

Seeker Study Series

Introduction

We are going to begin a three week study that will address some of the major questions people have about Christianity. The first topic will address the question of “Whether the New Testament is reliable as a historical record”. If it is, it will provide the “data” which we can use to address two other critical questions: 1) Was Jesus Christ God? and 2) Did Jesus rise from the dead? At the end of this study, you will be challenged to read the Gospel of John and the book of Romans to learn directly from the Bible what you must do to experience “life to the fullest” in both an earthly and eternal sense. However, you are encouraged now to begin reading the Gospel of John since critical information for the second and third studies are contained in that document; a more detailed reading can follow.

The logical order of our study in conclusive terms follows:

1. If the New Testament is historically reliable, then we can use it as a source of historical information about Jesus’ life and death.
2. The information says Jesus was(is) God.
3. The information says Jesus rose from the dead to prove he was God.
4. The information says Jesus taught about an eternal life either with God (heaven) or without God (hell).
5. The information tells us what we must do to experience “life to the fullest” on earth while ensuring an eternity in God’s presence

Specifically the studies are:

1. Is the New Testament historically reliable?
2. Was Jesus Christ God?
3. Did Jesus rise from the dead?

Is the New Testament Historically Reliable?

Seeker Study Series Week 1

The words of the New Testament (NT) have literally changed the course of history. Few books can make that claim. Indeed, virtually all aspects of Western civilization have been affected by the words contained in the NT documents. Certainly if you wish to have a foundational understanding of law, morality, politics, and life issues in general, the NT provides a critical entry point.. If you have not read the NT then why not start now. You do not have to approach the NT as being the “infallible word of God” but rather a first step to the big issues of origin, meaning, morality, and destiny; approach it in a purely historical light.

What constitutes the New Testament?

The NT is made of 27 books written by probably 10 different authors. Virtually all scholars agree that the 27 books were written sometime in the first century. The books and pertinent data are as follows:

<u>Book</u>	<u>Author/ Vocation</u>	<u>Approx Date</u> <u>* Written</u>	<u>Book</u>	<u>Author/ Vocation</u>	<u>Approx Date</u> <u>Written</u>
Matthew	Matthew/Tax collector	60's AD	1 Timothy	Paul	63
Mark	Mark/Disciple of Peter	50's	2 Timothy	Paul	66
Luke	Luke/Physician	60	Titus	Paul	65
John	John/Fisherman	85-90	Philemon	Paul	61
Acts	Luke	61	Hebrews	Unknown	64-68
Romans	Paul/Scholar	60	James	James/Fisherman	49
1 Corinthians	Paul	56	1 Peter	Peter/Fisherman	63
2 Corinthians	Paul	57	2 Peter	Peter/Fisherman	66
Galatians	Paul	49	1 John	John/Fisherman	90
Ephesians	Paul	61	2 John	John/Fisherman	90
Philipians	Paul	61	3 John	John/Fisherman	90
Colossians	Paul	61	Jude	Jude/Unknown	70-80
1 Thessalonians	Paul	51	Revelation	John/Fisherman	90's
2 Thessalonians	Paul	51			

*Dates taken from the Ryrie Study Bible, 1976, Moody Bible Institute.

Three basic principles of historiography:

To determine the historical accuracy, reliability, and authenticity of any writing of antiquity, three historiographic tests can be performed. They are the bibliographic test, the internal evidence test, and the external evidence test. Let's put the NT to these tests just as we would to any other ancient writing.

The bibliographical test

Definition: examination of the textual transmission by which documents reach us. In other words, not having the original documents, how reliable are the copies we have in regard to the number of manuscripts (MSS) and the time interval between the original and extant (existing) copy.

1. Numbers of manuscripts

In all of ancient Greek and Latin literature, the Iliad by Homer ranks next to the New Testament in the greatest number of manuscripts in existence.

There are in existence over 5000 complete or partial Greek manuscripts of the New Testament (the original language in which it was written). In total, there are over 24,000 extant manuscripts of the complete NT or portions of it, if copies in different languages

are included. Notice in the following table some of the distinctives of the NT when compared to one of the most reliable writings in ancient literature, the Iliad.

