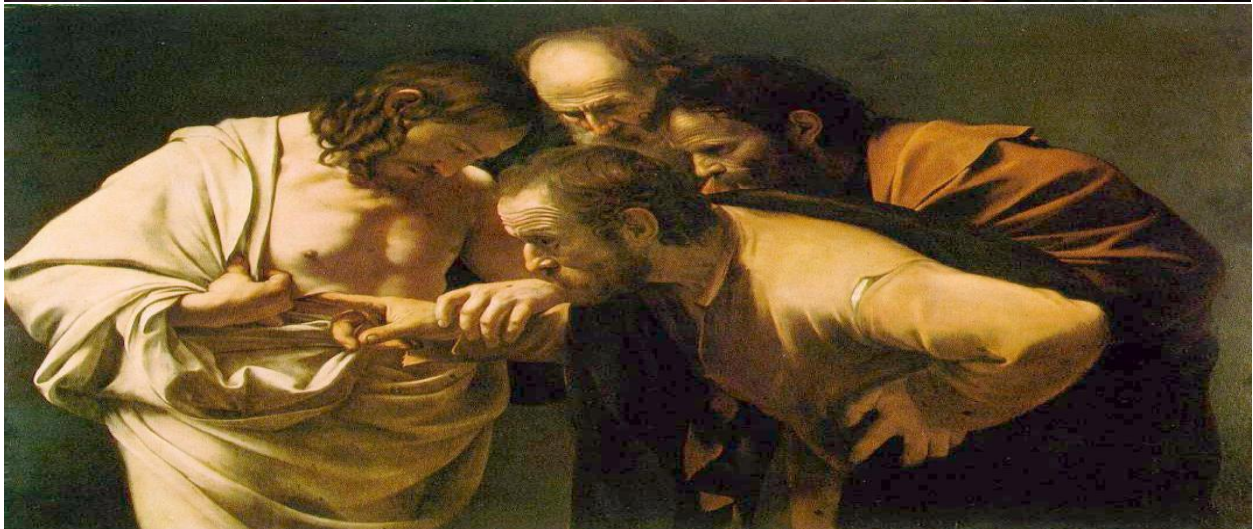


Up From The Grave He Arose!

By David Lee Burris



Explaining Resurrection

- “Resurrection stands as an essential element of the biblical and historical witness of the Christian Community. Without the resurrection, Jesus is not the Living Lord but a dead person held in memory. Without the resurrection, God is not the God of the Living, not the one who has the power to conquer death. Without the resurrection, humankind has no ultimate hope for the, ‘last enemy,’ death, wins.” – W. Willis

Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?

“Skeptics must provide more than alternative theories to the Resurrection; they must provide first-century evidence for those theories.”

—GARY HABERMAS

Gary Habermas has completed the most comprehensive investigation to date on what scholars believe about the Resurrection. Habermas collected more than 1,400 of the most critical scholarly works on the Resurrection written from 1975 to 2003. In *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope*, Habermas reports that virtually all scholars from across the ideological spectrum—from ultra-liberals to Bible-thumping conservatives—agree that the following points concerning Jesus and Christianity are actual historical facts:

1. Jesus died by Roman crucifixion.
2. He was buried, most likely in a private tomb.
3. Soon afterwards the disciples were discouraged, bereaved, and despondent, having lost hope.
4. Jesus’ tomb was found empty very soon after his interment.
5. The disciples had experiences that they believed were actual appearances of the risen Jesus.
6. Due to these experiences, the disciples’ lives were thoroughly transformed. They were even willing to die for their belief.
7. The proclamation of the Resurrection took place very early, from the beginning of church history.
8. The disciples’ public testimony and preaching of the Resurrection took place in the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified and buried shortly before.
9. The gospel message centered on the preaching of the death and resurrection of Jesus.
10. Sunday was the primary day for gathering and worshiping.
11. James, the brother of Jesus and a skeptic before this time, was converted when he believed he also saw the risen Jesus.
12. Just a few years later, Saul of Tarsus (Paul) became a Christian believer, due to an experience that he also believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.

The acceptance of these facts makes sense in light of what we’ve seen so far. The evidence shows:

The New Testament Story Is Not a Legend—The New Testament documents were written well within two generations of the events by eyewitnesses or their contemporaries, and the New Testament storyline is corroborated by non-Christian writers. In addition, the New Testament mentions at least 30 historical figures who have been confirmed by sources outside the New Testament. Therefore, the New Testament story cannot be a legend.

The New Testament Story Is Not a Lie—The New Testament writers included divergent and embarrassing details, difficult and demanding sayings, and they carefully distinguished Jesus' words from their own. They also referenced facts and eyewitnesses that their readers either already knew or could verify. In fact, the New Testament writers provoked their readers and prominent first-century enemies to check out what they said. If that's not enough to confirm their truthfulness, then their martyrdom should remove any doubt. These eyewitnesses endured persecution and death for the empirical claim that they had seen, heard, and touched the risen Jesus, yet they could have saved themselves by simply denying their testimony.

The New Testament Story Is Not an Embellishment—The New Testament writers were meticulously accurate, as evidenced by well over 140 historically confirmed details. They recorded miracles in those same historically confirmed narratives, and they did so without apparent embellishment or significant theological comment.

So Is the New Testament True?—If most scholars agree with the twelve facts stated above because the evidence shows that the New Testament story is not a legend, a lie, or an embellishment, then we know beyond a reasonable doubt that the New Testament writers accurately recorded what they saw. Does this mean that all of the events of the New Testament are true? Not necessarily. The skeptic still has one last out.

The last possible out for the skeptic is that the New Testament writers were deceived. In other words, perhaps the New Testament writers simply were wrong about what they thought they saw.

Given the characteristics of the New Testament that we have already reviewed, it does not seem plausible that the New Testament writers were deceived about everyday, non-miraculous events. They have been proven right about so many historical details. Why doubt their observations about everyday events?

But were they deceived about miraculous events like the Resurrection? Perhaps they really believed that Jesus had risen from the dead—and that's why they paid with their lives—but they were mistaken or fooled. Perhaps there are natural explanations for all the miracles they think they saw.

Critical scholars leave themselves this out. Consider fact number 5 from the dozen facts that nearly all scholars believe: "The disciples had experiences *that they believed* were actual appearances of the risen Jesus." In other words, scholars are *not* necessarily saying that Jesus actually rose from the dead (although some think he did). The minimal consensus of nearly all scholars is that the disciples *believed* that Jesus rose from the dead.

For the eyewitnesses and contemporaries of the events to be wrong, there must be some other explanation for the Resurrection and the other miracles recorded in the New Testament. Since the Resurrection is the central event in Christianity, let's begin there. How do skeptics explain away the Resurrection?

SKEPTICAL ABOUT SKEPTICAL THEORIES

Here are the explanations for the Resurrection most frequently offered by skeptics:

Hallucination Theory—Were the disciples deceived by hallucinations? Perhaps they sincerely thought they had seen the risen Christ but instead were really experiencing hallucinations. This theory has a number of fatal flaws. We’ll address two of them.

First, hallucinations are not experienced by groups but only by individuals. In that regard, they are a lot like dreams. That’s why if a friend says to you one morning, “Wow! That was a great dream we had last night, eh?” You don’t say, “Yeah, it was fabulous! Should we continue it tonight?” No, you think your friend has gone mad or is just cracking a joke. You don’t take him seriously because dreams are not collective experiences. Individuals have dreams—groups do not. Hallucinations work the same way. If *rare* psychological conditions exist, an individual may have a hallucination, but his friends will not. And even if they do, they will not have the same hallucination.

The hallucination theory doesn’t work because Jesus did not appear once to just one person—he appeared on a dozen separate occasions, in a variety of settings to different people over a forty-day period. He was seen by men and women. He was seen walking, talking, and eating. He was seen inside and outside. He was seen by many and by a few. A total of more than 500 people saw this risen Jesus. And they were not seeing a hallucination or a ghost because on six of the twelve appearances Jesus was physically touched and/or he ate real food (see table 12.1 on next page).

The existence of the empty tomb is the second fatal flaw with the hallucination theory. **If the 500-plus eyewitnesses did have the unprecedented experience of seeing the same hallucination at twelve different times, then why didn’t the Jewish or Roman authorities simply parade Jesus’ body around the city? That would have ended Christianity once and forever.** They would have loved to do so, but apparently they couldn’t because the tomb really was empty.

The Witnesses Went to the Wrong Tomb—Maybe the disciples went to the wrong tomb and then assumed that Jesus had risen. This theory also has two fatal flaws.

First, if the disciples had gone to the wrong tomb, the Jewish or Roman authorities would have gone to the right one and paraded Jesus’ body around the city. The tomb was known by the Jews because it was *their* tomb (it belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin). And the tomb was known by the Romans because they placed guards there. As William Lane Craig notes, the wrong tomb theory assumes that the all of the Jews (and the Romans) had a permanent kind of “collective amnesia” about what they had done with the body of Jesus.

THE ORDER OF THE TWELVE APPEARANCES OF CHRIST

	Persons	Saw	Heard	Touched	Other Evidence
1.	Mary MagdaleneX (John 20:10-18)		X	X	Empty tomb
2.	Mary Magdalene &X other Mary (Matt. 28:1-10)		X	X	Empty tomb (empty tomb and grave clothes also in Luke 24:1-12)

3.	Peter (1 Cor. 15:5)X & John (John 20:1-10)	X		Empty tomb, grave clothes
4.	Two disciples (LukeX 24:13-35)	X		Ate with him
5.	Ten apostles (LukeX 24:36-49; John 20:19-23)	X	X**	Saw wounds, ate food
6.	Eleven apostlesX (John 20:24-31)	X	X**	Saw wounds
7.	Seven apostlesX (John 21)	X		Ate food
8.	All apostles (Matt.X 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-18)	X		
9.	500 brethren (1X Cor. 15:6)	X*		
10.	James (1Cor. 15:7) X	X*		
11.	All apostles (ActsX 1:4-8)	X		Ate with him
12.	Paul (Acts 9:1-9; 1X Cor. 15:8)	X		

*Implied **Offered himself to be touched

Table 12.1

Second, even if the disciples did go to the wrong tomb, the theory does not explain how the risen Jesus appeared twelve different times. In other words, the appearances must be explained, not just the empty tomb.

Notice that the empty tomb did not convince most of the disciples (with the possible exception of John) that Jesus had risen from the dead. It was the appearances of Jesus that turned them from scared, scattered, skeptical cowards into the greatest peaceful missionary force in history. This is especially true of the devout enemy of Christianity, Saul (Paul). He was not only unconvinced by the empty tomb; he was persecuting Christians very soon after the Resurrection. It took an appearance of Jesus himself to turn Paul around. It seems that James, the skeptical brother of Jesus, also was converted after an appearance of Jesus. As we have seen, James's conversion was so dramatic that he became the leader of the Jerusalem church and was later martyred at the hands of the high priest.

The bottom line is this: even if one could explain the empty tomb naturally, this would not be enough to disprove the Resurrection. Any alternative theory of the Resurrection must also explain away the appearances of Jesus. The wrong tomb theory explains neither.

Swoon or Apparent Death Theory—Is it possible that Jesus didn't really die on the cross? Perhaps Jesus merely swooned. In other words, he was still alive when he was placed in the tomb, but he somehow escaped and convinced his disciples that he had risen from the dead. There are numerous fatal flaws with this theory as well.

First, enemies and friends alike believed Jesus was dead. The Romans, who were professional executioners, whipped and beat Jesus brutally to the point of his collapse. They then drove heavy, wrought-iron nails through his wrists and feet, and plunged a spear into his side. They didn't break his legs to speed death because they knew he was already dead. (Crucifixion victims often died by asphyxiation because they couldn't push themselves up to breathe. Breaking the legs would, therefore, speed death.) Moreover, **Pilate checked to make sure Jesus was dead**, and Jesus' death was the reason the disciples had lost all hope.

The brutal Roman crucifixion techniques have been verified through archaeology and non-Christian written sources. In 1968, the remains of a first-century crucifixion victim were found in a Jerusalem cave; the heel bone of this man had a seven-inch nail driven through it, and his lower arms showed evidence of nails as well. The spear in the heart has also been verified as a Roman crucifixion technique by the Roman author Quintilian (A.D. 35–95). Given such treatment of Jesus, it's no wonder the eyewitnesses thought he was dead.

Not only did those in the first century believe Jesus was dead; modern medical doctors also believe Jesus actually died. Writing in the March 21, 1986, edition of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, three medical doctors, including a pathologist from the Mayo Clinic, concluded:

Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side was inflicted and supports the traditional view that **the spear, thrust between his right rib, probably perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and heart and thereby ensured his death**. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge.

As we indicated in the last chapter, the blood and water from the spear wound appears to be another genuine eyewitness detail from the pen of John. That fact alone should end all doubt about the death of Jesus.

The second major flaw in the swoon theory is that Jesus was **embalmed in seventy-five pounds of bandages and spices**. It is highly unlikely that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (John 19:40) would have mistakenly embalmed a living Jesus.

Third, even if everyone was wrong about Jesus being dead when he went into the tomb, how would a badly injured and bleeding man still be alive thirty-six hours later? He would have bled to death in that cold, damp, dark tomb.

Fourth, even if he did survive the cold, damp, dark tomb, **how could he unwrap himself, move the two-ton rock up and away from the inside of the tomb, get by the elite Roman guards (who would be killed for allowing the breach of security)**, and then convince the scared, scattered, skeptical cowards that he had triumphed over death? Even if he could get out of the tomb and past the Roman guards, Jesus would have been a battered, bleeding pulp of a man whom the disciples would pity, not worship. They'd say, "You may be alive, but you're certainly not risen. Let's get you to a doctor!"

Fifth, the swoon theory cannot explain Jesus' bright-light appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus. What turned around this avowed enemy of Christianity shortly after the crucifixion? It certainly wasn't a normal human being who had healed from his crucifixion experience.

Paul's description of his conversion is recorded twice in the historically authenticated book of Acts. In chapter 22, Paul tells a hostile Jewish crowd about Christ's appearance to him:

"About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'

" 'Who are you, Lord?' I asked.

" 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied" (vv. 6–8).

Paul was then blinded for three days and experienced a 180-degree attitude change. He went from Christianity's most eager enemy to its most ardent advocate.

Paul's conversion experience cannot be explained by a swooned Jesus wielding a torch and using his "God voice" from the bushes. This was a dramatic display of divine power in broad daylight that dramatically changed a man, and the world, forever.

Sixth, several non-Christian writers affirmed that Jesus had died by crucifixion. These include Josephus, Tacitus, Thallus, and the Jewish Talmud. The Jewish Talmud, for example, says that Yeshua (Jesus) was hung on a tree on the eve of the Passover. This is not a source considered friendly to Christianity, so there's no reason to doubt its authenticity.

For these reasons and others, very few scholars believe the swoon theory anymore. There's simply too much evidence against it.

The Disciples Stole the Body—The theory that the disciples stole Jesus' body cannot support the skeptic's last option—that the New Testament writers were all deceived. Why? Because the theory makes the New Testament writers the deceivers, not the deceived ones! This, of course, flies in the face of all the evidence we've seen so far. The theory takes the untenable position that the New Testament writers were all liars. **For some inexplicable reason, they stole the body in order to get themselves beaten, tortured, and martyred!** Adherents to this theory cannot explain why anyone would do this. Why would the disciples embark on such a self-defeating conspiracy? **And why did every one of them continue to say that Jesus had risen from the dead when they could have saved themselves by recanting that testimony?**

In addition to the disciples' severe conflict of interest, adherents of this theory cannot explain other absurdities required by their theory. For example, how did the disciples get past the elite Roman guards who were trained to guard the tomb with their lives? If Jesus never rose from the dead, then who appeared to Paul, James, and the other eyewitnesses? Did the New Testament writers lie about their conversions too? Did Paul simply make up the evidence found in 1 Corinthians? And what about the non-Christian writers? Did Josephus lie about James being martyred by the Sanhedrin? **Did the Roman writer Phlegon (born ca. A.D. 80) lie** as well when he wrote in his *Chronicles*, "Jesus, while alive, was of no assistance to himself, but that he arose after death, and exhibited the marks of his punishment, and showed how his hands had been pierced by nails"? It would take more of a "miracle" for all this to happen than for Jesus to rise from the dead. *We don't have enough faith to believe all that!*

As we have seen, the notion that the disciples stole the body is exactly the explanation the Jews offered to explain the empty tomb. Beyond the fact that the disciples had no motive or ability to steal the body, this ancient Jewish explanation was not a good lie for two other reasons: 1) how would the sleeping guards have known that the disciples stole the body? and 2) no Roman guard would admit to the capital crime of sleeping on the job. (Perhaps that's why, as Matthew records, the Jewish authorities had to pay off the guards and promise to keep them out of trouble with the governor.)

In 1878, a fascinating archaeological discovery was made that may corroborate the Bible's claim that the Jews were circulating the theft explanation. A marble slab measuring 15 by 24 inches was discovered in Nazareth with this inscription:

Ordinance of Caesar: It is my pleasure that graves and tombs remain perpetually undisturbed for those who have made them for the cult of their ancestors or children or members of their house. If, however, anyone charges that another has either demolished them, or has in any other way extracted the buried, or has maliciously transferred them to other places in order to wrong them, or has displaced the sealing on other stones, against such a one I order that a trial be instituted, as in respect of the gods, so in regard to the cult of mortals. For it shall be much more obligatory to honor the buried. Let it be absolutely forbidden for anyone to disturb them. In case of violation I desire that the offender be sentenced to capital punishment on charge of violation of sepulchre.

Scholars believe this edict was issued by Emperor Tiberius, who reigned from A.D. 14–37 (during most of Christ's life), or Emperor Claudius, who reigned from 41–54. The striking nature of this edict is that it raises the penalty for grave robbing from a mere fine to death!

Why would the Roman emperor bother to make such a severe edict at this time in such a remote area of his empire? While no one knows for sure the reason for the edict, there are a couple of likely possibilities, both of which point back to Jesus.

If the inscription is from Tiberius, then it's likely that Tiberius learned of Jesus through one of Pilate's annual reports to him. Justin Martyr claims that this was the case. Included in that report may have been the Jewish explanation for the empty tomb (the disciples stole the body), prompting Tiberius to prevent any future "resurrections" with the edict.

If the inscription is from Claudius, then the edict may have been part of his response to the riots in Rome in A.D. 49. In Acts 18:2, Luke mentions that Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome. This is confirmed by the Roman historian Suetonius, who tells us that, "Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from the city." (Chrestus is a variant spelling of Christ.)

What did Christ have to do with Jewish riots in Rome? Perhaps Rome experienced the same course of events that took place in Thessalonica at roughly the same time. In Acts 17, Luke records that Thessalonica was thrown into "turmoil" when the Jews became "jealous" of Paul preaching that Jesus had risen from the dead. These Jews complained to the city officials, "These men [Paul and Luke] who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here.... They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus" (vv. 6–7).

