

Saturday, April 04, 2009

Three Questions on the Resurrection

Here are three penetrating questions for those who wish to defend the claim that Jesus rose from the dead to consider:

- 1) Do we have any physical evidence of Jesus' resurrection?
- 2) Does anyone purported to have been a witness to Jesus' resurrection claim to have seen Jesus actually rise from the dead?
- 3) Do people ever lie?

Please submit your answers and be prepared to discuss.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Christian Legends](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [6:00 AM](#)

4 Comments:

[Harold](#) said...

- 1) Not sure. How would one have evidence of such a thing?
- 2) No idea.
- 3) Is this another one of those trick questions? :-)

[April 05, 2009 7:37 PM](#)

[Robert Bumbalough](#) said...

Greetings

re: 1) Peter Kirby in "The Historicity of the Empty Tomb Evaluated: Argument from Silence" points to the silence in early Christian first century writings regarding the Empty Tomb tradition as the reason why the Christian has a burden of proof.

"It should be noted that, outside of the four gospels, all Christian documents that may come the first century mention neither tomb burial by Joseph of Arimathea nor the subsequent discovery of such a tomb as empty. Although there may have been no particular reason for any one of these writers to mention the story, it could be argued that, if they all accepted the story, perhaps one of them would have entered a discussion that would mention the empty tomb story. For example, if there were a polemic going around that the disciples had stolen the body, one of these early writers may have written to refute such accusations. In any case, it is necessary to mention these documents if only to note that there is no conflicting evidence that would show that the empty tomb story was an early or widespread tradition since the argument from silence would be shown false if there were. Here is a list of these early documents:

1. 1 Thessalonians, 2. Philippians, 3. Galatians, 4. 1 Corinthians, 5. 2 Corinthians, 6. Romans, 7. Philemon, 8. Hebrews, 9. James, 10. Colossians, 11. 1 Peter, 12. Ephesians, 13. 2 Thessalonians, 14. Jude, 15. The Apocalypse of John, 16. 1 John, 17. 2 John, 18. 3 John, 19. Didache, 20. 1 Clement, 21. 1 Timothy, 22. 2 Timothy, 23. Titus, 24.

The Epistle of Barnabas,

Indeed, outside of the four canonical gospels, the Gospel of Peter is the only document before Justin Martyr that mentions the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea or the discovery of the empty tomb. If the Gospel of Peter as it stands is considered to be dependent on the canonical gospels, then there is no independent witness to the empty tomb story told in the four gospels.”

Peter Kirby, “The Historicity of the Empty Tomb Evaluated: Argument from Silence”

http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/peter_kirby/tomb/silence.html

re: 2) There were no eye witnesses to the resurrection itself. The four accounts of post resurrection Jesus sightings cannot be harmonized. The long ending of Mark from 16:9-20 is an acknowledged interpolated appending. Thus there are no post resurrection appearances in Mark. Paul’s list of post resurrection appearances contradicts the Gospels and Acts which in turn contradict each other. The clear progression of legendary development apparent with the chronological order of writing of the Gospels indicates that the original writers had no concern with historical fact. They instead were very much interested in asserting doctrinal and theological points of significance to their faith communities.

re: 3) Randal Helms, in his book, “Gospel Fictions” notes many examples of how the Matthew, Luke, and John Gospel evangelists engaged in literary midrash by deliberately and self-consciously changing by elaborative additions to Mark’s Gospel. In the second chapter Helms points out that in three of the four canonical Gospels that the alleged final dying words of Jesus are recorded differently, and Matthew spins the words for his own purposes. I will cite the text at length as Helms is an excellent writer.

“For example, according to Matthew and Mark, the dying words of Jesus were, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” According to Luke, Jesus’ dying words were, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” But according to John they were, “It is accomplished.” To put it another way, we cannot know what the dying words of Jesus were, or even whether he uttered any; it is not that we have too little information, but that we have too much. Each narrative implicitly argues that the others are fictional. In this case at least, it is inappropriate to ask of the Gospels what “actually” happened; they may pretend to be telling us, but the effort remains a pretense, a fiction.

The matter becomes even more complex when we add to it the virtual certainty that Luke knew perfectly well what Mark had written as the dying words, and the likelihood that John also knew what Mark and perhaps Luke had wrote, but that both Luke and John chose to tell the story differently.”

Randel Helms, “Gospel Fictions” p.15-17

The Gospel writers lied. (This stuff came from my deconversion essay posted on Debunking Christianity.

[April 06, 2009 11:48 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Some very interesting points. Thanks for posting!

If I recall correctly, William Craig counts Paul as at least an implicit witness to the empty tomb. I do not remember his exact wording, but I’m pretty sure he lumped Paul in with the early witnesses of the empty tomb, saying that I Corinthians 15 implies an empty tomb. I see no mention of an empty tomb in I Corinthians 15, and to say it “implies” an empty tomb only tells me that he’s reading details he’s gotten from the gospels into the Pauline text. Obviously, if it were clear that Paul had an empty tomb in mind, one would not need to do this.

The question to ask is whether or not the passage in I Corinthians 15 can make sense without an empty tomb. If one grants validity to supernaturalism (which opens the field to one’s imagination like nothing else) as Christians want to do, why wouldn’t it? The passage says that Jesus was “buried” (but does not say how, nor does this require a tomb; it could have been a coffin or simply in the dirt), and that he “rose” three days later (in no way requiring that he left something “empty” behind).

The gospels record the stone in front of Jesus' tomb rolling away so that he could exist after he was resurrected. But in John (cf. 20:19) there's a passage which indicates that Jesus, in his resurrection body, could pass through solid walls. Why would the stone sealing the tomb need to be rolled away if the risen Jesus could pass through solid objects? It seems that both details - the rolling away of the stone before the tomb, and Jesus appearing in a room whose doors were shut - are dramatic features created by the authors to impress the reader. Many other examples of dramatic invention intended to impress readers can be found in the NT, especially in the gospels.

What I find telling is how eager Christian apologists are to count Paul's testimony in I Corinthians 15 as testimony of multiple *eyewitnesses* (note the use of the plural here). Here we have a conspicuously threadbare statement (often counted as a [creed](#) by Christians) made in passing by one individual, and all of a sudden it constitutes the testimony of *multiple* eyewitnesses. You are correct that Paul's list of post-resurrection appearances is contrary to what we read in the gospel accounts. Paul does not mention the women of course, who are central to all the gospel post-resurrection scenes, he mentions an appearance to someone named James (usually taken by Christians to mean Jesus' "brother"), which is nowhere corroborated in any other NT document (not even the epistle bearing this name in its title!), an appearance to "the twelve" (in the gospels, it is *eleven*, not twelve, because one of "the twelve" has defected), and an appearance to some 500 anonymous "brothers." Paul also nowhere tells us what any of these people saw, if in fact we are to suppose that they saw anything. He gives us no details about time or place or the circumstances in which these appearances allegedly took place. He just says that these post-resurrection appearances happened, giving us no details beyond that, save a few names. To count all this as "evidence" stretches credibility to the breaking point; to refer to it as testimony of many eyewitnesses only indicates the level of desperation behind the believer's anxiety to validate his religious confession.

Regards,
Dawson

[April 07, 2009 6:19 AM](#)

[danielj](#) said...

- 1)No physical evidence
- 2)Nope
- 3)Every last one of them

[April 07, 2009 4:17 PM](#)

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