



A Ready Defense

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Resurrection Apologetics

By Rev Tony Breeden

And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching in vain, and your faith is also vain. And if Christ be not raised, your faith is in vain, ye are yet in your sins. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. ...what doth it profit me if the dead rise not?

Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die.

(I Corinthians 15:14, 16, 19 & 29b)

Introduction:

There have always been those who attack the Christian faith. In recent years, Christians have had to contend with the Gospel of Thomas [a heretical Gnostic work promoted by the Jesus Seminar, a group of skeptics who promote the idea that the Bible must be stripped of miraculous references like the Resurrection so that we can find the "true, historical" Jesus], the Gospel of Judas [another heretical apocryphal work which promoted the idea that Judas Iscariot betrayed Christ at Jesus' request and that the Gospels twisted this], the Da Vinci Code [a fictional novel by Dan Brown which promotes a Gnostic view of Christianity and the heretical idea that Jesus Christ married Mary Magdalene] and the so-called Tomb of Jesus [promoted in a documentary by a noted Hollywood film producer, conveying the heretical view that Christ married Mary Magdalene, that they had a son together, and that they were buried together, an idea which would rule out the Ascension]. Interestingly enough, these attacks and arguments are not new.

To answer such heresies, the Church has always had its apologists. Apologetics is a branch of theology dedicated to providing reasons to believe and to the defense of the Gospel. The word 'apologetics' comes from the Greek work *apologia*, meaning 'defense'.

This series cannot cover all of the Apologetic Arguments concerning the Resurrection, but we can cover a few. Specifically, we will view arguments for Jesus' Historical Existence, Actual Physical Death & Literal Bodily Resurrection. You can judge the evidence for yourself.

How To Use This Resource

Each part of this Resurrection Apologetics series is outlined and divided into four sections [A, B, C & D]. Section A states the Lie we're answering. Section B spells out the implications for Christianity if this lie were actually true. Section C notes the Presupposition [what our critics are assuming] behind the lie. Section D lists the Solution to these lies and shows evidence to support the Biblical position.

A Ready Defense : Resurrection Apologetics – Part 1: Defending Christ's Existence

A. The Lie: Jesus did not really live.

Or at least we can't prove that Jesus really ever lived. I call this one the Skeptic's Lie. A true Skeptic believes that we really cannot know anything for sure. One is tempted to ask the Skeptic how we can really know that we cannot really know anything for sure; if it's true that nothing can be known for certain, then we cannot be certain that the Skeptic is correct. If your head hurts about now, that's OK. Only educated idiots take this one seriously. It's the defense of agnostics and others who would prefer to avoid the questions because they are certain they will not like the answers.

B. The Implication: If the Skeptic's Lie were true, then Jesus did not exist. Therefore the Resurrection is also a legend or lie.

C. The Presupposition: We can't prove Jesus existed.

It's true that we can't use the scientific method to prove Jesus existed. But we also can't use the scientific method to absolutely prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that Julius Caesar, William Shakespeare, Abraham Lincoln, George W Bush or anyone not in this room ever existed! I've never seen the President in person. Prove to me that he exists! How do we go about proving these things? We examine the historical documentary evidence. If you're lucky, you get to examine the witnesses.

D. The Solution: The New Testament, Early Historical References and the Church.

D1. The New Testament. The documentary evidence for the NT Scriptures is overwhelming.

There are literally hundreds of thousands of manuscripts [copies] of the New Testament scriptures in existence. Some of these are copies of the entire NT like the *Codex Sinaiticus* or partially completed works like the *Codex Vaticanus*. In addition to copies of New Testaments and individual books of the NT, we can also compare NT scriptures included in the writings of the early Church Fathers, in lectionaries [which contain scripture verses in the order they are to be read for church services at appropriate times of the year], and the many small fragments of NT scripture archaeologists have found containing only a few verses each. Scholars who compare these manuscripts are amazed by the consistency displayed in these copies.