If this is what actually happened in Rome, then Claudius would not have been pleased with a group who was defying his decrees and following another king. Once he had learned that this new seditious sect originated with Jews who believed their leader had resurrected, he may have exiled all the Jews from Rome and made grave robbing a capital offense.

Either of these two possibilities would explain the timing, location, and severity of the edict. But even if the edict is *not* connected with Christ's empty tomb, we already have good evidence that the Jews put forth the theft hypothesis. The main point is that **the theft hypothesis was a tacit admission that the tomb was really empty. After all, why would the Jews concoct an explanation for the empty tomb if Jesus' body was still in there?**

A Substitute Took Jesus' Place on the Cross—This happens to be the explanation offered by many Muslims today—Jesus was not crucified, but someone like Judas was killed in his place. The Qur'an claims of Jesus,

They killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not: Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise (Sura 4:157-158).

So according to the Qur'an, it only appeared that Jesus was crucified, and Allah took him directly to heaven.

There are a number of problems with this theory, not the least being that there's absolutely no evidence to back it up. This assertion from the Qur'an comes more than 600 years after the lifetime of Jesus. How can this be considered a more authoritative source for the life of Jesus than the accounts of the eyewitnesses? For this theory contradicts all the eyewitness testimony, and the testimony of the non-Christian sources.

Moreover, this theory raises more questions than it answers. Are we to believe that scores of people who witnessed some aspect of Jesus' death—the disciples, the Roman guards, Pilate, the Jews, Jesus' family and friends—were *all* mistaken about who was killed? How could so many people be wrong about a simple identification? This is like saying that Abraham Lincoln wasn't the one killed next to his wife on that April evening in 1865 at Ford's Theater. Was Mary Lincoln mistaken about the man sitting next to her? Was Lincoln's bodyguard wrong about whom he was guarding? Was everyone else mistaken about the identity of the president as well? This is not believable.

There are many other questions raised by this theory. If Jesus wasn't killed, then why was the tomb of the man who really *was* killed found empty? Are we to believe the *substitute* rose from the dead? If so, how did he do it? Are we to believe that all the non-Christian historians are wrong about the death of Jesus? And what are we to make about the Jewish admission of Jesus' death? Was the Talmud mistaken for saying that Jesus was hanged on a tree on the eve of the Passover? In short, are we to believe that everyone from the first century was wrong about everything?

One has to question a theory that comes more than 600 years after the events and asks you to believe that all the first-century evidence is wrong. In fact, this theory contradicts most of the twelve facts virtually all scholars believe (see the beginning of this chapter). Like other alternative theories, this one is built on mere speculation without a shred of evidence to support it. *Therefore, we don't have enough faith to believe it.*

The New Testament Writers Copied Pagan Resurrection Myths—This theory asserts that the New Testament is not historical because New Testament writers merely copied pagan resurrection myths. Skeptics are quick to cite supposed resurrections of mythical characters like Marduk, Adonis, and Osiris. Is the New Testament just another myth? Could this theory be true? That's not likely, for a number of reasons.

First, as we have seen, the New Testament is anything but mythological. Unlike pagan myths, the New Testament is loaded with eyewitness evidence and real historical figures, and it is corroborated by several outside sources. C. S. Lewis, a writer of myths himself, has commented that the New Testament stories do not show signs of being mythological. "All I am in private life is a literary critic and historian, that's my job," said Lewis. "And I'm prepared to say on that basis if anyone thinks the Gospels are either legends or novels, then that person is simply showing his incompetence as a literary critic. I've read a great many novels and I know a fair amount about the legends that grew up among early people, and I know perfectly well the Gospels are not that kind of stuff."

Second, the pagan-myth theory can't explain the empty tomb, the martyrdom of the eyewitnesses, or the testimony of the non-Christian writings. Nor can it explain the evidence that leads nearly all scholars to accept the other historical facts we listed at the beginning of this chapter.

Third, ancient non-Christian sources knew that the New Testament writers were not offering mythical accounts. As Craig Blomberg observes, "The earliest Jewish and pagan critics of the resurrection understood the Gospel writers to be making historical claims, not writing myth or legend. They merely disputed the plausibility of those claims."

Fourth, **no Greek or Roman myth spoke of the literal incarnation of a monotheistic God into human form (cf. John 1:1–3, 14), by way of a literal virgin birth (Matt. 1:18–25), followed by his death and physical resurrection.** The Greeks were polytheists, not monotheists as New Testament Christians were. Moreover, the Greeks believed in reincarnation into a different mortal body; New Testament Christians believed in *resurrection* into the same physical body made immortal (cf. Luke 24:37; John 9:2; Heb. 9:27).

Fifth, the first real parallel of a dying and rising god does not appear until A.D. 150, more than 100 years *after* the origin of Christianity. So, if there was any influence of one on the other, it was the influence of the historical event of the New Testament on mythology, not the reverse.

Finally, even if there are myths about dying and rising gods prior to Christianity, that doesn't mean the New Testament writers copied from them. The fictional TV show *Star Trek* preceded the U.S. Space Shuttle program, but that doesn't mean that newspaper reports of space shuttle missions are influenced by *Star Trek* episodes! One has to look at the evidence of each account to see whether it is historical or mythical. There's no eyewitness or corroborating evidence for the historicity of resurrection of any pagan god. No one believes they are true historical figures. But, as we have seen, there is strong eyewitness and corroborating evidence to support the historicity of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

DO YOU HAVE ANY EVIDENCE FOR THAT?

Christians are used to "counter-punching" alternative theories to the Resurrection. In fact, we've just done that by pointing out the numerous deficiencies in the alternative theories ourselves.

But that's not enough. While skeptics rightfully put the burden of proof for the Resurrection on Christians (and, as we have seen, Christians can meet that burden with good evidence), *Christians need to put the burden of proof on skeptics for their alternative theories.* In light of all the positive evidence for the Resurrection, skeptics must offer positive, first-century evidence for their alternative views.

It's one thing to concoct an alternative theory to the Resurrection, but it's another thing to actually find first-century evidence for it. A theory is not evidence. Reasonable people demand evidence, not just theories. Anyone can concoct a theory to explain any historical event. While skeptics have formulated numerous alternative theories to explain away the Resurrection, there is no evidence from any first-century source supporting any of them. **The only alternative theory that's even mentioned in a first-century source (the disciples stole the body) is from Matthew, and it is clearly identified as a lie.** No one from the ancient world—not even the enemies of Christianity—has offered a *plausible* alternative explanation for the Resurrection. Many **alternative theories formulated over the past 200 years are rooted in anti-supernaturalism.** Since modern scholars philosophically rule out miracles in advance, they concoct ad hoc explanations to explain away the Resurrection. As we have seen, their ad hoc explanations contain multiple absurdities or improbabilities.

And it's not just the Resurrection that the skeptics have to explain. They also have to explain the other thirty-five miracles that eyewitnesses have associated with Jesus. Are we to believe that the four Gospel writers were all deceived about all of those miracles as well as the Resurrection?

This mass deception theory needs evidence. Do we have any other first-century sources that offer a different explanation for the works of Jesus? The only one discovered (and it's probably from the second century) is the Jewish Talmud, which admits that Jesus performed unusual acts by saying that he "practiced sorcery." But this explanation is just as weak as the Jewish explanation for the Resurrection (the disciples stole the body). Perhaps sorcery could explain *some* of Jesus' "miracles," but all thirty-five? Sorcerers and magicians cannot perform the kinds of acts that Jesus is said to have performed—raising the dead, giving sight to the blind, walking on water, and so forth.

While it's true that we don't have independent attestation for all of the miracles in the New Testament (because some are mentioned by only one writer), we certainly have multiple attestation for many of them (including the Resurrection). The sheer number of Jesus' miracles cited by independent sources is too great to be explained away as a great deception. One person may be deceived once, but not numerous observers repeatedly.

The bottom line is that there are too many miracles and too much testimony to believe that all of the eyewitnesses got it wrong every time. With regard to the Resurrection, all alternative theories have fatal flaws, and we have strong eyewitness and circumstantial evidence that Jesus actually rose from the dead. In other words, not only do we lack a natural explanation for the empty tomb, we have positive evidence *for* the Resurrection. The explanation that requires the *least* amount of faith is that Jesus really did perform miracles and really did rise from the dead as he predicted. *So, we don't have enough faith to believe that the New Testament writers were all deceived.*

This is the case we have with the Resurrection. It's not just that we lack a natural explanation for the empty tomb. It's that we have positive eyewitness and corroborating circumstantial evidence *for* the resurrection miracle. Here's the context in which we must evaluate the evidence:

I. The Theistic Nature of This Universe Makes Miracles *Possible*—We live in a theistic universe where miracles are possible. (Indeed, the greatest miracle of all—creation of the universe out of nothing—has already occurred.) So, God can use prophets to announce his messages and miracles to confirm them. That is, a miracle can be used to confirm the word of God, through a man of God, to the people of God.

II. Ancient Documents Say Miracles Are to Be *Expected*—We have Old Testament documents, written hundreds of years in advance, that predict that the Messiah—a man who would actually be God—would come, be killed at a specific time as a sacrifice for sinful humanity, and rise from the dead.

III. Historically Confirmed Eyewitness Documents Say Miracles Are *Actual*—There are 27 documents written by nine eyewitnesses or their contemporaries that describe numerous miraculous events. Many of these documents contain historically confirmed eyewitness testimony that goes back to the time of the events, and the evidence demonstrates that the narrative is not invented, embellished, or the product of deception. We know this because the New Testament documents meet all seven tests of historicity identified in chapter 9. The New Testament documents:

1. are early (most written 15–40 years later, well within two generations of the events)
2. contain eyewitness testimony
3. contain independent eyewitness testimony from multiple sources
4. are written by trustworthy people who taught and lived by the highest standard of ethics, and who died for their testimony
5. describe events, locations, and individuals corroborated by archaeology and other writers
6. describe some events that enemies tacitly admit are true (enemy attestation)
7. describe events and details that are embarrassing to the authors and even to Jesus himself

These historically confirmed eyewitness documents tell the following story:

1. At the time and place, and in the manner predicted by the Old Testament, Jesus arrives in Jerusalem and claims to be the Messiah. He teaches profound truths and, according to numerous independent eyewitnesses, performs thirty-five miracles (some on groups of people) and rises from the dead.
2. Once-cowardly and unbelieving eyewitnesses suddenly begin to boldly proclaim Jesus' resurrection in the face of persecution and death. (Misguided people may die for a lie they think is true, but they will not die for a lie they know is a lie. The New Testament writers were in a position to know the real truth about the Resurrection.)

3. In the very city of Jesus' death and tomb, a new movement (the church) is born and quickly spreads by peaceful means on the belief that Jesus has risen from the dead. (This is difficult to explain if there was no Resurrection. How could Christianity begin in a hostile city like Jerusalem if Jesus' body was still in the tomb? The hostile religious and government authorities would have exposed Christianity as fraudulent by exposing the body.)
4. Thousands of Jerusalem Jews, including Pharisee priests, abandon five of their most treasured beliefs and practices and adopt strange new ones after converting to Christianity.
5. Saul, the most ardent enemy of the new church, is suddenly converted and becomes its most prolific proponent. He travels the ancient world to proclaim the Resurrection, suffering persecution and martyrdom. (If there was no Resurrection, then why did the greatest enemy of Christianity suddenly become its greatest leader? Why did he willingly suffer persecution and death?)
6. James, the skeptical brother of Jesus, suddenly becomes convinced that his brother is the Son of God, and then becomes the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He later suffers martyrdom at the hands of the high priest. (We all know that family members can be the most difficult people to convince to our religious viewpoint. James began as the unconvinced brother of Jesus [John 7:5]. If there was no Resurrection, then why did James—who was called “the Just” by second-century historians Clement and Hegesippus—suddenly come to believe that his brother really was the Messiah? Unless he saw the resurrected Christ, why would James become the leader of the church in Jerusalem and suffer a martyr's death?)
7. The Jewish enemies of Christianity don't deny the evidence but offer faulty naturalistic explanations to account for it.

Extraordinary Evidence—Some skeptics might admit that the Resurrection is possible, but they say it would require extraordinary evidence to believe it. That is, since the New Testament makes extraordinary claims—such as miracles—we must have extraordinary evidence in order to believe those claims. This objection seems reasonable until you ask, “What does ‘extraordinary’ mean?”

If it means *beyond the natural*, then the skeptic is asking the Resurrection to be confirmed by another miracle. How could that work? In order to believe in the first miracle (the Resurrection), the skeptic would then need a second miracle to support it. He would then demand a third miracle to support the second, and this would go on to infinity. So, by this criteria, the skeptic would never believe in the Resurrection even if it really happened. There's something wrong with a standard of proof that makes it impossible for you to believe what actually has occurred.

If “extraordinary” means *repeatable* as in a laboratory, then no event from history can be believed because historical events cannot be repeated. The believability of historical events can only be confirmed by looking at the quality of the eyewitness evidence and the nature of the forensic evidence in the light of the principles of uniformity and causality (we covered those principles in chapter 5). Besides, atheists who demand repeatability for biblical miracles are inconsistent because they do not demand repeatability of the historical “in which they believe—the Big Bang, spontaneous generation of first life, and macroevolution of subsequent life forms.

It certainly would be extraordinary, but is it really necessary? Does Jesus have to appear to every person in the world to make his claims credible? Why would he? We don't have to witness every event firsthand in order to believe the event actually occurred. In fact, it would be physically impossible to do so. We believe the testimony of others if they are trustworthy individuals, and especially if their testimony is corroborated by other data. This is exactly the case with the testimony of the New Testament writers.

Furthermore, if God were too overt because of frequent miraculous displays, then he might, in some cases, infringe on our free will. If the purpose of this life is to allow us to freely make choices that will prepare us for eternity, then God will give us convincing evidence but not compelling evidence of his existence and purposes. Therefore, those who want to follow God can do so with confidence, and those who do not can suppress or ignore the evidence and live as if he didn't exist.

Self-Canceling Miracles—The great skeptic David Hume argued that miracles cannot affirm any one religion because miracles are based on poor testimony and all religions have them. In other words, miracle claims are self-canceling. Unfortunately for Hume, his objection does not describe the actual state of affairs.

First, Hume makes a hasty generalization by saying that alleged miracles from all religions are alike. The miracles associated with Christianity are not based on poor testimony. They are based on early, eyewitness, multiple-source testimony that is unrivaled in any other world religion. That is, no other world religion has verified miracles like those in the New Testament.

Finally, the uniqueness, number, and quality of New Testament miracles cannot be explained by anything other than a supernatural cause. Jesus performed more than thirty miracles that were instantaneous, always successful, and unique. Some were even predicted. So-called miracle workers who claim partial success effect only psychosomatic cures, engage in trickery, perform satanic signs, or rely on naturally explainable events. In fact, no contemporary healer even claims to be able to heal all diseases (including "incurable" ones) instantaneously, with 100 percent success. But Jesus and his apostles did. This demonstrates the unique, God-authenticating nature of the New Testament miracles against all other supernatural claims of any other religion. In short, nothing "cancels" the miracles of the New Testament.

CONCLUSION: ONE SOLITARY LIFE

If you're still not convinced, consider one more piece of corroborating evidence: the incredible impact of Christ's life as expressed in a short sermon excerpt that is often titled "One Solitary Life":

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant. He grew up in another village, where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was 30. Then, for three years, he was an itinerant preacher.

He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a home. He didn't go to college. He never lived in a big city. He never traveled 200 miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

He was only 33 when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his garments, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave, through the pity of a friend.

[Twenty] centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race. I am well within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned—put together—have not affected the life of man on this earth as much as that one, solitary life.

If there was no resurrection, how could this life be the most influential life of all time? We don't have enough faith to believe that this one solitary life from a remote, ancient village could be the most influential life of all time ... *unless the Resurrection is true.*¹

¹ Geisler, N. L., & Turek, F. (2004). [*I don't have enough faith to be an atheist*](#) (pp. 298–324). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

The Resurrection Narratives

by [Kyle Butt, M.Div.](#)

Let's fit this [collusion] principle into our discussion of the resurrection narratives. If every single narrative describing the resurrection sounded exactly the same, what do you think would be said about the narratives? "They must have copied each other." In fact, in other areas of Christ's life besides the resurrection story, when the books of Matthew and Luke give the same information as the book of Mark, many people today claim that they must have copied Mark, because it is thought to be the earliest of the three books. Another raging question in today's upper echelons of biblical scholarship is whether Peter copied Jude in 2 Peter 2:4-17, or whether Jude copied Peter, because the two segments of scripture sound so similar.

Amazingly, however, the Bible has not left prospect of collusion open to the resurrection narratives. Indeed, legitimately it cannot be denied that the resurrection accounts come to us from various **independent** sources. Tad S. Clements, in his book *Science Vs. Religion*, vigorously denied there is enough evidence to believe in the resurrection. However, he acknowledged: "There isn't merely one account of Christ's resurrection but rather an embarrassing multitude of stories that disagree in significant respects" (1990, p. 193). And he makes it clear that the Gospels are separate accounts of the same story. Dan Barker admitted the same when he boldly stated: "Since Easter [the resurrection story—KB] is told by five different writers, it gives one of the best chances to confirm or disconfirm the account. Christians should welcome the opportunity" (1992, p. 179). One door, which everyone involved in the resurrection discussion admits has been locked forever by the resurrection accounts, is the dead-bolted door of collusion.

DEALING WITH “DISCREPANCIES”

Of course, it will not be possible, in these few paragraphs, to deal with every alleged discrepancy between the resurrection accounts. But some helpful principles will be set forth that can be used to show that no genuine contradiction between the resurrection narratives has been found.

Addition Does Not a Contradiction Make

Suppose a man is telling a story about the time he and his wife went shopping at the mall. The man mentions all the great places in the mall to buy hunting supplies and cinnamon rolls. But the wife tells about the same shopping trip, yet mentions only the places to buy clothes. Is there a contradiction just because the wife mentions clothing stores while the husband mentions only cinnamon rolls and hunting supplies? No. They are simply adding to (or supplementing) each other’s story to make it more complete. That happens in the resurrection accounts quite often.

For example, the Gospel of Matthew names “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary” as women who visited the tomb early on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1). Mark cites Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome as the callers (Mark 16:1). Luke mentions Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and “the other women” (Luke 24:10). Yet John mentions Mary Magdalene visiting the tomb early on Sunday (John 20:1). (Dan Barker cites these different names as discrepancies and contradictions on page 182 of his book.) Do these different lists contradict one another? No, not in any way. They are supplementary, adding names to make the list more complete. But they are not contradictory. If John had said “**only** Mary Magdalene visited the tomb,” or if Matthew stated, “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were the **only** women to visit the tomb,” then there would be a contradiction. As it stands, no contradiction occurs. To further illustrate this point, suppose that you have 10 one-dollar bills in your pocket. Someone comes up to you and asks, “Do you have a dollar bill in your pocket?” Naturally, you respond in the affirmative. Suppose another person asks, “Do you have five dollars in your pocket?,” and again you say yes. Finally, another person asks, “Do you have ten dollars in your pocket?” and you say yes for the third time. Did you tell the truth every time? Yes. Were any of your answers contradictory? No. Were all three statements about contents of your pockets different? Yes—supplementation not contradiction.