<u>Work</u>	<u>When Written</u>	<u>Earliest copy</u>	<u>Timespan</u>	<u>No. of copies</u>	<u>Accuracy of copy</u>
Homer (Iliad)	900 BC	400 BC	500 yr.	643	95%
NT	40-100 AD	125 AD	25 yr.	5000	99+%

Bruce Metzger, textual scholar, has compared the accuracy of the NT to that of other works of antiquity using various textual tests. He has determined that of the 15,600 lines in the Iliad, 764 of them are in question while of the 20,000 lines of the NT, 40 are in doubt (about 400 words). These are the accuracy figures in the table. Furthermore, none of the questionable words profoundly affects the message of the NT text.

2. Interval of time between original and extant copy.

Was the time between when the events occurred and their writing of them so long that it resulted in alterations in oral tradition i.e. folklore?

To test this we need to compare the time interval between the earliest copies of the writing in existence and when they were actually written. How does the NT compare with other literature? We will look at only a few main examples.

<u>Author</u>	<u>Works</u>	<u>When Written</u>	<u>Earliest Copy</u>	<u>Time Span</u>	<u>No. of Copies</u>
Caesar	Gallic Wars	100-44 BC	900 AD	1000 yr.	10
Livy	Roman History	59 BC-17 AD	-		20
Plato	Teratologies	427-347 BC	900 AD	1200 yr.	7
Tacitus	Annals	100 AD	1100 AD	1000 yr.	20
Pliny the Younger	History	61-113 AD	850 AD	750 yr.	7
Thucydides	History	460-400 BC	900 AD	1300 yr.	8
Aristotle		384-322 BC	1100 AD	1400 yr.	49

Compare these data with those in the first table and you will see that the earliest portion of the NT (John Ryland Manuscript, see below) is only about 25 years after the last book of the NT was completed. No other work of antiquity even comes close. Could this brief time span be enough to weave a web of folklore about Jesus such that the copies we have are a "second tier" of a "Jesus Myth". It seems unlikely. Scholars agree that for folklore to take root and grow, a lengthy period of many generations must occur between when events happen and their eventual oral alterations and subsequent written form. This used to be a popular theory purported by F.C. Baur at the German Tübingen School who dated the NT writings into the second century. However, finding the John Ryland manuscript which contains portions of the gospel of John and is dated at 117-138 AD has settled that issue. There is virtually no debating that the NT books were all written before 100 AD making the time span between the events (Jesus' death around 30 AD) and their writing little more than one generation later (one generation is generally considered about 40 years). Consider further that no "first tier" manuscripts exist, i.e. no manuscripts are in existence that present purely a "historical figure" named Jesus. Rather the Gospels present both the historical and divine Jesus; there are no other "tiers", no other manuscripts that begin to weave in some type of folklore. That the NT is mythical, is a virtual impossibility given the time constraints.

The internal evidence test

Definition: Is the written record credible and to what extent? i.e. does it tell the truth?

1. The writers (witnesses) were near the events both geographically and chronologically.

Luke 1:1-3
2 Peter 1:16
1 John 1:3
John 19:35
Luke 3:1

So you might conclude that this certifies the accuracy of what the witness retained and wrote down. However, it does not address the issue of possible falsehoods propagated by the witness, whether conscientiously or unconsciously. How do we deal with this? See the next point.

2. The NT accounts of Jesus' life were being circulated within the lifetimes of those alive at the time of his life. People could have either confirmed or denied the accuracy of the accounts. The writers of the NT spoke of the events of Jesus' life as common knowledge and even appealed to the people's experience of Jesus' life.

Acts 2:22
Acts 26:24-28

The external evidence test

Definition: Other historical material that either confirms or denies the internal testimony of the documents themselves. i.e. what sources are there apart from the literature under analysis, that substantiates its accuracy, reliability, and authenticity?