D1a. The Gospels are our primary record of Jesus Christ.

Most scholars today acknowledge that the Gospels were completed by 70 AD, before the Fall of Jerusalem predicted by Christ.

D1b. The epistles of Paul were written much earlier than the Gospels.

Many scholars believe that in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 Paul is quoting an early Church creed. This is important since it establishes an early tradition of Jesus' death for our sins, burial, resurrection, fulfillment of prophecy [i.e. "according to the scriptures"] and post-resurrection appearances. 1 Corinthians was written sometime between 54 to 57 A.D.

D2. There are many references to Jesus in accredited historical documents.

Many of these references are antagonistic, but they nonetheless corroborate the existence of Jesus Christ.

D2a. Josephus:

In a section of his work *The Antiquities*, finished in about A.D. 93, he notes that a high priest named Ananias took advantage of the death of the Roman governor Festus in order to have James killed.¹ Both James and Festus are mentioned in the NT. *The Antiquities* also has a section commonly referred to as the *Testimonium Flavium*: "About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people who accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Christ. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvelous things about him. And the tribe of Christians, so called after him, has to this day not disappeared."

D2b. Tacitus:

This historian wrote in A.D. 115 that Nero blamed Christians for the fire of Rome in A.D. 64 and how he set about

persecuting them: "Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome... Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty: then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind."

D2c. Pliny the Younger:

In letters to Emperor Trajan, Pliny the Younger writes of Christians he has arrested: "I have asked them if they are Christians, and if they admit it, I repeat the question a second and third time, with a warning of the punishment awaiting them. If they persist, I order them to be led away for execution; for, whatever the nature of their admission, I am convinced that their stubbornness and unshakable obstinacy ought not to go unpunished..." "They also declare that the sum total of their guilt or error amounted to no more than this: they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately amongst themselves in honor of Christ as if to a god, and also to bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery, and adultery..."

D2d. One should also mention that the Early Church Fathers wrote of the reality of Jesus in their works.

D3. The existence of the Christian faith must also be explained.

If Jesus never lived, it is very difficult to explain how Christianity came to be. Several aspects of the Christian experience corroborate the historical documentary evidence of Jesus' existence.

D3a. Worship on the Lord's Day.

The fact that devout Jewish believers chose to supplant the traditional Sabbath [Saturday] commanded in the 4th commandment with worship on the Lord's Day [Sunday] must be explained. The Resurrection sufficiently explains this mystery.

D3b. Communion, or the Lord's Supper, is specifically performed to show the Lord's death till He comes.

The bread represents Christ's body, broken for the remission of sin, while the wine represents the new testament of Christ's blood. This is not a traditional part of the Passover meal. The Lord's Supper is a specific remembrance of Christ's death and its meaning.

A Ready Defense : Resurrection Apologetics – Part 2: Defending Christ's Death

A. The Lie: Jesus never died.

A1. The Swoon Lie: Made popular by Venturini centuries ago, this idea has it that Jesus did not really die but merely fainted from his injuries, so that everyone thought that he died. Later, the chill of the tomb is said to have revived him.

A2. The Muslim Lie: The idea proposed that Jesus did not die, but rather Judas died on the cross in His place and that the witnesses were caused to see a hallucination of Jesus on the Cross.

B. Implication: If Jesus never died, there was no Resurrection.

If there was no resurrection, we are still in our sins, we have propagated a lie and there is no hope beyond this life.

C. The Presupposition: The Presuppositions of each Lie vary slightly, both presuppose Jesus' existence.

C1. The Swoon Lie proposes the Resurrection is a myth or legend, as men cannot rise from the dead. While this Lie comes from the idea that dead men cannot rise, the Empty Tomb must be explained.

C2. The Muslim Lie is proposed on theological grounds. Both the Resurrection, proving as it does that Christ was the Son of God, and the idea that God would allow one of their revered prophets to die such a horrid death must both be explained away to maintain Muslim orthodoxy.

