

Historical Evidences for the Resurrection of Christ

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Note: Please see endnote for source books for many of the ideas and information of this material.¹

Introduction: The Distinctive Nature of Christianity.

- Contrary to popular belief, Christianity is not merely a system of philosophy or values.

A. Christianity is dependent upon the identity of its founder (**Mat. 16:13-17**).

1. Contrast this with the religions of Buddha and Mohammed: If these men never existed, the religions (Buddhism and Islam) would still continue.

2. Unlike mythology, Jesus actually lived in a time-space dimension on earth.
- He was a part of history; Therefore Christianity itself is dependent upon history.

B. There are great consequences to Christianity if Jesus never actually was born, died and then raised from the dead (**1 Cor. 15:12-19**).

1. The apostles are liars (v. 15).
2. There is no forgiveness of sins (v. 17).
3. Those who died as Christians are gone forever (v. 18).
4. Those who make sacrifices to be Christians are "the most pitiable" (v. 19).
5. The Jesus of the Bible is an impostor!

6. Could Jesus have been only a good, moral man and nothing more?

a. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God! (**John 10:36**).

b. Jesus also referred to Himself as "the Son of Man" (**Mat 9:6**) which is a Divine title of authority and exaltation in the book of Daniel (**Dan 7:13-14**).

c. Jesus claimed to be the "I AM" or God (**John 8:24, 56-59; Matthew 14:27; Mark 6:50**).

7. If people believed Jesus' claim, they would radically change their lives for Him.

8. His words were so important that people would be judged by them before God (**John 12:48**).

9. In light of His claims, Jesus was either a liar, a lunatic, a legend or the Lord!

a. He was **liar** if He claimed to be the Son of God and knew He was not.

-- *If this is true He should be exposed, for He would not have been raised.*

b. He was a **lunatic** if He claimed to be God's Son but was just a man.

-- *Sane or mentally sound people do not make this claim!*

c. He was a **legend** if gospel accounts were written too far after the events.

- *Each account was written within the lifetime of eyewitnesses of Jesus.*

d. He is **the Lord God** if His claim is true.

WHICH DO YOU CHOOSE? -- THERE IS NO MIDDLE GROUND!

I. The Nature of the Evidence: Historical, Eyewitness Testimony.

A. Faith is based upon **evidence**.

1. Many speak of faith in terms of feelings, traditions, or preferences.
2. This is not the Biblical concept of faith (**Heb. 11:1; 1 Pet. 3:15**).
3. Faith is not a “blind leap in the dark and we do not park our brains at the door.”
4. The Lord gave us plenty of evidence to stand on in our belief of the Savior.

B. At the heart of every sermon of the apostles is their *eyewitness testimony* of the raised Christ (**Acts 2:32; 3:14-15; 5:30-32; 10:39-43; 13:27-31**).

1. **Witnesses** are what we rely on to confirm whether something is true or not.
2. Witnesses were crucial to verifying Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension and vital to the preaching of the gospel (**Acts 1:21-22**).

II. We Often Accept Things as True Based Upon Testimony.

A. All personal knowledge reduced to two categories: **Testimony & Memory**

1. Testimony deals with things that others have told us (word of mouth, books).
2. Memory relates to those things we have personally seen (observed the event).

B. Every day we accept things as true based upon testimony.

1. In a court of law 3 types of evidences are used (i.e., oral, written, physical testimony - e.g., notebook, fingerprints).
2. The Christian faith has oral and written testimony of the apostles:
 - a. Physical testimony or scientific method is not represented.
3. Consider some people of history we accept from written or oral testimony:
(a) Napoleon (b) Caesar (c) George Washington (d) Abraham Lincoln
4. *History is knowledge of the past based upon testimony.*

"Have you seen them?" – “No.” - "How do you know then that they existed?" - **We rely on testimony!**

C. **Of course not all testimony is valid** (many will lie or are simply mistaken).

1. On what basis do we reject some testimony and accept other testimony?
2. Consider the method used by lawyers in screening for creditable witnesses.