1. Josephus (37-100 AD)-a Jewish historian and contemporary of Christ wrote:

"the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ, whose name was James" (Antiquities XX 9:1)

"At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus...Pilate condemned him to be condemned and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders (Antiquities XVIII.33, Arabaic text)

2. Cornelius Tacitus (55-117 AD)-Roman historian wrote of Nero and his attempt to relieve himself of the guilt of burning Rome:

"Hence to suppress the rumor he falsely charged with guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also. (Annals XV.44)

3. Eusebius

a historian who preserved the writings of Papias, bishop of Heierapolis (130 AD) wrote:

"The Elder (Apostle John) used to say this also: 'Mark, having been the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately all that he [Peter] mentioned, whether saying or doing of Christ, not, however in order. For he was neither a hearer nor a companion of the Lord; but afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who adapted his teachings as necessity required, not as though he were making a compilation of the sayings of the Lord. So then Mark made no mistake, writing down in this way some things as he mentioned them;

for he paid attention to this one thing, not to omit anything that he had heard, not to include any false statement among them”. (Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 39).

4. Irenaeus

Irenaeus was Bishop of Lyons (180 AD) and a student of Polycarp who was Bishop of Smyrna. Polycarp had been a Christian for 86 years and was a disciple of John the Apostle. Irenaeus wrote:

“Matthew published his gospel among the Hebrews in their own tongue, when Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel in Rome and founding the church there. After their departure, Mark the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing the substance of Peter’s preaching. Luke the follower of Paul, set down in a book the gospel preached by his teacher. Then John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned on his breast himself produced his gospel, while he was living at Ephesus in Asia. (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 3.1.1.)

Archeological Evidence

There is a tremendous amount of archeological evidence that supports the historical reliability of the NT. Two examples will be given here.

1. In John 5 we read about Jesus healing a cripple at the pool of Bethesda. The text says (John 5:2) "Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda". Furthermore, the text describes the pool as being "surrounded by five covered colonnades". Archeological digs in Jerusalem are extremely difficult for two reasons 1) Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. to quench a Jewish revolt and the city was rebuilt over the old and 2) the high density of people in Jerusalem today exacerbates the problem. Nonetheless in 1888, a group of archeologist digging in the northeast corner of the old city near St. Anne's Church uncovered the pool of Bethesda right where it is predicted in the Gospel of John. The five colonnades as described by John are plainly seen.
2. Before 1961 all historical references to Pontius Pilate, who condemned Jesus to death, were believed to be due to the fact that the Gospels referred to him. In other words there were no archeological findings referring to Pontius Pilate. Then two Italian archeologists excavated the Mediterranean port city of Ceasarea. During the dig they uncovered a two-by-three foot inscription in Latin. The inscription read, "Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea, has presented the Tiberium to the Ceasareans". This was the first archeological discovery of a historical reference to the existence of Pontius Pilate.

These and other data (not presented) provide very strong evidence that the writings in the NT as we have them now are accurate, reliable, and authentic. The natural conclusion is that they are trustworthy as a source of Jesus’ life and teaching. The great classical scholar Sir Fredric Kenyon wrote:

“The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us as substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.”

Questions

1. If the writers of the NT were perpetuating a myth, what was their motive?

2. What are some elements of myths that you have read? Style? From what you know about the NT does it have the same type of elements?
3. Should there be a different standard for judging the authenticity and reliability of the NT compared to other ancient writings? Why or Why not?
4. Based on the information presented do you think it supports the claim that the NT is historically reliable?

References

Data and quotes cited were obtained from five main sources:

1. McDowell, Josh. Is the Bible Reliable *in A Ready Defense*, 1993, pg. 42-56, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN.
2. McDowell, Josh. Are the Biblical Records Reliable *in More Than A Carpenter*, 1977, pg. 41-59, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL.
3. Geisler, Norman L. The Historical Reliability of the New Testament *in Christian Apologetics*, 1976, pg. 305-329, Baker Book House Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI.
4. Kreeft, Peter and Ronald K. Tacelli. The Bible: Myth or History *in Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, 1994, pg. 199-223, Intersivarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL
5. Bruce, F.F. The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?, 1985, Intersivarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL

Was Jesus Christ God?

Seeker Study Series Week 2

Last time we investigated the evidence for the historical accuracy, reliability and authenticity of the New Testament. It became clear that comparing the NT to any other writing of antiquity showed it to be accurate, reliable, and authentic. This conclusion allows us to look at the information in the NT documents and ask the question “Was Jesus Christ God?”. We will look at what Jesus said about himself and what others said about him. Let’s try to minimize our preconceived notions about who Jesus was and “let the historical data speak” ; we can then sort through a conclusion on the matter. If you conclude that the information does not support Jesus being God, then you still must decide who or what he was. There are basically only five alternatives for Jesus’ identity; he was either Lord, Liar, Lunatic, Myth, or Guru. We will explore these possibilities also.

