

You may believe in the resurrection story, but scientifically or factually we have very strong arguments that it did not happen

The oldest Gospel, that of Mark, is reliable, but does not give us good reason to believe in the resurrection

In the Bible we find four gospels, that of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Mark wrote the oldest gospel, but in the Bible it comes after the younger gospel of Matthew. Let us now look at the gospel of Mark, the oldest testimony of Jesus' life. Mark describes that Jesus is laid in a rock tomb after the crucifixion. A few days later Mary Magdalene and two other women come to the rock tomb to embalm the body of Jesus (Mark 16: 1-8). In the rock tomb, however, they do not find the body of Jesus but a young man in a white robe. This man tells them that Jesus has risen and that the women should tell Jesus' disciples that Jesus will appear to his disciples in Galilee. After this follow verses 9 to 20, but those last 12 verses are, as is generally accepted, also by the Roman Catholic Church itself, not from Mark himself. Now there are two possibilities:

1

Mark ended his gospel with the events in the rock tomb. Then the scene in the rock tomb is the conclusion of the gospel of Mark.

2

Mark described further events after the scene in the rock tomb, but that ending of the Gospel of Mark was later removed and replaced with another ending.

Option 2 is the most likely. In verses 1-8 of his last chapter, Mark announces an appearance of Jesus in Galilee. That appearance is the climax of his gospel. It would be very strange if he ended his story before the finale.

Be that as it may, possibility 2 gives us no further leads. So let's consider possibility 1. Suppose we believe that Mark's testimony is 100% accurate. In that case, the Gospel of Mark gives us no good reason to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. An empty tomb and a man claiming that Jesus rose from the dead are not evidence for such an unearthly event as a resurrection from the dead. An empty tomb can be explained by people removing Jesus' body from the tomb, and a simple claim that Jesus rose from the dead is something anyone can make.

The Gospel written by Mark, as it is now before us (so without the last 12 verses that are found in all modern Bibles) therefore gives us no reason at all to accept a resurrection from the dead, not even if we assume that Mark's testimonies are 100% reliable, in short, that the tomb was empty, and that there was someone in that tomb who claimed that Jesus had risen.

The Gospel of Matthew gives us good reasons to believe in the resurrection, but...

Let us do the same exercise with the Gospel of Matthew. Suppose we assume that Matthew is 100% reliable in his testimonies. Do we have good reason to believe in Jesus' resurrection from the dead? Yes, we do. Three events would convince us:

1

In Matthew the tomb is sealed and soldiers are guarding the tomb.

2

When the women arrived at the tomb, there was a violent earthquake, and an angel, shining like lightning, came down from heaven, rolled back the tombstone, and sat on it. Then the angel told the women that Jesus had risen from the dead.

3

Jesus appears to his disciples on a mountain in Galilee. When some of the disciples doubt, Jesus comes closer and speaks to them.

The guards at the tomb rule out a scenario that people have removed Jesus' body from the tomb, and that is why it is empty. An earthquake and an angel descending from heaven are proof of divine intervention. What the angel says can therefore be taken as credible, which is confirmed once again in the actual appearance of Jesus in Galilee on a mountain. There are still, as Matthew writes, people who apparently doubt whether the man seen is Jesus, but then the man comes closer and speaks to them. In this way, the last doubt is apparently removed.

So if we can assume that Matthew is 100% reliable in his testimonies, then we have a good reason to believe in Jesus' resurrection from the dead. However, there is a major problem with the set-up reasoning. If we take the older gospel of Mark into consideration, we notice two things each time in the three events described by Matthew. For convenience, I will call them A and B.

A

Each of the three events in Matthew is extraordinarily remarkable. If you had witnessed it, you would not have forgotten it. In fact, you would probably have mentioned it first. Suppose you go to the grave of a loved one, and it is guarded by soldiers. That is, to say the least, not something you quickly forget. Or suppose an angel suddenly comes down from heaven like lightning, and the earth shakes. Also very remarkable. And suppose you see someone on a mountain who looks like Jesus, and you doubt whether it is Jesus. You would also not quickly forget it if he then comes closer and speaks to you.

B

Contrary to what Mark has said, each of the three events provides a very good reason to believe in Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

In A we have to ask this question: is it plausible that Mark, who gives the oldest testimonies, would not mention such remarkable events? In Mark, the women walk to the tomb after the Sabbath and enter without encountering a soldier. Could it be that they simply forgot that the tomb was guarded by soldiers and that they could therefore not enter at all? And would those women in the Mark story not have noticed that the earth began to shake violently and that an angel came down from heaven shining like lightning and rolled away the stone from the tomb? That is extremely unlikely. Any normal thinking person will conclude here that Matthew has added spectacular fabrications to the account of facts, and the reason for this can be explained simply by B. Matthew wants to do what Mark failed to do, namely convince us that Jesus rose from the dead.

The later Gospel of Matthew precedes the older Gospel of Mark in the Bible and there is a reason for that

There is thus a remarkable contrast between Mark and Matthew. Even if we believe Mark 100%, he gives us, as noted earlier, no good reason to believe in Jesus' resurrection from the dead. On the other hand, Matthew does give us good reasons to believe in it, but Matthew himself is untrustworthy because all the spectacular events he cites to convince us of Jesus' resurrection from the dead are completely absent from the older Mark account, and it is virtually impossible that Mark would not have mentioned them if they had really happened.