Also fitting into this supplementation discussion are the angels, men, and young man described in the different resurrection accounts. Two “problems” arise with the entrance of the “holy heralds” at the empty tomb of Christ. First, how many were there? Second, were they angels or men? Since the former question deals with supplementation, we will discuss it first. The account in Matthew cites “an angel of the Lord who descended from heaven” and whose “appearance was as lightning, and his raiment white as snow” (28:2-5). Mark’s account presents a slightly different picture of “a young man sitting on the right side, arrayed in a white robe” (16:5). But Luke mentions that “two men stood by them [the women—KB] in dazzling apparel” (24:4). And, finally, John writes about “two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain” (20:12). Do any of these accounts contradict any of the others as to the **number** of men or angels at the tomb? Factoring in the supplementation rule, we must answer, “No.” Although the accounts are quite different, they are not contradictory as to the number of messengers. Mark does not mention “**only** a young man,” nor does Luke say there were “**exactly** two angels, no less or no more.” Was there one messenger at the tomb? Yes. Were two there as well, Yes. No contradiction here.

The second question concerning the messengers is their identity: Were they angels or were they men? Most people who are familiar with the Old Testament have no problem answering this question. Genesis chapters 18 and 19 mention three men who came to visit Abraham and Sarah. These men stay for a short time, and then two of them continued on to visit the city of Sodom. Yet the Bible tells us in the first verse of Genesis 19 that these “men” were actually angels. But when the men of Sodom came to do violence to these angels, the city dwellers asked: “Where are the men that came in to thee this night” (Genesis 19:5). Throughout the two chapters, the messengers are referred to as men and as angels with equal accuracy. They looked like, talked like, walked like, and sounded like men. Were they men? Yes. Were they angels? Yes.

To illustrate, suppose you saw a man sit down at a park bench and take off his right shoe. As you watched, he began to pull out an antenna from the toe of the shoe and a number pad from the heel. He proceeded to dial a number and began to talk to someone over his “shoe phone.” If you were going to write down what you saw, could you accurately say that the man dialed a number on his shoe? Yes. Could you say that he dialed a number on his phone? Indeed, you could. The shoe had a heel, a sole, a toe, and everything else germane to a shoe, but it was much more than a shoe. In the same way, the messengers at the tomb would accurately be described as men—they had a head held in place by a neck, perched on two shoulders, a body complete with arms and legs, etc.

Thus, they were men, but they were much more than men, so they were just as accurately described as angels, holy messengers sent from God to deliver an announcement to certain people. Taking into account the fact that the Old Testament often uses the term “men” to describe angels, it is fairly easy to show that no contradiction exists concerning the identity of the messengers.

Perspective Plays a Part

What we continue to see in the independent resurrection narratives is not contradiction, but merely a difference in perspective. For instance, suppose a man had a 4x6-inch index card that was solid red on one side and solid white on the other. Further suppose that he stood in front of a large crowd, asked all the men to close their eyes, showed the women in the audience the red side of the card, and then had them write down what they saw. Suppose, further, that he had all the women close their eyes, showed the men the white side of the card, and had them write down what they saw. One group saw a red card, and one group saw a white card. When their answers are compared, it looks at first like they are contradictory, yet they are not. The reason the descriptions look contradictory is because the two groups had a different perspective, each looking at a different side of the card. The perspective phenomenon plays a big part in everyday life. In the same way that no two witnesses ever see a car accident the exact same way, none of the witnesses of the resurrected Jesus saw the activities from the same angle as the others.

I have not dealt with every alleged discrepancy in the resurrection accounts in this section. However, I have discussed some of the major ones that can be shown to be supplementation or items viewed from a difference of perspective. An honest study of the remaining “problems” reveals that not a single legitimate contradiction exists among the narratives—they are different, but they are not contradictory. Furthermore, the differences prove that no collusion took place, and instead offer the diversity that would be expected from different individuals relating the same event.

REFERENCES

Barker, Dan (1992), *Loosing Faith in Faith* (Madison, WI: Freedom from Religion Foundation).

Clements, Tad S. (1990), *Science vs. Religion* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus).

Glueck, Nelson (1959), *Rivers in the Desert: A History of the Negev* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Cudahy).

Ramsay, William (1915), *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975 reprint).

Templeton, Charles (1996), *Farewell to God* (Ontario, Canada: McClelland and Stewart).

Skeptics' Objections

OBJECTION 1: JESUS WAS A MYTHOLOGICAL FIGURE

Did Jesus of Nazareth even exist? If he did exist, what proof is there that he was crucified?

ANSWER: Evidence for Jesus Christ comes from many written documents from the first century.

- 39 ancient sources (in addition to the New Testament), such as Pliny, Josephus, and the Talmud, refer to the life of Christ, his teachings, crucifixion, and/or resurrection.
- Ignatius was a church leader, pupil of the apostle John, and lived only 70 years after the crucifixion of Jesus. Before he was martyred for his faith, Ignatius wrote the following concerning Jesus, "He was condemned: He was crucified in reality, and not in appearance, not in imagination, not in deceit. He really died, and was buried, and rose from the dead."¹



- An early creed or statement of faith found in the Bible was probably written from 8 to 20 years after the death of Jesus. The creed states that Jesus "was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15:3-8) Most critical historians agree that documents take more than 20 years to become corrupted by mythological development.
- Several witnesses report appearances of Christ after the resurrection. These reports are recorded in the Gospels, the apostle Paul's letters, and other letters in the New Testament. These accounts were dated from 25 to 60 years after the death of Jesus. If Jesus did not exist, or if the information within these documents were false or corrupt, those who knew Jesus, either friend or enemy, would have objected to the misinformation.
- Peter wrote that the disciples did not follow invented stories when they told people about the power of Jesus, but that they were eyewitnesses to Jesus and his majesty. (2 Peter 1:16)

Skeptics' Objections

OBJECTION 2: JESUS WAS JUST A MAN

Even if Jesus did exist, he wasn't everything his followers claimed he was. If anything, he was a compassionate person and a charismatic leader. He was a great prophet and teacher, but he was not God.

ANSWER: Evidence supports that Jesus was all he claimed to be.

Jesus claimed to be the Messiah (John 4:16-26) who came from heaven. (John 8:21-30) Jesus also claimed to be eternal (John 8:52-59), equal to God (John 10:24-39), and the savior of the world who would die for the forgiveness of sin and would rise from the dead on the third day. (Matthew 26:26-32)

Jesus performed many miracles and signs that supported his claims. Jesus performed miracles of healing (Matthew 8:2-4; Mark 7:31-37), miracles of nature (John 2:1-11; Matthew 8:23-27), and miracles of restoring life. (Matthew 9:18-26; John 11:1-44) The miracles of Jesus were performed in public and could not be contested by Jesus' enemies. On the day of Pentecost, Peter said that Jesus proved his power and authority by performing miracles, wonders, and signs. (Acts 2:22)

Jesus is either what he claimed, a madman, or worse. Knowing the things that Jesus claimed and did, most people would agree he was a moral and upright teacher. In addition, biblical scholars suggest that one cannot say "Jesus was a great teacher, but not God." C.S. Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*, "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him [Jesus]: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse."²

Jesus fulfilled many ancient prophecies. More than one hundred prophecies found in the Old Testament were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Statistician Peter Stoner³ reports that the probability of just eight of these prophecies about one person being fulfilled by chance is 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. Consider the chances of one person from the line of King David, being born in Bethlehem, entering Jerusalem on a donkey, being betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, crucified, buried in a rich man's tomb, and rising from the dead. Out of all the prophecies fulfilled in Jesus, more than fifty were fulfilled by his death and resurrection.

Jesus predicted he would suffer, die, and rise again. Months before his crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples that he [Jesus] must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31)

Skeptics' Objections

OBJECTION 3: JESUS' FOLLOWERS MADE IT ALL UP

After Jesus died, his followers invented a plan to deceive the entire world into believing that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the fulfillment of Scripture, and the Son of God who rose from the dead.

ANSWER: Evidence suggests that such a deception is highly unlikely.

People will not knowingly die for a lie. The disciples were not fearless liars who wanted to fool the world. After the crucifixion, the disciples fled in fear for their lives. However, once they saw, touched, and spoke with the risen Lord, their lives were transformed. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples left their former jobs and entered a life of telling about Jesus, and as a result endured hunger, persecution, abandonment, imprisonment, suffering, torture, and death. Former journalist Lee Strobel writes, "People will die for their religious beliefs if they sincerely believe they're true, but people won't die for their religious beliefs if they know their beliefs are false."⁴

Furthermore, all of Jesus' followers doubted the resurrection until Jesus physically appeared to them; then they believed.

- The women at the empty tomb were afraid and thought someone had stolen the body. Once Jesus appeared, the women worshiped him and shared the news with the disciples. (Matthew 28:1-10)
- The disciples did not believe the women's report of the empty tomb. They did not believe until Jesus appeared before them.
- Thomas did not trust the testimony of the other disciples. He requested to see and touch Jesus in order to believe. Once he did see Jesus, he believed.
- James, the brother of Jesus, was embarrassed when Jesus preached in Nazareth. (Matthew 13:55-56) He may have doubted the resurrection. However, after encountering the risen Lord (1 Corinthians 15:7), James became the leader of the Jerusalem church and, according to Josephus, was stoned to death because of his faith.⁵
- Saul of Tarsus was a Pharisee and strongly opposed Christians (followers of Christ). Saul opposed this new movement so much that he persecuted believers and assisted in the execution of early Christians. When the risen Christ appeared to Saul on the Damascus road, Saul was completely transformed. Saul, also known as Paul, became one of the greatest followers of Jesus. Throughout his lifetime, Paul was continuously persecuted and imprisoned for preaching the good news of Jesus. Paul's letters to churches and pastors eventually made up 13 books of the New Testament.

Skeptics' Objections

OBJECTION 4: THE WITNESSES WERE UNRELIABLE

There were no impartial witnesses who could verify the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ.

ANSWER: The reliability for the resurrection is supported by many witnesses, and by the lack of evidence from the opposition.

Anyone wishing to make up a story in the first century would not use women as their primary witnesses. All four gospels agree that the first eyewitnesses to the proof of Jesus' resurrection were women. On the surface, this does not seem like a major proof for the resurrection. Some may argue that these women, who were very close to Jesus, are not objective witnesses.

The significance of these eyewitnesses lies in understanding the role of woman in first century Judea. During the time of Jesus, a woman's testimony was considered worthless. In fact, a woman was not allowed to serve as a witness in court. If early believers wanted to fabricate the resurrection, they would have come up with witnesses who were men who had political and religious influence in their community. Instead, the writers reported the actual witnesses who were women and also close friends of Jesus. Those who recorded these events wanted to be accurate.

No one ever produced the body of Jesus. John Warwick Montgomery says, "In 56 AD Paul wrote that over 500 people had seen the risen Jesus and that most of them were still alive (1 Corinthians 15:6). It passes the bounds of credibility that the early Christians could have manufactured such a tale and then preached it among those who might easily have refuted it simply by

producing the body of Jesus."⁶ The greatest weapon against these early eyewitnesses would have been to produce the body of Jesus. That weapon was never used, because it didn't exist. The silence of those who opposed Christianity while Jesus' followers preached about the empty tomb only confirmed the fact that the tomb really was empty and its vacancy could not be explained otherwise.



Skeptics' Objections

OBJECTION 5: THE PHYSICAL RESURRECTION OF JESUS WAS NOT THAT IMPORTANT TO THE EARLY CHURCH

Christianity began as a moral and philosophical movement. The resurrection of Jesus was a later mythological theory rather than an early historical reality.

ANSWER: Sociological evidence suggests that the resurrection was a historical event.

The drastic social change in faithful Jews is evidence of the resurrection. For thousands of years, Jews endured persecution, oppression, and were scattered over the face of the earth. Unlike every culture around them, the Jewish people never lost their cultural and religious identity. Only a few years after the crucifixion, more than 10,000 Jews embraced the teachings of Jesus Christ and his followers. These early Jewish Christians continued to worship on the Sabbath, but they began worshipping on Sundays as well to mark the resurrection of Christ. As the church matured, they continued to worship on Sundays and referred to those days as "Little Easters." One reasonable explanation for the transformation of so many Jews is that they, or people they knew, had seen Jesus Christ after he rose from the dead.

Early church practices celebrated the resurrection. Jesus' followers were baptized when they first believed and then they would gather together to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

- Baptism celebrates the resurrection. (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12) By going under water, the believer remembers the death of Jesus, and by being brought out of the water, the believer identifies with Jesus rising to new life.
- In the Lord's Supper, believers eat bread and drink wine as a memorial to the suffering and death of Christ, as Jesus requested before he died. The Scriptures suggest that the Lord's Supper is a time of joy. (Luke 24:30-35; Hebrews 12:2) There is joy because believers recognize that with the crucifixion there is death, but with the resurrection there is eternal life.

These two practices would not have been carried out if the resurrection had not been a central component to the Christian faith.

Skeptics' Objections

OBJECTION 6: THE NEW TESTAMENT IS NOT RELIABLE

The New Testament is not historical and the information found in it is unreliable. The Bible has been translated too many times to trust its authenticity.

ANSWER: Archaeology and history supports the Bible's reliability.

Luke, the physician who wrote the Gospel of Luke, was proved to be an accurate historian. Theologian Norman L. Geisler examined Luke's references to 32 countries, 54 cities, and 9 islands, finding not one single mistake.⁷ Renowned archaeologist and historian Sir William Ramsay writes, "Luke's historical accuracy, supported by archaeological evidence, provides credibility to his depiction of Jesus Christ and the accuracy of his writings. 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. The book of Luke is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness."⁸ If Luke was so particular about the minor details, he most likely would be just as particular about the important ones.

The Bible we have today is remarkably true to the original writings. Of the thousands of copies made by hand before AD 1500, more than 5,300 Greek manuscripts from the New Testament alone still exist today. The text of the Bible is better preserved than the writings of Plato and Aristotle. In addition, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed the reliability of the Old Testament.

OBJECTION 7: THE RESURRECTION IS NOT IMPORTANT

Why should it matter whether Jesus Christ rose from the dead?

ANSWER: If it is true, there are eternal consequences.

The physical resurrection of Jesus Christ is important only if it is true. If Jesus did not rise from the grave, then the unbeliever is no worse or better off than before. However, if Jesus did rise from the dead, then it is reasonable to believe that everything Jesus claimed is true. If what Jesus claimed is true, then he died for the sins of the world and one receives eternal life by believing in Jesus.

The apostle Paul told skeptics in Athens that God wants all people everywhere to repent because he has set a day when he will judge the world by Jesus. He has given proof of this by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:16-33) Paul asserts that Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)

ISBN-10: 1-890947-97-0
ISBN-13: 978-189094-797-2



© 2004 RW Research, Inc.
Rose Publishing, Inc.
4733 Torrance Blvd., #259
Torrance, California 90503 U.S.A.
All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.
Email: info@rose-publishing.com
www.rose-publishing.com

Item 474X Evidence for the Resurrection. It is illegal to photocopy or reproduce this pamphlet in any way. 110411SCG
This pamphlet is also available as a 19" x 26" wall chart.

Other products by Rose Publishing:
100 Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus wall chart (511X); 100 Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus pamphlet (537X); Palm Sunday to Easter wall chart (310X); Life of Jesus wall chart (436X); Names of Jesus pamphlet (327X); Following Jesus pamphlet (492X)

Stock #474X Evidence for the Resurrection pamphlet
Retailers: Package of 10 pamphlets- Stock #475X (ISBN-13: 978-189094-798-9)

How does Jesus' death give evidence for the resurrection?

If it can be established that Jesus did die on the cross and was seen alive after His death by many credible witnesses, no one can logically doubt He was resurrected from the dead. The evidence may be ignored, but it cannot be denied. As difficult as it may be for some people to fathom, no other logical choice exists. The noted philosopher David Hume once remarked, "That a dead man should come to life has never been observed in any age or country." So, if Jesus Christ provided evidence that has convinced over a billion people throughout history that He actually did rise from the dead, it is clearly the most momentous event ever. But before we can examine the resurrection appearances, we must first prove beyond all doubt that Jesus really died on the cross.

That Jesus really died is doubted by no objective observer familiar with the evidence. In his *Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus*, Dr. Gary Habermas points out that historical evidence exists for the death of Christ even from non-Christian sources, including Cornelius Tacitus (A.D. 55-120) whom some acknowledge as the greatest historian of ancient Rome; the noted Jewish historian Josephus (A.D. 37-97); the early (Tannaitic) Talmud; and other accounts. "Of all the events in Jesus' life, more ancient sources specifically mention His death than any other single occurrence. Of the thirty-nine ancient sources, twenty-two relate this fact, often with details. Eleven of these sources are non-Christian, which exhibits an incredible amount of interest in this event."²

If we examine the details surrounding the crucifixion we can better understand why no one can logically doubt that Jesus really died.

Detail 1: Jesus was crucified publicly according to standard Roman practice which was both severe and chillingly efficient (John 19:18). Condemned criminals were deliberately placed on public display as a warning to others that they must obey Roman law and authority. Thus, the events were very plain and very public: A squad of four Roman executioners put Jesus to death in front of a large crowd.

Detail 2: The soldiers maintained a careful watch below the cross as indicated by their casting lots for Jesus' garments. Matthew mentions "they *kept watch* over him there" (Matthew 27:36 NIV) and that "the centurion and those with him... were *guarding* Jesus" (Matthew 27:54). Crucifixions were so horrible that guards were necessary lest family and friends remove the man from the cross and spare his horrible torment. Part of the soldiers' sworn duty was to make certain the condemned prisoners died.

Detail 3: Dozens of Jesus' friends and enemies watched Him as He died upon the cross. Everyone present heard His death cry. (See Mark 15:39-41; John 19:25-30,34.)

Detail 4: The crucifixion occurred on Friday. However, it was against Jewish law for the body of a condemned man to remain on the cross on the Sabbath day (Saturday). Therefore, the Jews requested of Pilate that the prisoners' legs be broken which would cause them to suffocate quickly (John 19:31). They could then, according to Jewish custom, be removed from the cross before the Sabbath began at 6 PM Friday. Pilate granted the request and the soldiers came and broke the legs of the two men on Jesus' side (John 19:32).

Detail 5: These soldiers, who were from practice accustomed to determining whether a crucified man was dead or alive, immediately recognized that Jesus was dead: “When they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs” (John 19:33, cf., verse 36; Numbers 9:12; Psalm 34:20).