New Testament Data for Christ’s claim to Divinity-from himself

Mark 2:5-12
John 8:58-59
John 10:30-33
Mark 14:60-64

There are many other instances where Jesus claims the attributes of God. In addition, Jesus’ claim to be the “Son of God” in many instances is equal to saying “of the same nature as God”.

New Testament Data for Christ’s claim to Divinity-from others

John 1:1,14
John 20:28
Colossians 2:9
Titus 2:13

There are many other instances in the New Testament where Jesus is equated with God.

A Bottom-Line Argument

The NT data strongly bear out that not only Jesus but others believed He was God. If this is not convincing enough for you, consider the following argument that draws on the primary data contained in the NT documents. The bottom line on the argument for Christ’s divinity is as follows:

1. Jesus was either Lord, liar, lunatic, guru, or myth.
2. He could not possibly be a liar, lunatic, guru, or myth.
3. Therefore “Jesus is Lord” (the earliest Christian creed).

Let’s consider each of these alternatives separately.

The Dilemma: Lord or Liar?

This is one of the oldest approaches used by Christians to demonstrate Christ’s divinity. Christians say of Jesus “either God or a bad man”. The argument goes like this:

1. Jesus was either God (if he did not lie about who he was) or a bad man (if he did).
2. But Jesus was not a bad man.
3. Therefore Jesus was (is) God.

To disprove this argument either premise 1 or 2 must be proved false. Few would challenge the second premise. So non-Christians must challenge the first. What justifies this premise?

Common sense. A liar is not a good man and if Jesus claimed to be God and if in fact he was not, then he lied about his essential identity. The argument that Jesus was a “good man” if he knowingly lied is offensive to anyone with a sense of logic.

Question: What are some characteristics of a liar.

Other points to consider why Jesus could not be a liar:

1. Because he has the wrong psychological makeup. He was unselfish not selfish. A liar by nature is selfish and lacks the characteristics of unselfishness.
2. Because there is no conceivable motive for his lie.
3. Because he could not have hoped that this “lie” would be successful, for the Jews were the least likely people in the world to have worshipped a man, and Jesus, as a Jew, would have known that.

The Trilemma: Lord, Liar, or Lunatic?

Perhaps Jesus was neither God nor a liar. Perhaps he sincerely believed he was God. Maybe he was not morally bad, i.e. a liar (he did not deliberately deceive people) but rather he was mentally bad, i.e. a lunatic (he was deceived himself). But Jesus’ character was not that of a lunatic.

Question: What are some characteristics of a lunatic?

Why Jesus could not be a lunatic:

1. Because the psychological profiles are opposite. Lunatics typically lack practical wisdom, tough love, and unpredictable creativity. Jesus possessed all these things.
2. When we meet a lunatic we are uncomfortable because we feel superior to him; when his enemies met Jesus they were uncomfortable for the opposite reason.
3. No Jew could sincerely think Jesus was God but clearly some did (i.e. the apostles). They would have seen right through him for Jews, of all people on earth, were able to distinguish the Creator (God) from the creature (man).
4. Lunatics or “Madmen” typically do things in private but all that Jesus did was out in the open. In fact Jesus asked his critics to investigate his life and actions since it was lived out in public. There was not a cultic, secretive aspect to Jesus and his ministry to people.

If the liar and lunatic hypotheses are rejected then only the Lord hypothesis is left. However, the modern skeptic may add another hypothesis since the previous three hypotheses assumed that *Jesus claimed* divinity. They answer, “Suppose he didn’t. Suppose his claim is a myth in the sense of fiction. Suppose the liar is not Jesus but the New Testament documents”.

The Quadrilemma: Lord, Liar, Lunatic, or Myth?

This is by far the greatest reason given by intellectuals for rejecting Christianity. They say that textual scholarship has reduced the NT to a mangled mess of myth. Today’s skeptics say “that Jesus is just like Buddha being a god. Buddha claimed to be only a supremely enlightened man but overdone hero worship divinized him. The same thing happened to this person named Jesus”. It would not seem possible in light of our last study on the New Testament texts. They are historically accurate, reliable, and authentic as previously laid out in detail. Let’s clearly lay out the reasons why the myth hypothesis is impossible.

