

# Evidences For The Resurrection

**Introduction.** C. S. Lewis said, “God became man to turn creatures into sons; not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man.” If God never came down on the earth, then no one would have the right to become sons of God (John 1:12).

The idea that Jesus never really died on the cross can be found in the Qur’an, which was written in the seventh century — in fact, Ahmadiya Muslims contend that Jesus actually fled to India. To this day there is a shrine that supposedly marks His real burial place in Srinagar, Kashmir. In contrast to this, we will investigate four lines of evidence for Jesus dying and rising from the dead that is absolutely conclusive, which proves that Jesus was the Son of God, He produced victory over sin and death, it validates our faith, and it assures us of our resurrection and the judgment.

## ***I. The Medical Evidence: Was His Death And Resurrection A Hoax?***

- A. Although the gospels mention it incidentally, Roman scourging was brutal (Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1). By using a braided leather whip, the back would be so shredded that part of the spine was sometimes exposed by the deep, deep cuts. Because of the terrible effects of this beating, Jesus was already in serious to critical condition even before being nailed to the cross.
- B. The Romans used spikes that were five to seven inches long and tapered to a sharp point (Psalm 22:16; Luke 24:40; John 19:37; 20:25). They were driven through the wrists and feet. The pain of the spikes would have been absolutely unbearable. Literally, excruciating means “out of the cross.” They actually needed to create a new word because there was nothing in the language that could describe the intense anguish caused during the crucifixion.
- C. Once a person is hanging in the vertical position, crucifixion is essentially an agonizingly slow death by asphyxiation. 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 locked up against the bones in the feet. The slowing of the breathing causes the acidity of the blood to increase. This eventually leads to an irregular heartbeat and cardiac arrest. John’s description in John 19:34 is consistent with what modern medicine would expect to have happened.
- D. Critics have tried to cast doubt on the gospels by attacking the crucifixion record. An article in the Harvard Theological Review concluded many years ago that there was “astonishing little evidence that the feet of a crucified person were ever pierced by nails.” Instead, the article said, the victim’s hands and feet were tied to the cross by ropes. However, archeology has now established that the use of nails was historical, although sometimes ropes were used.
- E. Another point of contention was that the Romans were very primitive in terms of their understanding of medicine and anatomy. How do we know they were not mistaken when they declared Him to be dead (Mark 15:44; John 19:33)? These people were experts in killing people — that was their job, and they did it very well. They knew without a doubt when a person was dead. Besides, if a prisoner

- escaped, the responsible soldiers would be put to death themselves, so they had a huge incentive to make absolutely sure that each and every victim was dead.
- F. There was no way for Jesus to fake His death on the cross. He would have been in shock from the blood loss. He could not have faked the inability to breathe for long. Also, the spear thrust into His heart would have settled the issue once and for all, and the Romans were not about to risk their own death by allowing Him to walk away alive.
    - 1. Even if you allow that Jesus could have escaped the cross, a person in that kind of pathetic condition would never have inspired His disciples to go out and proclaim that He is the Lord of life who had triumphed over the grave.
    - 2. He would have looked so pitiful that the disciples would never have hailed Him as a victorious conqueror of death; they would have felt sorry for Him and tried to nurse Him back to health.
  - G. Clearly, the weight of the historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to His side was inflicted. Interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge.