III. Tests for Accepting or Rejecting Testimony.

- A. Is the person giving testimony in a position to know the facts? Was he at the event?
- B. Does he have an ulterior motive in telling his account?
- C. Is this person of good character? Is he reliable?
- D. Are there other witnesses and do they agree?

IV. The New Testament Passes the Test.

A. Were the apostles in a position to know the facts?

1. They spent over three years with Jesus! (**1 John 1:1-3**)

B. Did the apostles have any advantages in lying? (**1 Corinthians 15:30-32**).

1. They loved Him and were followers of Him (an apparent bias), yet they had nothing to gain personally except criticism, ostracism, and martyrdom.

a. They had plenty of reasons to motivate them to keep quiet, not preach!

2. All the apostles, except for John died martyrs deaths according to reliable, ancient tradition: *They were **not** in it for fortune and fame!*

- Simon Peter, Simon the zealot, Andrew, James, son of Alphaeus, Philip, & Bartholomew crucified. Matthew and James, son of Zebedee killed by the sword. Thaddaeus killed by arrows. James, brother of Jesus stoned to death. Thomas killed by a spear thrust. -- Paul was beheaded.

C. Are the writings of the apostles historically accurate?

1. The intention of the apostles was to write accurately about the things investigated and found to be well-supported by witnesses (**Luke 1:1-4**).

2. The New Testament is infinitely stronger than for any other record of antiquity (**Luke 3:1-2**).

Sir William Ramsey, regarded as one of the greatest archaeologists who ever lived said this:
*"Luke is a historian of the **first** rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy... this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians. **Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness.**"*

- Repeatedly, archaeological discoveries have confirmed specific references in the gospels, especially in the gospel of John.

Dr. Nelson Glueck, former president of the Hebrew university, a renowned archaeologist at Temple Emanuel said this: *"It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever contradicted a biblical reference."*

3. If a person is going to be convinced enough to believe (**John 20:31**), such belief must flow from **accurate** history.

4. Instead of covering it up, they included the hard sayings of Jesus that may have been offensive to people and included the embarrassing moments of the apostles.

Examples: Peter's denial; James & John desiring positions of power in Heaven, doubting Thomas, etc.

5. Apparent "contradictions" between gospel accounts (e.g., **Mat. 8:28 / Lk 8:27 and Mat. 8:5 / Lk 7:3**) are not contradictions at all.

a. If the gospel accounts were *too* consistent, it would appear as if there was corroboration and they merely copied one another which would invalidate them as independent witnesses.

b. Differences between Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John only demonstrate that each were *independent* witnesses.

D. Was there agreement between numerous witnesses? (**1 Cor. 15:1-8**).

1. In addition, many non-bible sources of testimony from ancient historians (e.g., Cornelius Tacitus, Suetonius, Plinius Secundus, Flavius Josephus).

Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian, a Pharisee, and commander of the Jewish forces in Galilee wrote at the end of the first century: "He was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved Him at the first did not forsake Him, for He appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold."

V. The Historical Evidence

A. Jesus Lived

1. No reputable, scholarly critic of the resurrection has ever doubted that Jesus actually lived.
2. Jesus is referenced historically in the New Testament documents written by His apostles, the witnesses of His life and work.
3. Jesus is also spoken of by ancient historians such as Josephus, Tacitus and Suetonius.
4. More detail is known about Jesus, His life and His teachings, than most any other ancient historical figure.

B. Jesus **died** by crucifixion:

The idea that Jesus never really died on the cross can be found in the Koran (which was written in the 7th century). -- *Some Muslims contend that Jesus actually fled to India!*

There is a shrine that supposedly marks his real burial place in Srinagar in the vale of Kashmir.

1. Historical & Medical Accounts of Crucifixion:

a. Crucifixion was used by many nations throughout ancient history:

- In 1968 archaeologists in Jerusalem found the remains of about three dozen Jews who had died during the uprising against Rome around A.D. 70. One victim had obviously been crucified. - *Bone remains included the two heel bones still fastened together by a single iron nail of seven inches long still attached to small pieces of olive wood from the cross.*

Note: Jesus anticipated the horrible suffering of the cross He would have to endure the next day. His mental anguish was so great that he experienced Hematidrosis or sweat like drops of blood (**Luke 22:44**).

b. Before the crucifixion, punishment by **flogging** usually took place:

- The victim is severely whipped across the person's shoulders, back and legs with 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. The whip often had pieces of sharp bone which would cut the flesh severely. The back would be so shredded that part of the spine was sometimes exposed by the deep cuts.