D. The Solution: The Facts of the Crucifixion

D1. The Flogging.

Alexander Metherell, M.D., PH.D. notes: "Roman floggings were known to be terribly brutal. They usually consisted of thirty-nine lashes but frequently were a lot more than that, depending on the mood of the soldier applying it. The soldier would use a whip of braided leather thongs with metal balls woven into them. When the whip would strike the flesh, these balls would cause deep bruises or contusions, which would break open with further blows. And the whip had pieces of sharp bone as well, which would cut the flesh severely. The back would be so shredded that part of the spine was sometimes exposed by the deep, deep cuts. The whipping would have gone all the way from the shoulders down the back, the buttocks, and the back of the legs. One physician who has studied Roman beatings said, 'As the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh.' A third-century historian by the name of Eusebius described a flogging by saying, 'The sufferer's veins were laid bare, and the very muscles, sinews, and bowels of the victim were open to exposure.'" **5**

D2. The Crucifixion.

Metherell continues: "[Jesus] would have been laid down, and his hands would have been nailed in the outstretched position to the horizontal beam. The Romans used spikes that were five to seven inches long and tapered to a sharp point. They were driven through the wrists. This was a solid position that would lock the hand; if the nails had been driven through the palms, his weight would have caused the skin to tear and he would have fallen off the cross. So the nails went through the wrists, although this was considered part of the hand in the language of the day. It's important to understand that the nail would go through the place where the median nerve runs. This is the largest nerve going out to the hand, and it would have been crushed by the nail that was being pounded in. The pain was absolutely unbearable. In fact, it was literally beyond words to describe; they had to invent a new word: *excruciating*. Literally, *excruciating* means 'out of the cross.' Then the nails were driven through Jesus' feet... and there would have been similar pain." Metherell also notes that hanging from the cross would have dislocated Jesus' shoulders, thus fulfilling the Psalm 22 prophecy "My bones are out of joint." **6**

D3. Cause of Death.

Metherell states: "Once a person is hanging on the vertical position, crucifixion is essentially an agonizingly slow death by asphyxiation. The reason is that the stresses on the muscles and the diaphragm put the chest into the inhaled position; basically, in order to exhale, the individual must push up on his feet so the tension on the muscles would be eased for a moment. In doing so, the nail would tear through the foot, eventually locking up against the tarsal bones. After managing to exhale, the person would then be able to relax down and take another breath in. Again he'd have to push himself up to exhale, scraping his bloodied back against the coarse

wood of the cross. This would go on and on until complete exhaustion would take over, and the person wouldn't be able to push up and breathe anymore. As the person slows down his breathing, he goes into what is called respiratory acidosis—the carbon dioxide in his blood is dissolved as carbonic acid, causing the acidity of the blood to increase. This eventually leads to an irregular heartbeat. In fact, with his heart beating erratically, Jesus would have known he was at the moment of death. He died of cardiac arrest.” 7

D4. Confirmation of Death.

The Bible provides two important confirmations of Jesus' physical death.

D4a. Blood and Water.

The Bible states that a soldier [traditionally this soldier's name is Longinus] thrust a spear in Jesus' side to confirm his death, but broke the legs of the thieves crucified with him to speed their deaths. John 19:34 states that blood and water issued from Jesus' side when the spear pierced his side. Metherell comments on this medical phenomenon: “Even before He died the hypovolemic shock [low blood pressure] would have caused a sustained rapid heart rate that would have contributed to heart failure, resulting in a collection of fluid in the membrane around the heart, called a pericardial effusion, as well as around the lungs, which is called a pleural effusion. The spear apparently went through the right lung and into the heart, so when the spear was pulled out, some fluid — the pericardial effusion and the pleural effusion — came out. This would have the appearance of a clear fluid, like water, followed by a large volume of blood, as the eyewitness John described in his gospel.” 8

D4b. Mark 15:44-45 explains how Joseph of Arimathaea begged the body of Christ.