## ***II. The Physical Evidence: Was His Body Absent From The Tomb?***

- A. There are multiple, independent attestations of His burial, and all four gospels say that Jesus' corpse was given to Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the council that voted to condemn Jesus (Matthew 27:57-59; Mark 15:43-45; Luke 23:50; John 19:38). Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 15:3-7, which was written only about 25 years after His death, clearly states that Jesus was buried.
  - 1. Could Joseph of Arimathea been invented? Given the early Christian anger and bitterness toward the Jewish leaders who had instigated the crucifixion of Jesus, it is highly unlikely that they would have invented one who did what was right by giving Jesus an honorable burial — especially while all of Jesus' disciples deserted Him.
  - 2. Besides, they would not make up a specific member of a specific group whom people could investigate for themselves. Going further, the grave was quite secure to prevent someone from stealing the body (Matthew 27:62-66). In fact, the idea that the empty tomb is the result of some hoax, conspiracy, or theft is simply dismissed today.
- B. Many people disbelieve the gospels accounts because they say there are several discrepancies or inconsistencies. Taken at face value, this is a serious objection penetrating to the heart of their reliability.
  - 1. There are differences, but they are not discrepancies or inconsistencies in a negative sense. Each gospel writer is on the alert for details that fit in with his own special view of Jesus, and so there are naturally going to be inclusions and omissions that correspond with the particular aim of each writer.
    - a) But it should be understood that all four of them accurately related the events of Christ's career and the words of His mouth, even though they included only what was pertinent to their particular approach.
    - b) When any room is photographed, the camera may well capture different views of the contents, depending on the angle from which the picture is

shot. All of them are accurate, even though they are by no means identical. The same is true with a classroom of students who are engaged in taking notes on their teacher's lecture. Each student will note at least a few details that are not reported by the others, and yet none of them will be making a false report of what the instructor said.

2. Interestingly, if all of the gospels were identical in details, that would have raised suspicion of plagiarism. One cannot "have their cake and eat it too."
- C. The gospels agree that the empty tomb was discovered by women who were friends and followers of Jesus. According to skeptics, this makes them less than objective observers. However, when you understand the role of women in first century Jewish society, what is really extraordinary is that the empty tomb narrative should feature women as the discoverers of the empty tomb. They were on a very low rung of the social ladder. Their testimony in court was essentially regarded as worthless. Any later legendary account would have certainly portrayed male disciples as discovering the tomb instead of females.
- D. How do we know the tomb was empty? First, the empty tomb was in 1 Corinthians 15, which is a very old and reliable source. Second, the site of Jesus' tomb was known to Christians and Jews. If it were not empty, it would be impossible for the church to be founded on the belief in the resurrection. Third, the simplicity of the empty tomb report shows that it was unadorned by later historical, fictional accounts. Fourth, the unanimous testimony that the empty tomb was discovered by women argues for the authenticity of the story. Fifth, the earliest accounts presupposes the historicity of the empty tomb. There was nobody who was claiming that the tomb still contained Jesus' body. The question always was, "What happened to the body?"

### ***III. The Eyewitness Evidence: Was He Seen Alive After His Death On The Cross?***

- A. A problem in people's minds about the resurrection is that no one was sitting inside the tomb and saw the body start to vibrate, stand up, take the linen wrappings off, fold them, roll back the stone, amaze the guards, and leave. But this is not a problem. Science is all about causes. We may not know how a disease originates, but we study its symptoms. No one may witness a crime, but the police assemble evidence after the fact. We do this with the resurrection.
- B. There is abundant evidence that Jesus died on the cross, and there is abundant evidence that people saw Him after He rose from the dead. One very strong line of evidence is that virtually all critical scholars accept the fact that Paul saw the Lord. Nobody questions that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, and he affirms in two places that he personally saw the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8).
  1. The passage in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 is pivotal to establishing the validity of the resurrection, for it names specific individuals and groups of people who saw Him, and it was written at a time when people could still investigate and find the people if they wanted confirmation.
  2. The words used, and the stylized structure and content all point to the fact that this passage was very early; in fact, it was in all likelihood a statement with which eyewitnesses were familiar.

