

# Evidence of Jesus' Resurrection

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# 1. Reliability of the Bible

- Over 5000 Greek manuscripts. Compare: Caesar (10 copies), Tacitus (20 copies), Plato (7 copies).
- Oldest manuscripts: John Ryland (130 AD)
- Magdalen fragment (mid first century-150 AD).
- Compare: Caesar, Plato & Tacitus (1000 years), Buddha (500 years).
- Dead Sea Scrolls - 1000 years older than previous manuscripts of the Old Testament, with no significant differences.

# Early quotations of Gospels

- Almost entire Bible can be reconstructed from quotations in Church Fathers. The myth of Constantine's "revision" (Da Vinci Code).
- Ignatius (107)
- Basilides (125)
- Polycarp (108) – quotes from all 4 Gospels, Romans, I, II Corinthians

# Evidence for Early Date

- Evidence for early date of composition: no detailed reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. (John A. T. Robinson)
- Use of proper names matches 1st century Palestine pattern: Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*.

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>New Testament</b>
Two most popular (M) (Simon, Joseph)	15.6%	18.2%
One of 9 most popular (M)	41.5%	40.3%
Name occurring once (M)	7.9%	3.9%
Two most popular (W) Mary, Salome	28.6%	38.9%
One of 9 most popular (W)	49.7%	61.1%
Name only occurring once (W)	9.6%	2.5%

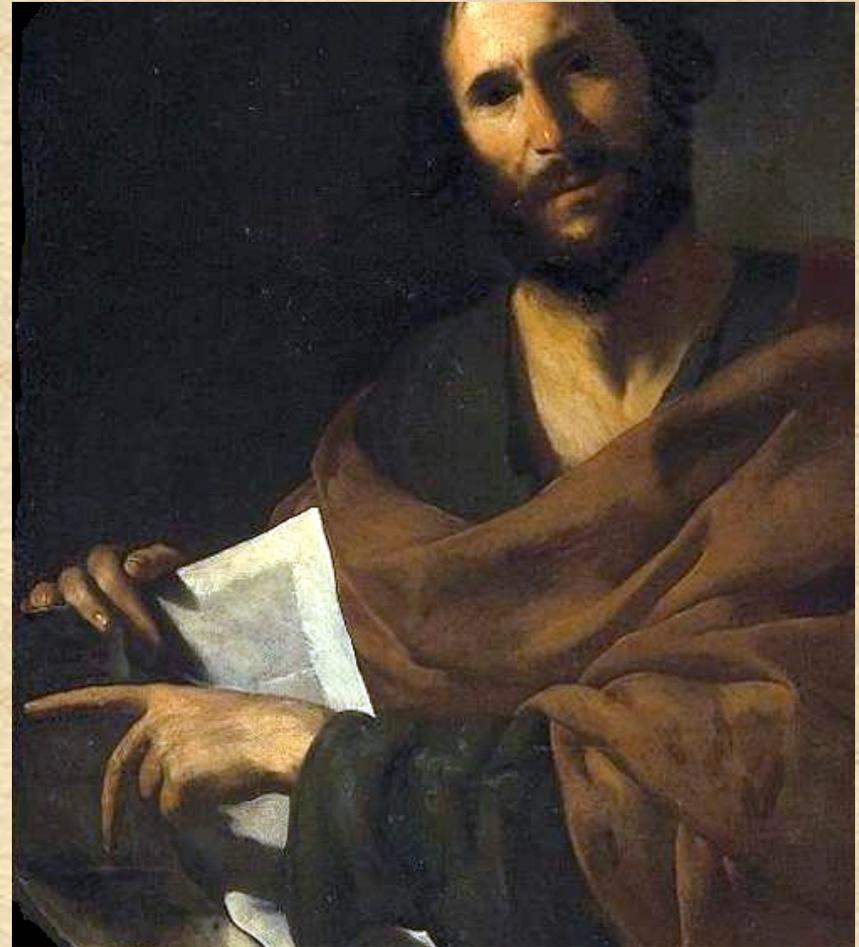
Frequency of Proper Names, from Bauckham, pp. 71-2.