1. If the same neutral, objective, scientific approach is used on the NT texts as issued on all other ancient documents, then the texts prove remarkably reliable.
2. The state of the manuscripts is very good. Besides the massive number of manuscripts there are very few discrepancies between the 5000 or so copies and no really important ones.
3. A critical point: If Jesus' divinity is a myth invented by later generations then there must have been at least 2 or 3 generations between the original eyewitnesses of the historical Jesus and the universal belief in this mythical, divinized Jesus. This must be so because the myth never could have been believed as fact since it could be refuted by eyewitnesses. The only problem with this view is that all the NT documents were written in the first century. There was literally no time to create a myth.
4. If a mythic "layer" had been added later onto an originally merely human Jesus, we should find some evidence of this earlier layer. No such evidence exists in any writing of antiquity. The Gospels are not the second layer, the myth layer, they are the only layer.
5. The style of the Gospels is not the style of myth but rather that of an eyewitness account. The Gospels are filled with little details of people and places. If the Gospels are a myth, this means that these writers invented modern realistic fantasy (a sort of literary "911") over 1900 years ago.
6. The claim of Jesus to be God makes sense of his trial and crucifixion. He had no political aspirations. Such a lie was invoked by the Jews to cover the real charge of having claimed to be God.
7. There are four Gospels not just one. Written by four different authors, at four different times, with a view to probably four different audiences. This would be quite remarkable if Jesus was only a myth.
8. If the divine Jesus of the Gospels is a myth, who invented it? If it was the first disciples or some later generation, no possible motive can account for their invention. People were tortured, persecuted, and martyred for believing Jesus was God. To knowingly die for a myth is at worst tragic, at best stupid.
9. First-Century Jews and Christians were not prone to believe myths.
10. Finally, anyone who reads the Gospels with an open mind, may well conclude in their heart, "no mere man could have possibly invented this story".

The Quintilemma: Lord, Liar, Lunatic, Myth or Guru?

You might say at this point, okay, the Gospels tell the truth that Jesus was divine so he could not be a liar, lunatic, or myth. But maybe you say "Jesus never meant for us to understand him literally, but rather in a mystical way. We should not interpret his claim to divinity in a Western, Jewish, or Christian sense but rather in a Eastern, Hindu, or Buddhist sense. We are all gods and Jesus knew he was one. He was one of those spiritual masters or gurus who had traveled the road to Nirvana and reached it. He may simply have been one of the most enlightened gurus of all time".

There is one major problem with this hypothesis. Jesus was a Jew. To see Jesus as a Hindu is to uproot his Jewishness. It would be a complete uprooting of his identity. The chasm between religious Judaism and the teaching of gurus and their Eastern equivalents is enormous. If Jesus was some type of guru he was the worst teacher of all time because no one understood what he said; and this has been going on for almost 2000 years. Here are eight contradictions between Jesus' Judaism and the universal teaching of all gurus.

1. Judaism is a public religion of collective observance of a public law (Torah) and belief in a public book (Scriptures). Gurus teach a private, individual, inner experience that can't be communicated by words. See John 18:20-21 and determine if you think it is a rabbi talking or a guru.
2. Eastern gurus believe in pantheism, i.e. we and everything else in the world is God. Judaism says that God is distinct from the world.
3. Eastern gurus teach that you are to empty your mind and become one with everything. Judaism teaches that you are to fill your mind with God and his laws.
4. Eastern gurus teach that time and history are ultimately unreal, illusory, projections of unenlightened consciousness; they want to look away from time or back. Judaism says that time and matter are real because God created them; Jews look at time and forward. Judaism is rooted in history while Eastern religions are "rooted" in timelessness.
5. Gurus believe God is unknowable, except wordlessly in mystical experience. Jews believe God made himself known publicly in deed and words.
6. Gurus teach that God is passive; we find him, not he finds us. For Jews, God is active; he finds us, not we find him.
7. The Jewish God has a will, established laws, and communicates preferences; he is moral, holy. The pantheistic God of the gurus has no will, no law, and no preferences; he is amoral, nondiscriminating.
8. Gurus teach that God does not judge. They say there is no sin, no separation from God, no hell, for God is the All. Judaism teaches an eternal ultimate justice and judgment from God, the possibility of eternal separation from God. Jesus clearly taught the way of Judaism.

