

Is Jesus Alive? Did He Rise from the Dead?

The Bible says that if Jesus didn't rise from the dead the Christian faith is worthless, a waste of time, but if He did raise from the dead then Christianity is the way to God, because Jesus is God. Is there any proof? Any evidence that Jesus did indeed rise from the grave as He said He would?

The Bible states that Jesus presented, "*Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs.*" (Acts 1:3) Infallible (en pollois tekmeriois), means unmistakable, undeniable proofs. "*an expression indicating the strongest type of legal evidence.*"

The following are some notes considering some of that infallible evidence that we have from history, archaeology, & the Bible. This is not intended to be an exhaustive defence for the resurrection of Jesus. To make it easier to remember what we're looking at we'll use the Acronym – EMPTY.

- I. E- Evidence for an empty tomb: (Matt. 28:1-6; Mark 16:1-6, Luke 24:1-3; John 20:1,2):
 - a. The empty tomb was verified by Jesus followers: It is reported to be found first by Jewish women, which is very significant because, "*In the first century Judaism, a woman's testimony was virtually worthless. A woman was not allowed to give testimony in a court of law except on rare occasions.*" No one in their culture would have stated that the tomb was first found empty by women unless it were true.
 - b. We know their findings were true, because those who were responsible for Jesus' death would have quickly produced His body or revealed His *real* tomb to counteract the declarations that He was resurrected.
 - I. Jewish Religious authorities did not produce a body to stop the teaching that Jesus had risen. "*Their job would have been easy if they could have invited potential converts [to Christianity] for a quick stroll to the tomb and there produced Christ's body.*"
 - II. Roman authorities did not produce a body to stop the teaching that Jesus had risen. Pontius Pilate the Roman Governor would have been quick to produce any evidence he had to the contrary, because he desired to keep the peace in a region that could quickly become volatile than as it is now.
 - c. The earliest recorded response of the Jewish Religious authorities agrees that the tomb was empty, because they began to claim that Jesus' body had been stolen by the disciples – Matt 28:11-13. *There are many problems with this theory, which we'll discuss later.*
 - d. *Nazareth Inscription*- a Roman Imperial edict written upon stone dating after the resurrection accounts warns of serious consequences against meddling with tombs or graves. This is a very unusual edict and most likely a response to the uproar in Jerusalem after the resurrection accounts.
 - e. Ancient Non-biblical writers confirm the teaching that Jesus lived, was crucified and rose from the dead:
 - I. *Josephus* (AD 37-97) – a Jew historian writing at the end of the 1st century recorded in his *Antiquities* (AD 90-95), "those who had loved [Jesus] from the first did

not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive on the third day.." Josephus was a Jew writing for the Romans as their subject. Knowing that the Roman's would not not have liked this account he would not have included it if it were not true.

II. *Pliny the Younger* (AD 112) – This Roman author and administrator's writings confirm that Christian's met on a certain day and celebrated communion, both which point to the early Christian's belief in the resurrection.

III. *Tacitus* (AD 55 - 120) – A Roman historian in his *Annals* (AD 155) states about Jesus, "suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for a moment, again broke out not in Judea., but even in Rome." His description of "a most mischievous superstition," is most likely a reference to Jesus' resurrection

IV. *Toledoth Jesu* (5th Century AD) – an anti-Christian writing from a Jewish perspective "specifically acknowledges the empty tomb" in trying to explain that the body was stolen.

II. Many Post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus: Jesus is recorded to have physically revealed Himself to His disciples after raising from the dead on several occasions, in different locations, different times, & to different groups of people over the course of 40 days after His resurrection. Everyone who saw Him declared Him to be alive and well:

- I. (Day one) *First occurrence is significant* - Mary Magdalene and other women at the tomb – John 20:15-18; Mark 16:11.
- II. Two disciples on the Road to Emaus – Luke 24:13-32; Mark 16:12-13.
- III. Peter by himself – Luke 24:34.
- IV. The disciples less Thomas in the upper room – John 20:19-25.
- V. (Eight days later) The disciples including Thomas in the upper room – John 20:26-25.
- VI. Disciples in Galilee – John 21.
- VII. 500 disciples at once – 1 Cor. 15:6 - This document written in 56 A.D., records (verse 6) that most of the people who saw Jesus were still alive when this was written basically saying, "*The witnesses are there to be questioned.*" Paul is quoting a creed that would have been written between three and eight years of the resurrection itself.
- VIII. James, Jesus brother who was not a disciple – 1 Cor. 15:7.
- IX. Saul of Tarsus who would become Paul the apostle – 1 Cor. 15:8; Acts 9:3-8.

III. P – Prophetic fulfillment: Jesus' resurrection fulfilled prophesy given about Him. He himself predicted His own death and resurrection in great detail, not vague statements as some who claim to predict the future do today, but very specific and precisely given and fulfilled.

a. Mark 10:33-34 - "*Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.*"

b. We know that Jesus said these things before they happened, because of the Jewish leaders' after Jesus death requested to have His tomb guarded.

Matt 27:63-64 - *"Sir (to Pilate), we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise. Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first."*

a. It is extremely significant that a man could foretell the way in which He would die & especially that He would later rise from the dead.

b. The Old Testament Scriptures also prophesied that Jesus would rise up from the grave:

Isaiah 53:10-12 (over 700 years before Jesus Birth prophesied) - Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; he has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, he shall see His seed, *He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.* He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah 26:19 - Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

d. Acts 13:33-35 – (Paul, speaking of Jesus resurrection & quoting Old Testament Scripture) "God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You. '(Psalm 2:7) "And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: 'I will give you the sure mercies of David.'" Therefore He also says in another Psalm: 'You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption. (Psalm 16:10-11)."

e. Acts 2:23-27 – (Peter on the day of Pentecost also quotes Old Testament Scripture in regards to Jesus' resurrection) "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. "For David says concerning Him: 'I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption (Psalm 16:10-11)."

Peter preached that powerful sermon in front of thousands within weeks of being so afraid of being identified with Christ that he denied even knowing Jesus to a servant girl. Something had transformed his life = seeing the resurrected Christ.

IV. T- Transformed Lives: The drastically changed lives of the disciples after these appearances. At Jesus' betrayal and through His crucifixion the disciples were afraid and hid themselves most of the time. But they suddenly became bold and started proclaiming Jesus had risen from the dead.

They who were once so fearful gave their lives completely to preaching about Jesus and His resurrection. They faced hardship, ridicule, hostility and eventually for all but one, John, they were martyred for their faith in a resurrected Christ.

- Would they have died for a lie? *"There would have been several opportunities over three to four decades of ministry to reconsider and renounce the lie."* A stolen body cannot explain the disciples' strong belief in the resurrection, so much as to die for it.
- *Would you die for something that you knew was a lie?* There are people who will die today for their religion, because they believe it to be true. *But would they die if they knew it was a sham?*
- The disciples weren't the only ones who radically changed after saying that they had seen Jesus risen from the dead:

V. The drastically changed lives of unbelievers:

- a. *Saul* – who was an ardent disciple of Judaism of the school of the Pharisees vehemently opposed the teachings of Christians and the message that Jesus was the Messiah and that He had risen from the dead. He was present and in agreement with the stoning of the first Christian martyr Stephen (Acts 7:58). He also was instrumental in leading persecution against Christians having them thrown into prison (Acts 8:3).

But Saul was changed from one who hated Jesus to His most zealous follower risking life and limb to teach of the risen Jesus. His letters make up a large portion of the NT. He was eventually beheaded in Rome for declaring Jesus had risen from the dead. *Why/how did this man change?* Because he met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-22).

- b. *James* - James is named specifically as a brother of Jesus in Matthew 13:55. In the Gospel of John 7:5 it states that, "For even His brothers did not *believe in Him.*"

But something changed the life of Jesus' brother James because later in the New Testament he is called an apostle (Galatians 1:19) and he is mentioned several times as being one of the elders of the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:18; Gal. 2:9,12). He also refers to himself as "*a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*" in James 1:1.

What is the most likely cause for a man who disbelieved the claims and actions of his brother to be the Messiah to reverse his thinking so much so that the Scriptures tell us that he became one of the leaders of the Christian church in Jerusalem and history (Josephus) tells us he was eventually stoned to death because of his beliefs in Jesus?

The irrefutable testimony of the resurrection of Jesus.

- c. Josh McDowell (who himself used to be a skeptic, but now travels the world lecturing about his faith in Jesus) wrote, *"The established psychological fact of changed lives, then, is a credible reason for believing in the resurrection. It is subjective evidence bearing witness to the objective fact that Jesus Christ arose on the third day. For only a risen Christ could have such transforming power in a person's life."*
- d. Frank Morison an English Trial Lawyer in the 1920's was a skeptic of Jesus resurrection and devoted himself to disproving its validity. However after examining the evidence himself became a Christian and authored, "*Who Moved the Stone?*" a book presenting the fact of Jesus' resurrection.

e. Thomas Arnold who was the Chair of Modern History at Oxford stated, *"I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."*

VI. Y - Young Church/Religion: that was birthed in a hostile environment to become a world religion is astounding evidence. Jewish religious leaders didn't want it to start and neither did the Romans, but it grew tremendously and quickly.

- a. The *Rapid growth of the Christian Church* in the immediate vicinity of the empty tomb and the resurrection appearances validates Jesus rising from the grave.
- b. Christianity would not have grown without the disciples' fervent belief that Jesus rose from the dead. The doctrine of the resurrection being true can be the only explanation for the rapid spread of the Christianity in a world locally dominated by Judaism and internationally by paganism. Someone has well said, *"The empty tomb of Christ has been the cradle of the Church."*
- c. If Jesus resurrection was disprovable the Church would have never been born, especially in area where the tomb was located. Along with the rapid establishment and spread of Christianity a great culture shift took place among those who embraced the news that Jesus was alive.
- d. Historically, *"...Jews have had a tenacity in clinging to their religious customs."* But, within weeks of the resurrection thousands of devout Jews living in their religions capital and who's culture was completely steeped in the religion of their ancestry drastically changed in their habit of worship:

1. Day of Worship – "The Jews' original day of rest and worship was Saturday because it was said that God had finished His creation and rested on the seventh day. This was written into their holy laws. The Sabbath is one of the supporting columns of Judaism. One of the most reverent things in the life of a Jew was the keeping of the Sabbath."

The Jewish followers (setting the precedent for all other Christians) of Christ changing their day of rest/worship from Saturday to Sunday (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). This is a monumental shift for the early disciples *"were Jews themselves! Keeping in mind what they thought would happen if they were wrong, we must recognise that this was probably one of the biggest decisions any religious body of men have ever made! How are we to explain the change from Saturday to Sunday worship without the resurrection?"*

2. Animal sacrifice was an integral part of Jewish worship. They practiced animal sacrifice as a way to atone for sin. They stopped sacrificing animals in recognition that Jesus came as the Lamb of God and was sacrificed on the Cross for the sins of the world then rose the 3rd day.

3. Jewish believers began to celebrate communion, i.e. the wine and bread symbolising the blood and body of Jesus being sacrificed on the Cross as a celebration of joy (Acts 2:46). If He was not risen proving His victory over death communion would not have become something to celebrate. If there was no resurrection, *"Jesus' death would have meant only humiliation and accursedness by God."* *"The memory of the meal that led directly to the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus, their Lord, would have been an unbeara-*

ble pain. What changed the anguish of the Last Supper into a communion of joy the world over?"

4. Converts to Judaism continued to be circumcised, while the Jewish Christians ceased the religious practice of circumcision and began to baptise fellow believers. Baptism is symbolic of a believer being united to Christ's death and resurrection. When he enters the water he dies to his old sin nature, and he rises out of the water to share a new resurrected life in Christ. How is one to account for the meaning of Christian baptism if the resurrection never took place?

VII. Early church fathers writings attest their belief in the resurrection of Jesus and history records their willingness to be martyred for their faith. For Example:

a. Ignatius (A.D. 50-115) – history records that he was thrown to wild beasts in the Colosseum in Rome for his faith. While on his journey from Antioch to Rome he wrote several epistles one which states of Jesus, "He really died, and was buried, and rose from the dead."

IX. The importance of the resurrection – Jesus is God:

- a. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead proves that He is God, because He rose by His own power showing that He has the power of God and is equal to God (John 10:18). *"Could the Man who predicted His death and resurrection, only to have it come to pass exactly as He had said, be anything but God?"*
- b. Since Jesus prophecies about Himself came to pass it shows that what He says is truth and we should accept what He has said concerning God. Also since it is proven that Jesus rose from the dead and He alone has come back from the dead He has the authority to tell us what takes place after death and in regards to how we can attain eternal life.
- c. Since the Bible accurately tells us about Jesus & His resurrection we should believe its' accuracy in telling us that we need to turn from our sins & accept Jesus as our Lord & Saviour.

X. Addressing Other Questions Such as the Disciples Stealing the Body:

- a. Would they have died for a lie? "There would have been several opportunities over three to four decades of ministry to reconsider and renounce the lie." A stolen body cannot explain the early Christians strong belief in the resurrection as we'll talk about in a minute.
- b. The disciples were not in a position to steal the body. They had all abandon Jesus out of fear for their lives. They would not have been able to overcome a Roman guard if they wanted to.
- c. Why weren't they forced to produce the body by the Romans or religious leaders?
- d. How could the soldiers have known the disciples stole the body if they were asleep? "What judge would listen to you if you said that while you were asleep, your neighbour came into your house and stole your television set? Who knows what goes on while he's asleep? Testimony like this would be laughed out of any court."

e. "It is a matter of history that the apostles from the very beginning made many converts in Jerusalem, hostile as it was, by proclaiming the glad news that Christ had risen from the grave- and they did it within a short walk from the sepulchre."

f. Facts about the tomb show the impossibility of this theory:

I. I. Stone: – Word for stone used here is *Golel*, which means great stone. It has been suggested by notes found in a fourth century manuscript of Mark 16:4 that this was a stone that was so heavy that at least 20 men would have pushed it to put it into place. 1 ½ - 2 tons

II. Roman Guard: - Consisted of 10 – 30 men with a constant 4-man watch. The punishment for deserting ones post was death. There were 18 items that a Roman soldier could be put to death for and one was leaving a night watch. It is recorded that in 390 AD that a Roman soldier who was found asleep while on night watch was punished by being thrown off a cliff resulting in his death. "A.T. Robertson, the noted Greek Scholar, says that the phrase, 'Have a guard' (*echete koustodian*) [is] present imperative [and refers to] a guard of Roman soldiers, not mere temple police."

III. Temple Police: Why would they have asked Pilate for a guard if they were going to use their own? But if they did the Temple police were well trained and disciplined priests. They were highly disciplined for example if they were found to be sleeping on a night watch they would be severely beaten with a rod and have their clothes burned, sometimes while they were still wearing them. They would have had nothing to gain from letting Jesus' body go.

IV. Roman Seal: - The Roman guard witnessed the sealing of the tomb before they began their watch. The seal was a symbol of Roman law, which meant if it were to be violated that the offender would be punished with a high penalty (being crucified upside down). The sealing was performed by stretching a cord across the stone and fastening it to the rock at either end by means of sealing clay that would be stamped with an official Roman seal.

XI. Answering the Question concerning the reliability of the New Testament:

- a. There are over 5,686 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in existence today.
- b. More than 25,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament are in existence today.
- c. There are also over 15,000 early versions of the Scriptures; (a version of the Bible is when it is translated into another language). Some of these versions may date as early as 150 A.D.
- d. J. Harold Greenlee stated:

The number of available MSS of the New Testament is overwhelmingly greater than those of any other work of ancient literature... the earliest extant MSS of the N.T. were written much closer to the date of the original writing than is the case in almost any other piece of ancient literature... Since scholars accept as generally trust-

worthy the writings of the ancient classics even though the earliest MSS is in many cases so small, it is clear that the reliability of the text of the N.T. is likewise assured.

- e. F.F. Bruce world-renowned biblical scholar, author and former head of the Department of Biblical History and Literature at the University of Sheffield stated, "There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament."
- f. Comparison to other ancient texts: The *Iliad* written by Homer in the 9th century B.C. is second with only 643 manuscripts that still survive. The first complete preserved text of Homer dates from the 13th century A.D. (approximately 400 years after it was written). A quick comparison with the N.T.:
 - I. The earliest complete manuscripts of the New Testament are of the 4th century from 250-300 years after the originals were written.
 - II. There are only 40 lines or 400 words of the NT that there is any kind of debate over. The *Iliad* has 764 lines in question. The difference amounts to the *Iliad* having a 5 % in question where the NT has a 1/2 of 1 %. There are no fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith are hinging on the lines represented in the small percentage that are in question.
- g. Comparison with the Early Church Fathers Writings:
 - I. Dean John Burgon compiled an index of the New Testament in the Church Father's writings. This 16-volume work is in the British Library and contains Burgon's catalogue of 86,000 quotations from the New Testament found in their writings. Their quotations of the New Testament are identical to the Bible today.
 - II. Sir David Dalrymple explored the works of the church Fathers of the second and third centuries and found quotes from the entire New Testament except for 11 verses.
- h. The unison of the many manuscripts, writings of the church fathers, and other early versions of the New Testament show that the transmission of the Scriptures up to the present day have been done with amazing accuracy and hold more validity than any other works of antiquity. As scholar Dr. John Warwick Montgomery has said:

To be skeptical of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament.
- i. Archaeological evidence: Nelson Glueck, the renowned Jewish archaeologist, wrote, "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a single biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible."
- j. Prophetic proof in the example of the prophecies concerning Jesus, there are hundreds of prophecies concerning Jesus in the Bible:

- I. Scholars have worked out the probability of one man who has lived upon the earth up to present day to be able to fulfil eight prophecies in regards to Jesus. For one man to have fulfilled all eight prophecies the probability is 1 in 10^{17} . That would be 100,000,000,000,000,000.

- II. To illustrate the chances of this happening the following example is given, "supposing that we take 10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and [this silver dollar must be the marked one]."

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