- As the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh. The veins were laid bare, and the very muscles, sinews, and bowels of the victim were open to exposure.
- When it is determined by the centurion in charge that the prisoner is **near death**, the beating is finally stopped and led to his crucifixion (Roman floggings consisted of 39 lashes or more).
- Many people would die from this kind of beating even before they could be crucified. At the least, the victim would experience tremendous pain and go into **hypovolemic shock** (suffering caused by losing large amounts of blood; blood pressure drops causing fainting or collapse).
- Jesus was scourged (whipped or flogged) before His crucifixion as well as abused by the people (**Matthew 27:20-31**).

c. Included in pre-crucifixion punishment was *the crossbar burden*:

- A man condemned to be crucified had to **carry his own crossbar** from prison to the place of his execution.
- Jesus must have been severely beaten for He was unable to carry his own crossbar. Simon of Cyrene carried it for Him (**Mat. 27:32**; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26).
- Scholars say they used a long piece of wood (which was used for barring doors), a crossbeam that weighed approximately **110 pounds**. This was strapped to the victim's shoulders.

d. Crucifixion was a horrible way to die:

- *Jesus was crucified in the usual Roman manner*: Spikes 5 to 7 inches long tapered to a sharp point were driven through the wrists on to the horizontal beam (crossbar) in the outstretched position (each spike would go through median nerve to the hand causing **excruciating** pain (The word “excruciating” literally means “out of the cross”).
- Once Jesus was nailed to the crossbar, it was attached to the vertical stake and then spikes were driven through Jesus’ feet (nerves in his feet crushed causing severe pain). The actual hanging on the cross with arms outstretched would cause a dislocation of both shoulders (cf. **Mat. 27:33-35** -> fulfillment of **Ps. 22:12-18**).
- "The unnatural position made every movement painful; the lacerated veins and crushed tendons throbbed with incessant anguish; the wounds, inflamed by exposure, gradually gangrened; the arteries -- especially at the head and stomach -- became swollen and oppressed with surcharged blood." (Dr. Frederick Farrar).
- Crucifixion is an agonizingly slow death by **asphyxiation** (A condition in which an extreme decrease in the amount of oxygen in the body accompanied by an increase of carbon dioxide leads to loss of consciousness or death):
- Crucifixion puts stress on the muscles and diaphragm putting the chest into the inhaled position; in order to exhale, the person must push up on his feet so the tension 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 that form the heels. -- These efforts to breathe would lead to exhaustion.

- As the victim slows down his breathing he goes into what is called **respiratory acidosis** - the carbon dioxide in the blood is dissolved as carbonic acid, causing the acidity of the blood to increase. -- This eventually leads to an irregular heartbeat and **cardiac arrest**.
- Before death, the **Hypovolemic shock** (suffering caused by losing large amounts of blood) would have caused a sustained rapid heart rate that would have contributed to **heart failure**, resulting in the collection of fluid in the membrane around the heart as well as around the lungs.
 - e. Roman guards often used a steel shaft of a short spear to shatter the lower leg bones of the victims so they could not push upward to breathe in order to speed up death (**John 19:28-33**).
 - f. The guards verified Jesus' death by piercing His side (**John 19:34**).
 - (1) The fact that Jesus was already dead and His bones were not broken fulfilled prophecy (**John 19:35-36 / Ps. 34:20**).
 - (2) Blood and water came out as a result of the ruptured heart and collection of fluids during the crucifixion.
- *Medical authorities confirm that blood & water poured out of heart & lungs was proof of death.*
 - (3) Roman guards made **no** mistake about death (To make a mistake in their work could cost them their lives; e.g., **Acts 16:27; 27:42**).

2. Jewish Burial

- a. It was custom to prepare the dead (after cleansing) with various types of aromatic spices (**John 19:39-40**).
- b. If Jesus was not already dead by crucifixion, he would of suffocated by the wrappings and spices.