Why is this strange contradiction not apparent when we read the gospels? The answer is simple. The younger gospel of Matthew was placed in the Bible by the church before the older gospel of Mark. So people read Matthew first, and the belief in Jesus' resurrection is then, as it were, anchored in them. Then comes the gospel of Mark. That does not provide any good reason to believe in Jesus' resurrection, but if you already believe in that resurrection by reading Matthew, Mark will not make you abandon this belief in the resurrection either. The gospel of Mark is, you could say, superfluous in this respect, a watered-down version of the gospel of Matthew, but not harmful. A simple change in the order of the gospels makes a world of difference.

However, if you look at the gospels in the right order, you will see that Mark does not give us a good reason to believe in the resurrection from the dead, and it is striking that Matthew has added all kinds of spectacular events to the story of Mark that do lead us to believe in the resurrection, but at the same time raise the suspicion that they are not true, because they fit so well, too well, into the message of faith (Jesus rose from the dead). If you look at the gospels in the right order, you will see that the gospel of Matthew is an exaggerated version of the gospel of Mark.

But Matthew comes before Mark in the Bible, and then Luke and John follow. If you read in that order, then as a believer you get the idea that there were four parallel witnesses who all gave their own version of the story, all four with their own personality and way of looking at things, which would explain all the differences between the versions. You only see that there is exaggeration when you go from Mark, to Matthew, to Luke, to John. Only then do you see that the evidence becomes increasingly 'convincing', which makes you suspicious and perhaps gives you the idea that you are being taken for a ride.

The Gospel of Luke 'proves' that Jesus' appearance after the crucifixion was not a ghostly apparition

This pattern in Matthew of added spectacular fabrications to make us believe in the resurrection story continues in the other two evangelists, Luke and John. In Matthew, Jesus first appears to his disciples in Galilee. A believer might wonder why Jesus first appears to his disciples in faraway Galilee and not near Jerusalem where he was finally laid to rest. Luke does have Jesus first appear to his disciples near Jerusalem after his death (Luke 24:13-35). Moreover, Luke solves another problem. Believers might think that Jesus' appearances are ghostly apparitions. In Luke, Jesus says, "Handle me and see: a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see me have" (Luke 24:37). Jesus then eats a broiled fish (Luke 24:42-43) to further underscore the point that he is not a ghostly apparition.

The Gospel of John gives complete 'proof' that Jesus rose from the dead

You would think that this would be the end of the matter. However, one thing is still missing from the evidence. In Luke, Jesus is touched and he eats a roasted fish. In short, Jesus is alive and not a ghost. However, someone could still doubt whether he rose from the dead. What if he did not die on the cross? What if he fell into a coma, was taken down from the cross and later regained consciousness? If that had happened, there would be no resurrection from the dead. Well, the missing piece of the puzzle in the evidence is provided by John, and he does this with a spectacular addition to the account. The previous three evangelists, Mark, Matthew and Luke, mention that Jesus gave up the ghost on the cross. With them you can doubt whether Jesus really died on the cross, because they do not mention a single fact that would substantiate the alleged death of Jesus on the cross: there is no Roman soldier who feels Jesus' pulse, or puts a hand in his neck to determine that his heart is no longer beating, or takes the safe option and cuts Jesus' throat. In John a soldier comes to Jesus and this soldier pierces Jesus' side with a lance so that blood and water come out (John, 19: 34). This is such a dramatic scene, imagine it, that it is totally unlikely that the previous three evangelists would not have mentioned it if it had really happened. Just like the soldiers at the tomb, the angel from heaven, the earthquake, the touching of Jesus after his crucifixion, it is a spectacular fabrication to convince believers that Jesus really died on the cross and then really rose from the dead.

Conclusion: The Bible gives us good reasons to believe that the resurrection story is untrue

If you were to place the gospels in order, i.e. Mark, Matthew, Luke and John, you would notice that the oldest gospel, even if you believe 100% in its reliability, does not give a good reason to believe or assume that Jesus rose from the dead. Mind you, the normal course of events is that you believe in something as miraculous as a resurrection from the dead, because there are good reasons for it. However, if there are no such reasons, you fall back on your normal common sense that rules out such miraculous events, in short that the resurrection story is untrue. Then, as you read further in the Bible, you notice that Matthew, Luke and John add a number of spectacular things to the account that, if you accept their truth, can lead to no other conclusion than that Jesus rose from the dead. But you also come to the conclusion that the stories of Matthew, Luke and John cannot be trusted, because it is totally implausible that Mark, as the oldest evangelist, would not have mentioned all those spectacular events if they had really happened. These additions therefore reinforce the conclusion already drawn that the resurrection story is untrue, because if it had been true, then it would not have been necessary to add all kinds of fabrications to the account.

We can add another weighty argument to that. As noted earlier, it is plausible that the original ending of the Gospel of Mark was removed and replaced by another ending, an ending that can now be found in all modern Bibles. We do not know what was in that original ending, but we can consider the following three possibilities:

1

The original ending gave us good reason to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead.

2

The original ending was neutral on the matter.

3

The original ending gave us good reason to doubt the story that Jesus rose from the dead.

Option 1 is not plausible, because if the original ending had given us good reason to assume that Jesus rose from the dead, it would have remained in the Bible. Think of all those other additions in Matthew, Luke and John that are supposed to support the resurrection story.

Option 2 is also not plausible, because if it had been neutral, there would have been no reason to remove it.

This leaves option 3 as the only one left, which also explains why it was removed.

So, all things considered, the Bible gives us good reasons to believe that the resurrection story is false. This is also completely in line with science.

What Joseph Knew

My novel *What Joseph Knew* is not a religious fantasy-based thriller, but an exciting novel in which what has been proven above is told and demonstrated in a narrative way, namely that the resurrection story is untrue, also viewed from a biblical perspective.