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## *Evidence you should consider for The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*

**Part of Chapter Eleven “He Has Risen, Indeed!”  
in *As You Are Going... Make Disciples***

The question before us is, “Did Jesus Christ really rise from the grave?” The importance of this question is emphasized by the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, where he wrote “... **If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.**” Put another way, “**If Jesus Christ did not rise from the grave, then the Christian faith is a waste of time, a bad joke.**” But if Jesus Christ did actually rise from the grave, it validates His personal claims, and there are personal implications for each of us, implications so vital that it would be foolish for you to ignore this question.

**If Jesus Christ arose from the grave. There are eternal implications that no one should ignore.**

A second question logically follows, “Is there evidence that can establish beyond a reasonable doubt, that Jesus did rise from the grave on that Easter Sunday morning?” I believe the answer to that question, and thus also to the first question, is a resounding “**yes.**” Having made this assertion, it is only proper that I lay out for you some of the evidence. While books have been written on the resurrection of Jesus, my purpose here is not to give you an exhaustive explanation, rather a brief summary of some of the evidence for His resurrection.

Let's start with a look at one of the most influential men of history, the Apostle Paul. Paraphrasing part of I Corinthians 15, Paul wrote, “**We know that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.** How do we know this?

Because over 500 people saw Him alive at one time (after he was crucified and put in a tomb), and many of those people were still alive when Paul wrote that epistle.” This passage and others from Paul's letters which became part of the New Testament and the historical records about Paul found in the book of Acts, clearly reveal some irrefutable truths that have a bearing on the question, “Did Jesus really rise from the grave?” **Let's take a look at them:**

- First: Paul was a very intelligent man and a brilliant debater
- Second: The Apostle Paul was very controversial and had many critics who would do anything they could to discredit him. Some even wanted to kill him.
- Third: The Apostle Paul was not writing with us in mind (who live nearly 2,000 years after his death); rather he was first and foremost writing to the people of his day.
- Fourth: The writings of the Apostle Paul clearly establish two things that must be considered:
  - One, What Paul believed
  - Two, Certain things the people Paul was writing to believed.

It is obvious that the people to whom Paul was writing must have believed that Jesus arose from the grave. If they did not believe that more than 500 people saw Jesus alive after His crucifixion, His critics would have used such a false statement to ridicule him. He would have been particularly

vulnerable to the charge of hypocrisy. After all, in Paul's writing, he advocated a high moral standard and spoke out strongly against dishonesty.

Such a blatant lie would have so discredited Paul that it is highly unlikely that we would know anything of his letters today. Brilliant man that he was, Paul was not about to make such a foolish statement if he did not believe it was true, and if he did not also believe the people he was writing to believed it to be true.

Paul was not the only one who wrote based on this belief. The other writers of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, James, and whoever wrote the book of Hebrews, all wrote from the belief that Jesus Christ was the Son of God who was killed by crucifixion, but three days later rose from the grave. In their writings, they also assumed that the people they were writing to believed these same things. Like Paul, all of these men advocated a high moral standard. You may question the validity of their belief, but right or wrong, it borders on the absurd to even question whether they actually believed it.

The question we must answer is, "Where did this widespread belief that Jesus arose from the grave come from?" Remember, these people were contemporaries of Jesus. There had been no time for a legend to evolve. Furthermore, they held to this belief even though it cost many of them dearly. They were literally, "thrown to the lions." We know that they held steadfastly to this belief, because if they had not, the church (a product of that belief) would not exist today.

No one can seriously question whether Jesus lived. To suggest that the writings about Him were merely fiction, is beyond incredulous. It is hard to even imagine that four separate authors could create a fictitious character so real that over 500 people thought He actually lived during their lifetimes, that He was crucified by the Romans, and that they personally saw Him alive after He rose from the grave. Remember, they were so sure of these things, that they were willing to die for the belief. To deny that He lived, would make a mockery of all historical inquiry.