3. Though it would have been impossible, had Jesus somehow survived crucifixion, His physical state would have been extremely poor and His disciples would have had to nurse him to health.

- a. He would have hardly been a role model as a victorious conquer of death nor an inspiration to His apostles to preach of the resurrection.

- **May we conclude that Jesus did in fact die from crucifixion!**

VI. Modern Day Attempts to Deny the Resurrection of Jesus.

A. The Swoon Theory

1. This theory maintains that Christ really didn't die, that He merely "swooned" or fainted and passed into a state of semi-consciousness that was mistaken for death.
2. Others assert that Jesus had been given a drug that made Him appear to die and later he was revived by the cool, damp air of the tomb.
 - a. Theorists will point out that Jesus was given some liquid on a sponge while on the cross (**Mark 15:36**) and that Pilate seemed surprised at how quickly He had died (**Mark 15:44**).

3. The truth is Jesus was given liquid on a sponge two different times on the cross.
 - a. The first time He rejected it because it was wine mixed with myrrh (a narcotic to deaden the pain) (**Mark 15:23**).
 - b. The second time He received it because it was only sour wine with no drug in it (**Mark 15:36; John 19:29**).
4. This theory must be rejected because we have already established that Jesus did indeed die from being crucified.

B. The Hallucination Theory

1. This theory explains the appearances of Christ after His death as private phantasms, subjective experiences, or internal visions seen within the mind while deprived of any external, objective reference.
2. The resurrection of Jesus could not be a hallucination for the following reasons:

#1 Hallucinations usually occur only with particular kinds of personalities (e.g., high-strung, imaginative, unstable). - *Jesus appeared to housewives, fishermen, tax collectors, Pharisees, etc.*

#2 Hallucinations are very individualistic because their source is the private subconscious. They come one at a time. - *It is highly unlikely that the 500 disciples (1 Cor. 15) would all experience the same exact hallucination at the same time.*

#3 Rarely are there misinterpretations of the external object in a hallucination. - *The theory can't explain how it happens that on three separate occasions the vision of the Christ was not immediately recognized as Jesus (Luke 24:13-31; John 20:15, 21:4).*

#4 Hallucinations usually occur in people who have had psychological preparation, induced by such things as special drugs or plants, strong ascetic practices, or deprivation of food, drink, and sleep. - *If the disciples had been in such a receptive mood we might be persuaded to accept this theory, but none of them expected the Resurrection.*

#5 Hallucinations usually occur in favorable places, such as a sacred grove or sanctuary of some kind. - *But Christ appeared in a variety of places: on a lake shore, on a mountain, near the tomb, in both Jerusalem and Galilee, on the road to Emmaus.*

#6 Hallucinations usually occur at favorable times, such as night, early morning, or twilight. - *But Jesus appeared to people at several different times of the day.*

#7 Normally hallucinations reoccur over a long time with some regularity. - *After 40 days no one saw Christ again. Paul and Stephen saw Christ briefly. - If it was a hallucination, then why did they all stop so suddenly?*

C. The Objective Vision Theory or the "telegram theory."

1. This theory explains that the appearances of Jesus were truly visions, but objective visions, or messages sent to the grieving disciples by God, to reassure them that Jesus was still alive, though in a glorified, spiritual form.
 - a. *This idea is as miraculous as the resurrection itself!*

2. This theory is false for the following reasons:

- a. Jesus ate a meal with the disciples (**Luke 24:43**).
- b. A spirit has no flesh & bones (**Lk 24:39**); resurrected Jesus had a body.
- c. No Jew would have believed in a resurrection that was totally spiritual.
- d. To a Jew, resurrection meant the restoration to life of the total person, body, soul, spirit and whatever else personality entails.

D. The Stolen Body Theory - the oldest competing theory based on the empty tomb.
[We shall see that this theory holds no ground as we examine the following evidence.]