# 1 Peter 3:16

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

# John 21:24

“This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.”



# 1 John 1:3

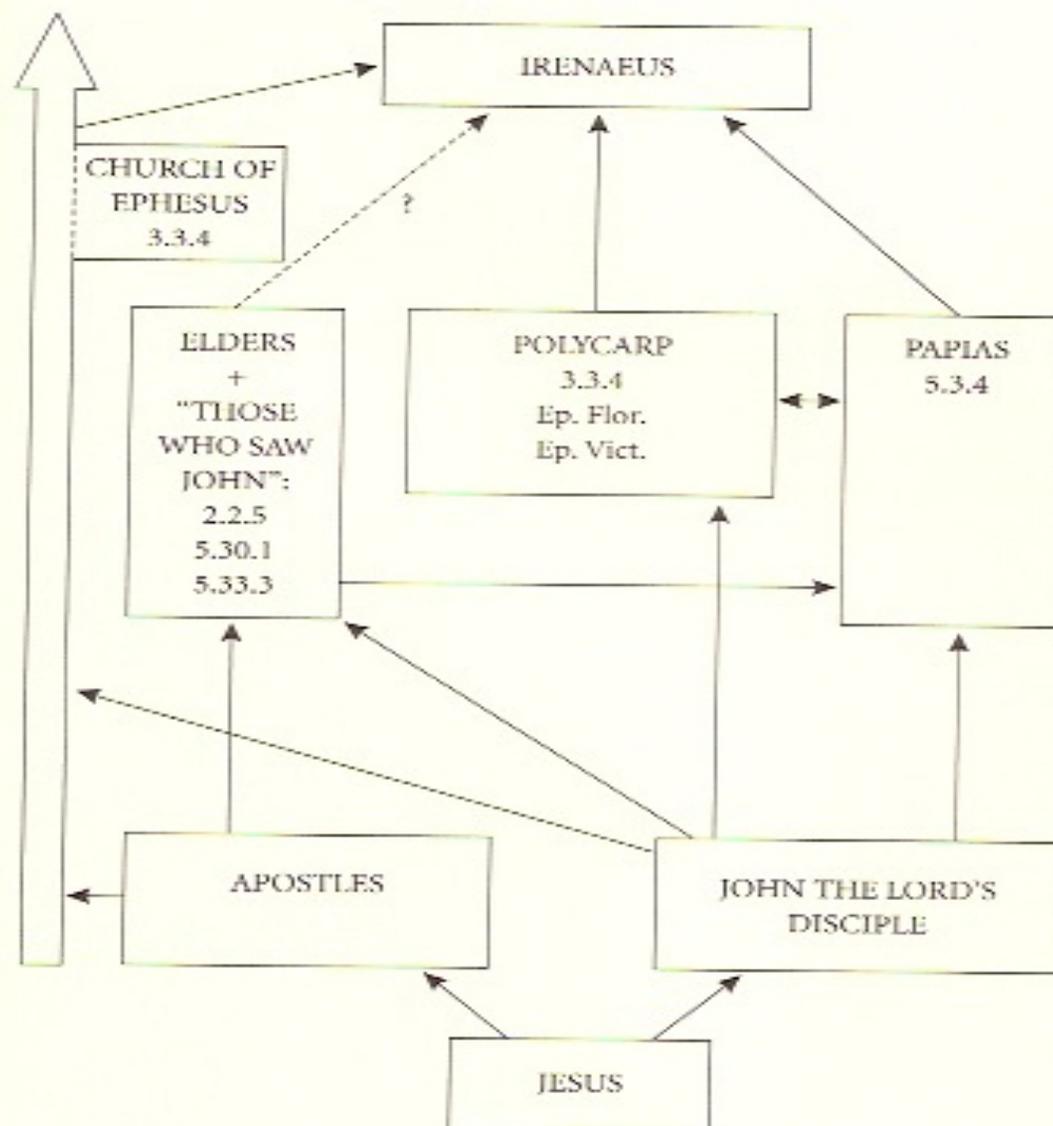
What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Other authors claim to have interviewed eyewitnesses: Luke 1, Acts 26:24-26.

