

# Historical and Logical Evidence Supporting The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

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- 1) The Doctrine of Christ's Resurrection
  - a. The Resurrection account of the New Testament
    - i. Christ prophesied to His followers that He would die and be resurrected.
    - ii. After praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, He was taken by Roman soldiers. He was tried and sentenced to crucifixion.
    - iii. His body was taken down from the cross and buried in a tomb.
    - iv. A stone was placed over the entrance and guards were positioned.
    - v. Mary and some other women came to the tomb to anoint Christ's body with spices and perfume, and found the tomb empty; the guards had fallen to the ground, the stone was rolled away, and an angel testified that Christ had risen.
    - vi. The women ran to tell the disciples. Peter and another disciple came to see the empty tomb.
    - vii. The tomb was empty. Christ was not there.
    - viii. Jesus subsequently appeared to His followers on different occasions.
  - b. Inconsistencies in the New Testament gospel accounts
    - i. Some would point out that there are some differences of the story in the books of Matthew, Mark and Luke.
      1. These are:
        - a. The stone was rolled back while the women were there (Matthew), vs. before they arrived (Mark, Luke).
        - b. An angel is sitting on the rolled-away stone (Matthew), vs. in the tomb (Mark, Luke).
        - c. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go to the tomb first (Matthew), vs. both Marys and Salome (Mark), vs. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna, and the other women (Luke).
        - d. The women rush from the tomb in fear and joy to tell the disciples, and meet Jesus on the way (Matthew), vs. run from the tomb in fear, with no mention of meeting Christ (Mark), vs. they simply report the story to the disciples (Luke).
      2. Most proven historical facts of ancient times are described by slightly differing accounts – and you can note that it is only secondary details. The main points are the same: all the New Testament gospel accounts report that Joseph of Arimathea takes the body and puts it in the tomb, which is visited by a small group of women followers early on the following Sunday morning, who find the tomb empty and have angels testify that Christ is risen.
      3. If all the accounts were exactly the same, it could be said that the apostles compared notes before writing the story. Nevertheless, the fact that they differ shows that they all had independent sources.
  - c. Credibility:
    - i. Wayne Jackson noted: "In Acts, Luke mentions thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine Mediterranean islands. He also mentions ninety-five persons, sixty-two of which are not named elsewhere in the New Testament. And his references, where checkable, are always correct. This is truly remarkable, in view

of the fact that the political/territorial situation of his day was in a state of almost constant change.” Therefore, Luke’s testimony is very probably accurate.

- d. Jewish traditions concerning resurrection:
  - i. Many Jews in ancient times did believe in a physical resurrection that would occur to everyone at the end of the world.
- e. Christ’s power over death:
  - i. Jesus raised Lazarus and Jairus’ daughter from the dead
  - ii. These examples are not resurrections (the resurrection involves the taking up of a new and glorified, perfected body), they are only revivals from the dead – but they prove that Christ had power over death.
- f. The New Testament teaches clearly that Christ was resurrected. However, the events surrounding the resurrection can also be proven from non-Biblical historical sources.
- g. Non-Christian sources:
  - i. Before we can prove the resurrection as probable, we must first prove that Jesus Christ actually lived.
    1. Several witnesses, even those hostile to Christianity, have written about and thereby proven that there actually was a person named Jesus Christ who lived in the first century AD.
  - ii. Christ’s existence, works, and the existence of early Christians
    1. Origen wrote of Christ’s parables. Philopseudes alluded to his miracles.
    2. Suetonius (AD 75-160), another Roman historian, speaks of Christians in Rome in 41-49 AD.
    3. Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor, wrote a letter to Emperor Trajan (AD 61-115) asking how to deal with the Christians – who were described as innocent citizens, who could not be shaken from their allegiance to Christ. Pliny acknowledges their high moral principles and their “determined and unbending resolve,” traced back to their worship of Christ. He asks if their “mere profession of Christianity, albeit without crimes, or only the crimes associated therewith are punishable” (Book 10, Letter 96, to the Emperor Trajan). Pliny continues: “This is the course that I have adopted in the case of those brought before me as Christians. I ask them if they are Christians. If they admit it, I repeat the question a second and a third time, threatening capital punishment; if they persist, I sentence them to death.”
    4. Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian (AD 37-94), wrote: “About this time appeared Jesus, a wise man (if indeed it is right to call Him man; for He was a worker of astonishing deeds, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with joy), and He drew to Himself many Jews (many also of Greeks. This was the Christ.)...” (*Antiquities* XVIII, iii, 3)
  - iii. The trial and crucifixion
    1. Tacitus (AD 54-119), a Roman historian, recorded that “Christus, from whom the name [of Christianity] had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus...” (*The Annals*, 109 AD: Book XV, xlv)
    2. Philopseudes alluded to Christ’s crucifixion.
    3. Origen wrote about an earthquake at the crucifixion of Christ. So also did Julius Africanus (AD 160-240): “On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness

Thallus, in the third book of his History, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun... Phlegon records that, in the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the sixth hour to the ninth - manifestly that one of which we speak."

4. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote: "And when Pilate, at the denunciation of those that are foremost among us, had condemned Him to the cross, those who had first loved Him did not abandon Him (for He appeared to them alive again on the third day, the holy prophets having foretold this and countless other marvels about Him.) The tribe of Christians named after Him did not cease to this day." (*Antiquities* XVIII, iii, 3)
5. Early Jewish rabbis wrote in the Talmud, "Jesus of Nazareth was a transgressor in Israel who practiced magic, scorned the words of the wise, led the people astray, and said that he had not come to destroy the law but to add to it. He was hanged on Passover Eve for heresy and misleading the people."

iv. The empty tomb

1. The enemies of Jesus Christ did not dispute, but acknowledged the fact that the tomb was in fact empty.
2. The earliest Jewish propaganda against Christians presupposed the empty tomb.
3. If the tomb were not really empty, it would've been impossible for the teaching of the Resurrection to be taught in the same city as the execution and burial.

v. Other records

1. Suetonius, the Roman historian, expresses confusion about having heard Jews arguing about Christ still being alive. This proves that the story of Christ's resurrection was not fabricated years after his death.
2. If it were simply a legend, it wouldn't be such a simple story. Fictional apocryphal accounts from the second century add all kinds of details and added narratives, but the original account remains in simplicity and clarity.

2) The burial

- a. Joseph of Arimathea, a Jewish leader, asked the Roman authorities for permission to give Jesus a proper burial in the tomb.
  - i. This detail actually gives credibility: if the story were made up, early Christians would not have portrayed a Jewish leader as one of the "good guys."
- b. Guards were guarding the tomb, and a heavy rock was placed over the entrance.

3) Theories for the empty tomb:

- a. Conspiracy theory (disciples stole the body)
  - i. The guards were placed at the tomb to prevent people from stealing the body.
  - ii. A heavy stone was placed over the entrance. Even if the guards had fallen asleep, the sound of the stone would have awakened them.
- b. Apparent death theory (Jesus didn't really die), also called the "swoon theory"
  - i. Hugh Schonfield suggested that Christ merely fainted or "swooned," and didn't really die. Later, in the cold, dark tomb, he revived and exited the tomb.
    1. Modern medical studies prove without a doubt that nobody could survive the suffering, crucifixion, and abuse that the Romans customarily inflicted upon their death-sentenced prisoners.