The Bible states that Pilate marveled if Jesus were already dead and that the centurion confirmed this.

D5. Specific Comments upon the Swoon Theory.

D5a. The chill of the grave was more likely to finish a man off after these tortures than to revive him.

D5b. It is impossible to comprehend how Jesus could have rolled away the stone in this state, all without attracting the attention of a squad of soldiers sent to protect the tomb. In fact, Justin in his Digest 49.16 lists eighteen offenses for which a guard unit could be put to death. These included falling asleep or leaving one's position unguarded. It is equally impossible to see how he could have walked the Emmaus Road on nail-scarred feet in this state.

D5c. The skeptic David Friedrich Strauss, who does not believe in the resurrection, gives the deathblow to any thought that Jesus merely revived from a swoon: “It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulcher, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which He had made upon them in life and in death, at the most could only have given it an elegiac voice, but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship.” 9

D5d. If Jesus lived, he either died after his post-resurrection appearances and his second burial escaped the notice of everyone involved, including those who wanted very much to disprove that he was alive, or he lived out the rest of his life in anonymity, careless of the sufferings his followers faced. Either way, how did he escape notice?

D6. Specific Comments on the Muslim Theory

D6a. There is no historical support for this position that, in essence, Judas was crucified in Jesus' place but no one noticed the switch apart from the Islamic idea that God would not have allowed such a good prophet as Jesus to die in such a way. This idea is very offensive to Muslims.

D6b. This theory has the additional problem of explaining how Judas identified Jesus with a kiss, yet was somehow crucified in His place.

D6c. This theory also makes a liar out of God, for if this were true God had made the world believe that His Son died on the cross when in fact his betrayer did. This would have grave theological consequences, for if Christ did not die and rise again we are still in our sins.

A Ready Defense : Resurrection Apologetics – Part 3: Defending Christ's Resurrection

A. The Lie: Jesus did not rise from the dead.

A1. The Grave robber Lie: The idea that someone for reasons unknown stole the body of Jesus from the tomb. There are 3 main versions of this lie, and one minor variation.

A1a. The Grave robbing Disciples version: The first theory proposed against Christ's resurrection is actually recorded in the Bible in Matthew 28:11-15. This theory, propagated by Jewish authorities, proposes that the disciples came by night and stole the body of Jesus to make it appear that he had resurrected.

A1aa. The Joseph of Arimathaea/Nicodemus variant: That Joseph of Arimathaea and/or Nicodemus used their influence as members of the Sanhedrin against the Roman guard and tricked them into allowing them to take the body to a different location to either protect the body from Jewish authorities or propagate the Resurrection myth.

A1b. The Grave robbing Sanhedrin version: That the Jewish authorities stole the body of Jesus as a final insult.

A1c. The Grave robbing Romans version: That the Romans stole the body for reasons unknown.

A2. The Wrong Tomb Lie: The idea propounded by Kirsopp Lake that the women who first visited the Empty Tomb went to the wrong tomb and, as a result, were mistaken about the Risen Christ.

A3. The Mass Hallucination Lie: The proposal that everyone who claimed to see the Empty Tomb or the resurrected Christ had only suffered some sort of ecstatic religious hallucination culminating in an imagined Ascension

A4. The Twin Lie: The ridiculous notion that Christ had an unmentioned twin brother who appeared after Christ's death and thus, intentionally or unintentionally, spawned the Resurrection myth.

B. Implication: If Jesus did not rise again, Christianity is based on a lie. We are still in our sins, et cetera.

C. The Presuppositions. Interestingly enough, while there are minor differences, each lie presupposes that Jesus actually lived, died and that an Empty Tomb must be explained away. This is significant because, as the Apostle Paul affirmed before Festus and Agrippa, "These things were not done in a corner." [Acts 26:26] Paul Althaus adds, "[the resurrection] could not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact for all concerned."