Having to admit that Jesus lived, but starting out with the assumption that miracles are impossible (some would describe this as blind prejudice), many skeptical scholars have tried to go into the historical records about Jesus to remove the supernatural elements. Early in the twentieth century, there were many respected scholars involved in this effort. Albert Schweitzer even wrote a book about it, titled, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*. These scholars were trying to describe Jesus as a simple teacher of righteousness who did not perform the miracles recorded in the Gospels. They assumed that the miracles were fictitious embellishments added to the records about the real Jesus.

While the efforts of skeptics to find a different Jesus from the Gospel accounts has continued to this day, it has proven to be an exercise in futility. In account after account, the removal of the miraculous destroys the purpose for which it was written.

Furthermore, if they were ever able to come up with a reasonable alternative to the Jesus of the Gospels, their removal of the miracle would create an even bigger problem. They would not be able to reasonably deny that "this simple teacher of righteousness" believed He was the Messiah who was promised in the prophecies in the Old Testament. It is nearly as easy to establish that Jesus claimed he was the promised Messiah, as it is to establish that He lived at all. After all, that is why the Jews had Him crucified.

If Jesus was merely a dynamic leader and teacher, as these skeptics propose, the logical conclusion is that He was a hypocritical liar, or a delusional schizophrenic. As C.S. Lewis observed, "Either Jesus was who He claimed to be, the Son of God, or He was a liar or a lunatic. **Jesus left us no other alternative.**"

So we know, there once lived a man named Jesus who claimed He was the Messiah and whom most historians recognize as one of the greatest leaders and teachers in the history of the world. We also know many of His contemporaries believe that three days after He died on the cross, He rose from the grave.

It is an undeniable fact that over 500 people believed they saw Him alive after His dead body was placed in a tomb, and many of these people believed it so strongly that they committed their lives to proclaiming this belief – even if it meant they would die for doing so. We need to ask, “Where did this belief come from?” Skeptics have tried to explain it away by various theories. Let's take a look at them.

**The first theory is that Jesus did not really die.** This is sometimes called the “**swoon theory.**” It suggests that after spending a day on the cross, and having a spear thrust in his side, that Jesus did not really die. He merely went into a coma, was wrapped in linen and ointment and laid in a tomb. But, after three days in the tomb (without food or water) He was resuscitated, bust out of the linen and ointment that bound Him, pushed back the gigantic boulder that sealed the entrance to the tomb, and walked by the sleeping guards (who, according to Roman law, would be executed if they went to sleep on the job). In His weakened state, He then appeared to His disciples, and about 500 other people before He disappeared, never to be seen or heard from again. This theory has few advocates. It is not reasonable that anyone in such a weakened condition was the risen son of God.

**The second theory is called: The Visionary hypothesis.** This theory suggest that the disciples did not really see Jesus alive after His body was placed in a tomb. They just thought they saw Him. Now, we might accept one of two visions. But over 500 people all having the same vision is hard to believe, unless there was something that encouraged them to have the visions. If Jesus had healed the sick, given sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and made the lame to walk, we could understand why they might have visions. But if He did those things, it is not hard to believe that He arose from the tomb. Those miracles would substantiate His claim that He was the Messiah, and the Son of God. Another problem with this theory is that the Jews and Romans could have eliminated a major problem, the belief that Jesus arose, by merely going to the tomb and producing His body.

**The third and most widespread theory is: The stolen body theory.** Recognizing that His tomb was empty, this theory alleges that someone stole the body of Jesus. But, we must ask, “Why would someone steal a decaying corpse. Sure, the Jews had a good motive. They could have used the body to quickly quash this “new sect” that so irritated them. But they could not produce His body to discredit the disciples who claimed that He had risen from the grave.

How about a group of Romans? You say, “Maybe they stole His body.” What was its value? They could have sold it to the Jews. But, as we saw above, the Jews apparently could not produce His body. Furthermore, it was in the best interest of the Romans to maintain law and order. Pontius Pilate, the governor appointed by the Romas was very much a political animal. A missing body was certainly not in Pilate's best interest. That is why he had the Roman guards posted at the tomb.