2. First of all, Jesus sweat “as it were great drops of blood.” This is a known medical condition called hematidrosis, associated with high psychological stress. When this occurs, chemicals break down the capillaries in the sweat glands – internal bleeding – which would come out with the sweat. (The medical condition probably wasn’t known of when the account was written, so the hard-to-believe description wouldn’t have been made up.) This condition would have already weakened Him before he was even taken by the soldiers. His skin would have been made extremely fragile.
3. Then He was flogged. Roman floggings consisted of thirty-nine lashings, but could be more depending on the mood of the soldier. The lashings were done with a whip of braided leather with metal balls woven in. When the flesh was stricken with the metal balls, it would cause deep bruises or contusions, which would break open as the flogging continued. In addition, the whip had pieces of sharp bone. The back would be shredded, often exposing the spine and even the muscles and sinews – lashings from the shoulders to the legs. This alone could cause death before the actual crucifixion.
4. The victim would go into hypovolemic shock – from loss of large amounts of blood. The heart races to pump blood that isn’t there, blood pressure drops considerably, causing fainting and collapse, kidneys stop producing urine to maintain liquid, and the person becomes very thirsty.
5. Christ was suffering many of these effects, according to the narrative – He collapsed while carrying His cross, and he said “I thirst” while on the cross – at which point he was given vinegar on a sponge. Christ would be in critical condition even before the nails were pounded into his hands and feet.
6. Next, the victim is laid down, his bleeding back against the ground. His hands are attached outstretched to the horizontal beam – nailed with 5-7 inch spikes through the wrists, about an inch below the palms. The nail would crush through the median nerve, the largest nerve going to the hand. The pain from this would be compared to hitting the nerve in the elbow called the funny bone – but more like taking a pair of pliers and squeezing and crushing the nerve, causing a permanent pain. The word “excruciating” actually was invented to describe the indescribable pain of crucifixion – it literally means “out of the cross.”
7. Then, the victim was hoisted and the horizontal bar was dropped into place onto the affixed vertical bar of the cross. Spikes were driven into the feet, causing similar pain as the hands.
8. The weight of the body would stretch the skin around the arms about six inches and both shoulders would be dislocated (interesting to note that Psalm 22 prophecies, “my bones are out of joint”).
9. Hanging in that vertical position, to exhale, the victim had to push up on his feet to give his stressed diaphragm freedom to push his lungs. The nail would tear through the foot. Eventually, complete exhaustion would take over and the victim had to stop breathing. The final death would be caused by asphyxiation. The carbon dioxide in the blood is dissolved as carbonic acid, causing an increase in the acidity of the blood. The heartbeat becomes irregular and erratical, and then the victim would have cardiac arrest.

10. Even before the death, the hypovolemic shock would cause fluid to be collected in the membrane around the heart, called a pericardial effusion, and around the lungs, called a pleural effusion. According to the Biblical account, a Roman soldier pierced his side with a spear (according to science, it would've been his right side), drawing the water-like fluid that had collected, with blood, out of His body. This would not have been anticipated, and by writing this, credibility is given to the account.
  11. Survival would be impossible. Jesus did die.
- c. Wrong tomb theory (the women went to the wrong tomb)
    - i. The site of Jesus' tomb was known to the Jewish authorities. The authorities would quickly point their way to the correct tomb.
    - ii. Even if the women could've gone to the wrong tomb, would the disciples who came after also have gone to the same wrong tomb?
  - d. Why the recorded Resurrection is the most probable theory:
    - i. Archaeologists have been able to study several first-century tomb sites.
      1. Generally there was a slanted groove on which a large disk-shaped stone was rolled down over the entrance. A smaller stone was used to secure the disk.
      2. This stone would be easy to roll into place, but would take several men to roll back uphill away from the entrance.
    - ii. The guards watching over the grave would have been severely punished for not doing their duty and guarding the grave. They would not have left it unguarded.
    - iii. According to the narrative, the stone was rolled away and the guards had fallen down, and an angel proclaimed that Christ was not there, but risen, as He said.
- 4) The Witnesses (post-resurrection)
- a. In a court of law, the testimony of only a few witnesses is required to prove a man guilty or innocent. There are over 500 witnesses to the Resurrected Christ.
    - i. The Resurrected Christ appeared on the day of His resurrection to Mary Magdalene, some other women, two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Simon Peter, and all of the apostles except Thomas.
    - ii. Later, he appeared to the apostle Thomas, again to seven of the disciples, 500 people on the mountain in Galilee, to James, and again to the 12 Apostles as He taught them for 40 days.
  - b. The apostles didn't understand Christ's prophecies about His resurrection, and didn't expect it, but after he appeared, their testimony only grew.
  - c. The apostle Thomas ("Doubting Thomas") did not believe the story of Christ's resurrection until he was allowed to feel the prints of the nails in His hands and feet. Then he believed.
  - d. What would the witnesses have gained from lying, anyway?
    - i. Money was donated to the church, but it was shared among all members – not just among the apostles.
    - ii. They were persecuted, and martyred.
    - iii. The apostles and others spent the rest of their lives proclaiming the Gospel all over the known world.
    - iv. They could easily have confessed having lied or stopped preaching, to save themselves from persecution, but they didn't. They didn't stop teaching, they didn't deny it, and they didn't change their minds.
  - e. Note that the first witnesses were women. Any later legendary account of this time period and culture would probably have portrayed men as being the first to visit the tomb. But

this wasn't the case: the writers faithfully recorded what happened, even if it was culturally embarrassing.

- f. The apostles suffered because of and for their convictions.
  - i. *Fox's Book of Martyrs* (16<sup>th</sup> century) records the martyr death of every one of the 12 original apostles except John the Beloved:
  - ii. James was beheaded. Peter was crucified (probably upside-down); Andrew, Phillip, Bartholemew, Jude, and Simon were also crucified. Thomas was thrust through with a spear, Matthew was killed with a sword, James the son of Alphaeus was stoned, and Judas hanged himself after betraying the Christ.
  - iii. Many of the later disciples were martyred as well: Mark was dragged to death, Luke was hanged on an olive tree, Matthias was stoned, and Paul was beheaded.
  - iv. Note: John the Beloved was exiled to the Isle of Patmos; a record of his death has not been found.
- g. Some would ascribe these appearances to hallucination.
  - i. Hallucination is rare – and usually caused by drugs or bodily deprivation.
  - ii. Nevertheless, people from all sorts of backgrounds and locations all witnessed similar appearances of Christ. It is extremely improbable, even absurd, to suggest that all these witnesses were hallucinating.
  - iii. The disciples touched his wounds, ate with Him, etc.

#### 5) The Success of Christianity

- a. Christ was a man of low social standing in his community. He was not a nobleman, nor a government official of great influence. He was born into a poor family.
- b. He claimed to be the Christ, or Messiah, that the Jewish (Old Testament) scriptures prophesied would come. Most of the other Jews did not believe Him; they persecuted Him, reviled Him, and accused Him of blasphemy. Nevertheless, according to the New Testament account, he fulfilled all the prophecies concerning the Messiah.
- c. He was arrested, judged, and crucified.
- d. Three days later, some women who went to His tomb found His body gone.
- e. His disciples claimed that He had risen from the dead and appeared to them before ascending into heaven.
- f. This simple story has prompted billions to follow Christ's teachings and believe in Him as the Savior and Redeemer of the world. Followers believe that without Him, all people would be lost. Followers believe in His literal Resurrection – wherein Christ took up His physical body again. Followers believe that He still lives today.
- g. Christianity is growing faster than the world's population. In China, where Christianity is just beginning to take root, there are an estimated 28,000 new Christians every day! In 1900, there were 10 million Christians in Africa. Today, there are 360 million – almost half the population of Africa.
- h. Christianity now has approximately 2.1 billion adherents, making it by far the largest religion in the world. This number reflects only those living today. However, since Christ's ministry, the number of Christians who have lived or are living is much more than 2.1 billion. It is expected to continue growing at an incredible rate.

#### 6) The Personal Witness

- a. What accounts for this growth?
- b. Millions of people claim to have received a personal witness of the truth of Christianity. This personal witness is described as the Holy Spirit, which witnesses of truth through a feeling of peace and faith. It carries with it the testimony of Christ. The Old and New Testaments speak about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit always testifies of truth.

- c. Every person can receive this personal witness for themselves, if they honestly and sincerely seek to learn the truth. Each person can know for themselves that Christ was, in reality, resurrected from the dead.
- d. Statistics prove that people who have accepted and live good Christian lives are happier in general, which proves that the Christian teachings of how one should live must be based in truth.
- e. This debate is not over the truth of Christianity, but by proving Christianity to be true, we also prove the reality of the resurrection. We acknowledge that there are Christians on both sides of this debate.