# Authorship

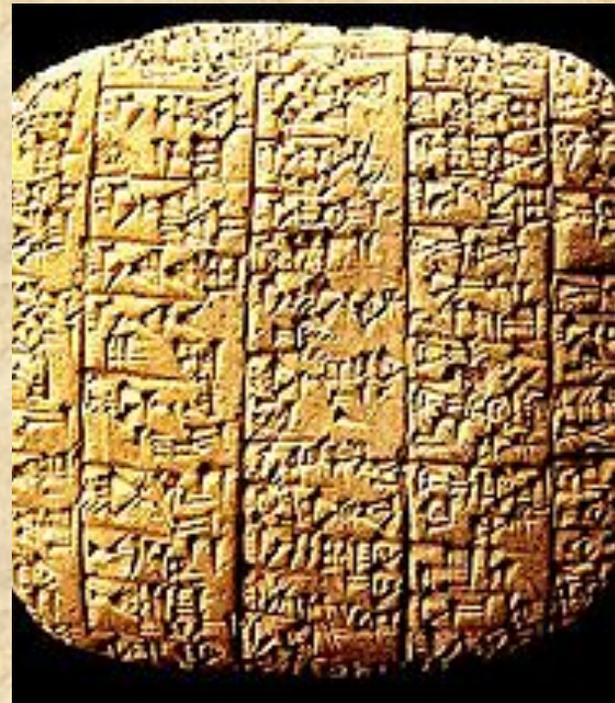
- An unbroken chain of transmission from the apostles through the Church.
- Early attestations of apostolic authorship of Gospels:
  - Papias of Hierapolis (125)
  - Justin Martyr (150)
  - Ireneaus of Lyons (180)
  - Clement of Alexandria (180)

Table 17: Sources of Irenaeus's Knowledge of John the Disciple of the Lord<sup>107</sup>



# Archeology

- Ebla tablets (2300 BC): matches proper names (Canaan), names of cities in Genesis 14.
- Accurate Egyptian names in Exodus.
- Merneptah Stela in Egypt mentions Israel in late 13th century BC.
- Hittites once thought to be Bible myth, now fully confirmed by archeology.



# More Old Testament archeology

- Hittite documents in Nuzi confirms many legal details in Genesis, Deuteronomy.
- Ancient seal of Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary, found.
- At Tel Dan, inscriptions from 9th c. BC referring to "House of David".



# New Testament Names/Titles: Confirmed by Archeology

*Lysanias the Tetrarch* in  
Abilene Luke 3:1

*Erastus*, city treasurer of  
Corinth (Romans 16:23)

*Gallio*—proconsul of  
Achaia (Greece) in A.D.  
51: Acts 18:12.

*Politarchs* ("city ruler")  
in Thessalonica: Acts  
17:6.

*Chief Man of the  
Island* on Malta (Acts  
28:7).



# More Archeology

*Stone Pavement* at Pilate's headquarters: John 19:13.

*Pool at Bethesda*—  
discovered in 1888.