You may say "but Jesus was just misunderstood by both his friends and enemies. He was trying to teach them but they just didn't get it. He still was an 'enlightened master'". One major problem: Jesus was then the worst teacher of all time. An "enlightened master" who can't teach appears to be a contradiction.

Question: Do you know of any gurus? What are they like? What do they teach?

A summary of the argument:

- I. Jesus claimed divinity
 - A. He meant it literally
 1. It is true _____ Lord
 2. It is false
 - a. He knew it was false _____ Liar
 - b. He didn't know it was false _____ Lunatic
 - B. He meant it nonliterally, mystically _____ Guru
- II. Jesus never claimed divinity _____ Myth

References

Most of these arguments were taken from:

Kreeft, Peter and Ronald K. Tacelli. *The Divinity of Christ in Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, 1994, pg. 150-174, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL

Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?

Seeker Study Series Week 3

We are at the last of our studies on three key questions surrounding Christianity. We now come to an absolutely critical topic: “Did Jesus rise from the dead?” If this can be shown to be false then Christians all over the world might as well back up their spiritual suitcases and go home. With no resurrection of Jesus there is no Christianity. It rises and falls on this one fact. The resurrection sharply distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. The bones of Abraham, Mohammed, Buddha, and Confucius are still here on earth. But Christians believe Jesus’ tomb is empty.

A reasonable challenge to the skeptic is this: If it can be proved that Jesus really rose from the dead, will you believe in him? The resurrection, if true, provides a concrete, factual, empirical proof that life has hope and meaning. If the resurrection did not occur then we are cosmic orphans, abandoned to wallow in obscurity along with 6 billion other people. Is there a proof for the resurrection of Jesus? There is and it is rooted in the historical data of the NT.

The Argument for the Resurrection: Five Possible Theories

Let’s first define what is meant by resurrection. It literally means “the standing up of the corpses.” The resurrection of Jesus did not involve a ghost, resuscitation (out of body experience), reincarnation, vision, legend, or myth. It was the raising up of a man’s corpse, completely dead for three days, which retained the personality and identity of Jesus. It was not arriving at Nirvana as the Eastern religions would suggest since there was no loss of personal individuality into the One or All which is by definition the sought after Nirvana.

What happened then on that first Easter morning? Or more specifically, what theory can account for data contained in the NT texts and the fact that a Christian religion exists today? There are five possibilities as diagrammed below.

Jesus died	Jesus rose		1. Christianity
	Jesus didn’t rise	the apostles were deceived	2. Hallucination
		the apostles were myth-makers	3. Myth
		the apostles were deceivers	4. Conspiracy
Jesus didn’t die			5. Swoon

These are the only possibilities unless you want to invoke some type of flying saucer and Martian theory or some such thing. Given these theories Christians certainly admit that the resurrection is not directly observable, but the data are directly observable. If the data refute theories 2-5 then we will have proved the truth of the resurrection.

Refutation of the Swoon Theory (Jesus did not really die but resuscitated)

1. Jesus could not have survived crucifixion. Roman law even laid the death penalty on any soldier who botched up a crucifixion. Soldiers simply would not fail at this point.
2. The fact that the Roman soldier did not break Jesus’ legs (John 19:31-33) means the soldier was sure that he was dead.

3. John an eyewitness saw blood and water come from Jesus' pierced side (John 19:34-35). If the spear in his side did not kill him then the massive internal injuries as evidenced by the blood and water did (likely by asphyxiation). See "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ" (Journal of the American Medical Association-JAMA, (1986) 255:1455-1463) for a detailed description of the physiological consequences of death by crucifixion through the eyes of physicians.
4. The body was totally encased in winding sheets and entombed. The body was apparently wrapped in 100 pounds of spices as was the custom (John 19:38-42)..
5. The postresurrection appearances convinced the disciples that Jesus was alive (John 20:19-29). To fearlessly worship a half-dead, staggering sick man and refer to him as God would be strange indeed.
6. How were the Roman guards overpowered by a swooning corpse?
7. How could a swooning half-dead man have moved the great stone at the door of the tomb? Who moved the stone if not an angel? No skeptic has ever answered this question.
8. If Jesus awoke from a swoon, where did he go? With a past like Jesus' you would expect to find some data on his post-death life. There is none.
9. Most simply, the Swoon theory turns into the Conspiracy theory or the Hallucination theory because the disciples testified that Jesus did not swoon but really died.