C1. The Grave robber lies all presuppose that the Empty Tomb can only be explained by natural means. Thus, someone stole the body.

C2. The Wrong Tomb lie, presupposes that the disciples of Christ at least believed they had found an Empty Tomb. Thus, they must have gone to the wrong one.

C3. The Mass Hallucination lie presupposes that the miraculous does not exist. It also seems to presuppose the Freudian hypothesis that religious belief is a mental imbalance. In any case, it proposes that everything was in the disciples' heads.

C4. The Twin lie presupposes a twin no one has any evidence for. It presupposes that this twin was unknown to anyone before the death of Christ. It presupposes that the twin knew enough of Christ to capitalize on his reputation. It's ridiculous. I have a hard time addressing it seriously.

D. The Solution: Facts Concerning the Tomb and Witnesses of the Post-Resurrection Appearances of Christ.

D1. Conditions at the Tomb.

According to the Bible, the tomb was protected by a guard [4 soldiers] and sealed with a large stone. This tomb was the property of Joseph of Arimathaea, a rich man, secret follower of Jesus and member of the Sanhedrin who had not been present during Jesus' illegal night trial. No man had ever yet lain in this tomb. Jesus was laid in this tomb and wrapped in grave linens according to the tradition of the Jews before the stone was moved in place. Nicodemus also helped in the preparation of the body. It is also noted that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where the body was laid; it was these two women and Salome and Joanna who first found the Empty Tomb. [Mark 15:42-16:1; Matthew 27:57-61; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42]

D2. Post-Resurrection Appearances.

In the 40 days between his resurrection and Ascension, Christ made several appearances, providing many convincing proofs and expounding Old Testament prophecies concerning himself.

D2a. He appeared first to Mary Magdalene [Mark 16:9-11; John 20:11-18]

D2b. Then to the women who had seen the Empty Tomb [Matt 28:9-10]

D2c. Then to Simon Peter, called Cephas, as related by Cleopas and another disciple [Luke 24:33-35; I Cor 15:5]

D2d. Then to Cleopas and another disciple on the road to Emmaus. [Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-32]

D2e. Then to 10 disciples [Thomas absent] [John 20:19-23]

D2f. Then to all 11 disciples [Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:24-31; 1 Cor 15:5]

D2g. Then to 7 disciples by the Sea of Galilee as they were fishing [John 21]

D2h. Then to His brother, James [1 Cor. 15:7]

D2i. Then to about above 500 on an appointed mountain in Galilee. [Mark 16:15-20; Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:3-12; 1 Cor. 15:6-7]

D2j. Then the appearance to Paul "as one born out of time," which explains his sudden conversion from a determined persecutor of Christians to spreading the gospel of Jesus' resurrection throughout the Roman empire. [Acts 7:58; 8:1-3; 9:1-22; 22:1-21; 26:8-23; 1 Cor 15:8]

D3. Specific Comments upon the Grave robbing Disciples Lie

D3a. It is unlikely that the disciples had the ability to overpower well-armed Roman soldiers.

D3b. The disciples had no motive for such a theft.

If they knew they'd stolen the body, they knew that the Gospel they preached was a lie. Few men are willing to knowingly die for a lie. Still less, to allow others to suffer cruel torture and death for that lie. Yet all of the disciples suffered cruel martyrdom, save John who was exiled to Patmos. Commenting on the proposition that the disciples stole Christ's body, J.N.D. Anderson says: "This would run totally contrary to all we know of them: their ethical teaching, the quality of their lives, their steadfastness in suffering and persecution. Nor would it begin to explain their dramatic transformation from dejected and dispirited escapists into witnesses whom no opposition could muzzle."¹¹

D4c. The disciples could not have fabricated the witnesses to the Living Christ.