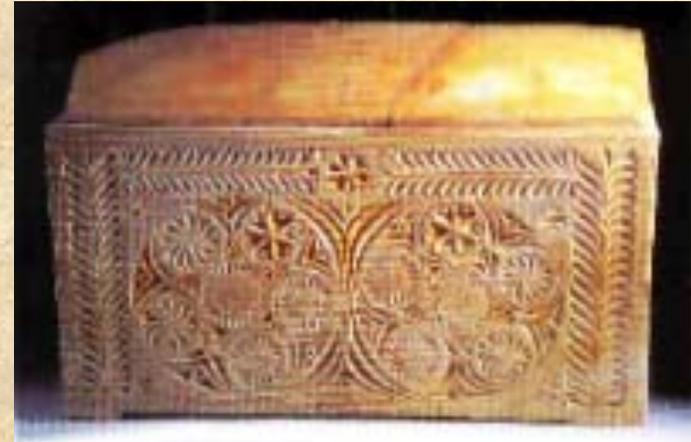
Many examples of silver shrines to *Artemis* found (Acts 19:28). Inscription confirms the title of the city as “Temple Warden of Artemis”.



# Recent discoveries

Ossuary with the inscription  
“Joseph son of Caiaphas” .  
Caiaphas was the priest at  
Jesus’ trial.

Home of Peter’s mother-in-  
law in Capernaum unearthed.



# Reliability of St. Luke

- The book of Acts is considered the most informative record in the world on ancient seafaring.
- Colin Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (1989) lists 84 specific facts that have been confirmed by historical and archeological research: ports, boundaries, slang, local language, local deities, local industries, and proper titles for regional and local officials.

# Internal Evidence: Undesigned Coincidences

Undesigned coincidences: two texts interlock in a way that establishes that they are reporting the same events, without one copying from the other. Fitting together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle: non-obvious correspondence.

Feeding of 5000 – why does Jesus talk to Philip? John 6:5

- John 12:21 Philip was from Bethsaida
- Luke 9:10-11. Fed the crowds in Bethsaida.

Matt. 11:21. What mighty works were done in Bethsaida?

- Feeding happens later in Matthew.
- Only in Luke do we learn that the feeding was earlier.

Destroying the temple in 3 days: Mark 14:58, 15:29.

- Explained in John 2:18-19

# More Coincidences

Do you love me more than these? John 21:15

- Peter's boast: Matt 26:33

Luke 23:2-4. Why does Pilate find no fault, when Jesus admits to being a king?

- John 18:33-38. Not of this world. But John doesn't give the accusation – statement comes out of nowhere.

Malchus's ear. John 18:10.

- Yet Jesus said that his followers would not fight. John 18:36
- Luke 22:51. Jesus healed the ear. No more fighting!

# Non-Christian references to Jesus & the early Church

- Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* (80s). Refers to John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostle James.
- Thallus (52 AD): refers to the eclipse at the crucifixion of Jesus.
- Justin Martyr (150 AD) refers to the report filed by Pontius Pilate, still in archives. Jews still claim that the disciples stole the body. Tacit confession that the Jewish authorities could not find the body.
- Tacitus (110 AD): “Chrestus” was executed under Pontius Pilate. Large numbers of Christians in Rome under Nero (65 AD), proclaiming his resurrection.
- Suetonius (120 AD): Christians expelled from Rome by Emperor Claudius (in 50s AD).

# Objection: St. Luke's Errors

In Acts 5, where the scene is Jerusalem about the mid-30s AD, Gamaliel reviews bygone Messianic risings and mentions that of Theudas. But we know from the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (who lived in the first century AD) that Theudas's Messianic prophecies were made when Fadus was procurator (AD 44-46) and so could not have been known to Gamaliel at the time when he is represented as speaking...

Gamaliel continues by saying that after Theudas there was a Messianic rising under Judas the Galilean at the time of the census. Luke knows of only one census, that under Quirinius (Luke 2:1-2) of AD 6 -- forty years before Theudas. As we shall see, in his gospel Luke confounds the muddle by dating this census of AD 6 under Herod, who died in 4 BC.