VII. Proof That Jesus Rose from the Dead.

A. Jesus was securely sealed in His tomb (**Mat. 27:57-60**).

1. Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Council that voted to condemn Jesus, asked for his body and buried him (Joseph did not vote with them - **Lk 23:50-52**).
 - a. Jesus was safely **buried** (**1 Cor. 15:4**), not eaten by birds on the cross nor dug up from the grave by wild dogs.

Question: “Why would the apostles make up a story that one of the members who belonged to the Council who voted to crucify Him was the one who did the right thing and gave Jesus an honorable burial?” - Especially while all of Jesus’ disciples (except John) deserted Him!

2. The body was placed in a **new** tomb. - There was *only one* body to account for.
3. The tomb was cut out of rock. There was *only one* way in and *one* way out.
4. A large stone covered the entrance. -This prevented any easy access to the body (**Mat 27:65-66**).

Note: Excavations of first-century sites of ancient tombs demonstrate that there was a slanted groove that led down to a low entrance, and a large disk-shaped stone was rolled down this groove and lodged into place across the door. A smaller stone was then used to secure the disk. It would be easy to roll this big disk down the groove. However, it would take several men to roll the stone back up in order to reopen the tomb. -- *Each tomb was therefore quite secure.*

5. A Roman guard was placed at the tomb and a Roman seal was placed on the stone (This was to prevent tomb robbery from happening during the Passover):
 - a. This signified that the full power and authority of Rome would stand against the one who broke the seal!
 - b. By moving the stone a person would have to break the Roman seal thus mocking the authority of the Roman Empire. - The person would have to get past the Roman guard who was placed at the tomb.

B. Who could have possibly moved the stone?

1. **The Jewish leaders did not** (**Mat. 27:62-64**).
 - a. They were the very ones trying to prevent the resurrection!
 - b. They had a perfect time to present the body on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached that God raised Jesus from the dead (**Acts 2**).

2. **The Romans did not.** They would not want to risk their necks for what they would consider as "silly Jewish superstition."

a. The penalty for a Roman guard's failure was death (e.g., **Acts 16:27**).

3. The best explanation the Jews came up with was to **accuse the disciples** of stealing the body (**Matt 28:11-15**).

Note: There is precedent for Roman guards reporting to Jewish leaders (e.g. John 18:3), therefore it was not unusual for Roman guards to report to the chief priests of the Jews.

a. If they were asleep, how did they know it was the disciples?

b. How could they sleep with a big boulder being moved?

c. Why did the authorities not prosecute the apostles as grave robbers?

d. The Roman guards guarded Jesus' grave and the Jews could not deny this fact when hearing about the risen Christ.

4. **Only God** could have moved the stone! (**Mat. 28:1-2; Acts 13:30**).

C. **Witnesses** saw that the tomb was empty (**John 20:1-8**; Later Peter preaches about it in the first gospel sermon after Jesus' resurrection - **Acts 2:24-32**).

Note: If the tomb had not been **truly** empty, it would have been **impossible** for the movement of Christianity founded on belief in the Resurrection to have come into existence in the same city where this man had been publicly executed and buried. -- *No one claimed that the tomb still contained Jesus' body.*

D. Numerous witnesses saw the resurrected Jesus (**Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-14; Luke 24:13-40, 50-52; John 20:11-28; 21:1-23; Acts 1:3; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8; etc.**).

VIII. The Significance of the Resurrection.

A. Declares Jesus to be the Son of God (**Romans 1:3-4**).

B. Gives Christians assurance of their own resurrection (**1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:13-14**)

Note: Through baptism (**Rom. 6:1-4**) and the Lord's Supper (**1 Cor. 11:23-28**), the early Christians celebrated His death, burial, & resurrection. His death provided atonement or forgiveness (**Eph. 1:7**) and His resurrection was a triumph over death - *a great victory!* (**1 Cor 15:51-58; Heb 2:14-15**)

C. Demonstrates that salvation is found only in Christ (**1 Peter 3:21**).

1. If you are not a Christian, you have only one option if you want to be saved.

a. You must obey the gospel of Jesus Christ if you want to benefit from His death and resurrection and go to Heaven (**2 Thes. 1:7-10**).

Conclusion: Base Your Faith in Jesus on the Evidence the Lord Has Provided!

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