Some suggest. “The obvious explanation is that some disciples of Jesus stole His body so they could start a new religion,” The problem with this theory is that they would have known that the faith they were promoting was fraudulent. But, 11 of the 12 disciples, and many of His other followers, gave their lives for the belief that Jesus rose from the grave and that He was the Messiah, the Son of God.

The records indicate that the disciples disassociated themselves from Jesus when He was on trial. That was normal, natural behavior. Peter's denial of Jesus (three times, two in response to young girls) was what we would expect of a man who was running scared. This same Peter, only a few days later, boldly risked being stoned by standing on the corner in Jerusalem, pointing his finger at the Jews and accusing them of killing their Messiah! That Peter risked his life for no earthly gain, was unreal apart from having seen the risen Christ.

Thomas, who first doubted and said, that he would not believe in the resurrection of Jesus unless he could put his finger in His nail pierced hand, was very real and human. But, the Thomas who went all the way to India as a missionary and died as a martyr, was unreal apart from having later become convinced that Jesus rose from the grave and that He was the Messiah. The Bible explained that Thomas

changed his mind because He met his risen Lord and Savior.

Furthermore, we have to ask, “Why would His followers think that anyone would fall for the story that Jesus was the Messiah?” Again, if Jesus actually healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, made the lame to walk, stilled a storm, and walked on water, we can understand why they might think that people could be fooled into thinking that He was the Messiah. But, those things would clearly establish that His claims were true and that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and thus it would be reasonable to expect that He had risen from the grave.

**When the facts are honestly considered: The alternative theories are not reasonable.**

None of these theories make any sense when one honestly considers the known facts. The most reasonable explanation for the historical evidence is that Jesus was the Son of God and that he did rise from the grave on that first Easter Sunday morning.

There is an additional body of evidence that Jesus rose from the grave that is easy for us to check out today. The Bible not only tells us that Jesus rose from the grave, but Luke chapter 24:12-32, also tells us that after He arose, he walked and talked to some men on a road to a small town called Emmaus a few miles from Jerusalem. It also tells us what He said to them. At first these men did not recognize Jesus when he walked up along side of them. They were troubled about the things that had happened in Jerusalem, about Jesus being crucified. Jesus responded to them by saying:

**Oh, foolish men and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ (a word that means Messiah) to suffer these things and to enter into His glory.**

The author Luke continued:

**And beginning with Moses and all of the prophets, He explained to them in all of the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.**

This is a very significant account. In a nutshell, this record tells us that Jesus Christ claimed that the Old Testament, a book written by about 50 men over a span of nearly 1,000 years, and completed over 300 years before He was born, talked specifically about Himself when it foretold of the promised Messiah.

There is no debate that the Old Testament was written before Jesus was born – it was even translated from Hebrew to Greek about 150 years before He was born. (It is believed to be the first book ever translated from one language to another). We have copies of that translation today. It is called the Septuagint (often written LXX, as it was translated by a team of seventy men). Consequently, using the Old Testament Scriptures, we can check out these claims by examining the biblical documents.

The evidence that Jesus rose from the grave is compelling, and His words on the road to Emmaus can be examined. If He did rise from the grave, and He is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament, then your eternal destiny depends on how you respond to the truths proclaimed in the Bible. There is too much at stake for you to ignore this evidence.

**If Jesus rose from the grave, and His words on the road to Emmaus are true, then your eternal destination depends on your response to the truths proclaimed in the Bible.**

I have written a book, *The Master Plot of the Bible*, that explains the foundation for the Messianic promises, and then examines the Old Testament prophets and their expectations for a coming Messiah, that point to Jesus Christ. If you have doubts about the validity of the Christian faith, reading this book may be the most valuable investment of time in your life. It is also a good gift for doubters & skeptics.

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