Detail 6: Because it was unusual, if not rare, for a man to die by crucifixion this quickly—and to be doubly sure Jesus was dead—emphatic steps were taken. A soldier pierced Jesus' side with a spear “and immediately there came out blood and water” (John 19:34). This is medical confirmation that the sword had pierced Jesus' heart and that Jesus was dead.³

Detail 7: Pilate had the centurion *confirm* that Jesus had died. The only basis upon which Pilate could, by law, release the body to Joseph of Arimathea for burial was to verify the death of Jesus: “[He] ... went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph” (Mark 15:43-45 NIV).

Detail 8: Jesus' death was directly observed by the apostle John who recorded the entire series of events, including the spear thrust and the death cry. John wrote: “And he who has seen has borne witness, and his witness is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe” (John 19:35). In other words, John wanted to be absolutely sure that his readers understood Jesus *had* died on the cross. And because Jesus had died, there is simply no way to account for the subsequent resurrection appearances than by the resurrection itself.

Now consider all that Jesus went through in the events surrounding His crucifixion. He underwent six trials,⁴ which included horrible beatings and scourging. This alone killed some men. He carried the heavy beam of the cross (or part of it) part of the way to His crucifixion site. He underwent all the unspeakable tortures of the crucifixion itself. He had a Roman sword thrust through His side, piercing His heart. His death was then confirmed by Roman soldiers. It was confirmed again by the centurion to Pilate.

To think Jesus never died is ludicrous.

Consider one description of a typical crucifixion:

The condemned man was invariably scourged, and men were known to die under that punishment alone, so severe were the wounds inflicted by this cruel cat-o'-nine-tails inset with pieces of metal. It is possible that Jesus suffered this punishment both from the Jewish and from the Roman authorities (Matthew 26:67ff.; John 19:1). Thereafter, he had to carry the *patibulum* of his cross, and was led out under armed guard to die....

Heart and lungs... were put under immense strain by the position of the crucifixion. When the torture was deemed to have gone on long enough, or in order to ensure that the man was dead, the soldiers would perform the *crurifragium*, or breaking of the legs. This meant that the man, if still alive, could no longer hoist himself [in order to breathe] and would soon expire. The physical effects of crucifixion were appalling. Of all death it is the most lingering and agonizing. The unnatural position of the body made every movement a pain. The suspension of the whole body on jagged iron nails (one dating from A.D. 50 has recently been discovered in Jerusalem) driven through the most sensitive nerve centers of the wrists and ankles, insured constant exquisite torture.

The wounds of the nails and the weals from the lash soon became inflamed and even gangrenous. The body's position hindered circulation and caused indescribable pain in the chest. A raging thirst set in, brought on by the burning sun. The flies were thick around the victim. The agony of crucifixion was terrible beyond words.⁵

Indeed, survival from crucifixions was unknown; just as today, men simply do not survive the firing squad, electric chair, lethal injection, or gas chamber. Because the law has decreed the prisoner's death, even if a first attempt fails, procedures are repeated until death occurs. But death from crucifixion was just as certain as any modern method of execution; there was no escape.

I know of only one instance in ancient literature which is remotely comparable. Josephus (*Vita*, 75) tells of a time when he saw a number of captives being crucified; and, noticing three of his friends among them, he asked Titus, the Roman commander, for a reprieve. This was granted, and the men were taken down at once. It seems that they had only just been crucified, but despite being given every care by the most expert physicians available, two of the three died.... There can be no doubt that Jesus was dead.⁶

Further, those who removed the body and buried it would certainly have noticed any life, on Jesus' part. Had He been alive, they certainly would not have proceeded to bury Him; they would have done all in their power to save Him. But the historical accounts agree that Jesus was buried according to Jewish custom, the body wrapped with 75 pounds of spices and linen (John 19:39 NIV).

All four evangelists say the same: Mark says that Jesus died (Mark 15:37). Matthew says Jesus died (Matthew 27:50). Luke says Jesus died (Luke 23:46). John says Jesus died (John 19:30). The fact that "Christ died" is repeated a dozen times in Acts and the epistles.

There is absolutely no doubt that Jesus Christ died on the cross. There is also no doubt He was later seen *alive* by dozens of eyewitnesses in many different locations over a period of 40 days.

How does the burial of Christ supply evidence for His resurrection?

The facts surrounding the burial of Christ give further proof that not only was Christ dead, but it would have been absolutely impossible for anyone to take the body. Even if Jesus had somehow survived crucifixion, the burial wrappings alone would have killed him. In John 19:38-42 (NIV), the apostle describes how Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus came and removed Jesus' body from the cross and wrapped it in 75 pounds of linen and spices, according to Jewish custom. This meant Jesus' body was literally encased in this material—something like an Egyptian mummy.

Further, the place where Jesus was buried was common knowledge. It had been observed by both Jesus' friends and enemies (Matthew 27:61,66). Once Jesus was entombed, extraordinary procedures were undertaken to make certain that the body could not be moved or stolen. Jesus' enemies were well aware of His prediction that He would resurrect from the dead on the third day. As far as they were concerned, the only manner in which this could come about would be if the disciples were to steal the body. Therefore, they wanted to be absolutely certain that no one could even approach the tomb. Matthew reports what happened:

The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, lest the disciples come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone (27:62-66).

To safeguard their interests, the authorities both requested and secured a Roman guard next to the tomb. They made it as secure as they could, rolling a massive stone in front of the entrance. They placed the official seal connecting the stone and the grave. The stone could *not* be moved without breaking the seal. **The Roman seal not only carried the weight of Roman penal authority behind it, but would also indicate any tampering.** "The sealing was done in the presence of the Roman guards who were left in charge to protect the stamp of Roman authority and power."⁷ These events make it impossible that someone could have stolen the body of Jesus.

First, consider the gravestone, called a *gloal*. These massive stones were used as protection for the deceased against both man and beast. They usually **weighed not less than a ton nor more than two tons.**⁸

In this case, a **two-ton stone was probably selected because of the fear the disciples might attempt to steal the body in order to "fulfill" Jesus' prediction of rising from the dead.** The Jews were told to make the tomb as secure as they knew how and they did so. An indication of this can be seen from a phrase written in parentheses in the codex Bezae manuscript currently in the Cambridge library. This phrase, written next to Mark 16:4, states **that the stone against the tomb was one "which twenty men could not roll away."**⁹ The apostle Mark says the stone was extremely large (Mark 16:4).

Second, the presence of the Roman guard was a further guarantee the body could not be stolen. These soldiers, who routinely participated in crucifixions, were not the caliber of men to allow someone to steal the body. Nor would they foolishly risk their own lives by sleeping on the job, as the Jewish leaders bribed them to say (Matthew 28:11-15). Indeed, it was certain death for a Roman sentinel to sleep at his post. George Currie refers to the discipline of the Roman guard noting that, "The punishment for quitting [one's] post was death according to the laws (dion. hal, antiq. rom. viii.79). The most famous discourse on the strictness of camp discipline is that of Polybius (vi.37-38) which indicates that the fear of punishments produced faultless attention to duty, *especially in the night watches.*"¹⁰ Additional ancient testimony indicates that the death penalty was required for desertion, disobedience in wartime, losing or disposing of one's arms, or taking flight when the example would influence others.¹¹

Given the penalties each Roman guard knew would be incurred, plus the commanding weaponry each guard carried,¹² plus their extensive military training and expertise, plus their fanatical devotion to the Roman seal—all of these facts and more indicate with certainty no human source could have removed the body. This is precisely why it took nothing less than an angel from heaven to frighten the guards away (Matthew 28:2-4).

This was also probably the first time in Roman history that a Roman guard had been assigned to watch the grave of a publicly crucified "criminal." Guards were not normally posted at the gravesites of condemned prisoners because the condemned did not ordinarily claim they would rise from the dead—nor did their claims so seriously draw the attention of the religious leaders of the day who feared the consequences of a possible conspiracy. So, everything humanly possible had been done to make certain the body could not be stolen. **Rome simply didn't want any more trouble from the Jews, who were already trouble enough.** So, the *first* thing the guard would have done is to inspect the tomb and make certain everything was in order—that the body was still there. But later, those same soldiers reported the tomb they were guarding was now empty (Matthew 28:11)!

Why is the empty tomb compelling evidence for Jesus' resurrection?

Remember, everyone saw Jesus die. Everyone knew where He was buried. Many witnesses saw His body placed in the tomb, and later, the great rock rolled across the entrance and the Roman seal and Roman guard placed on duty to secure it.

But what is most relevant is this: No one at all, at any time, at any place, has ever seriously doubted that the tomb was found empty. Every critic, every critical theory, *accepts the fact of the empty tomb*. As Dr. Wilbur Smith comments, "No man has written, pro or con, on the subject of Christ's resurrection, without finding himself compelled to face this problem of Joseph's empty tomb. That the tomb was empty on Sunday morning is recognized by everyone, no matter how radical a critic he may be; however antisupernatural in all his personal convictions, he never dares to say that the body was still resting in the tomb, however he might attempt to explain the fact that the tomb must have been empty."¹³

Most amazing of all, the Jewish authorities themselves never questioned the report of the Roman guards that the tomb was empty (Matthew 28:11-15). They knew that the guards would never have come back with such a story unless they were reporting an indisputable fact. However, because of the seriousness of the situation, it is also likely that the authorities would also have gone to the tomb to personally examine it. Once they saw that the tomb was empty, they knew they had problems. **Thus, their only recourse was to bribe the guards to lie about the disciples stealing the body. (Of course, if the guards were *really* asleep, how did they know it was the *disciples* who took the body?)**

In light of all this, what do you think Christ's enemies would have done once the apostles proclaimed that the grave was empty and that Christ was resurrected? It is incredible, with the apostles preaching throughout Jerusalem both day and night that Christ had risen from the dead, that **His enemies would not have produced the body had they been able to do so.**¹⁴ (See Acts 4:1,2,13-21; 5:14-30,42.) Indeed, there is little doubt that the most exhaustive search would have been made to recover the body. But they never could find it. And we know it couldn't have been stolen because of the Roman guard. The body of Jesus was certainly in the tomb when the guard was placed.

Indeed, had *any* doubts existed concerning the empty tomb, reports would certainly have been widely circulated. But there were none. Prominent lawyer J.N.D. Anderson observes:

It is also noteworthy in this context that all the references to the empty tomb come in the gospels, which were written for Christians who wanted to know the facts. In the public preaching to those who were not yet convinced, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, there was an insistent emphasis on the resurrection, but not a single reference to the tomb. For this I can see only one explanation. There was no point in speaking of the empty tomb, for everyone—friend and foe alike—knew that it was empty. The only points worth arguing about were why it was empty and what its emptiness proved.¹⁵

In brief, "If Jesus had not arisen, there would have been evidence that he had not. His enemies would have sought and found this evidence, but the apostles went up and down the very city where he had been crucified and proclaimed right to the faces of his slayers that he had been raised, and no one could produce evidence to the contrary."¹⁶

Further evidence that the empty tomb signifies Jesus' resurrection is supplied by the odd position of the graveclothes which were found in a cocoon-like shape. This explains why, when John first looked into the empty tomb, "He saw and believed" (John 20:8). He believed because he had little choice. **A human body cannot be removed from graveclothes having 75 pounds of embalming spices—not without severely disturbing them.** Michael Green, who read classics at Oxford and theology at Cambridge, discusses John's account: "No wonder they were convinced and awed. **No graverobber would have been able to enact so remarkable a thing.** Nor would it have entered his head. He would simply have taken the body, graveclothes and all."¹⁷

But there is one more proof of the empty tomb. It is human nature to venerate the burial places of unparalleled religious leaders. Throughout the history of mankind, religious pilgrimages are often made to special shrines honoring a dead prophet—especially his burial place. Jews have the grave of Abraham in Hebron. Muslims have their yearly pilgrimage to Mecca to honor Mohammed. But such has never occurred for Jesus, not in the entire history of Christianity. Why? What could explain this exception to the rule?

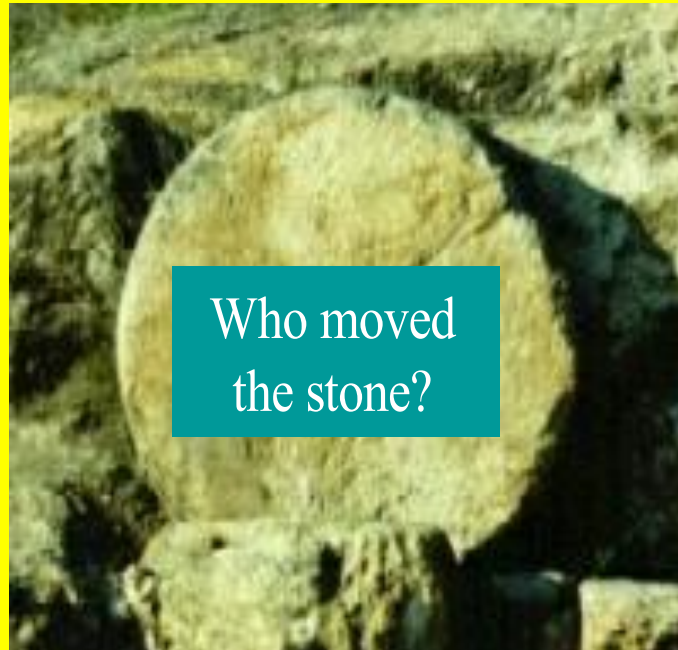
When Christians go to see Christ's tomb in Israel, everyone knows they go to see an *empty* tomb. What other religious people on earth do this?

In conclusion, no one can logically hold the slightest doubt that the tomb of Jesus Christ was empty—which occurred in spite of everyone knowing its exact location, in spite of the Roman guard and seal, and in spite of the best attempts of Jesus' enemies to locate the body.

Virtually every theory ever proposed to explain the empty tomb [e.g., the "swoon," "stolen body," "hallucination," "evaporation," "mistaken identity," and "wrong tomb" theories. Almost no historian or biblical critic accept such theories as credible today], other than the resurrection of Christ, is considerably more difficult to believe than the resurrection itself. This indicates that the only possible reason the tomb was empty is what Christians everywhere have maintained for 2,000 years—Christ literally rose physically from the dead.

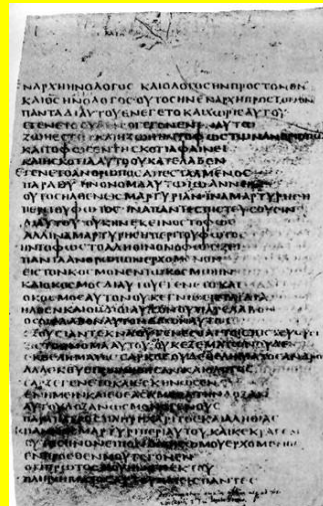
Of course, an empty tomb by itself is only a mystery. Unless Jesus actually appeared physically alive, the empty tomb is ultimately irrelevant.²

² Ankerberg, J., & Weldon, J. (2011). [*Knowing the truth about the resurrection*](#). Chattanooga, TN: ATRI Publishing.



Who moved the stone?

There is an interesting parenthetical in the Bezae manuscripts.



- *“And when He was laid there, he put against the tomb a stone which **twenty men could not roll away.**”*

Double Bound Spice-Soaked Body Wraps Weighed 78 lbs

Answering the Objections of the Critics Concerning the Number of Angels.

In harmonizing the Gospel accounts, we should keep in mind, if two or more angels are present at various times, they can be in a variety of locations and positions both inside and outside the tomb.

If two angels are present, there is nothing contradictory or false about mentioning the existence of one angel. If two angels are present, obviously one angel is present. It is a contradiction if one writer specifically states that only one angel was present, and another writer flatly contradicts this statement by asserting that two angels were present at the same moment. But if anyone examines the accounts, he will see that this is not the case. In fact, in honor of Christ's Resurrection, many different angels could have been present at the tomb.

Answering the Objections of the Critics Concerning Whether the Persons Were Men or Angels.

Were the persons men or angels?

The Gospel writers seem to report different "beings" at the tomb. Matthew reports "an angel." Mark reports "a young man." Luke reports "two men." John reports "two angels." Do these accounts conflict concerning the nature of the beings reported i.e., were they earthly men or heavenly angels? How do we respond to the critics who claim these accounts conflict?

When the Gospel writers refer to angels as men, they are describing how the angels **appeared** to them. Whenever angels appear to men in the Scriptures, they are almost always said to take the form of men. Nor is this surprising; it seems to be a deliberate attempt to reduce the anxiety level of those they contact. But they may reveal that they are angels in some unique way as they did in Matthew 28:2-3 or they may keep their angelic nature entirely hidden, as is plain from Hebrews 13:2. Therefore, it is not contradictory for the four Gospel writers to refer to the angels as men or as angels. Both are correct.

Regardless, Matthew specifically states it was an angel of the Lord. When angels are described as men, there is really little doubt as to the angelic nature of the men.

Luke, although describing their appearance as "men," also clearly identifies them as angels for he notes they were "in clothes that gleamed like lightning." Throughout the Bible angels are many times described as "men." In fact, sometimes in the very same passage angels are first described as "men" and later as "angels."

The Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, refer to angels in this way. It is not unique to these passages. Any critic who says this is a contradiction has not read the rest of the Bible (Genesis 18:1-3,22; 19:1,5,11-13,15; Judges 13:3,8,9-11,13; Luke 2:9-10; Hebrews 13:2).

Answering the Objections of the Critics Concerning the Location of the Angels.

Are we or are we not going to accept the existence of "beings" called angels? If we do accept their existence, then isn't it also logical to assume that they may come and go as they please and appear and disappear as they please?

If the critics are going to argue the number of angels reported and the positions they were seen to be in, then why should they be surprised if the eyewitnesses report that they are in different positions at different times? If one assumes that “beings” called angels do exist, then isn’t it also reasonable to assume that even angels move at some time during the day? And if angels exist and can seemingly appear and disappear at will, the Gospel writers may all be honestly reporting these phenomena. We will speak more about this as we answer other questions. Now let’s examine the location of the angels.

Does Matthew conflict with Mark’s description concerning the location of the angels?

In Matthew’s account, by the time the women arrived, the guards had already been frightened away by the angel. Then the angel proceeded inside the tomb so as not to frighten the women away:

Matthew intends us to understand that the angel rolled back the stone, not to let the body out, but to let the witnesses in, in proof of the resurrection. He sat in awesome splendor on the great gravestone, making it clear that no one could replace it. He sat there to frighten the guard away, and then presumably went inside not to frighten the women unnecessarily. He told them that **they** were not to be afraid. (3:77)

Why did the angels go inside the tomb? Again, probably so as to not frighten the women and also because this is where the women would naturally go, observing that the rock had been rolled back. It seems the angels wanted the women to enter the tomb to observe the absence of Jesus’ body. Now, does Matthew conflict with Mark’s description concerning the locations of the angels?

Mark is clear that the women “**entered the tomb**” and there saw an angel “on the right side” (Mark 16:5). Luke is also very clear that the women **entered** the tomb: “They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when **they entered**, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus” (Luke 24:2, 3). Further, Mark states the women went inside the tomb (“as they entered the tomb”), and tells us the angel helped the women by giving them the same message recorded by Matthew, “see the place where they laid him.”

