but so is all of history. History is the study of the unusual and unrepeatable. We seek high probability. This is done by examining all the possibilities and asking how well a theory explains the data. If the skeptics dream came true and an explanation came along that was both a sufficient and a necessary condition and it explained all the facts, the resurrection would not be historically reliable. There has been no other explanation in 2000 years. The early Christians did not invent the empty tomb and the meetings to explain their faith. Their faith came as a result of the empty tomb and the many appearances.

To suggest the early Christian belief came into existence because of some unknown factor is to stop doing history and to enter into fantasy world of our own. All the above explanations are just attempts to shore up the post-Enlightenment naturalistic worldview. In terms the kinds of proof historians normally accept, the empty tomb plus the appearances causing the early Christian belief is as watertight as you're ever going to find.

7. We've gotten this far by following the historical method and not by importing any *a priori* beliefs. The Christian belief is only explicable if we acknowledge that the early Christians all believed that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead and that this belief came about because of the empty tomb and the meetings. How can we explain the empty tomb and the appearances? The only necessary and sufficient cause, not to mention the only cause with any known evidence, is the resurrection of Jesus.

Some people think that the only way to affirm the resurrection is by shutting both eyes and flailing about in the dark. To say the tomb was empty and the meetings took place because the resurrection actually happened seems to require the suspension of all our normal language of how we know things about the past. Yet, if we were faced with some other historical problem which had brought us to a secure and interrelated pair of conclusions, and if we were looking for a fact to explain them both, and if we discovered something which explained them as thoroughly and satisfactorily as the bodily resurrection of

Jesus explains the empty tomb, the appearances, and the Christian faith in resurrection, we would accept it without a moment's hesitation.

For instance, imagine that you see an elephant in front of the mall, which is odd since elephants are rare in these parts, but then you hear a report that the traveling circus has had an escaped elephant. It does not take a genius to figure out what happened and how that elephant got there. This is how history works. You look at evidence: an elephant in front of the mall or the Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection, the empty tomb, and the appearances of Jesus after he died. You then try to find an explanation for the evidence: if you saw an elephant at the mall running and physically crashing into parked cars, you would not just think you were dreaming. If you heard a radio report that the traveling circus has an empty elephant car, you would draw the conclusion that...the elephant is a figment of your imagination and someone stole the elephant or that the radio reporter accidentally or maliciously looked at the wrong circus car? No, you'd be convinced that the elephant escaped. It is the only logical conclusion. A report that a traveling circus has an elephant escape fits the data well. So, too, Jesus actually rising from the dead fits the historical data. The early Christians actually believed in Jesus' resurrection, because it was the only logical conclusion.

These are examples of "inferences to the best explanation" or examples of the "most likely hypothesis." If Jesus was raised from the dead with a transphysical body, the empty tomb and the meetings are explained. We know that elephants can escape sometimes. What we do not know is that a truly dead person can become truly alive. Christianity doesn't suggest otherwise. The whole point is that this was the greatest miracle of all time. The early Christian understanding of Easter was not that this was likely to happen sooner or later and then it finally did. It was not that one man had more spiritual powers than anyone before him. It was not that God decided to perform a more spectacular miracle than they expected. It was not a special favor for Jesus because God liked Him best. The fact that dead people don't ordinarily rise is itself a part of the early Christian belief, not an objection to it.

The early Christians insisted that what happened to Jesus was precisely something new. The start of a whole new mode of existence, a new creation. The fact that Jesus' resurrection was, and remains without analogy, is not an objection to Christianity, but a claim of it.

Jesus' resurrection is available to historical investigation. And in regard to the investigation of the resurrection there is no neutrality. The resurrection is self-involving, you cannot say that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead with minimal involvement. If it happened, it matters. The person who affirms the resurrection is committed to living in a different world. So too, saying that Jesus was not raised is equally self-involving. The more the person looks at the question, the deeper his involvement becomes. If this is the case and there is no neutral historiography that can serve as a tribunal before which one can ask a question and receive a decision, how are we to advance?

Thomas, in John 20, came to the question of resurrection with one particular epistemology, or way of knowing. He wanted to touch Jesus. He insisted that the data must be caught within his proposed epistemological net or he would not acknowledge it as real data at all. Yet, when Jesus confronted him and invited him to touch, seeing became enough for Thomas. The confession that follows is the goal of John's gospel. Thomas yells out to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" But Jesus does not just affirm Thomas for his good confession. Instead, he offers Thomas a slight rebuke: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Modern, anti-supernatural man is too much like Thomas, insisting on hard evidence and scientific proof. Some Christians are too much like the rebuke, claiming that if you need proof, or even want it you do not

have true faith. Neither side is right. Scientific proof is impossible because science is the study of the repeatable. To study history is to study the unrepeatable. The way to determine historical proof is to draw an inference to the best explanation. The inference to the best explanation is that the elephant escaped, and Jesus actually rose from the dead. In the case of history these are inferences to things that are unrepeatable.

The question is whether the explanation of the data that the early church gave (the resurrection) explains the aggregate of the evidence (the empty tomb and the appearances) better than the alternate skepticisms. My claim is that it does.

The claim is explained in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. The bodily resurrection clearly provides a sufficient condition for the empty tomb and the meetings. No one would deny that. Once you grant that Jesus was raised from the dead, all the pieces of the historical jigsaw puzzle fall into place. That is nice, but my claim is much stronger! The bodily resurrection of Jesus is not just sufficient. It also provides the necessary condition for the empty tomb and the meetings. In other words, no other explanation could or would do to explain the data. All the efforts to find an alternative explanation fail.

Many challenge this claim. And I do not suppose that it constitutes proof of the resurrection on some neutral standpoint, but proof in the historical sense—much in the same way we can 'prove' that Washington was the first president. This claim is a challenge to other explanations and worldviews. For those who want to decide on the basis of history and evidence, the challenge is to ask what alternative account can be offered which will explain the data just as well, which can provide an alternative sufficient explanation for all the evidence and so challenge the right of the resurrection to be regarded as *the* necessary explanation?

The stupefaction of contemporary scholarship when confronted with the facts of the empty tomb, the appearances of Jesus, and the fact that belief in the resurrection came into existence at all suggests that no better rival theory is on the horizon. It is hard to deny that the resurrection is the best explanation of the facts. An intelligent and reasonable person, fully apprised of the evidence, can confidently believe that on the first Easter morning a divine miracle took place and Jesus Christ rose from the dead! Praise God, for Christ is Risen!