G. A. Wells, *Who Was Jesus?* p. 9.

## 2. Jesus Fulfilled Prophecy

- Seed of Judah, David.
- Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)
- Born of a virgin (Is. 7, esp. Septuagint).
- Ministry in Galilee (Is. 42, 49)
- Performs miracles (Is. 35)
- Enters Jerusalem on donkey (Zech 9)
- Tortured, crucified, pierced (Is. 53, Ps. 22, Zech. 12)

# Jesus and Prophecy

- Dies in 33 AD, after the formation of the Roman empire, and before the destruction of Jerusalem (70 AD):
  - Daniel 9:24-26. “From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (454-444 BC) until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ ” (476-483 years) = (23-40 AD, 33 most likely)
- Dies with criminals, buried with rich.
- Resurrection. (Psalm 16)
- Rejected by Jewish religious leaders (Psalm 118, Isaiah 8 and 28, Zechariah 12)

# 3. Jesus' Resurrection

- Eyewitnesses to his death. Described in anatomically correct detail.
- The empty tomb.
  - Discovered by women. Not considered legally valid witnesses by Jewish authorities of day.
  - Authorities claim that the disciples stole the body (Talmud).



# Jesus' Resurrection

- Immediate proclamation in Jerusalem weeks after Easter (Pentecost)
- Multiple appearances to groups, some large.
- Transformed lives of disciples. Enduring death, persecution.



# Justice Antonin Scalia

“It is not irrational to accept the testimony of eyewitnesses who had nothing to gain... The [worldly] wise do not believe in the resurrection of the dead. So everything from Easter morning to the Ascension had to be made up by the groveling enthusiasts as part of their plan to get themselves martyred.”

Address to the Mississippi College School of Law, April 9, 1996

# Early References

- Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, written in 52-53 AD (even skeptics agree). Less than 20 years after event.
- Implied reference to empty tomb: “on the third day”.
- Appearance to over 500, many are still alive. (1 Corinthians 15)
- Clearly a physical, not merely “spiritual”, resurrection.

# 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

First and foremost, I handed on to you the facts which had been imparted to me: that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised to life on the third day, according to the scriptures; and that he appeared to Cephas, and afterwards to the Twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred of our brothers at once, most of whom are still alive, although some have died. Then he appeared to James, and afterwards to all the apostles. In the end he appeared even to me.

# 1 Corinthians 15:14-15

“If Christ was not raised, then our gospel is null and void, and so is your faith; and we turn out to be lying witnesses for God.”

Christianity **is** the Resurrection: the Resurrection could not have been invented to support or promote Christianity.

# Important details

- Broken Roman seal
- Empty tomb
- Large stone moved
- Roman guard goes AWOL
- Grave clothes remain behind
- Jesus appears -- although unexpected.  
Doubting Thomas.

# Contradiction in the Resurrection Accounts?

Mark continues by representing the women as too afraid to deliver the young man's message to the disciples, so that "they said nothing to anyone." Fuller, like many others, thinks that the empty tomb story is no part of the early tradition, but "a later legend introduced by Mark for the first time into the narrative" (p. 52). And it has often been suggested that Mark's motive for making the women keep silent was to account for the fact that, as he well knew there was no already existing tradition about an empty tomb when he wrote.... Whatever Mark's motive may have been, Luke reworded this passage so as to make it lead in to the Jerusalem appearances he has added to Mark:

Mark 16:8

And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them: and they said nothing to anyone; for they were afraid.

Luke 24:9

And they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest.

G. A. Wells, *Who Was Jesus?* pp. 28-9

# Story of the Guards (in Matthew's Gospel): Is It Credible?

But why did not these soldiers, once they had recovered, tell of what they had seen and thus make it difficult for the Jews to deny the fact of the Resurrection? To provide a plausible answer to this question, Matthew has it that the chief priests persuaded the guards with bribes to pretend that they had slept on duty and thus given Jesus's disciples a chance to steal the body. The guards “took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying was spread abroad among the Jews and continueth until this day” (28:15). This is psychologically quite incredible. “Whoever has seen an angel descending from heaven, with an appearance like lightning (28:3), is not going to say -- even for a considerable sum of money -- that he was asleep and saw nothing” (Haenchen, p. 549-550). The phrase “until this day” betrays the whole narrative as late apologetic, accounting, to both Jews and Christians, for the silence of alleged Jewish witnesses.