The post-Resurrection appearances pose a major obstacle to this theory. Someone would have had to play the part of the risen lord and somehow convince his closest acquaintances, disciples and his own brother James that this was he who was cruelly crucified, buried and was now risen again.

D4d. As to the version involving Joseph of Arimathaea and/or Nicodemus, there is no evidence for this specific theory.

It is unlikely that either secret disciple would have hidden the body. To allow Jesus his tomb was an act of utmost honor. Moving the body seems unlikely in this light. Given this honor afforded to Christ, it seems unlikely they would have let untold Christians die for a lie if they really knew the body was elsewhere.

D5. Specific Comments on the Grave robbing Sanhedrin and the Grave robbing Romans.

D5a. Neither suspected party has a motive to speak of.

The Romans would gain nothing by the theft at all. The Jews were trying to prevent the disciples from saying Christ was raised and therefore asked that a guard be placed at the tomb to keep anyone from moving the body to propagate just such a claim.

D5b. Either party could have simply produced a body to squash all notions of a risen Christ.

D5c. This claim doesn't explain the post-resurrection appearances of Christ.

D6 Specific Comments on the Wrong Tomb Lie

D6a. If the women went to the wrong tomb, then the disciples also went to the wrong tomb.

D6b. Joseph of Arimathaea certainly knew the right location of the tomb and could have corrected any false notions immediately.

D6c. The Jews and Romans also knew the correct location of the tomb. If Christ were not raised, they could have simply produced the body.

D6d. This does not account for the post-resurrection appearances.

D7 Specific Comments on the Mass Hallucination Lie

D7a. Aside from being insulting, this theory is also unlikely due to the number of appearances and wide range of witnesses: an unbelieving sibling, a disciple who had thrice denied him, Thomas who refused to believe unless he could touch Christ's physical crucifixion wounds, 500 at once.

D7b. The appearances have physical elements not general associated with hallucinations: Jesus eats fish, the disciples touch him, and Jesus spends time with them expounding the Old Testament scriptures about himself.

D7c. The witnesses display skepticism and misapprehension rather than the receptive sort of spirit which usually accompanies hallucinations: Thomas will not believe until he touches Jesus, the disciples think Jesus is a ghost at first when he walks through a wall to visit them, the disciples do not immediately believe the report of the women returning from the tomb.

D7d. Paul's challenge in 1 Cor. 15:1-8 is "Check my story! I have plenty of witnesses!"

D7e. If it was all a hallucination, a body could have been produced to bring everyone to their senses.

D8 Specific Comments on the Twin Lie.

D8a. The Twin lie is purest fabrication.

It requires so many improbabilities, like a twin no one has any record of, whom no one knew of until after Christ's death, which bore crucifixion wounds, who is able to convince Jesus' closest friends and relatives. There is not a single shred of evidence for this Soap Opera-level story. It completely stretches the bounds of imagination.

D8b. An occupied tomb would have worked against such a con.

A Ready Defense : Resurrection Apologetics – Conclusion

- I. Given the documentary and corroborating evidence gleaned from the Bible, other accredited historical writings and the existence of the Church, we can reasonably conclude that **Jesus actually existed**.
- II. Given the details of the crucifixion, a medical analysis of its effects and the witness of the Bible and other accredited historic writings, we can reasonably conclude that **Jesus actually died**.
- III. Given the details of the tomb as recorded in the Bible, the inescapable fact of the Empty Tomb and the zeal of the Early Church, we can reasonably conclude that **Jesus rose from the dead**.

It still takes faith. (When faith becomes certainty, it is no longer faith.) Yet it is a reasonable faith. In addition to these many proofs, we Christians have the witness of the Holy Ghost within us, so that we can boldly assert as Peter did: We have not followed cleverly devised fables, but are eyewitnesses to His majesty!

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Recommended Reading

1. *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel.
2. *The Evidence that Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell.
3. *More Than a Carpenter* by Josh McDowell.
4. *Know Why You Believe* by Paul Little.
5. *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis