

Did Jesus Really Rise From the Dead?

SR: Luke 24:1-12 or Acts 1:1-3

INTRO

1. If someone walked up to you this minute and said he could raise the dead, what would you do? How would you respond to such a claim? Would you believe? Probably not, right? So, why believe this story in the Bible?
2. Yet, the Bible account of the resurrection of Jesus has stood for 2000 years. Why?
3. Today, I will show you why! I will be the defense attorney, defending Jesus of Nazareth against false claims of fraud, deceit, and worse. You can be the jury – you decide!
4. Because, one way or the other, we all must decide whether we will have faith in Christ Jesus, and all mankind does decide, one way or the other...

A. First, **Some Ground Work – Salvation is through Faith not “Science:”**

1. Our salvation is based on faith –my faith, your faith. “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1)
2. That salvation is of faith is decreed by God and will not change. Thus we cannot prove in human or scientific terms that God exists, because God has prevented it. If we have concrete proof, then we have absolute knowledge, not faith. Where there are absolutes, there is no need for faith, and one simply knows. In a case like that, faith has no merit!
3. Consider what Jesus said to the apostle Thomas, when Thomas saw and felt His wounds: John 20:24-29 –
4. But God does not demand BLIND faith from us, and thus He has left us the best eye-witness testimony ever assembled to prove one point in time – the most important point in time – the Life of Christ. Consider what Luke says to introduce his Gospel: **Luke 1:1-4 -**

I will present the case for the resurrection in reverse chronological order, beginning with the opinions of modern OBJECTIVE scholars, and ending with a detailed examination of the New Testament evidence. This will take time, so please attend patiently!

B. The Opinion of Historians & Scholars

Over the centuries, many historians & scholars have offered their learned opinions regarding the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. These opinions are neither inspired nor infallible, but we will begin with the thoughts of these people and work our way back in time to the eye-witness accounts of the Holy Bible.

What is at Stake: The Resurrection as Historical Fact – or Not?

1. Dr. Norman Geisler, Dean, Southern Evangelical Seminary:
“If Christ did not rise in the same physical body that was placed in the tomb, then the resurrection loses its value as evidential proof of His claim to be God (John 8:58; 10:30). The resurrection cannot verify Jesus’s claim to be God unless He was resurrected in the body in which he was crucified.”
2. The Apostle Paul: 1 Corinthians 15:13-17

It is immediately clear that the resurrection is either fact or fiction, and if fiction, why would so many have died for such a bizarre and lost cause?

The Unique Nature of the Prophecies of the Resurrection:

3. Jesus's Prophecies of His Own Resurrection: (16 places + John 14-16)
Matthew 12:38-40; 16:21; 17:9, 22, 23; 20:18-19; 26:32; 27:63
Mark 8:31-9:1; 9:10, 31; 10:32-34, 14:28,58
Luke 9:22-27 **John** 2:18-22; 12:34; chapters 14-16
4. R. M'Cheyne Edgar in *The Gospel of a Risen Savior*,
 "Here is a teacher of religion and He (*Jesus*) calmly professes to stake His entire claims upon His ability, after having been done to death, to rise again from the grave. We may safely assume that there never was, before or since, such a proposal made..."
5. Wilbur Smith, Professor of English Bible, Moody Bible Institute:
 "But when He said that He Himself would rise again the 3rd day after He was crucified, He said something that only a fool would dare say, if he expected longer the devotion of any disciples – unless He was sure He was going to rise. No founder of any world religion known to men ever dared say a thing like that!"

Historians on the Nature and Quality of the Evidence:

6. Wilbur Smith, Professor of English Bible, Moody Bible Institute:
 "Let it simply be said that we know more about the details of the hours immediately before and the actual death of Jesus, in and near Jerusalem, than we know about the death of any other man in all the ancient world."
7. Clark Pinnock, McMaster University:
 "There exists no document from the ancient world, witnessed by so excellent a set of textual and historical testimonies . . . Skepticism regarding the historical credentials of Christianity is based upon an irrational bias."
8. E. M. Blaiklock, Professor of Classics, Auckland University:
 "I claim to be an historian. My approach to Classics is historical. And I tell you that the evidence for the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ is better authenticated than most of the facts of ancient history . . ."
9. Frederick Fyvie Bruce, Manchester University:
 "If the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt."
10. A. N. Sherwin-White, Classical Roman Historian
 "For the New Testament of Acts, the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. Any attempt to reject its basic historicity, even in matters of detail, must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted."
11. Thomas Arnold, Oxford University:
 "I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind that 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."
12. Ambrose Fleming, Professor Emeritus of Electrical Engineering, University of London, and honorary fellow, St. John's College, Cambridge: Commenting on the New Testament:
 "We must take this evidence of experts as to the age and authenticity of this writing, just as we take the facts of astronomy on the evidence of astronomers who do not contradict each other."

This being so, we can ask ourselves whether it is probable that such a book, describing events that took place about 30 or 40 years previously, could have been accepted and cherished if the stories of abnormal events in it were false or mythical. It is impossible...”

13. To conclude, is it possible for someone today to write a biography or an historical account of an event or a person, pertaining to events of 20 to 40 years ago, and present in it lies and false reports, and have such actions go unchallenged? NO! The false reports would be challenged, and the lies would be exposed through a disciplined examination of the evidence.

Now, let's move back further in time, to the works of another group of experts & authorities...

C. The Testimony of the 2nd & 3rd Century Christian Writers

1. These writers were men in the early congregations in Asia, Egypt, Europe, and Palestine. Neither Inspired not infallible, but one step closer in time -
2. They were devout followers of Christ and many were martyred for their faith in Jesus.
3. Some of the earliest claimed to have been pupils of some of the Apostles
4. In their many writings and letters to each other, they testify again and again to the reality of the life of Christ and His resurrection.
5. The names of some of these men: Clement of Rome, *Epistle to the Corinthians* (AD 95); Polycarp *Epistle to the Philippians* (AD 110); Justin Martyr (c. AD 100-165); Ignatius (c. 35 – 107) *Gospel*; Tertullian (c. AD 160-220), to name a few...
6. And finally, there is a most compelling account from the pen of Flavius Josephus (AD37 – c.100), who was a hostile Jewish historian who, around the end of the first century, wrote his work *The Antiquities of the Jews*. This passage has been named *The Testimonium* by more recent scholars:

“Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, *if it be lawful to call him a man*; for he was a doer of wonderful works - a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. *He was the Christ*; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those who had 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 these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him*; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.” (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.3.3)
[italics mine – SSW]

But the younger Ananus who, as we said, received the high priesthood, was of a bold disposition and exceptionally daring; he followed the party of the Sadducees, who are severe in judgment above all the Jews, as we have already shown. As therefore Ananus was of such a disposition, he thought he had now a good opportunity as Festus was now dead, and Albinus was still on the road; so he assembled a council of judges, and brought before it the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ, whose name was James, together with some others, and having accused them as law-breakers, he delivered them over to be stoned.
(Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.9.1)

Now, let's retreat even further back in time and even closer to the days of Christ – to the Holy Bible and the 1st century AD...

D. The Credibility of the Bible

1. Beginning in the so-called “age of Enlightenment” of the 1600’s and 1700’s, and the waning power of the Roman church, attacks upon the credibility of the Bible became common. The accounts of the great people of the Bible and of cities such as Babylon & Nineveh were assumed to be quaint myths and silly stories.
2. By the end of the 1800’s, however, archaeology had proven the historical accuracy of the Bible. This continues today – wherever there appears to be a difference between the Bible account and the “historical record,” the unbelievers say, “see there, the Bible is wrong!” as though one discrepancy proves failure where 100’s if not 1000’s of accounts proven accurate mean nothing.

But wait a little longer until something else is uncovered, and the alleged error is shown to be the truth and the Bible is once again proven to be correct:

3. There exist over 20,000 copies of early manuscripts or parts of manuscripts of the New Testament. Likewise, we now have very early papyri - documents and fragments that very neatly and accurately span the period of time between the first century authors of the New Testament and the early manuscripts.
4. **This constitutes a more extensive historical record for the origin and authorship of the New Testament than for ANY OTHER book, document, story, legend, etc. of ancient times.**
5. William F. Albright, biblical archaeologist:
 "We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about A.D. 80, two full generations before the date between 130 and 150 given by the more radical New Testament critics of today."
6. In these ancient documents that we call the books of the New Testament, are written accounts of the resurrection.
 - a) The writers testify that they are directly inspired by God thru the HS
 - b) There are eye-witness accounts (we will give details below)
 - c) There are accounts of those who were with the eye-witnesses
 - d) These accounts are found in:
 - i. All 4 Gospels and the book of Acts
 - ii. The letters of Paul, Peter, John, James, Jude, and in Hebrews (Paul)
 - iii. This is a varied and large group of witnesses
 - e) It is significant that we have BOTH direct & indirect testimony, and not just one or the other.
 - f) Consider the simple account of Luke in **Acts 1:1-3** - The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

7. Ernest Kevan, Professor:
 “For the establishment of an alleged historical fact, no documents are esteemed to be more valuable than contemporary letters.”
- “There is the unimpeachable evidence of the contemporary letters of Paul the Apostle...about the authenticity and date of which there is very little dispute, belong to the time of Paul’s missionary journeys, and may be dated in the period AD 55-58.”

Now, regarding these historically credible Bible documents – who are the writers and the witnesses that speak from the pages of scripture...

E. Eyewitness Evidence (1st Century)

1. There were a number of credible and varied eye-witnesses to the resurrection:
 - a) The women at the tomb
 - b) Peter and John at the tomb
 - c) The Roman guards at the tomb
 - d) The angels at the tomb
 - e) Jesus Himself!

2. There were even greater numbers credible and varied eye-witnesses to the resurrected Jesus Christ:
 - a) The eleven Apostles and the rest of the disciples (John 20:19ff)
 - b) The two disciples on the road to Emmaus
 - c) The 500+
 - i. Paul’s account in 1 Corinthians 15 reports more than *500 witnesses* of the risen Christ.
 - ii. 1 Corinthians was written from Ephesus about AD 54 or 55
 - iii. Paul reports that the majority of these people were still alive at the time of his letter to the church in Corinth – “go ask them if you don’t believe me!”
 - iv. If only half were still alive, imagine putting 250 people on the stand to testify one after the other, that Jesus had indeed appeared to them, alive and in the body He was crucified in, during the 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension!!
 - d) The unnamed disciples who followed Jesus from Galilee and the many who witnessed His many miracles, signs, and wonders.
 - e) **Let me ask you, if you were attempting to discredit a truth you opposed, would you want to be faced by such a “cloud of witnesses?”**

3. False reports would have been challenged immediately and disproved by other eyewitnesses in that very day:
 - a) Jerusalem was filled with potential contradicting witnesses, both hostile and indifferent
 - b) Guards on the walls, at the gates, at the palaces, in the city streets
 - c) Merchants and other non-Jewish travelers from outside Judea
 - d) The Jewish leaders

- e) The residents of the city
- f) The very large numbers of non-resident Jews in and around the city for the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
- g) Any and all of these people were intensely aware of the presence of Jesus of Nazareth (witness the accounts of his triumphal entry and the events of the last week in Jerusalem)
- h) Any & all of these people would have been quick to dispute and disprove any false claims regarding the trial, the crucifixion, the attending miracles that the entire region would have witnessed, the empty tomb...

4. Jesus Appeared to Paul – One of the Most Hostile Opponents of the Early Church

Paul, a persecutor of the church, is converted to Christ upon seeing Him on the road to Damascus. Like the other disciples and Apostles before him, he suffers much for the Lord and eventually is killed simply because he was a Christian.

Paul is able to testify as an eye-witness of the risen Lord

F. A Consideration of the Recorded Evidence in the Scriptures

Now let's look carefully at the direct evidence these many witnesses and record-keepers have left for us to examine. Let us read it and weight it carefully.

How can anyone doubt the truth of the resurrection given the brutal nature of Jesus's execution, the unusual effort taken in His burial, and the evidence of the empty tomb? Consider the following:

1. The Burial of Jesus of Nazareth

- a) Jesus was placed in the tomb of the wealthy and influential Joseph of Arimethea.
- b) This man was a member of the Sanhedrin (Mark 15:42-45) – *he acted at great personal risk. Why, unless he knew the Truth?*
- c) The tomb was new & never used (Luke 23:53) – *no way to confuse the remains of Jesus with another body previously buried, no way to say the stone was easy to move because it had been moved many times before.*
- d) The tomb was cut into solid rock (Mark 15:46) – *no other way to enter*
- e) Joseph took Jesus's body down from the cross himself (Mk 15:46) – *Another Sanhedrin member also acting at great personal risk.*
- f) The tomb was in a garden (John 19:41) – *a tended place, visited by people, not remote. This was to have been the burial place of Joseph himself, a rich man, so it was located in a prominent and accessible place.*
- g) The garden, and thus the tomb, was near the site of the crucifixion (John 19:41) – *thus the body of Jesus went directly from the cross to the tomb. No long journey to a remote spot where some deception could have been attempted.*
- h) Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped His body in strips of fine linen and treated it with about 100 pounds of spices (John 19:39-40) – *the body was completely sealed in this wrapping, cutting off all air, sight and sound.*
- i) Joseph closed the tomb himself with a large rock – the usual method – *some scholars report that the rock would have been about 1 to 2 tons in weight – too heavy for a severely wounded man to move. (see Mark 16:4)*
- j) All this was seen by the group of women from Galilee who had been with Jesus. They followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how His body was

laid inside of it. (Luke 23:55) – *Jesus was definitely placed in the tomb and its location was clearly known.*

2. The Roman Guard & the Seal

- a) The Jewish leaders learned a little bit of the Gospel – they remembered that Jesus prophesied he would rise from the dead in 3 days (Matthew 27:63-65) so they ask Pilate to set a guard on the tomb. Pilate agrees.
- b) The guards are placed and the tomb stone is sealed, sometime on the second day, the day following the Day of Preparation. (Matthew 27:66)
- c) The number of guards is not given in the New Testament, but is reported by scholars to have been at least 4 and maybe as many as 16. (e.g., see Acts 12:4)
- d) The seal, if it was an official Roman seal, represents the authority of the government. Its presence is an official barrier, intended to warn anyone not to proceed further upon pain of death.

The statements of the Jewish leaders makes it clear that they understand that Jesus is dead, as do the disciples, the Roman guards at the cross, and Pilate.

The presence of the guards establishes round the clock protection from anyone attempting to tamper with the tomb, and so any theft or deception is prevented. The Roman guards will lose their lives if they go to sleep, leave their post, or if who or what they guard escapes or comes to harm. This is the most secure type of guard possible.

3. The Guards Abandon the Tomb

- a) As dawn approaches on the first day of the week, there is a great earthquake, an angel appears from heaven, rolls the stone away and sits on it. (Mt 28:2)
- b) The appearance of the angel is so terrifying that the guards shake in fear and “become like dead men.” (Mt. 28:3-4)
- c) Later, some of the guards present themselves to the Chief Priests and report the events at the tomb. (Mt 28:11)
- d) The chief priests bribe the guards to lie and say the disciples stole the body, and the Jews say they will protect the guards from execution by Pilate.

What would cause the guards to abandon their posts, an act that guaranteed a death sentence for them? They ran because of great fear, because of witnessing the actions of the Angel, and because they new the tomb was now empty.

Indeed, the tomb was really empty, the guards had really seen the angels (at least) and the hostile Jewish leaders clearly believed them, or they would not have felt the need to bribe them to ensure a different story. The only lying going on in Jerusalem was the lie created to hide the truth of the empty tomb!

4. The Empty Tomb

- a) At dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and a number of other women arrive at the tomb, only to find it clearly empty. (Lk 24: 1-10)
- b) The truth of the resurrection is testified to by angels (Mt 28:5-6, Lk 24:4-7)
- c) Jesus testifies of Himself to Mary and the other women (Mt 28:9-10, Jn 20:16)

- d) They excitedly spread the word among the disciples in the city.
- e) Peter and John come to the tomb to see for themselves.
- f) The disciples return to Jerusalem after this and remain there.

Is this what those guilty of a cheap hoax or fraud would have done? What would they have done with the body and when? How would they have stood against the combined scorn of the citizens of the city? How could they have kept their lie a secret for so long? Eventually someone talks or someone overhears a conversation about the truth, and the game is over and done.

The rest of the disciples were apparently content to believe the women and Peter and John. And they could go see for themselves! What reason is there for people to doubt it today?

The strongest kind of historical evidence is positive evidence from a hostile source. Who are our hostile sources for the Resurrection?

- *Both Jewish and Roman sources accept the empty tomb*
- *The guards, the High Priests and Pharisees*
- *Gamaliel in Acts 5:34-39 warns the Sanhedrin not to act against the disciples, lest they be found to be resisting God. He would not have said this if the Resurrection was a proven fraud, or if the body of Christ was still in the tomb.*
- *Josephus, whom we have already quoted.*

And today, 2000 years later, no one has produced a single piece of evidence from any source, whether direct or indirect, written or spoken, or archaeology that would disprove the resurrection of our Lord and Savior. No one.

5. The Moved Stone

- a) To those who approached the tomb, the first and most obvious clue that Jesus was risen was the fact that the stone had been rolled away / taken away from the tomb. (Luke 24:2, John 20:1)
- b) Note the language! The stone had been taken away from the tomb, not just slipped out of place.

Because their lives were at stake, the Roman guards would not all have been asleep at the same time, if any were. If somehow they had slept, any attempt to move such a huge stone would have awakened them, if the disciples approach to the tomb had not done so already.

If a living Jesus had tried to escape by moving the rock, they would have simply run him through with their spears. They would have likewise killed anyone attempting to steal the body.

The Roman guards would not have moved the stone and broken the Roman seal that they placed on it themselves.

The Jews didn't move the stone. The last thing they wanted was any hint of activity at that grave!

The disciples had run away at His arrest, and they watched the crucifixion from a distance (Luke 23:49). They were crushed and assumed Him dead and buried, because they did not believe Mary's report of His resurrection at first. So, they did not come to move it.

The women could not move the stone, it was too large and they knew it. (see Mark 16:3)

WHO MOVED THE STONE? The angle did, just as reported in Matt. 28:2!

6. The Grave Clothes

- a) We know already that Jesus's body was wrapped in linen and spices by Joseph and Nicodemus.
- b) Peter and John, upon entering the empty tomb, find the linen burial cloths still inside the tomb. The body cloths in one place, and the face cloth folded by itself. (John 20:3-7)

What does this mean? What is the point of noting that the cloths remain and that they are in two different places with the face cloth folded? This would not be what anyone would see if –

- *Jesus had never been put into this tomb – His body had been buried right there!*
- *Jesus had been somehow stolen out from under the guards' noses*
- *Remember, this was a new tomb – never used before.*
- *Jesus had risen and removed the cloths, or the angels had!*

7. The Risen Jesus

- a) The body of Jesus was not in the tomb, and neither the Jews nor the Romans ever produced it!
- b) Jesus eats in front of the disciples. (Luke 24)
- c) Jesus invites Thomas to see and feel His wounded hands and His lacerated side. (John 20)
- d) Jesus appears to over 500 people over a period of 40 days. (1 Cor. 15:1-8)
- e) Jesus performs at least 2 miracles after His is risen. (Luke 24, John 20 & 21)
- f) Jesus is publicly seen to ascend into heaven. (Acts 1)

8. The Behavior of the Apostles and early Christians

- a) Remained at first in Jerusalem preaching to the Jews present in those times.
- b) Went everywhere preaching the Gospel.
- c) Were opposed in the most severe ways possible.
- d) Persisted more & more as the persecutions increased in intensity.
- e) Rejoiced in the opportunity to suffer and even die for Jesus.
- f) Many ultimately laid down their lives.
- g) The only explanation for this is that they knew for a fact that what they preached was indeed true.
- h) If what they preached was false, what motive can they have had to die for an empty lie? 2000 years of inquiry have failed to produce even one plausible explanation!

G. CONCLUSION

1. What do you think now?
2. Objective (unbiased) minds have repeatedly acknowledged the historical and evidential strength of the Bible
3. The early Christians worldwide testified to the truth of the resurrection (book of Acts)
4. The Bible is the most thoroughly validated ancient document in existence
5. Even a host of hostile witnesses admit the fact of the empty tomb and that great numbers believed.
6. The people present in and around Jerusalem did not refute the resurrection in the days of the early church. The only known or recorded lie was that created by the Jewish authorities themselves.
7. The scriptural evidence is thorough, detailed, unimpeachable, and ultimately most credible, and so it has been for 2000 years – so it will always be.
8. Read Hebrews 12:1-2

HE IS RISEN