Refutation of the Conspiracy Theory

Why couldn't the disciples have made up the whole story?

1. There is no evidence from any historical data that the resurrection was a fake, a lie, or a deliberate deception. Even under the most extreme of torture, not one of the twelve Apostles, as far as can be known, "let the cat out of the bag" that the whole resurrection story was a hoax. The human heart would seem to be too fickle to imagine that not one of the twelve would explain the hoax, if indeed it was such.
2. If the Apostles made up the story they were some of the most brilliant, creative, and clever writers in all of history to produce such an enduring story.
3. The character of the disciples argues against a conspiracy. They were honest, simple, common peasants. They willingly died for their "conspiracy". Nothing proves sincerity like martyrdom. How can you explain their radical transformation from fearful fisherman to bold proclaimers of the resurrection, if it were not true. There is an effect, what then is the cause?
4. What was the motive for their lie? To be tortured, burned, boiled alive, sawn in two, fed to lions? Some motive! Many have died for a lie without knowing it to be true (Jim Jones' followers) but to knowingly die for a lie is a different matter.
5. If the resurrection was a hoax, the Jews needed to only produce the corpse and that would have been the end of it. The Jews and Romans were in this together so getting the body would not have been a problem. If the disciples stole the body, how in the world would unarmed fisherman and peasants overpower the Roman guard, move the stone, and take the body? A Roman guard consisted of 4 to 16 men and each man was trained to protect six feet of ground; these were not countryside peasants but battle hardened Roman soldiers.

6. If it was a conspiracy, the disciples never would have gotten away with proclaiming the resurrection in Jerusalem—a place full of eyewitnesses to the events—if it was a lie. They even proclaimed it in the face of their enemies who apparently knew it to be true.
7. Why wasn't the conspiracy unearthed by the enemies of the disciples and exposed? The Jew's explanation that the disciples stole the body does not hold up in light of point 5 above.

Refutation of the Hallucination Theory

If you saw a dead man walking around wouldn't you think you were hallucinating rather than seeing correctly? Why couldn't this have been the case with those who thought they saw Jesus. There are at least twelve reasons.

1. There were too many witnesses. Hallucinations are private, individual, and subjective. Jesus was seen by numerous people including 500 at one time (I Cor. 15:3-8)! This fact was a cornerstone to why the apostle Paul did what he did. Anyone doubting what he was saying about the resurrection could have found one or more of the 500 and asked them directly!
2. The witnesses were qualified. They had firsthand knowledge of the facts.
3. The 500 people saw Jesus together, at the same time and place (I Cor 15:3-8). 500 separate Elvis sightings could be dismissed, but if 500 simple fishermen walked, touched, and talked with him at the same time and place that would be a different matter.
4. Hallucinations usually last a few seconds or minutes; rarely hours. This one hung around for 40 days (Acts 1:3)!
5. Hallucinations usually happen only once, except for the insane. This one returned many times, to ordinary people (John 20:19-21:14, Acts 1:3)
6. Hallucinations come from within, from what we already know, at least unconsciously. This one said and did surprising and unexpected things (Acts 1:4,9)—like a real person and unlike a dream.
7. Hallucinations do not eat. The resurrected Christ did, on at least two occasions (Luke 24:42-43, John 21:1-14).
8. The disciples touched him (Matt. 28:9, Luke 24:39, John 20:27).
9. The disciples spoke with him, and he spoke back. Can a hallucination hold profound, extended conversation?
10. The apostles could not have believed in the "hallucination" if Jesus' corpse had still been in the tomb. All they would have to do is check for the corpse. If it was there they could not have believed in the "hallucination".
11. If the apostles had hallucinated and then spread their hallucinogenic story, the Jews would have stopped it by producing the body of Jesus—unless the disciples had stolen it, in which case we are back to the conspiracy theory and all its difficulties.
12. A hallucination would explain only the postresurrection appearances; it would not explain the empty tomb, the rolled-away stone, or the inability to produce the corpse.