From this it can be seen that the angel’s “request” in Matthew to “come and see the place where he lay” is not a request for the women outside the tomb to come inside the tomb, but to take more specific notice of the exact location of Jesus’ body and to note that it was no longer there. Tombs in those days were not small body-sized graves, but were often large sepulchers the size of a small modern room. The angels’ request is appropriate if it is made from inside the tomb.

There is no reason to assume that the angel’s message in Matthew was given outside the tomb since: 1) Mark and Luke both record the message as being given inside the tomb and 2) Matthew has compressed his narrative, leaving out some of the details Mark and Luke include.

The only difference between Matthew and Mark is that Matthew does not include the details of the women **entering** the tomb. But this omission is the kind of omission that all of us make every day.

That Matthew does not specify the location at which the angel delivered his message to the women hardly proves it did not occur inside the tomb, particularly when all the other writers say it did. That's why no contradiction exists between Matthew and Mark.

Here, the critics wrongly assume that Matthew has stated the angel **always** remained outside the tomb. Clearly, the angel was outside the tomb at one point. But Matthew never states anywhere that the angel was confined to existing outside the tomb and could not change locations in order to speak to the women.

It is very important to understand how Matthew has recorded specific events in his book. His account of what took place at the tomb concerning the angels appearing, the guards being frightened away, the women coming to the tomb, and what happened next are all compressed. How do we know? By comparing what the other Gospel writers say.

Thus, sometimes, even though Matthew relates his story of events with no visible break in time, from other sources we can determine that one event must be separated from another by a period of time. Modern writers do this every day.

Matthew's narrative of the events which took place at the tomb is one such example. When the guards were frightened away by the appearance of the angel (Matthew 28:2-4), this is actually separate from the next event Matthew records of the angel appearing and speaking to the women who came to the tomb (Matthew 28:5-8). As we shall see, there is good reason to believe "gaps" exist between the events recorded in this passage.

In brief, there are "unidentified breaks" or "unspoken breaks" in Matthew's narrative. What proof is there that Matthew compressed events here and is not describing every occurrence that took place at and around the empty tomb? The answer is that if it can be shown that Matthew compresses events in other portions of his Gospel, then we must hold open the possibility that he did the same in this portion of the Gospel, especially when the other Gospel writers supply the missing information.

Matthew's compressing of the events helps us understand that there may be periods of time in between the events described of which Matthew is giving us no details. If we understand how Matthew compresses events in his narrative throughout his Gospel, it will help us answer the questions, How many angels were at the tomb, and were the angels inside or outside the tomb? The only way we will know what happened in the periods of time Matthew does not record is to read the account of the other Gospel writers.

Obviously, Matthew did not record the angel going into the tomb. But it is clear from the other Gospel accounts that after the angel appeared and frightened the guards away, that he proceeded into the tomb. It is also clear that another angel appeared in the tomb with him.³

³ Ankerberg, J., & Weldon, J. (2011). [*Do the resurrection accounts conflict and what proof is there that Jesus rose from the dead?*](#). Chattanooga, TN: ATRI Publishing.

Answering the Objections of the Critics Concerning the Number of Women.

The first objection of the critics is that there are contradictions concerning the **number** of women who went to the tomb. Matthew mentions Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, i.e., two women; Mark mentions Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, i.e., three women; Luke simply mentions “the women,” while John mentions only Mary Magdalene, i.e., one woman.

But writers have every right to select facts according to their purposes. Mark obviously feels it is important to report that Salome was also at the tomb while Matthew does not. Perhaps Salome was the woman, or one of the two women, who reported the events to Mark.

Or, because Matthew learned of this event from a different source which may not have included Salome, he does not mention her. We cannot know the reasons why one author selects information another author does not. Such information is simply not given, nor does anyone have the right to expect that it should be. It would make any writer’s job virtually impossible for him to meticulously list all the specific reasons for including the details he did and why he did not include other details.

The critics charge that Luke disagrees with Matthew and Mark because Luke merely mentions “the women.” But this is absurd. Notice, none of the Gospel writers say it was **only** two women, or **only** one woman, or **only** these three women. Each writer describes those he wants to recognize—either because of a specific emphasis he has or because that is all the information he knows. But none of the writers give wrong or contradictory information. If one of the four writers had said **only** so and so went to the tomb and another writer said **only** somebody else specifically went to the tomb, then we would have a contradiction.

The critics charge that John contradicts Matthew, Mark and Luke because he mentions only one woman, Mary Magdalene, who went to the tomb.

There are two possibilities. First, all the women set out for the tomb, and Mary arrived first. John simply records the fact of Mary arriving first. Why, we explain below. Or second, it may be as simple as stating John only chooses to write about Mary even though he could have written about all of them.

But again, John didn’t say only Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and no other women. There is no reason why John should not concentrate upon Mary Magdalene if he has reason to do so.

Probably the reasons John concentrates upon Mary Magdalene are because 1) Jesus’ first Resurrection appearance was to Mary Magdalene, not one of the apostles according to Mark’s appendix (Mark 16:9). 2) Mary had looked into the tomb and seen the two angels (John 20: 11-12). 3) Jesus may have appeared to Mary first because He knew of her complete dedication and earnestness in following Him. John has already recorded in 19:25 that Mary was at the cross while Jesus was dying. In John 20:1, she went to His tomb early on Sunday morning. In 20:10-14, Mary remained outside the tomb crying. All of these things reveal how much Mary loved Jesus. 4) In 20:17, Mary was personally commissioned by Jesus to go and tell the disciples the good news.

Anyone who reads John 20:1-18 will see that the entire section stresses the importance of Mary Magdalene: What she did, how she came running to Peter and John, how Mary subsequently met Jesus at the tomb, and how she was commissioned to give a message to the apostles. It is not surprising then that the Apostle John should choose to single out Mary Magdalene in his reporting of these events.

We must also keep in mind that each of the writers learned their information from different sources. Luke records, "It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this [knowledge of the fact of the empty tomb and the angels' message concerning Jesus' Resurrection] to the apostles" (Luke 24:10).

Picture the different women, immediately after their dramatic encounter with the angels, each explaining what she had seen and what she thought was important to any one of the eleven apostles who happened to be standing by her at the moment. This would explain why certain facts are mentioned and other facts are omitted. Luke might have heard a little bit from each of the women or most of it from just one.

Cambridge graduate John Wenham in his book, *The Easter Enigma*, lists the following reasons why Luke and Mark, for example, might have presented different pieces of the total story. Probably, "...Luke's is a straightforward account written from Joanna's point of view [Joanna was a wealthy supporter of Jesus whose husband was 'steward' to Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee.] (Luke 8:3; 24:10), whereas Mark is an account written from the point of view of the other three women" ... (3:69,39). Similarly, John's account could be written strictly from Mary's viewpoint.

John might have correctly assumed that the majority of Christians already knew that this group of women went to the tomb. But he decided to share additional details of what had happened to Mary Magdalene which others may not have known. Indeed, when Luke mentions "the others with them" (Luke 24:10), one could even assume that at that first morning visit to the tomb, more than three women were present. If Luke is describing the women who were actually at the tomb, then there were at least five women (Joanna and "the others," signifying at least one more person than Salome). It is also possible that the "other women" mentioned by Luke were present and part of those who collectively "told this [event] to the apostles."

In conclusion, we know that at least three women were present, possibly more. We also can see none of the accounts contradict. None of the writers state "only" a specific number of women were present at the tomb. No modern critic can give a good reason why each writer was not free to select the details he, in fact, chose to record.

Answering the Objections of the Critics Concerning Who First Came to the Tomb.

As noted earlier, John may have concentrated on Mary Magdalene to the exclusion of the other women. But it is more probable that Mary was actually the first person to the tomb. Thus, we believe this second option is preferable. Let's say all the women had planned to meet at the tomb and left their homes at approximately the same time. Mary arrived first, observed the empty tomb and before her companions arrived, ran to tell Peter and John that the tomb was empty. Matthew, Mark and Luke could talk generally about all of the women- going to the tomb. They would be correct. John could report the fact that Mary reached the tomb first. He would be correct.

If our assumption is valid, this explains John's account as it stands. Nor does it conflict with anything the other Gospel writers assert. But here we must observe there are unannounced breaks in two of the Gospels. These occur in Mark 16 between verses 1 and 2 and in Matthew 28 between verses 1 and 2 and again between verses 4 and 5. Acknowledging these breaks permits us to see that Mary was first to the tomb and that the other women came shortly after she left. Further, in Luke 24: 9-11, Luke's inclusion of Mary with the other women who report what happened at the tomb is not in conflict with our reconstruction.

But there are other views. For example, noted Roman Catholic scholar John Lilly believes that Mary was first to arrive (while it was still dark), but that she was still present when the other women arrived at the tomb. Lilly adopts the view that all the women mentioned by the Gospel writers were, as a group, first to arrive at the tomb. Answering the general question, "Who discovered the empty tomb?", he states:

We say without a moment's hesitation: All of them! And perhaps others besides. Each evangelist tells the story in his own particular way with his own particular plan and purpose in view.

St. John evidently wants to lead up to the discovery of the empty tomb by [Peter] and himself, and as these got the first inkling of what had happened from Magdalene, he introduces her alone, passing over her companions in silence, for there would be no particular point in mentioning them....

St. Matthew does not introduce details which are not strictly necessary, and since according to the Mosaic Law two witnesses were enough to establish a fact, he mentions no others, although he does not deny that others shared in the startling discovery of the empty tomb.

Mark adds the name of Salome to the group of women who went early Sunday morning to the tomb of Jesus. The reason for Mark's mentioning these three women is probably that he has already told us that they assisted at a distance at the crucifixion of Jesus, and his mention of them at the tomb on Sunday morning is designed to show that their love and devotion were not extinguished by the horrible death of their Master on the cross.

Answering the Objections of the Critics Concerning When the Tomb Was Visited.

The critics allege that contradictions exist concerning the specific **time** the women went to the tomb. After all, didn't Matthew say "at dawn," while Mark says "just after sunrise"?

If we say we went to the beach "at dawn," the hearer understands that we could mean anything from several minutes before sunrise till several minutes after sunrise. Thus, there is no contradiction between Matthew and Mark.

The critics next charge that Luke disagrees with Matthew and Mark because Luke says, "very early in the morning," not "at dawn" per Matthew or "just after sunrise" per Mark. But again, "very early in the morning" includes the descriptions given by both Matthew and Mark. In fact, the phrase could refer to any time after 1 a.m.! When one gets up "very early in the morning," this can include a significant span of time, certainly at least half an hour before dawn until just after sunrise. Therefore, Luke does not contradict anything Matthew or Mark says.

But the critics charge that with John we certainly have a contradiction. John says, “While it was still dark.” This phrase the critics allege is certainly not compatible with “at dawn” or “just after sunrise” when obviously it would not be “still dark.” But consider again the normal use of language. “While it was still dark” **can** describe conditions that exist “at dawn.” Everyone who has been up “at dawn” certainly knows it is not yet the full light of day. In fact, depending on weather conditions, it can be quite dark even “at dawn” or “just after sunrise.”

If we only consider the manner in which language is typically used, we can see that there is no necessary contradiction between Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Even the most “discrepant” of the accounts—“just after sunrise” and “while it was still dark”—can easily refer to the same period of time.

There are other facts that must be considered which further indicate there is no contradiction between these accounts. What if each writer is describing a certain period of time at which the women either left their houses, or traveled, or the point in time when they actually arrived at the tomb? Dr. Gleason Archer carefully examined the original language used by the writers and concluded:

They [the women] apparently started their journey from the house in Jerusalem while it was still dark (*skotias eti ouses*), even though it was already early morning (*proi*) (John 20:1). But by the time they arrived [at the tomb], dawn was glimmering in the East (*te epiphoskouse*) that Sunday morning (*eis mian sabbaton*) (Matthew 28:1). (Mark 16:2, Luke 24:1, John 20:1 all use the dative: *te mia ton sabbaton*.) Mark 16:2 adds that the tip of the sun had actually appeared above the horizon (*anateilantos tou heliou*—aorist participle; the Bezae codex uses the present participle, *anatellontos*, implying “while the sun was rising”). (4:347-348)

So, if one reads the accounts carefully and takes note of the fact that the women were on a journey to the tomb, not only is there no basis to assume a contradiction, one actually wonders why anyone would accuse these writers of such a thing. Obviously, there could be many unstated reasons why each writer would include different details of the same event. Because he does, this does not show contradiction; rather, it shows truthfulness in his reporting.

Lilly not only observes the harmony existing among the four accounts but also supplies an additional reason explaining why they differ: the delay of certain of the women to purchase spices. This would require additional time and explain the difference between John’s Gospel and the others. In this event, Mary herself would have arrived at the tomb alone, before the other women.

It should be noted that all four evangelists agree on the time: it was very early in the morning. The only discrepancy is that Mark tells us that the sun had already risen, while John says that Mary Magdalene went to the sepulcher while it was still dark. Pere Lagrange has an obvious solution: “It is clear that in Mark’s account the women are delayed by the purchase of spices. We may suppose then that Magdalene, leaving this matter to the other women, went alone and much in advance of the other women to the tomb,” even while it was yet dark, and that the other women who had stopped to purchase ointments did not reach the sepulcher until the sun had risen. (127:106-107)

John Wenham provides an overall succinct summary, proving that there is no contradiction concerning the time element in the four narratives:

There is perhaps no need to insist upon any distinction between Matthew's "toward the dawn", Mark's "very early", Luke's "early dawn" and John's "while it was still dark." Darkness and light are relative terms and it would be perfectly possible, and not inaccurate, for one person to describe the time as "early dawn" which another described as "still dark."

It needs to be remembered, however, that it could have been undeniably dark on the women's departure and undeniably light on their arrival, particularly if their starting point were Bethany.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the words "went" in Matthew, Mark and Luke translate the same verb as the "came" in John and that either translation would be possible in any of the cases, it depending on what standpoint the writer is thought to be adopting. If John is thinking of Mary Magdalene setting off from Bethany, the translation "went to the tomb early, while it was still dark" would be precisely accurate.

Similarly, Matthew's "toward the dawn...went" suggests the same Bethany standpoint—the two Marys started their journey just before dawn. Mark's "very early" could well represent Peter's recollection of the Marys and Salome leaving John's house and Luke's "at early dawn" would fit well enough the departure of Joanna and "Susanna" from the Hasmonean palace.

These distinctions may be too fine, but we undoubtedly get a consistent and coherent picture if we see the first departures as being in the dark and the last arrivals as being before [full] sunrise. (3:81-82)

Whether we are considering the number of women at the tomb or the time element, it is clear that there is no contradiction between the Gospel accounts.

Answering the Objections of the Critics Concerning Who Supplied the Spices to Anoint Jesus' Body and When This Occurred.

When Mark and Luke report that the women bought spices for anointing Jesus' body on Sunday morning, and John records that Nicodemus supplied the spices and applied them to Jesus' body on Friday evening, the critics claim this is another contradiction.

John records that on Friday evening (before the Sabbath began), "Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, and strips of linen. This was in accordance with the Jewish burial custom" (John 19:39-40).

But according to Luke certain unnamed women had followed Jesus from Galilee. They saw Him crucified, saw the tomb and how the body was laid and "went home and prepared spices and perfumes." (Luke 23:56). They rested on the Sabbath, but on Sunday morning they brought the spices to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. (Luke 24:1).

According to Mark 16:1-2, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome purchased additional spices and went to the tomb on Sunday morning to anoint Jesus' body.

This is not a contradiction because although the women were intending to anoint Jesus' body with the spices, they never had the opportunity to do so. When they arrived at the grave, the body was already absent and Christ was resurrected.

Why the women wanted to anoint Jesus' body **after** Joseph had already done so is probably easily answered. Lilly observes, "Decent burial according to the standards of the day was the most highly cherished and ardently desired lot of every Jew; its privation was deemed a frightful misfortune. Relatives and friends of the deceased considered it a grave obligation to discharge this office on behalf of their departed" (127:103). Most likely, the women felt that in the rush after the crucifixion to move Jesus' body, it was not properly prepared before the Sabbath had started. They feared some important element might have been overlooked.

Further, the critic charges that only Mark and Luke mention that the women brought spices, whereas Matthew and John do not mention this at all. But why should anyone consider this a contradiction?

All four Gospel writers would have known that the body of Jesus required anointing according to Jewish burial custom. It is perfectly reasonable for two to mention this fact and the other two to assume it.

There is no contradiction concerning the anointing of Jesus' body. Both Wenham (3:68-71) and Lilly (127:101-104) further discuss these passages and prove that there is no error or contradiction in them.

We must also remember that the Gospel writers are independent reporters of these events. The hallmark of independent reporting is differences in content.

For example, in a court of law, it is always true that four witnesses describing a traffic accident (or a crime) will each supply different information. Characteristically, witnesses notice and report matters which are unique, relevant or important to them. But no judge would ever instruct a jury to ignore what a dependable witness says merely because different details were reported.

The same is true for the Gospel writers. Each one devotes differing amounts of space and detail to the women coming to the tomb. Matthew and Mark supply 8 verses each (Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8), yet both mention things the other does not. Luke gives 10 verses (Luke 24:1-10) while John gives only 2 verses (John 20:1-2).

It is unreasonable to assume that every Gospel writer would record the event in precisely the same way, giving precisely the same details. This would be evidence of collusion, not independent testimony.

There is no reason to demand that the Gospel writers must report the same detail. When the critic charges contradictions exist merely because the accounts differ, he is being unfair. He is holding the Gospel writers to a standard to which he would not subject anyone else, least of all himself.⁴

⁴ Ankerberg, J., & Weldon, J. (2011). [*Do the resurrection accounts conflict and what proof is there that Jesus rose from the dead?*](#) Chattanooga, TN: ATRI Publishing.

The Resurrection Appearance

The events of the previous twenty-four hours had been incredible to the disciples. Following the observance of the Passover, they had accompanied Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane. There Judas brought the soldiers who arrested Jesus. From there he was taken for trial to Annas (Jn. 18:13), Caiaphas (Jn. 18:13) for a private investigation and then with the scribes and elders gathered (Matt. 26:57). At this trial, Jesus was condemned to die. The Sanhedrin reconvened early the next morning to ratify the judgment of the previous night (Luke 22:66). Afterwards Our Lord was taken for examination before Pilate, Herod, and then again before Pilate where sentence was given that Jesus be crucified.

Jesus was taken to Golgotha where he was crucified. In shocked amazement, the disciples witnessed the death of the one whom they supposed would be the Messiah. No doubt they shared the contemporary idea that he would become king of Israel and overthrow the Roman government dominating them. Those hopes were dashed.

In a state of shock, the disciples left others to take care of Jesus' dead body and departed from Golgotha. The next day was the Sabbath, so little or no activity occurred on that day. No doubt their broken hearts were trying to mend as they tried to pull together their shattered hopes. The following morning, Sunday morning, would forever change their lives.