G. A. Wells, *Who Was Jesus?* pp. 29-30.

# The Resurrection: Spiritual or Physical?

G. A. Wells, *Who Was Jesus?*

p. 31:

If Jesus' s tomb was empty, he did not leave his flesh and bones in his grave; and so either they had been transformed into something different, or else he rose in a physical body. Paul (as we shall see) takes the former view, and the gospels (other than Mark's, which gives no evidence either way) the latter. They refer to the "flesh and bones" of the risen Jesus (Luke 24:39), who "eats and drinks" with his disciples (Acts 10:41) and invites Thomas to touch him (John 20:27; cf. Luke 24:39 where he invites the eleven to "handle" him).

Paul: "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50)

p. 34:

Paul would surely have rejected as blasphemous any claim to have eaten and drunk with the exalted one.

# Incredible alternatives

- Disciples stole the body
- The tomb was misplaced
- The Jews or Romans stole the body
- Jesus swooned and recovered
- Mass hysteria and hallucinations
- Two crucial data: the origin of the Church, and the inability of opponents to refute the Resurrection.

# Rejected by Skeptics

...the theory that Jesus did not die but merely "swooned" on the cross, recovered consciousness in the cool tomb, crept out unnoticed when the earthquake rolled the stone away, and showed himself from time to time to his followers. Such nonsense..

It is equally unsatisfactory to trace the gospel Resurrection narratives to deliberate lies by eyewitnesses of the crucifixion who concocted Resurrection stories they knew to be false.

G. A. Wells, *Who Was Jesus?* (Open Court, La Salle, Ill., 1989), p.38.

# Mass Hallucinations: Interpreted Correctly?

As, according to Paul, Jesus sometimes appeared to more than one person on a given occasion, some apologists hold that there must have been some external reality to be perceived. It still will not follow that what was there was interpreted correctly. There are examples enough of collective perception of what were taken for ghosts. The evidence of sworn eyewitnesses at witchcraft trials likewise suggest that what people observe depends at least as much on their habits of thought as on what is actually there.

G. A. Wells, *Who was Jesus?* (Open Court, La Salle, Ill., 1989), pp. 34-5.

# Mass Hallucinations: Group Enthusiasm?

It is of course true that hallucinations, even when induced by some common physical means, will not be the same for different people, since they depend not only on the present physiological state but on the stock of memories in the mind of each individual. But inasmuch as the appearances of Jesus were vouchsafed to groups such as the 500 and more of 1 Corinthians 15:6, who may, like Paul, never have known Jesus personally, the agreement between what each person experienced could have been minimal yet sufficient for all to say that they had seen a vaguely-conceived risen Jesus. Furthermore, the nonconformist is mistrusted, and so every individual, whatever he may inwardly feel and believe, may try to give the impression that he believes what those around him seem to believe -- as in Hans Christian Anderson's story of the emperor's new clothes.

G. A. Wells, *Who Was Jesus?* p. 35.

# Product of Guilt?

What, then, occasioned this belief in the first place? Our psychologists are not very successful in explaining even ordinary mental phenomena, so one must not expect too much by way of explanation of apparitions.

How could such despondency have been replaced by belief in his triumph over death? Carnley notes in this connection: “Most of those who have argued for the subjective nature of the visions contend that psychological disturbance induced by the guilt of having deserted Jesus sufficiently accounts for them.”

G. A. Wells, *Who Was Jesus?* pp. 41-2.

## 4. Some Objections

- The early Christians were superstitious and ignorant of science. They just didn't know that these things (resurrections) are scientifically impossible.
- They borrowed these stories from pagan myths of dying and rising gods (Osiris, Baldur, Persephone).

