

SESSION FOUR

COMMON OBJECTIONS
TO THE *RESURRECTION*

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EXPLANATION AND REBUTTAL^{1 2 3 4}

I. THE SWOON THEORY

A. Explanation

1. Swoon – faint with extreme emotion
2. Jesus didn't actually die, but only appeared dead
3. Jesus was simply unconscious until cool temperatures and spices revived him.

B. Rebuttal

1. Jesus unable to survive Roman torture
2. Roman soldiers were good at killing
3. Modern medical knowledge concludes His death
4. Not in Jesus' character to pretend He was raised
5. Pilate double-checked Jesus' death (Mark 15:44)
6. A "Jesus" who "suffered" only, would not have inspired martyrdom
7. Three groups were satisfied of Jesus death (Roman guards, Pilate, Sanhedrin) (Matt 27:62-66, Mark 15:42-45)

II. THEISTIC SWOON THEORY

A. Explanation

1. Muslim response to the Resurrection
2. God miraculously preserved Jesus' life on the cross. He did not die.
3. This circumvents the inevitability of Jesus' death. No matter how brutal the cross, God's ability to preserve Jesus is greater.
4. "If God can perform the grand miracle of raising Jesus from the dead, why can he not perform a lesser miracle of preserving him from death in the first place?"⁵

¹ Clay Jones, *Prepared Defense Software*, www.clayjones.net.

² Robert Cupp, "Theories of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ," in *We Believe: A Survey of Theology*, Fellowship Bible Church, NWA, 174, 176, 178.

³ Matt Slick, *Objections to Jesus' physical resurrection answered*, *Christians Apologetics and Research Ministry*, Nov. 24, 2008, accessed on 6/15/2024, <https://carm.org/doctrine-and-theology/objections-to-jesus-physical-resurrection-answered/>.

⁴ Ted Lennard, Compilation of notes and discussion from the class, *In Defense of the Resurrection*, Sean McDowell, Talbot Seminary, Biola University, 2020.

⁵ Nabeel Qureshi, *No God But One: Allah or Jesus?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2016), 171.

5. Originates from the Qur'an 4.157 that states, "That they said (in boast), 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah,' but *they killed him not, nor crucified him*, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not." [emphasis added].

B. Rebuttal

1. This gives no account of the inception of the Christian church.
2. Jesus unable to survive Roman torture
3. Modern medical knowledge concludes His death.
4. Not in Jesus' character to pretend He was raised
5. Pilate double-checked Jesus' death (Mark 15:44).

III. SUBSTITUTION THEORY

A. Explanation

1. Jesus visage was placed on another person who was crucified in His place. (Jesus' face was placed on someone else.)
2. Many state Simon of Cyrene (who literally switched places with Jesus as he was carrying the cross) or Judas Iscariot (who justly deserved the punishment for betrayal) were the substitutes for Jesus on the cross.
3. Common position among Muslims
4. Originates from the Qur'an 4.157 that states, "That they said (in boast), 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah,' but *they killed him not, nor crucified him*, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not." [emphasis added].

B. Rebuttal

1. This position cannot be easily defended.
2. "No one had ever survived a full Roman crucifixion, and had Jesus done so, that would have been a much more appealing message for the early church to proclaim than was the stumbling block of a crucified Savior."⁶

⁶ Qureshi, *No God But One: Allah or Jesus?* 182.

IV. HALLUCINATION THEORY (THE EYE WITNESSES EXPERIENCED HALLUCINATIONS)

A. Explanation

1. Hallucinations explain the sightings of Jesus.
2. Strauss described these sightings as “supposed supernatural mental revelations” that restored the disciple’s wavering faith with “the power of imagination and nervous excitement.”⁷
3. Gerd Ludemann in 20th century, described sightings as “shared hallucinatory fantasy.”⁸
4. The disciples and followers of Jesus were so emotionally involved with Jesus’ Messianic expectation that their minds projected hallucinations of the risen Lord.

B. Rebuttal

1. Hallucinations aren’t contagious; they are individual experiences (subjective and cannot be shared).
2. No documented cases of group hallucinations
3. Too many witnesses in very different moods
4. Cross-examination would have proved the delusion false (hostile witnesses would have used that against them).
5. Hallucinations rarely transform lives.
6. Does not explain the empty tomb or missing corpse
7. Hallucinations seldom last long; not forty days.
8. Jews could have pointed to the occupied tomb to prove them false.
9. Typical causal factors not present (drugs, hysteria, or deprivation of food, water, or sleep)

V. JESUS’ BODY WAS STOLEN FROM THE TOMB

A. Explanation

1. The disciples stole the body while the guards were sleeping.

B. Rebuttal

1. The enemies of Christ had no motive.
2. The disciples had no ability.

⁷ David Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus*, Vol 1 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1865), 418.

⁸ Gerd Ludemann, *The Resurrection of Christ: A Historical Inquiry*, (Amherst: Prometheus, 2004), 175-76, as quoted in John W. Bergeron and Gary R. Habermas, “The Resurrection of Jesus: A Clinical Review of Psychiatric Hypotheses for the Biblical Story of Easter,” *Iris Theological Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (2015): 157-172.