The Body Is Missing (Matt. 28:1-10; Mk. 16:1-11; Lk. 23:56-24:12; Jn. 20:1-18)

The women who had followed Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus to see where they buried Jesus (Jn. 19:38-42) prepared spices to anoint his dead body. Early on Sunday morning, when the sun was risen, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna and Salome went to the tomb. There was a great earthquake. An angel descended from heaven and rolled away the stone. Those who were guarding the tomb became as dead men. When the woman arrived, the angel announced, “Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which hath been crucified. He is not here; for he’s risen, as he said. . . . And go quickly, and tell his disciples, He is risen from the dead; and lo, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him” (Matt. 28:57).

Mary Magdalene (Jn. 20:1-2) ran and told Simon Peter that the soldiers had removed Jesus’ body and she did not know where they had taken him. Peter and John ran to the tomb. They found the tomb empty; the burial garments were there but the body was missing.

Jesus’ Appearance To Mary Magdalene (Matt. 28:9-10; Mk. 16:9-11; Jn. 20:11-18)

Mary Magdalene stood outside the tomb weeping. When she stooped to look inside, she saw two angels who asked her why she was weeping. She explained that she was weeping because they had taken away the body of Jesus. When she turned around, Jesus was there. Supposing him to be the gardener, she asked where they had taken Jesus’ body. Jesus said, “Mary.” Recognizing his voice, she replied, “Master.” Apparently the other women were also present (Matt. 28:9). They fell at Jesus’ feet and clung to him. Jesus told them to turn loose for he must ascend to his father. He told them to go tell the disciples that he was ascending unto the father. When the women reported what they had seen, the disciples did not believe it (Mk. 16:11).

Report of the Guard (Matt. 28:11-15)

The Roman soldiers went to the chief priests and reported what had occurred. The Sanhedrin assembled. They bribed the soldiers not to tell what had happened but to report that Jesus' disciples had stolen the body while they were asleep.

Appearance to Simon Peter (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5)

Sometime during the day, Jesus appeared to Simon Peter. Reference is made to this appearance but the circumstances of it are not recorded.

Appearance to Two on the Road to Emmaus (Mk. 16:12-13; Lk. 24:13-35)

Later that day, two disciples (one named Cleopas) were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus. While they were talking about the events which had transpired, Jesus joined them. "But their eyes were holden that they should not know him." As Jesus inquired of the disciples, they related the circumstances of his death, the disappearance of the body, and the words of the angels announcing the resurrection. Jesus began teaching the two as they traveled, opening their minds so that they might understand the Scriptures. As they drew near the village, they asked Jesus to abide with them and he consented. As they sat to eat, their eyes were opened so that they recognized Jesus. He vanished out of their sight. They immediately returned to Jerusalem and told the eleven disciples, who had gathered together, what had happened.

Appearance To The Eleven In Jerusalem (Mk. 16:14; Lk. 24:36-42; Jn. 20:19-25)

At the end of this same Sunday, the eleven (Thomas absent) assembled together, probably to discuss the events which had transpired. The doors were locked for fear of the Jews. Suddenly Jesus appeared to them. They were afraid, supposing him to be a ghost. Jesus said, “Why are ye troubled? And wherefore do reasonings arise in your heart? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye behold me having.” Their hearts could barely comprehend what had occurred. While they were still stunned, Jesus took a piece of broiled fish and ate it.

A spirit of joy filled the disciples. When Thomas arrived, he refused to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. He said, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and putray finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

Appearance To The Eleven (Jn. 20:26-29)

The following Sunday, the eleven were again assembled together with Thomas among them. The doors were locked. Jesus appeared to them and said, “Peace be unto you.” Speaking to Thomas, he said, “Reach hither thy finger, and see my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and put it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.” Thomas replied, “My Lord and my God.” Jesus said, “Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”

Appearance to Seven Disciples By The Sea of Galilee (Jn. 21:1-24)

Enough time transpired for the disciples to return to Galilee from Jerusalem. They tried to sort through the things which had transpired. Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John and two other disciples decided to go fishing – to return to their jobs. They fished all night and caught nothing. When day began to break, Jesus stood on the beach but the

disciples. did not recognize him. He asked if they had caught anything and they replied that they had not. He said, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and ye shall find.” They did what he said and could not draw in the fish for the catch was so large.

John said to Peter, “It is the Lord.” Peter put on some clothes & jumped into the sea to see Jesus. The other disciples came ashore in the boat dragging out the 153 fish which they had caught. Jesus ate with them.

Appearance to the Eleven on a Mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-18)

On another occasion Jesus appeared to the disciples on a mountain. Perhaps this is the reference mentioned in I Corinthians 15:6 where 500 were gathered. If so, he separated the eleven and gave them the Great Commission. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned.”

Appearance to James (1 Cor. 15:7)

Paul referred to an appearance to James, the brother of the Lord. The circumstances of this appearance are not mentioned. However, its impact is shown by the fact that the brother of Jesus who previously did not believe on him (Qn. 7:5) became one of the leaders in the church at Jerusalem.

Jesus’ Final Appearance to the Twelve and Ascension (Lk. 24:44-53; Acts 1:1-11)

Jesus appeared to his disciples again in Jerusalem and instructed them to tarry in the city until they were clothed with power from on high. They walked with him out of Jerusalem toward Bethany until he came to the Mount of Olives.

After he finished speaking, he ascended out of their sight into heaven to await his second coming. This appearance occurred 40 days after his resurrection (Acts 1:3).

Jesus' Appearance to Paul (Acts 9,22,26)

The final appearance of Jesus was to the infamous persecutor of the church, Saul of Tarsus. Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. From seeing the resurrected Jesus, Saul became convinced that Jesus was the Lord and Christ. He obeyed the gospel and devoted himself to preaching it to the world. He became known as the apostle Paul.

Observations

These are the resurrection appearances of Jesus. With these facts before us, let us make these conclusions.

1. The Lord's resurrection was a bodily resurrection, a miracle. There is no doubt that the text states that the body which was crucified died, was buried, and was raised from the dead. Nothing but a miracle, the miracle of the resurrection of the body, can explain the meaning of the text. The physically resurrected body was seen by more than 500 people. The historical record stands unimpeachable. The resurrection of Jesus is not some myth invented by delusioned men; it is a fact of history.

2. The resurrection confirmed the deity of Jesus. Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4). His resurrection proved that he was both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). The resurrection demonstrated that his claims were not the claims of an impostor.

3. The resurrection of Jesus demonstrates his victory over sin and death (Rom. 4:25; 5:10). Jesus entered into the domain of Satan, the house of the strong man, and spoiled his goods (Matt. 12:29). His resurrection proves that he triumphed over the devil, destroyed the power of sin and the grave.

4. The resurrection assures me that Jesus Christ ever lives to make intercession for me (Heb. 7:25). His resurrection confirms that he has ascended to the right hand of God and serves as an Advocate to the Father in behalf of his children (1 Jn. 2:2).

5. The resurrection of Jesus assures me of my resurrection. There can be no doubt that Jesus is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25); this was not only demonstrated by his power to raise Lazarus, the son of the widow of Nain, and Jairus' daughter, but also by his own resurrection. Jesus was raised as the first fruits of them that sleep (1 Cor. 15:20). "In Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). He is my guarantee that my natural body which is sown in corruption, dishonor, and weakness will be raised as a spiritual body in incorruption, glory, and power (1 Cor. 15:42-44). Consequently, I can sing, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory."

"We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. 3:20-21).

Conclusion

The knowledge Jesus was raised transformed that small band of disciples who witnessed his death. Their cowardness was changed to boldness; their weakness to strength; their doubt to assurance; their despair to hope. After that little band which met in a room behind locked doors became convinced of the resurrection, they boldly preached the gospel of Jesus Christ at the Temple, defying the threats of Jewish authorities. They were convinced that their fate was better to die preaching Christ than to live in disobedience to him. – *Guardian of Truth*

Would the evidence for the resurrection stand cross examination in a modern court of law?

In Acts 1:3, the historian Luke tells us that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead by "many infallible proofs" (KJV). The Greek *en pollois tekmariais* is an expression which is defined in the lexicons as "decisive proof" and indicates the strongest type of legal evidence.⁵⁷

Lawyers, of course, are expertly trained to deal in the matter of evidence. Skeptics can, if they wish, maintain that only the weak-minded would believe in the literal, physical resurrection of Christ, but perhaps this only reveals their own weak-mindedness when it comes to taking the evidence at face value.

So, let us proceed with specific examples of noted legal testimony concerning the resurrection.

Lord Darling, a former Lord Chief Justice in England, states: "in its favor as a living truth there exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true."⁶⁰

John Singleton Copley (Lord Lyndhurst, 1772-1863) is recognized as one of the greatest legal minds in British history. He was solicitor general of the British government, attorney general of Great Britain, three times the high chancellor of England and elected high steward of the University of Cambridge. He states, "I know pretty well what evidence is; and I tell you, such evidence as that for the Resurrection has never broken down yet."⁶¹

Hugo Grotius was a noted "jurist and scholar whose works are of fundamental importance in international law," according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. He wrote Latin elegies at the age of eight and entered Leiden University at 11.⁶² Considered "the father of international law," he wrote *The Truth of the Christian Religion* (1627) in which he legally defended the historic fact of the resurrection.

J.N.D. Anderson, in the words of Armand Nicholi of the Harvard Medical School (*Christianity Today*, March 29, 1968), is a scholar of international repute eminently qualified to deal with the subject of evidence. He is one of the world's leading authorities on Muslim law, dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of London, chairman of the Department of Oriental Law at the School of Oriental and African Studies, and director of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies at the University of London.⁶³ In Anderson's text, *Christianity: The Witness of History*, he supplies the standard evidences for the resurrection and asks, "How, then, can the fact of the resurrection be denied?"⁶⁴ Anderson further emphasizes, "Lastly, it can be asserted with confidence that men and women disbelieve the Easter story not because of the evidence but in spite of it."⁶⁵

Sir Edward Clark, K.C., observes:

As a lawyer, I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter day. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence, and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect. The gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as a testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate.⁶⁶

Irwin H. Linton was a Washington, D.C. lawyer who argued cases before the U.S. Supreme Court. In his *A Lawyer Examines the Bible*, he challenges his fellow lawyers "by every acid test known to the law... to examine the case for the Bible just as they would any important matter submitted to their professional attention by a client...."⁶⁷ He believes that the evidence for Christianity is overwhelming and that at least "three independent and converging lines of proof," each of which "is conclusive in itself," establish the truth of the Christian faith.⁶⁸ Linton observed that "the logical, historical... proofs of ... Christianity are so indisputable that I have found them to arrest the surprised attention of just about every man to whom I have presented them...."⁶⁹ He asserts the resurrection "is not only so established that the greatest lawyers have declared it to be the best proved fact of all history but it is so supported that it is difficult to conceive of any method or line of proof that it lacks which would make [it] more certain."⁷⁰ And that, even among lawyers, "he who does not accept wholeheartedly the evangelical, conservative belief in Christ and the Scriptures has never read, has forgotten, or never been able to weigh—and certainly is utterly unable to refute—the irresistible force of the cumulative evidence upon which such faith rests...."⁷¹

He concluded the claims of Christian faith are so well established by such a variety of independent and converging proofs that "it has been said again and again by great lawyers that they cannot but be regarded as proved under the strictest rules of evidence used in the highest American and English courts."⁷²

Simon Greenleaf was the Royall Professor of Law at Harvard and author of the classic three-volume text, *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence* (1842), which, according to Dr. Wilbur Smith "is still considered the greatest single authority on evidence in the entire literature on legal procedure."⁷³ Greenleaf himself is considered one of the greatest authorities on common-law evidence in Western history. The *London Law Journal* wrote of him in 1874, "It is no mean honor to America that her schools of jurisprudence have produced two of the finest writers and best esteemed legal authorities in this century—the great and good man, Judge Story, and his eminent and worthy associate Professor Greenleaf. Upon the existing law of evidence (by Greenleaf) more light has shown from the New World than from all the lawyers who adorn the courts of Europe."⁷⁴

Further:

H. W. H. Knotts in the *Dictionary of American Biography* says of him: "To the efforts of Story and Greenleaf is ascribed the rise of the Harvard Law School to its eminent position among the legal schools of the United States."...

In his book *Testimony of the Evangelists Examined by the Rules of Evidence Administered in Courts of Justice*, Greenleaf states:

All that Christianity asks of men... [is] that they would be consistent with themselves; that they would treat its evidences as they treat the evidence of other things; and that they would try and judge its actors and witnesses, as they deal with their fellow men, when testifying to human affairs and actions, in human tribunals. Let the witnesses [to the resurrection] be compared with themselves, with each other, and with surrounding facts and circumstances; and let their testimony be sifted, as if it were given in a court of justice, on the side of the adverse party, the witness being subjected to a rigorous cross-examination.⁷⁶

Lord Caldecote, Lord Chief Justice of England, observed that an "overwhelming case for the Resurrection could be made merely as a matter of strict evidence"⁷⁷ and that "His Resurrection has led me as often as I have tried to examine the evidence to believe it as a fact beyond dispute...."⁷⁸ (Cf., Thomas Sherlock's *Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, which places the resurrection in a legally argued forum and in the words of lawyer Irwin Linton, "will give anyone so reading it the comfortable assurance that he knows the utmost that can be said against the proof of the central fact of our faith and also how utterly every such attack can be met and answered."⁷⁹ At the end of the legal battle one understands why "the jury returned a verdict in favor of the testimony establishing the fact of Christ's resurrection."⁸⁰

Richard F. Duncan holds a national reputation as a legal scholar whose area of specialty is constitutional law. He graduated from Cornell Law School (where he wrote for the *Law Review*) and practiced corporate law at White and Case, a major Wall Street law firm. He has spent 11 years teaching at such law schools as Notre Dame and New York University, and is a tenured professor at the University of Nebraska. Mr. Duncan has written briefs at the Supreme Court level and is the author of a standard text on commercial law widely used by attorneys practicing under the Uniform Commercial Code, *The Law in Practice of Secure Transaction* (Law Journal Seminars Press, 1987). He observes, "The resurrection of Jesus Christ, the central fact of world history, withstands rational analysis precisely because the evidence is so persuasive.... I am convinced this verdict would stand in nearly any modern court of law."

Donovan Campbell, Jr., is a graduate of Princeton University and the University of Texas (where he was editor of the *Texas Law Review*). He was admitted to the Texas Bar in 1975; the U.S. Tax Court in 1976; the U.S. Court of Claims in 1977; and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in 1978. He has had wide experience in the field of law and litigation. He states, "If the evidence for the Resurrection were competently presented to a normal jury in a civil court of law at the current time, then a verdict establishing the fact of the resurrection should be obtained."

William Burns Lawless, retired justice of the New York Supreme Court and former dean of Notre Dame Law School, asserts, "When Professor Simon Greenleaf of Harvard Law School published his distinguished treatise on the Law of Evidence in 1842, he analyzed the Resurrection accounts in the Gospels. Under the rules of Evidence then he concluded a Court would admit these accounts and consider their contents reliable. In my opinion that conclusion is as valid in 1995 as it was in 1842."

In *Leading Lawyers Look at the Resurrection*, many other examples are given, such as Sir Lionell Luckhoo who is listed in the *Guinness Book of Records* as the world's "most successful lawyer," with 245 successive murder acquittals. He was knighted twice by the queen of England and appointed high commissioner for Guyana. He declares, "I have spent more than forty-two years as a defense trial lawyer appearing in many parts of the world... I say unequivocally the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no doubt."⁸¹⁵

⁵ Ankerberg, J., & Weldon, J. (2011). [*Knowing the truth about the resurrection*](#). Chattanooga, TN: ATRI Publishing.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

by Kyle Butt, M.Div.



In all likelihood, most of you reading this article already have made up your minds about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Truth be told, the majority of you probably believe that Jesus Christ lived on this Earth for approximately 33 years, died at the hand of the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, was buried in a new tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea, and miraculously defeated death by His resurrection three days later.

But there may be some of you who have lingering doubts about the truthfulness of the resurrection of Christ. In fact, many people have much more than lingering doubts; they already have made up their minds that the story of the resurrection happened too long ago, was witnessed by too few people, has not been proven scientifically, and thus should be discarded as an unreliable legend.

Regardless of which position best describes your view of Christ's resurrection, what we all must do is check our prejudice at the door and openly and honestly examine the historical facts attending the resurrection.

FACT—JESUS CHRIST LIVED

Determining whether Jesus Christ actually lived is something that must be established before one can begin to discuss His resurrection. If it cannot be proved beyond reasonable doubt that He did walk this Earth, then any discussion about whether or not He arose from the dead digresses quickly into an exercise in yarn stringing based on little more than guesswork and human imagination. Fortunately, the fact that Jesus lived is practically universally accepted. A host of hostile witnesses testified of His life, and the New Testament documents in intricate detail His existence. [Even if one does not accept the New Testament as inspired of God, he or she cannot deny that its books contain historical information regarding a person by the name of Jesus Christ Who really did live in the first century A.D.] The honest historian is forced to admit that documentation for the existence, and life, of Jesus runs deep and wide (for an in-depth study on the historicity of Christ, see Butt, 2000). Thus, knowing that Jesus Christ existed allows us to move farther into the subject of His resurrection.

FACT—JESUS CHRIST DIED

For most people, coming to the conclusion that Jesus died is not difficult, due to either of two reasons. First, the Bible believer accepts the fact that Jesus died because several different biblical writers confirm it. Second, the unbeliever accepts the idea, based not upon biblical evidence, but rather on the idea that the natural order of things which he has experienced in this life is for a person to live and eventually die. Once evidence sufficient to prove Christ's existence in history has been established, the naturalist/empiricist has no trouble accepting His death. However, in order to provide such people with a few more inches of common ground on this matter, it would be good to note that several secular writers substantiated the fact that **Jesus Christ did die**. Tacitus, the ancient Roman historian writing in approximately A.D. 115, documented Christ's physical demise when he wrote concerning the Christians that "their originator, Christ, had been executed in Tiberius' reign by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilatus" (1952, 15.44).

In addition to Roman sources, early Jewish rabbis whose opinions are recorded in the Talmud acknowledged the death of Jesus. According to the earlier rabbis,

Jesus of Nazareth was a transgressor in Israel who practised 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** (Bruce, 1953, p. 102, emp. added).

Likewise, Jewish historian Josephus wrote:

[T]here arose about this time Jesus, a wise man.... And when Pilate had condemned him to the cross on his impeachment by the chief men among us, those who had loved him at first did not cease (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.3.3).

The fact that Pilate condemned Christ to the cross is an undisputed historical fact. As archaeologist Edwin Yamauchi stated:

Even if we did not have the New Testament or Christian writings, we would be able to conclude from such non-Christian writings such as Josephus, the Talmud, Tacitus, and Pliny the Younger that...he [Jesus—KB] was crucified under Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius (1995, p. 222).