# Ignorant of science?

- Palestine in the first century was part of a highly literate, sophisticated society.
- In any case, everyone knew that people don't naturally rise from the dead. They didn't need modern physiology to know that.
- The supernatural nature of the Resurrection was the whole point!

# Pagan Borrowings/Myths

- There are precursors to Christ in pagan mythologies: dying and rising fertility gods, etc.
- This is evidence for the divine origin of Christ -- like OT prophecies.
- The Gospels are not mythic in form: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien. Realistic, historical narrative, anchored in recent past. Legends take hundreds of years to form.

# Can miracle reports be credible?

- Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) argued that if anyone were to report that he had witnessed resurrection, we would have good grounds for believing that he is a liar or deluded.
- The inaccuracy of the report is always more probable than the occurrence of a miracle (against the laws of nature).

# Mass Hallucinations?

On the face of it mass visions, such as the report that seventy thousand pilgrims at Fatima in Portugal in 1917 saw the sun “tear itself from the heavens and come crashing down upon the multitude”, are harder to write off. It is not easy to explain how seventy thousand people could share the same hallucination. But it is even harder to accept that it really happened without the rest of the world, outside Fatima, seeing it too -- and not just seeing it, but feeling it as the catastrophic destruction of the solar system... David Hume's pity test for a miracle comes to mind: “No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish.”

Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, MA, 2006), p. 91.

# Anthony Flew summarizes Hume

The basic propositions are: first, that the present relics of the past cannot be interpreted as historical evidence at all, unless we presume that the same fundamental regularities obtained then as still obtain today; second, that in trying as best he may to determine what actually happened the historian must employ as criteria all his present knowledge, or presumed knowledge, of what is probable or improbable, possible or impossible; and, third, that since 'miracle' has to be defined in terms of practical impossibility the application of these criteria inevitably precludes proof of a miracle.

Anthony Flew, *God and Philosophy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), p. 146.

# How to define a “Miracle”

- A “violation of a law of nature”?
- No – it is no violation of the nature of anything for a created thing to act in accordance with God’s will.
- Better: a miracle is an event willed by God with the intention of demonstrating its divine “authorship”, as an instrument of divine revelation.

# A Dilemma?

It is therefore not enough for the defender of a miracle to cast doubt (as well he might) on the certainty of our knowledge of the law of nature that seems to have been violated. For he must himself say that this is a law of nature: otherwise the reported event will not be miraculous. That is, he must in effect concede to Hume that the antecedent improbability of this event is as high as it could be, hence that, apart from the testimony, we have the strongest possible grounds for believing that the alleged event did not occur. This event must be, by the miracle advocate's own admission, contrary to a genuine, and not merely a supposed, law of nature, and therefore maximally improbable. It is this maximal improbability that the weight of testimony would have to overcome.

J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and Against the Existence of God* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982), p. 25.

# Principle of Credulity

- All testimony should be believed, unless it can be discredited. Since God exists, spiritually meaningful miracles cannot be dismissed as impossible a priori.
- Miracle reports may raise certain questions:
  - (i) is the report intended to be interpreted literally?
  - (ii) is the report part of a pattern of behavior suggesting mental illness (schizophrenia)?
  - (iii) is the reporter motivated to lie, for the sake of self-promotion or profit?
- In the case of the apostles' testimony, we are not justified in dismissing it in any of these ways.

# What Hume overlooks

- The miracles of the Bible aren't absurd or meaningless: they fit into a pattern of revealed truth.
- We have multiple witnesses and independent accounts.
- The reports of various miracles support and confirm each other (whole greater than the sum of its parts).