- C. There are several different post-resurrection appearances in the gospels and Acts. The appearances covered a broad spectrum of circumstances over several weeks — some saw Him individually, some saw Him in groups, sometimes they were indoors, sometimes they were outdoors. He appeared to softhearted people like John and skeptical people like Thomas. At times they touched Jesus or ate with Him, with the text stating that He was physically present. There are good reasons to trust the accounts; they are lacking in many typical mythical tendencies seen in the later centuries.
- D. The sightings of Jesus were not fleeting observances of a ghost by one or two people. If you were to cross-examine each witness for 15 minutes, it would take you from breakfast on Monday to dinner on Friday to finish (129 hours). Who could possibly walk away unconvinced? If that were not enough, Acts mentions the resurrection four times (2:32; 3:15; 10:41; 13:31). The earliest Christians did not just endorse Jesus' teachings; they were convinced He was alive. That is what changed their lives. Since this was their centermost conviction, they would have made absolutely sure it was true. It is simply not rational to think that it was result of legendary development, hallucinations, or groupthink. The appearances of Jesus are as well-authenticated as anything in antiquity. There can be no doubt that they occurred.

#### ***IV. The Circumstantial Evidence: Do The Supporting Facts Point To A Resurrection?***

- A. Eyewitness testimony is called direct evidence because people describe under oath how they personally saw the defendant commit the crime. Circumstantial evidence is made up of indirect facts from which inference can be rationally drawn. Its cumulative effect can be every bit as strong — and sometimes even stronger — than eyewitness accounts. There are several pieces of circumstantial evidence which establishes the resurrection of Christ.
- B. When Jesus was crucified, His followers were discouraged and depressed. Then, after a short period of time, they abandoned their occupations, regathered, and committed themselves to spreading a specific message — that Jesus Christ was the Son of God who died on a cross, returned to life, and was seen alive by them. They were willing to spend the rest of their lives proclaiming this message without any payoff from a human point of view. Why? Because they believed in the resurrection.
- C. The gospels tell us that Jesus' family, including James, were embarrassed by what He was claiming to be (John 7:1-5). They did not believe in Him; they confronted Him. Josephus tells us that James was later stoned to death because of his belief in Jesus. Paul spent his early life persecuting Christians, but then joined them and preached the gospel. He did so because he saw the risen Christ and heard Christ appoint him to be an apostle (Acts 26:16-18).
- D. The social structures that gave the Jews their national identity were incredibly important to them. But within just a few weeks after Jesus was crucified, thousands of Jews gave up animal sacrifices, the keeping of the law of Moses, the keeping of the Sabbath, and the belief that the Messiah would be a political

leader. The fact that an entire group of people were willing to give up treasured beliefs passed down for centuries shows their deep belief in the Son of God.

- E. The early followers of Christ did not assemble to celebrate His teachings or how wonderful He was. They came together to remember that Jesus had been publicly slaughtered in a grotesque and humiliating way (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). This can be explained by the fact that they realized that Jesus' slaying was a necessary step to a much greater victory (John 16:33). Furthermore, when they were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they were elevating Jesus to the full status of God, and recognizing that He was still alive in heaven (Matthew 28:19-20). Baptism also was the supreme recognition of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-4).
- F. There is no doubt that the church started shortly after the death of Jesus and spread so rapidly that within a period of about 30 years it had triumphed over a number of competing ideologies and was on its way to overwhelming the entire Roman Empire (Colossians 1:23). No one would have imagined that a ragtag group of people whose primary message was that a crucified carpenter from an obscure village had triumphed over the grave. Yet it was so successful that today we name our children Peter and Paul and our dogs Caesar and Nero.
- G. If you want to reject this evidence and say that Jesus did not rise from the dead — fair enough. But you have to offer an alternative explanation that is plausible for all of these facts. Can it be done?

**Conclusion.** You should be ambushed by the amount and quality of the evidence that Jesus is the unique Son of God. There have been defendants carted off to the death chamber on much less convincing proof.

The case for Christ is conclusive. In Revelation 1:18, Jesus said, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore ..." Are you ready to reach a verdict and become a Christian? Do not approach this issue casually or flippantly, because there is a lot riding on your conclusion. We ourselves — and not merely the claims of truth — are at stake in the investigation. If our conclusion in the case for Christ is correct, your future in eternity hinges on how you respond to Christ (John 8:24).