It is at this point in our study that some would suggest that Hugh Schonfield's infamous "Swoon Theory" should be considered. Schonfield (1965) postulated that Christ did not die on the cross; rather, He merely fainted or "swooned." Later, after being laid on a cold slab in the dark tomb, He revived and exited His rock-hewn grave. Such a theory, however, fails to take into account the heinous nature of the scourging (sometimes referred to as an "intermediate death") that Christ had endured at the hand of Roman lictors, or the finely honed skills of those Roman soldiers whose job it was to inflict such gruesome punishment prior to a prisoner's actual crucifixion. To press the point, in the March 1986 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, William Edwards and his coauthors penned an article, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," that employed modern medical insight to provide an exhaustive description of Jesus' death (256:1455-1463). Sixteen years later, Brad Harrub and Bert Thompson coauthored an updated review ("An Examination of the Medical Evidence for the Physical Death of Jesus Christ") of the extensive scientific evidence surrounding Christ's physical death (2002). After reading such in-depth, medically based descriptions of the horrors to which Christ was exposed, and the condition of His ravaged body, the Swoon Theory quickly fades into oblivion (where it rightly belongs). Jesus died. Upon this, we all most certainly can agree.

FACT—THE TOMB OF CHRIST WAS EMPTY

Around the year A.D. 165, Justin Martyr penned his *Dialogue with Trypho*. At the beginning of chapter 108 of this work, he recorded a letter that the Jewish community had been circulating concerning the empty tomb of Christ:

A godless and lawless heresy had sprung from one Jesus, a Galilaean deceiver, whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb where he was laid when unfastened from the cross, and now deceive men by asserting that he has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven.

Somewhere around the sixth century, another caustic treatise written to defame Christ circulated among the Jewish community. In this narrative, known as *Toledoth Yeshu*, Jesus was described as the illegitimate son of a soldier named Joseph Pandera. He also was labeled as a disrespectful deceiver who led many away from the truth. Near the end of the treatise, under a discussion of His death, the following paragraph can be found:

A diligent search was made and he [Jesus—KB] was not found in the grave where he had been buried. A gardener had taken him from the grave and had brought him into his garden and buried him in the sand over which the waters flowed into the garden.

Upon reading Justin Martyr's description of one Jewish theory regarding the tomb of Christ, and another premise from *Toledoth Yeshu*, it becomes clear that a single common thread unites them both—the tomb of Christ had no body in it!

All parties involved recognized the fact that Christ's tomb laid empty on the third day. Feeling compelled to give reasons for this unexpected vacancy, Jewish authorities apparently concocted several different theories to explain the body's disappearance. The most commonly accepted one seems to be that the disciples of Jesus stole His body away by night while the guards slept (Matthew 28:13). Yet, how could the soldiers identify the thieves **if they had been asleep**? And why were the sentinels not punished by death for sleeping on the job and thereby losing their charge (cf. Acts 12:6-19)? And an even more pressing question comes to mind—why did the soldiers need to explain anything if a body was still in the tomb?

When Peter stood up on the Day of Pentecost, after the resurrection of Christ, the crux of his sermon rested on the facts that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again on the third day. In order to silence Peter, and stop a mass conversion, the Jewish leaders needed simply to produce the body of Christ. Why did not the Jewish leaders take the short walk to the garden and produce the body? Simply because they could not; the tomb was empty—a fact the Jews recognized and tried to explain away. The apostles knew it, and preached it boldly in the city of Jerusalem. And thousands of inhabitants of Jerusalem knew it and converted to Christianity. John Warwick Montgomery accurately assessed the matter when he wrote:

It passes the bounds of credibility that the early Christians could have manufactured such a tale and then preached it among those who might easily have refuted it simply by producing the body of Jesus (1964, p. 78).

The tomb of Jesus was empty, and that is a fact.

FACT—THE APOSTLES PREACHED THAT JESUS PHYSICALLY ROSE FROM THE DEAD

Regardless of whether or not one believes that Christ rose from the dead, one thing that cannot be denied is the fact His apostles **preached** that they saw Jesus after He physically rose from the dead. The New Testament book of Acts stresses this issue almost to the point of redundancy. Acts 1:22, as one example, finds Peter and the other apostles choosing an apostle who was to “become a witness” of the resurrection of Christ. Then, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter insisted in his sermon to the multitude that had assembled to hear him that “God raised up” Jesus and thus loosed Him from the pangs of death (Acts 2:24). And to make sure that his audience understood that it was a **physical** resurrection, Peter stated specifically that Jesus’ “flesh did not see corruption” (Acts 2:31). His point was clear: Jesus **had** been physically raised from the dead and the apostles **had** witnessed the resurrected Christ. [Other passages which document that the central theme of the apostles’ preaching was the bodily resurrection of Christ include: Acts 3:15; 3:26; 4:2,10,33; and 5:30.] Furthermore, the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 (especially verse 14) verifies that the preaching of the apostle Paul centered on the resurrection.

Even Joseph McCabe, one of the early twentieth century’s most outspoken infidels, remarked: “Paul was absolutely convinced of the resurrection; and this proves that it was widely believed not many years after the death of Jesus” (1993, p. 24). The skeptical modernist Shirley Jackson Case of the University of Chicago was forced to concede: “The testimony of Paul alone is sufficient to convince us, beyond any reasonable doubt, that this was the commonly accepted opinion in his day—an opinion at that time supported by the highest authority imaginable, the eye-witnesses themselves” (1909, pp. 171-172). C.S. Lewis correctly stated: “In the earliest days of Christianity an ‘apostle’ was first and foremost a man who claimed to be an eyewitness of the Resurrection” (1975, p. 188).

It has been suggested by some critics that the apostles and other witnesses did not actually see Christ, but merely hallucinated. However, Gary Habermas had this to say about such a fanciful idea:

[H]allucinations are comparably rare. They’re usually caused by drugs or bodily deprivation. Chances are, you don’t know anybody who’s ever had a hallucination not caused by one of those two things. Yet we’re supposed to believe that over a course of many weeks, people from all sorts of backgrounds, all kinds of temperaments, in various places, all experienced hallucinations? That strains the hypothesis quite a bit, doesn’t it? (as quoted in Strobel, 1998, p. 239).

Indeed, the hallucination theory is a feeble attempt to undermine the fact that the apostles (and other first-century eyewitnesses of a risen Christ) preached the message that they really **had** seen a resurrected Jesus.

The apostles preached that Christ physically rose, and those who heard the apostles verified that they preached the resurrection. Apart from what a person believes about the resurrection of Christ, he or she cannot deny (legitimately) the fact that the apostles traveled far and wide to preach one central message—“Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

FACT—THE APOSTLES SUFFERED AND DIED BECAUSE OF THEIR TEACHINGS ABOUT THE RESURRECTION

As the list of facts continues, one that must be enumerated is the verified historical fact that the majority of the apostles suffered cruel, tortuous deaths because they preached that Christ rose from the dead.

Documenting these persecutions is no difficult task. *Fox's Book of Martyrs* relates that Paul was beheaded, Peter was crucified (probably upside down), Thomas was thrust through with a spear, Matthew was slain with a halberd, Matthias was stoned and beheaded, Andrew was crucified, and the list proceeds to describe the martyr's death of every one of the Lord's faithful apostles except John the brother of James (Forbush, 1954, pp. 2-5).

Additional testimony comes from the early church fathers. Eusebius, who was born about A.D. 260 and died about 340, wrote that Paul was beheaded in Rome and that Peter was crucified there (*Ecclesiastical History*, 2.25). [Exactly how and where Peter was martyred is unclear from history; the fact that he was martyred is not.] Clement of Rome (who died about A.D. 100), in chapter five of his *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, also mentioned the martyrs' deaths of Peter and Paul. Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, documented the death of James when he stated: "Now about that time Herod the king put forth his hand to afflict certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword" (Acts 12:1-2). The apostle Paul perhaps summed it up best when he said:

For, I think, God hath set forth us the apostles last of all, as men doomed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, both to angels and men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye have glory, but we have dishonor. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and we toil, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things, even until now (1 Corinthians 4:9-13).

Wayne Jackson correctly noted that "while men may die out of religious deception, they do not willingly go to their deaths knowing they are perpetrating a hoax" (1982, 2:34). Some ill-advised attempts have been made to deny that Christ's apostles actually died because of their belief in, and preaching of, the resurrection. For example, it has been proposed that the apostles died because they were political instigators or rabble-rousers. However, combining the high moral quality of their teachings with the testimony of the early church fathers, and acknowledging the fact that their primary task was to be witnesses of the resurrection, it is historically inaccurate to imply that the apostles suffered for any reason other than their confession of the resurrection. The fact of the matter is, the apostles died because they refused to stop preaching that they had seen the Lord alive after His death.

FACT—THE BIBLE IS THE MOST HISTORICALLY ACCURATE BOOK OF ANTIQUITY

Sir William Ramsay was a one-time unbeliever and world-class archaeologist. His extensive education had ingrained within him the keenest sense of scholarship. But along with that scholarship came a built-in prejudice about the supposed inaccuracy of the Bible (specifically the book of Acts). As Ramsay himself remarked: [A]bout 1880 to 1890, the book of the Acts was regarded as the weakest part of the New Testament. No one that had any regard for his reputation as a scholar cared to say a word in its defence. The most conservative of theological scholars, as a rule, thought the wisest plan of defence for the New Testament as a whole was to say as little as possible about the Acts (1915, p. 38). As could be expected of someone who had been trained by such "scholars," Ramsay held the same view. He eventually abandoned it, however, because he was willing to do what few people of his time dared to do—explore the Bible lands themselves with an archaeologist's pick in one hand and an open Bible in the other. His self-stated intention was to prove the inaccuracy of Luke's history as recorded in the book of Acts. But, much to his surprise, the book of Acts passed every test that any historical narrative could be asked to pass. In fact, after years of literally digging through the evidence in Asia Minor, Ramsay concluded that Luke was an exemplary historian. Lee S. Wheeler, in his classic work, *Famous Infidels Who Found Christ*, recounted Ramsay's life story in great detail (1931, pp. 102-106), and then quoted the famed archaeologist, who ultimately admitted:

The more I have studied the narrative of the Acts, and the more I have learned year after year about Graeco-Roman society and thoughts and fashions, and organization in those provinces, the more I admire and the better I understand. I set out to look for truth on the borderland where Greece and Asia meet, and found it here [in the book of Acts—KB]. You may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historian's, and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment, provided always that the critic knows the subject and does not go beyond the limits of science and of justice (Ramsey, 1915, p. 89).

In his book, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, Ramsay was constrained to admit:

Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense.... In short, this author should be placed along with the very greatest historians (1915, p. 222; cf. also Ramsay's 1908 work, *Luke the Physician*).

Indeed, Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, is widely acknowledged as an extremely accurate historian in his own right—so much so that Ramsay converted to Christianity as a result of his personal examination of the preciseness of Luke's historical record. It is of interest, then, to note what Luke himself wrote concerning Christ's resurrection:

The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which he was received up, after that he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom he also showed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:1-3).

What legitimate reason is there to reject Luke's testimony regarding Christ's resurrection when his testimony on every other subject he presented is so amazingly accurate? As 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 (1991, 27:2).

Other Bible critics have suggested that Luke misspoke when he designated Sergius Paulus as proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13:7). Their claim was that Cyprus was governed by a propraetor (also referred to as a consular legate), not a proconsul. Upon further examination, such a charge can be seen to be completely vacuous, as the late Thomas Eaves documented:

As we turn to the writers of history for that period, Dio Cassius (*Roman History*) and Strabo (*The Geography of Strabo*), we learn that there were two periods of Cyprus' history: first, it was an imperial province governed by a propraetor, and later in 22 B.C., it was made a senatorial province governed by a proconsul. Therefore, the historians support Luke in his statement that Cyprus was ruled by a proconsul, for it was between A.D. 40-50 when Paul made his first missionary journey. If we accept secular history as being true, we must also accept biblical history, for they are in agreement (1980, p. 234).

The science of archaeology seems to have outdone itself in verifying the Scriptures. Eminent archaeologist William F. Albright wrote: "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament tradition" (1953, p. 176). The late Nelson Glueck, himself a pillar within the archaeological community, said:

It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible (1959, p. 31).

Such statements—offered 40+ years ago—are as true today as the day they were made. Please note, however, that this argument is not being introduced here to claim that the New Testament is inspired (although certain writers have used it in this way quite effectively). Rather, it is inserted at this point in the discussion to illustrate that the books which talk the most about the resurrection have proven to be accurate when confronted with any verifiable fact. Travel to the Holy Lands and see for yourself if you doubt biblical accuracy. Carry with you an honest, open mind and an open Bible, and I assure you that you will respect the New Testament writers as accurate historians.

ON SUPPOSED CONTRADICTIONS WITHIN THE GOSPELS

Maybe the New Testament documents are accurate when they discuss historical and geographical information. But what about all the alleged “contradictions” among the gospel accounts of the resurrection? Charles Templeton, who worked for many years with the Billy Graham Crusade but eventually abandoned his faith, used several pages of his book, *Farewell to God*, to compare and contrast the statements within the four gospels, and then concluded: “The entire resurrection story is not credible” (1996, p. 122). Another well-known preacher-turned-skeptic, Dan Barker, has drawn personal delight in attempting to locate contradictions within the four accounts of the resurrection. In his book, *Losing Faith in Faith*, he filled seven pages with a list of the “contradictions” he believes he has uncovered. Eventually he stated: “Christians, either tell me exactly what happened on Easter Sunday, or let’s leave the Jesus myth buried” (1992, p. 181).

It is interesting, is it not, that Barker demands to know “exactly what happened” on a day in ancient history that occurred almost 2,000 years ago? Such a request speaks loudly of the historical legitimacy of the resurrection story, since no other day in ancient history ever has been examined with such scrutiny. Historians today cannot tell “exactly what happened” on July 4, 1776 or April 12, 1861, yet Christians are expected to provide the “exact” details of Christ’s resurrection? Fortunately, the gospel writers described “exactly what happened” – without contradiction. Examine the following evidence.

Head-on Collusion

“Collusion: A secret agreement between two or more parties for a fraudulent, illegal, or deceitful purpose” (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 2000, p. 363). Even if we never had heard the word collusion before, most of us still would understand the situation it describes. Suppose, for example, that five bank robbers don their nylon-hose masks, rob the city bank, and stash the cash in a nearby cave. Each robber then goes back to his respective house until the police search is concluded. The first robber hears a knock at his door and, upon opening it, finds a policeman who “just wants to ask him a few questions.” The officer then inquires, “Where were you, and what were you doing, on the night of February 1, 2002?” The thief promptly responds, “I was at Joe Smith’s house watching television with four other friends.” The policeman obtains the four friends’ names and addresses and visits each one of their homes. Every single robber, in turn, tells exactly the same story. Was it true? Absolutely not! But did the stories all sound exactly the same, with seemingly no contradictions? Yes.

Now, let’s examine this principle in light of our discussion of the resurrection. If every single narrative describing the resurrection sounded exactly the same, what do you think would be said about those narratives? “They must have copied each other!” In fact, in other areas of Christ’s life besides the resurrection, when the books of Matthew and Luke give the same information as the book of Mark, critics today claim that Matthew and Luke must have copied Mark because it is thought to be the earliest of the three books. Another raging question in today’s upper echelons of biblical “scholarship” is whether Peter copied Jude in 2 Peter 2:4-17 (or whether Jude copied Peter), because the two segments of scripture sound so similar.

Amazingly, however, the Bible has not left open the prospect of collusion in regard to the resurrection narratives. Indeed, it cannot be denied (legitimately) that the resurrection accounts have come to us from **independent** sources. In his book, *Science vs. Religion*, Tad S. Clements vigorously denied that there is enough evidence to justify a personal belief in the resurrection. He did acknowledge, however: “There isn’t merely one account of Christ’s resurrection but rather an embarrassing multitude of stories...” (1990, p. 193). While he opined that these stories “disagree in significant respects,” he nevertheless made it clear that the gospels **are** separate accounts of the same story. Dan Barker admitted the same when he boldly stated: “Since Easter [his wording for the resurrection account—KB] is told by five different writers, it gives one of the best chances to confirm or disconfirm the account” (1992, p. 179). One door that everyone on both sides of the resurrection freely admits has been locked forever by the gospel accounts is the dead-bolted door against collusion.

Dealing With “Contradictions”

Of course it will not be possible, in these few paragraphs, to deal with every alleged discrepancy between the resurrection accounts. But I would like to set forth some helpful principles that can be used to show that no genuine contradiction between the resurrection narratives has been documented.

Addition Does Not a Contradiction Make

Suppose a man is telling a story about the time he and his wife went shopping at the mall. The man mentions all the great places in the mall to buy hunting supplies and cinnamon rolls. But the wife tells about the same shopping trip, yet mentions only the places to buy clothes. Is there a contradiction just because the wife mentioned only clothing stores, while the husband mentioned only cinnamon rolls and hunting supplies? No. They simply are adding to (or supplementing) each other’s story to make it more complete. That same type of thing occurs quite frequently in the resurrection accounts.

As an example, Matthew’s gospel refers to “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary” as women who visited the tomb early on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1). Mark cites Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome as the callers (Mark 16:1). Luke mentions Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and “the other women” (Luke 24:10). Yet John writes only about Mary Magdalene visiting Christ’s tomb early on Sunday (John 20:1). Dan Barker cited these different names as discrepancies and/or contradictions on page 182 of his book. But do these different lists truly contradict one another? No, they do not. They are supplementary (with each writer adding names to make the list more complete), but they are not contradictory. If John had said “**only** Mary Magdalene visited the tomb,” or if Matthew had stated that “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were the **only** women to visit the tomb,” then there would be a contradiction. As it stands, however, no contradiction occurs. To further illustrate this point, suppose you have 10 one-dollar bills in your pocket. Someone comes up to you and asks, “Do you have a dollar bill in your pocket?” Naturally, you respond in the affirmative. Suppose another person asks, “Do you have five dollars in your pocket?” and again you say that you do. Finally, another person asks, “Do you have ten dollars in your pocket?” and you say yes for the third time. Did you tell the truth every time? Yes, you did. Were all three statements about the contents of your pockets different? Yes, they were. But were any of your answers contradictory? No, they were not. How so? The fact is: **supplementation does not equal contradiction!**

Also fitting into this discussion about supplementation are the angels, men, and young man described in the different resurrection accounts. Two different “problems” arise with the entrance of the “holy heralds” at the empty tomb of Christ. First, exactly how many were there? Second, were they angels or men? Since the former question deals with supplementation, I will discuss it first.