# Bayes' Theorem

- $P(M)$ : the “prior” probability of the miracle.
- $P(\sim M)$ : the probability of no miracle.  
 $P(\sim M) = 1 - P(M)$ .
- $P(E)$ : the prior probability of the eyewitness testimony's being given.
- $P(E/M)$ ,  $P(E/\sim M)$ : the conditional probabilities of  $E$ , given  $M$ , and of  $E$  given no miracle.
- $P(M/E)$ : the posterior (final) probability of the miracle.

# The Bayes Formula

$$P(M / E) =$$

$$\frac{P(E / M) \cdot P(M)}{P(E / M) \cdot P(M) + P(E / \sim M) \cdot P(\sim M)}$$

# Some rough guesses

- $P(M) = 10^{-m}$
- $P(E/\sim M) = 10^{-l}$  (prob. witness lies)
- $P(E/M) = \text{close to } 1$
- $P(M/E) \approx 10^{l-m}$
- Suppose  $10^{-m}$  is 1 in a 10 billion, and  $10^{-l}$  is just one in 10 ( $m = 9, l = 1$ ).
- Then  $P(M/E) \approx 1$  in a billion. Hume was right!

## But wait!

- Suppose we have more than one witness. Let's say we have  $n$ .
- Then  $P(M/E) \approx 10^{n! - m}$ .
- If  $n = 10$ ,  $P(M/E) \approx 1/2$ .
- If  $n = 12$ ,  $P(M/E) \approx 98.88\%$
- If  $n = 500$ , the probability a miracle did **not** occur is only 1 in  $10^{490}$ !

# Plus, multiple miracles

- The miracles of the Bible are a series of mutually reinforcing events: the miracles of the Exodus, of Elijah and Elijah, and (especially) of Jesus and the apostles.
- Also, add in the miracles of the saints.
- The probability of each miracle increases when the probabilities of the others increase.

## For more information:

- Daniel Bonevac, “The Argument from Miracles,” *Oxford Studies in the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 3, edited by Jonathan Kvanvig (2011).

## 6. Historical Evidence is Not Enough

- “Jesus rose from the dead. So what?”
- It doesn't follow logically that Christianity is true.
- We have to encounter the person of Jesus in the canonical Gospels, and in the Church, His Body.
- We must come to realize our need for a Savior: the holiness of God, the righteousness of Christ, our own sinfulness, alienation from God.

# Jesus Claimed to Be God

- “I and the Father are one (neuter -- one being, not one person).” John 10:30.
- “Before Abraham was, I AM.” John 7:58
- Unlike the Rabbis (“The Scriptures say...”) or the prophets (“Thus says the Lord...”), Jesus speaks with authority equal to God, in the first person, “Amen, Amen, I say to you...”
- Jesus forgives sins, even sins against others or God.
- Jesus identifies himself with Yahweh in prophecy (Mark 1:3).

# C. S. Lewis: Trilemma



- Since he claimed to be God, Jesus is either (a) a liar, (b) a lunatic (on the level of one who thinks he's a poached egg), or (c) the Lord.
- We cannot say that he was a great philosopher, ethical teacher, prophet, moral example, but not God.

# Did the Disciples Invent Jesus?

The only fourth alternative: the disciples invented these claims, and put them in Jesus' mouth.

Some problems:

- A very un-Jewish thing to do: given strict monotheism, and the duty owed a rabbit by his students.
- If Jesus didn't claim to be God, why would the disciples want to portray him as a blasphemer?
- Jesus' divine self-understanding is inseparable from his life & teachings.

# Objection: Can we Leap to God?

Since the positing of a god explains nothing, one cannot infer the existence of a god from an unusual event as a causal explanation. Regardless of the phenomenon involved, it is never rational to jump from the statement, “x is unexplained” to the statement, “Therefore, a supernatural power must have caused x.” Explanations, by their very nature, must fall within the realm of natural causality. To posit the supernatural as an explanation is to posit the unknowable as an explanation, and this is nothing more than an exercise in futility.

George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case Against God*  
(Prometheus Press, 1989), p. 212