

# Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

## 1) First we must prove that Jesus both lived and died as recorded in the gospel accounts.

### a) Did a real man named Jesus and called the “Christ” live in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine? Even the vast majority of scholars today would answer “yes” based upon:

- The reliability of the New Testament as an accurate record of the history of Jesus
  - (1) See my “The Reliability of the New Testament” for proofs of the reliability of the NT. If the NT is proven an accurate record of history, then Jesus’ life as recorded is also proven. While many non-Christian scholars reject the accounts of miracles in the Bible and contest some of the teachings ascribed to Jesus, few if any deny that they at least prove that a real man named Jesus lived in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine.
- Early extra-Biblical references to Jesus such as:
  - (1) **Josephus**, the preeminent historian of 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish-Roman interaction wrote *Antiquities* completed ~93 AD
    - (a) “He [the high priest Ananias] convened a meeting of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ, and certain others.”
    - (b) “About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, *if indeed one ought to call him a man*. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and Greeks. *He was the Christ*. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. *On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvelous things about him*. And the tribe of Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.” [italicized text is debated by scholars and is probably later additions by Christian copyists]
  - (2) **Tacitus**, the most important Roman historian of the first century wrote in 115 AD, “Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus [Latin for Christ], from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome...”
  - (3) **Pliny the Younger** in 111 AD confirms that the “Christian” community worshipped a man called “Christ” as if he were a god.
  - (4) **Seutonius** in his *Life of Claudius* confirms Claudius’ expulsion of the Jews from Rome in 49 AD because of their bickering over Chrestus [Latin for Christ].

### b) Did this Jesus die on a cross as described in the gospel accounts?

- The above evidence also proves that Jesus was executed by the orders of Pontius Pilate.
- Yet some scholars say that Jesus did not actually die on the cross, but merely fainted, later awaking in the cool of the grave. Almost all scholars reject this “Swoon” theory for the death of Christ for it fails to explain the following.

- (1) John 19:34 states that a soldier pierced Jesus' side with a spear "bringing a sudden flow of blood and water". This is actually a very accurate medical description of what occurs when a person's pericardium, the sac surrounding the heart, is pierced. Such a wound would bring certain death.
  - (2) How could a man weakened by beatings, scourging, crucifixion, and finally a stab to the chest gather the energy to roll a large stone (probably weighing 1-1/2 to 2 tons) away from the tomb that even a healthy man would fail to budge?
  - (3) If Jesus was in such poor physical shape, obviously in need of medical attention, why did his disciples worship him and claim he was the risen Lord instead of calling a physician to treat him?
  - (4) The Swoon Theory neglects historical accounts about the cruelty and finality of crucifixion. A guard who failed to execute his prisoner would pay for the failure with his own life (see Acts 12:18-9 for the penalty a guard faced for failure). Fortunately for the guards it was easy to tell if a crucified victim had died. The only way to breathe while crucified was for the victim to push himself up on his nail pierced feet, relieving the weight from his chest and allowing him to inhale. When he fatigued of lifting himself up and remained motionless, he quickly suffocated.
- c] **Conclusion:** As almost all scholars would agree, a real man named Jesus and called "Christ" lived in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine and was crucified as described in the gospel accounts. But did he rise from the dead? If not, Christianity is of little value. Yet if he did rise from the dead, then he has proven that he has power even over death, that he is the promised messiah, and that he is the divine Son of God as he claimed to be.

## 2) Did Jesus actually rise from the dead?

- a] **The following 6 facts are considered virtually beyond question by critical historical scholars, including those who are non-Christians. Adding them together, we have substantial factual proof that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, as recorded in the gospels.**
- (1) **Jesus' death caused the disciples to despair and lose hope.** What we want to point out here is that instead of expecting his resurrection, they scattered when Jesus was arrested (Mathew 26:56) and even disbelieved the first accounts of his resurrection (Luke 24:4-11). Such behavior makes little sense if they planned to fake Jesus' resurrection.
  - (2) **Yet later the disciples claimed to both see and touch the risen Jesus** and preached and wrote consistently about this experience (Acts 2:32, 1 Corinthians 15:1-8).
    - (a) Hallucinations offer no explanation for modern science has proven that they are neither collectively experienced nor contagious.
    - (b) These claims were made in Jerusalem, the very city where Christ was crucified. If he did not rise from the dead, why did the Jewish rulers who opposed Christianity not parade Jesus' body down the streets of Jerusalem to silence the rumor? Could the disciples have stolen Christ's body? Unlikely, since the disciples could never have defeated the Roman soldiers guarding Jesus' tomb. Only the resurrection can explain the failure of the Jews to produce Jesus' body for display.
  - (3) **Because of these experiences, the disciples were transformed** from doubters who were afraid to identify themselves with Jesus to bold proclaimers of his death and resurrection.
    - (a) Notice the change in Peter between denying Christ just before the crucifixion (Mark 14:66-72) to boldly proclaiming Christ in public despite risking beatings and

imprisonment (Acts 2:14-36; 3:11-4:22). The other apostles likewise spoke with great boldness even in the face of severe persecution.

- (b) Would these men endure hardship, torture, and death for a message that they knew was untrue? How about for a message they strongly doubted? No, these men must have truly believed that they literally experienced the resurrected Christ.
- (4) As a result of this preaching, the church was born and grew.**
  - (a) Within the first few chapters of Acts, literally thousands of Jews join the church. Not long after, the message extended to Samaritans and Gentiles as the church spread throughout the Roman world.
  - (b) This growing church consistently viewed Sunday as the primary day of worship because this was the day Christ rose from the dead. This affirms that Christ's resurrection was at the center of Christian doctrine and practice.
- (5) James, the brother of Jesus, who had been a skeptic (John 7:3-5), was converted** to the faith when he saw the resurrected Jesus (1 Cor 15:7). His transformation was so complete that he later served as leader of the Jerusalem church and finally lost his life as a martyr.
- (6) A few years later, Paul (also called Saul) was converted** by an experience which he also believed to be an appearance of the risen Jesus. This is a particularly important fact for the following reasons:
  - (a) Paul was a high-ranking, zealous Jew (Philippians 3:4-6) with Roman citizenship (Acts 22:27-8). From a human perspective, he had nothing to gain and much to lose by renouncing Judaism and joining the heavily persecuted Christian church.
  - (b) After the resurrection as the church grew, Paul started out vehemently opposed to Christianity, persecuting many of its followers (Acts 8:1-3, 9:1-2). He was certainly not sympathetic to their beliefs or to the claims of Jesus.
  - (c) He claims to have seen the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-9) and from that point forward, his life was radically changed. He became the preeminent missionary to the Gentiles proclaiming a message that was consistently focused on the resurrection of Christ. For his new faith he suffered greatly (2 Corinthians 11:23-28), finally being martyred by Nero.

Only the resurrection can adequately explain all of the facts above. Yet few unbelievers honestly evaluate these facts. Instead, either because they assume that miracles such as the resurrection are impossible or because their lifestyles contradict Jesus' teachings, most unbelievers reject the evidence without ever studying it. Therefore, use these arguments whenever you have an opportunity but always saturate your conversation in prayer.

## **Bibliography**

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- McDowell, Josh. A Ready Defense.
- Strobel, Lee. The Case for Christ