3. If the disciples stole the body, why would they die for what they knew was a lie?
4. The theft story admits that the tomb was empty.
5. Jesus taught that lying was of the devil (John 8:44).
6. If the guards were awake, there would have been a fight.
7. If the guards were asleep, how would they know what happened?
8. Matthew 28:11-15

VI. THE WOMEN WENT TO THE WRONG TOMB

A. Explanation

1. When the women went to the tomb Sunday morning, they went to the wrong one.⁹ They mistakenly identified the man as an angel and fled.

B. Rebuttal

1. The women did not come looking for an open tomb, but for a sealed one. They would certainly bypass an open tomb if they were uncertain of its location.
2. The man at the tomb responded, "He is risen."
3. The women noted the tomb's location 72 hours earlier. This commits the fallacy of special pleading (double standard) because it treats the evidence selectively.
4. Does not explain the appearances of the risen Christ
5. The Jews, Romans, and Joseph of Arimathea knew the location of the tomb and could easily have identified it as proof against any resurrection.

VII. OTHERS HAVE BEEN RESURRECTED

A. Explanation

1. Jesus' Resurrection is not that special because other divinities have been resurrected.¹⁰

B. Rebuttal

1. There are other Biblical resurrections but only Jesus didn't die again.
2. Jesus' Resurrection was more than the resurrection of a corpse.
3. Jesus is dissimilar to the gods of mythology.

⁹ Kirsopp Lake, *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), 250–253.

¹⁰ John Granger Cook, *Empty Tomb, Resurrection, Apotheosis*, (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 56-62.

VIII. CONTRADICTORY GOSPEL ACCOUNTS

A. Explanation

1. The various Gospel accounts contradict one another; therefore the entire story must be regarded as untrue.

B. Rebuttal

1. All Resurrection accounts agree on the main points.
2. Even if there were contradictions on minor points, that doesn't nullify the main points.
3. The so-called discrepancies testify to a lack of collusion.

IX. THE DISCIPLES CONSPIRED THE RESURRECTION

A. Explanation

1. The disciples conspired to lie to the world that they had seen Jesus risen from the dead.

B. Rebuttal

1. Who dies for what they know is a lie?
2. Why would the Apostles suffer torture and death?
3. After fleeing following the execution of their leader, are we to think the disciples regrouped and plotted to lie to their nation?
4. The tomb was empty (the disciples could not have lied about the Resurrection for one day unless the tomb was empty).
5. Others living could have refuted their claims.
6. Successful perjury is hard work.
7. Morally implausible runs contrary to all we know of them.

X. THE RESURRECTION IS SIMPLY A MYTH OR LEGEND

A. Explanation

1. The resurrection was a fabrication that evolved over a lengthy period to vindicate a leader long since dead.

B. Rebuttal

1. Not enough time to develop a myth¹¹

¹¹ Cook, *Empty Tomb, Resurrection, Apotheosis*, 62-63.

2. The writers say it is not a myth so that would mean they lied.
3. In myths, no party takes responsibility for the story.¹²
4. There is strong external testimony that it is not a myth.

XI. HISTORY CAN'T BE TRUSTED

A. Explanation

1. How can history be trusted? We can never know.

B. Rebuttal

1. Like historians, even scientists must rely on the testimony of others. Scientists often lack direct access to the things they study.
2. Historians reconstruct historical events. They may lack direct access to the past, but things from the past are directly accessible.
3. Testimony made by people of noble character
4. Testimony is made by eyewitnesses.
5. Testimony is made by people who willingly suffered for their testimony.
6. Paper evidence suffices for most of what humans believe.

XII. THE RESURRECTION WAS NOT CONFIRMED BY JEWS OR PAGANS

A. Explanation

1. There is absence of non-Christian testimony to the Resurrection of Christ.

B. Rebuttal

1. We would hardly expect someone to confirm the Resurrection of Christ and not be a Christian.
2. Former enemies of Christianity became Christians after the Resurrection of Christ.
3. There is significant non-Christian testimony to the life and death of Jesus Christ.
4. Jews contended the body was stolen admitting the tomb was empty after Jesus crucifixion.

¹² W. Burkert, *Mythisches Denken: Versuch einer Definition an Hand des griechischen Befundes*, in: idem, *Kleine Schriften*, 8 vols., Göttingen 2001-2011, 4, 42-65 as discussed in Cook, *Empty Tomb, Resurrection, Apotheosis*, 63.

XIII. OTHER OBJECTIONS TO THE RESURRECTION

- A. Hyper-suggestibility
- B. Miracles can't happen.
- C. No absolute certainty
- D. Non-Christians also die for their beliefs.
- E. Only faith matters.
- F. Requires unusual evidence
- G. There was a twin brother of Jesus.
- H. Jesus actually appeared only in a vision.
- I. Jesus appeared to believers only – those expecting a resurrection.
- J. The real story was suppressed.
- K. The gardener removed the body (The Lettuce Theory).