Refutation of the Myth Theory

Many of these arguments refuting the Swoon, Conspiracy, and Hallucination theories are as old as the second and third centuries. Many skeptics will argue that the resurrection didn't occur by bringing up one

of these theories or modified version; others simply realize that these theories don't support the data so they have used another approach. Their counterattack which is by far the most popular today, is to try and escape the traditional dilemma of the disciples being "deceivers" (conspirators) or "deceived" (hallucinators) by interpreting the Gospels as myth; i.e. the Gospels are spiritually or symbolically true not historically. This view discounts the historical accuracy, reliability, and authenticity of the NT texts. So we are back to arguing about the NT documents. Let's recount the reasons why these documents are not some myth, loaded with folklore but rather point to a Jesus and his resurrection at a specific time and place in history.

1. The style of the Gospels is radically and clearly different from the style of all the myths. It does not contain the elements in say an "Alice in Wonderland". It contains small details of personal actions and character. The Gospels contain depth if you will; fully bearing the marks of eyewitness accounts. For a comparison of myths written near the time of the Gospels see the so-called "Gospel of Peter" (125 AD) which contains images of men with their heads protruding into the clouds and a talking cross; notice that this myth never took root, probably because it was too close to the actual events (see below). Also see the story of "Apollonius of Tyana" (220 AD) by Flavius Philostratus for another example of myth from this era.
2. There was not enough time for myth to develop. The Gospels were simply written too close to the actual event to have come about by myth. There was no time for a myth to take root and if a mythic version was being proclaimed it would easily be discredited by eyewitnesses of the events.
3. The myth theory has two layers. The first layer is the historical Jesus, who was not divine, did not claim divinity, performed no miracles and did not rise from the dead. The second, later, mythologized layer is the Gospels as we have them, with a Jesus who claimed to be divine, performed miracles and rose from the dead. The problem with this theory is simply that there is not the slightest bit of any real evidence whatever for the existence of any such first layer. The Gospels we have is the only layer!
4. In distinguishing the Gospels from myth, note that the first witnesses of the resurrection were women. Women in first-century Judaism had no legal right to serve as witnesses. If someone was going to start a myth and invent the legend of the resurrection, they never would have started it with women witnesses. The Gospel writers simply reported what happened and that was Jesus first appearing to women after he rose from the dead.
5. The NT could not be myth misinterpreted and confused with fact because it specifically distinguishes the two and repudiates the mythic interpretation (see 2 Peter 1:16).
6. The textual arguments including the bibliographic test, internal evidence test, and external evidence test all attest to the historical accuracy, reliability, and authenticity of the NT documents (see Study 1).

Conclusions

These are the arguments. With the massive amount of historical evidence to support that the resurrection occurred the skeptic must ask himself whether he can truly neglect the resurrection. To paraphrase Pascal "you cannot destroy eternity by neglecting it" and so playing on this thought, we say, "you cannot destroy the fact of the resurrection by neglecting it". To disbelieve the resurrection means that you are willing to make an exception to the rules you use everywhere else in history. You must commit a type of intellectual euthanasia to reject it. The implications of the resurrection are staggering not only for this life but the one to come.

The challenge to you now is this: read the NT texts in detail and find out directly from them what God is like, what man is like, and what you must do to ensure an eternity with God rather than without him. Start at the Gospel of John and then read the Book of Romans. To read these through with someone who can

answer your questions will also be helpful. Take up the challenge today. An eternal destiny, yours, lies in answering the question “What does God want me to do with Jesus?” The NT tells us. Read it and find out for yourself rather than take someone’s word for it.

Questions

1. Pascal wrote “if Jesus did not rise, who made the apostles act as they did?”. Can you answer it?
2. Imagine a later writer claiming that Socrates, Buddha, Mohammed, Solomon or Michael Jordan claimed divinity. How would that be different from the case of Christ?
3. In your opinion, what is the most convincing positive or negative argument outlined in this study that supports the contention that “Jesus rose from the dead”?
4. Have you ever read the Gospel accounts of the death and resurrection of Christ? If not, why? What do you think it says about your preconceived notions concerning Christianity?

References

The majority of this material is from Kreeft and Tacelli.

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