The account in Matthew cites “an angel of the Lord who descended from heaven” and whose “appearance was as lightning, and his raiment white as snow” (28:2-5). Mark’s account presents a slightly different picture of “a young man sitting on the right side, arrayed in a white robe” (16:5). But Luke mentions that “two men stood by them [the women—KB] in dazzling apparel” (24:4). And, finally, John writes about “two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain” (20:12). Are any of these accounts contradictory as to the **number** of men or angels at the tomb? Factoring in the supplementation rule, we must answer in the negative. Although the accounts are different, they are not contradictory as to the number of messengers. Mark does not mention “**only** a young man” and Luke does not say there were “**exactly** two angels.” Was there one messenger at the tomb? Yes, there was. Were there two as well? Yes, there were. **Once again, note that supplementation does not equal contradiction.**

Were They Men or Angels?

The second question concerning the messengers is their identity: Were they angels or men? Most people who are familiar with the Old Testament have no problem answering this question. Genesis chapters 18 and 19 mention three “men” who came to visit Abraham and Sarah. These men remained for a short time, and then two of them continued on to visit the city of Sodom. The Bible tells us in Genesis 19:1 that these “men” actually were angels. Yet when the men of Sodom came to do violence to these angels, the city dwellers asked: “Where are the **men** that came in to thee this night?” (Genesis 19:5). Throughout the two chapters, the messengers are referred to both as men and as angels with equal accuracy. They looked like, talked like, walked like, and sounded like men. Then could they be referred to (legitimately) as men? Yes. But were they in fact angels? Yes.

To illustrate, suppose you saw a man sit down at a park bench and take off his right shoe. As you watched, he began to pull out an antenna from the toe of the shoe and a number pad from the heel. He proceeded to dial a number and began to talk to someone over his “shoe phone.” If you were going to write down what you had seen, could you accurately say that the man dialed a number on his **shoe**? Yes. Could you also say that he dialed a number on his **phone**? Indeed you could. The shoe had a heel, sole, toe, and everything else germane to a shoe, but in actuality it was much more than a shoe. In the same way, the messengers at the tomb could be described accurately as men. They had a head perched on two shoulders and held in place by a neck, and they had a body that was complete with arms and legs, etc. So, they were men. But, in truth, they were much more than men because they were angels—holy messengers sent from God’s throne to deliver an announcement to certain people. Taking into account the fact that the Old Testament often uses the term “men” to describe angels who have assumed a human form, it is fairly easy to show that no contradiction exists concerning the identity of the messengers.

Perspective Plays a Part

What we continue to see in the independent resurrection narratives is not contradiction, but merely a difference in perspective. For instance, suppose a man had a 4x6 index card that was solid red on one side and solid white on the other. Further suppose that he stood in front of a large crowd, asked all the men to close their eyes, showed the women in the audience the red side of the card, and then had them scribble down what they saw. Further suppose that he had all the women close their eyes while he showed the men the white side of the card and had them write down what they saw. One group saw a red card and one group saw a white card. When their answers are compared, at first it would look like they were contradictory, yet they were not. The descriptions appeared contradictory because the two groups had a different perspective, since each had seen a different side of the same card. The perspective phenomenon plays a big part in everyday life. In the same way that no two witnesses ever see a car accident in exactly the same way, none of the witnesses of the resurrected Jesus saw the events from the same angle as the others.

Obviously, I have not dealt with every alleged discrepancy concerning the resurrection accounts. However, I have mentioned some of the major ones, which can be explained quite easily via the principles of supplementation or difference of perspective. An honest study of the remaining “problems” reveals that not a single legitimate contradiction exists between the narratives; they may be different in some aspects, but they aren’t contradictory. Furthermore, whatever differences do exist prove that no collusion took place and document the diversity that would be expected from different individuals witnessing the same event.

THE PROBLEM WITH MIRACLES

Based on historical grounds, the resurrection of Jesus Christ has as much or more evidence to verify its credibility than any other event in ancient history. Unfortunately, this evidence often gets tossed aside by those who deny the possibility of miracles. Using a strictly empirical approach, some have decided what is, and what is not, possible in this world, and miracles such as the resurrection do not fall into their “possible” category. Since they never have seen anyone raised from the dead, and since no scientific experiments can be performed on a resurrected body, they then assume that the gospel resurrection accounts must have some natural explanation(s). In an article titled “Why I Don’t Buy the Resurrection,” Richard Carrier embodied the gist of this argument in the following comment:

No amount of argument can convince me to trust a 2000-year-old second-hand report over what I see, myself, directly, here and now, with my own eyes. If I observe facts which entail that I will cease to exist when I die, then the Jesus story can never override that observation, being infinitely weaker as a proof. And yet all the evidence before my senses confirms my mortality.... A 2000-year-old second-hand tale from the backwaters of an illiterate and ignorant land can never overpower these facts. I see no one returning to life after their brain has completely died from lack of oxygen. I have had no conversations with spirits of the dead. What I see is quite the opposite of everything this tall tale claims. How can it command more respect than my own two eyes? It cannot (2000).

Although such an argument at first may appear plausible, it encounters two insurmountable difficulties. First, there are things that took place in the past that no one alive today has seen or ever will see, yet they still are accepted as fact. The origin of life on this planet provides a good example. Regardless of whether a person believes in creation or evolution, he or she must admit that some things happened in the past that are not still occurring today (or at least that have not been witnessed). To evolutionists, I pose the question: “Have you ever personally used your five senses to establish that a nonliving thing can give rise to a living thing.” Of course, evolutionists must admit that they never have seen such happen, in spite of all the origin-of-life experiments that have been performed over the last fifty years. Does such an admission mean, then, that evolutionists do not accept the idea that life came from nonliving matter, just because they never have witnessed such an event? Of course not. Instead, we are asked to consider “ancient evidence” (like the geologic column and the fossil record) that evolutionists believe leads to such a conclusion. Still, the hard fact remains that no one alive today (or, for that matter, anyone who ever lived in the past) has witnessed something living come from something nonliving.

Following this same line of reasoning, those who believe in creation freely admit that the creation of life on Earth is an event that has not been witnessed by anyone alive today (or, for that matter, anyone else of the past, except possibly Adam). It was a unique, one-time-only event that cannot be duplicated by experiment and cannot currently be detected by the five human senses. As with evolutionists, creationists ask us to examine evidence such as the fossil record, the inherent design of the Universe and its inhabitants, the Law of Cause and Effect, the Law of Biogenesis, etc., which they believe leads to the conclusion that life was created at some point in the past by an intelligent Creator. But, before we drift too far from our primary topic of the resurrection, let me remind you that this brief discussion concerning creation and evolution is inserted only to establish one point—

everyone must admit that he or she accepts **some** concepts from the distant past without having personally inspected them using the empirical senses.

Second, it is true that a dead person rising from the dead would be an amazing and, yes, empirically astonishing event. People do not normally rise from the dead in the everyday scheme of things. Yet, was not that the very point the apostles and other witnesses of the resurrection were trying to get people to understand? If Jesus of Nazareth truly rose from the grave never to die again—thereby accomplishing something that no mortal man ever had accomplished—would not that be enough to prove that He was the Son of God as He had claimed (see Mark 14:61-62)? He had predicted that He would be raised from the dead (John 2:19). And He was!

Those first-century onlookers certainly understood that a person rising from the dead was not natural, because even they understood how the laws of nature worked. As C.S. Lewis explained:

But there is one thing often said about our ancestors which we must not say. We must not say “They believed in miracles because they did not know the Laws of Nature.” This is nonsense. When St. Joseph discovered that his bride was pregnant, he “was minded to put her away.” He knew enough about biology for that.... When the disciples saw Christ walking on the water they were frightened; they would not have been frightened unless they had known the Laws of Nature and known that this was an exception (1970, p. 26).

The apostle Paul underscored this point in Romans 1:4 when he stated that Jesus Christ was “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, **by the resurrection from the dead.**” The entire point of Christ’s resurrection was, and is, that it proved His deity. As I stated earlier, most people who deny the resurrection do so because they refuse to believe in a God Who performs miracles, not because the historical evidence is insufficient.

FACE THE FACTS

When dealing with the resurrection of Christ, we must concentrate on the facts. Jesus of Nazareth lived. He died. His tomb was empty. The apostles preached that they saw Him after He physically rose from the dead. The apostles suffered and died because they preached, and refused to deny, the resurrection. Their message is preserved in the most accurate document of which ancient history can boast. Independent witnesses addressed the resurrection in their writings—with enough diversity (yet without a single legitimate contradiction) to prove that no collusion took place.

The primary argument against the resurrection, of course, is that during the normal course of events, dead people do not arise from the grave—which was the very point being made by the apostles. But when all the evidence is weighed and it is revealed that the apostles never buckled under torture, the New Testament never crumples under scrutiny, and the secular, historical witnesses refuse to be drowned in a sea of criticism, then it is evident that the resurrection of Jesus Christ demands its rightful place in the annals of history as the most important event this world has ever seen. To quote the immortal words of the Holy Spirit as spoken through the apostle Paul to King Agrippa in the great long ago: “Why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth raise the dead?” (Acts 26:8).

REFERENCES

Albright, William F. (1953), *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press).

American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (2000), (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin), fourth edition.

Barker, Dan (1992), *Losing Faith in Faith* (Madison, WI: Freedom From Religion Foundation).

Bruce, F.F. (1953), *The New Testament Documents—Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), fourth edition.

Butt, Kyle (2000), “The Historical Christ—Fact or Fiction?,” *Reason & Revelation*, 20:1-6, January.

Carrier, Richard (2000), [On-line], URL:
http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/resurrection/1b.html.

Case, Shirley Jackson (1909), “The Resurrection Faith of the First Disciples,” *American Journal of Theology*, pp. 171-172, April.

Clements, Tad S. (1990), *Science vs. Religion* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus).

Eaves, Thomas F. (1980), “The Inspired Word,” *Great Doctrines of the Bible*, ed. M.H. Tucker (Knoxville, TN: East Tennessee School of Preaching).

Edwards, William D., Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer (1986), “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 256:1455-1463, March 21.

Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 2, chapter 25.

Forbush, William B., ed. (1954), *Fox’s Book of Martyrs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan).

Glueck, Nelson (1959), *Rivers in the Desert: A History of the Negev* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Cudahy).

Harrub, Brad and Bert Thompson (2002), “An Examination of the Medical Evidence for the Physical Death of Jesus Christ,” *Reason & Revelation*, 21:1-7, January.

Jackson, Wayne (1982), “He Showed Himself Alive by Many Proofs,” *Reason & Revelation*, 1:33-35, August.


Jackson, Wayne (1991), “The Holy Bible—Inspired of God,” *Christian Courier*, 27:1-3, May.

Lewis, C.S. (1970), *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).

Lewis, C.S. (1975), *Miracles* (New York: Touchstone).

McCabe, Joseph (1993), *The Myth of the Resurrection and Other Essays* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, reprint of 1926 edition).

Montgomery, John Warwick (1964), *History and Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity).



Two proofs [Christ arose] are offered by the Apostle Peter, on the first Pentecost following the resurrection. One rested upon the testimony of believing witnesses; and the second, upon the experience of enemies who heard the witnesses. The first, His enemies were asked to believe; the second, they could prove to themselves by their own logic and experience.

Peter's second proof of the resurrection called upon his audience to accept the logical conclusion of their own seeing and hearing. It ran something like this: You have seen and heard proof that the Holy Spirit is poured out from heaven; and you are amazed and marvel at this fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. But these "last day" wonders could not occur until the Messiah is exalted, and the Holy Spirit's promise of kingship is realized. The promise of kingship was to one who would not be left in the place of the dead, and whose body would not see corruption. The conclusion is inescapable: We are witnesses to Jesus' resurrection (v. 32); and you are witnesses to something that could only occur after Jesus had been resurrected, exalted, and made King on David's throne (v. 33). - Guardian of Truth Magazine

Jesus' Resurrection and the Life of a Christian

by [Eric Lyons, M.Min.](#)



Is the fact that Jesus rose from the grave about 2,000 years ago really all that important to a Christian's faith? What if Jesus had never risen from the tomb in which He was buried? What if He were in the grave today? Could we still be Christians if Jesus had never arisen?

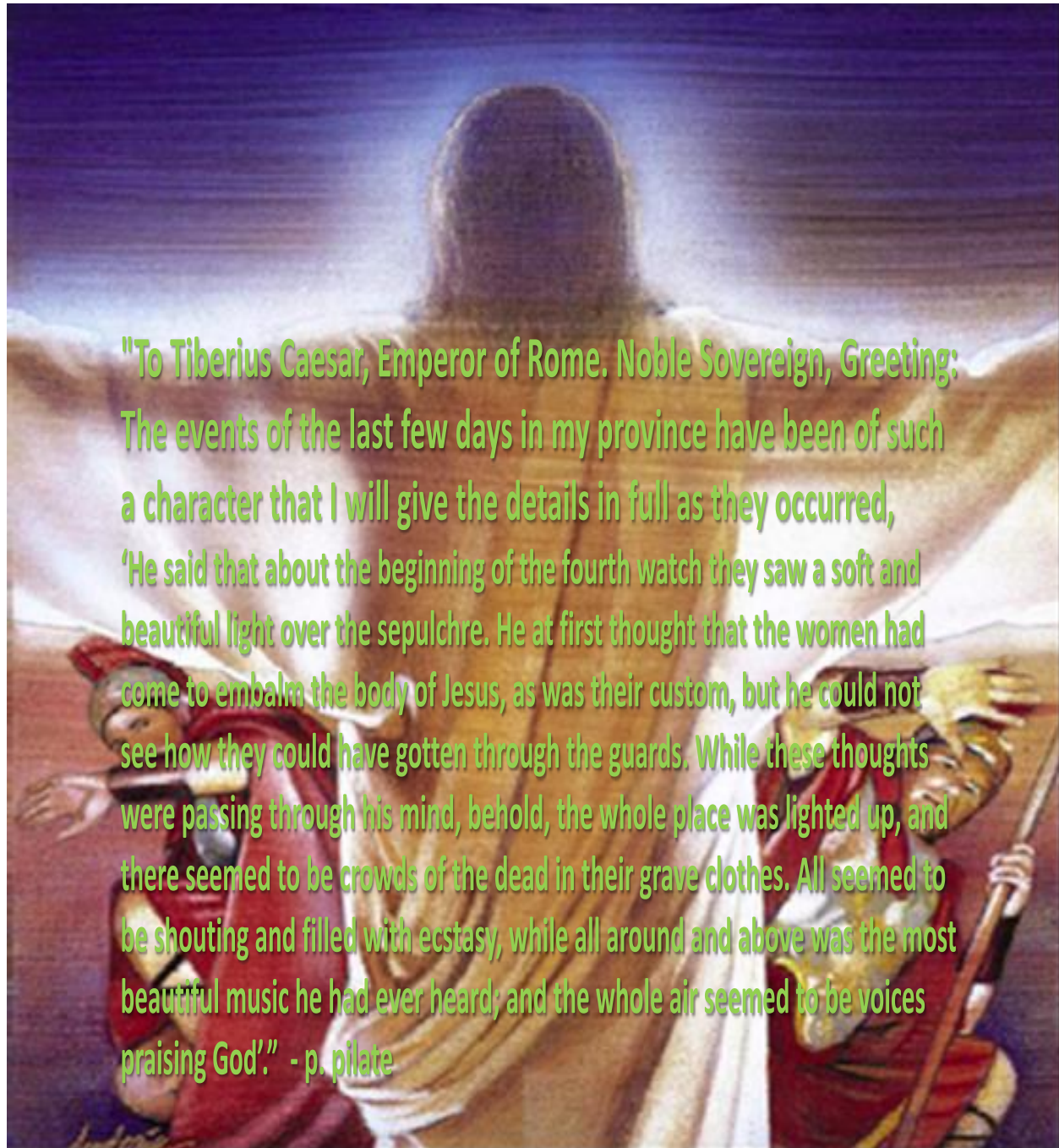
Consider what the apostle Paul told the Christians at Corinth about the resurrection of Christ. In a passage of scripture where he was writing about the reality of the resurrection of the dead at the end of time, he also mentioned Christ's resurrection, saying, "If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty" (1 Corinthians 15:14). Then, three verses later, he made a similar statement, saying, "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (15:17). In other words, without Jesus' resurrection, no one would have any hope of going to heaven. The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of our faith (Romans 1:4).

The early church multiplied quickly in just a few short years. They grew by “leaps and bounds.” People were obeying the Gospel by the thousands, and one central message laid at the heart of their decision—the death, burial & resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Had Jesus never been raised from the grave, the Gospel never could have been preached. The Gospel isn’t about a “lifeless lord,” but a “risen Redeemer.”

Jesus resurrection’ gives meaning to a Christian’s faith.

- Every Sunday when Christians partake of the Lord’s Supper, we remember the Lord’s death “until He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). If Jesus were not risen, however, we would have no hope of His coming again, and Paul’s statement here regarding the Lord’s Supper would be meaningless.
- Every time Christians pray “in Jesus name,” we are relying on a risen Savior—Jesus—to mediate on our behalf (1 Timothy 2:5; John 14:6; 1 John 2:1). But, if Jesus were not risen, our prayers would not be heard, and our petitions to have our sins forgiven could not be granted.
- The only reason that preaching and baptizing (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16) are of any importance is because **Jesus is not dead**, but alive. When a person is baptized “for remission of sins” (Acts 2:38), he is raised from a world of sin, “just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father” (Romans 6:4).

Christians always need to keep in mind how important Jesus’ resurrection is to our faith. We must not let the fact that Jesus’ resurrection occurred nearly 2,000 years ago lessen the importance of His victory over death.



"To Tiberius Caesar, Emperor of Rome. Noble Sovereign, Greeting:
The events of the last few days in my province have been of such
a character that I will give the details in full as they occurred,
'He said that about the beginning of the fourth watch they saw a soft and
beautiful light over the sepulchre. He at first thought that the women had
come to embalm the body of Jesus, as was their custom, but he could not
see how they could have gotten through the guards. While these thoughts
were passing through his mind, behold, the whole place was lighted up, and
there seemed to be crowds of the dead in their grave clothes. All seemed to
be shouting and filled with ecstasy, while all around and above was the most
beautiful music he had ever heard; and the whole air seemed to be voices
praising God.'" - p. pilate

GOD THE SON—RESURRECTION

108

Christ Arose!

R. L.
Slow.

Rev. Robert Lowry.

1. Low in the grave He lay— Je - sus, my Sav - ior! Wait - ing the com - ing day—
 2. Vain - ly they watch His bed— Je - sus, my Sav - ior! Vain - ly they seal the dead—
 3. Death can-not keep his prey— Je - sus, my Sav - ior! He tore the bars a - way—

CHORUS. *Faster.*

Je - sus, my Lord! Up from the grave He a - rose, With a
 He a - rose,

might - y tri-umph o'er His foes; He a - rose a Vic - tor from the
 He a - rose;

dark do - main, And He lives for - ev - er with His saints to reign; He a -

rose! He a - rose! He a - rose! Hal - le - lu - jah! Christ a - rose! A-MEN.
 He a - rose! He a - rose!

Copyright, 1902, by Mary Runyon Lowry. Renewal. Used by permission.

