



# Evidence for the Resurrection

## Introduction

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead has always been a contentious area of discussion all over the world. It is this event which has drawn the most criticism from the sceptics; and for very good reason. For the authority of Jesus's teachings was based on His claim that He was the unique Son of God. Yet, Jesus was dependant on the resurrection from the dead to prove that He was the One that He said He was – the Messiah – and that He was the Son of God ([Matthew 16:21](#), [Mark 8:31](#), [Luke 9:22](#), and [John 2:19-22](#)).

It is, therefore, imperative that we go to the event of the resurrection to ascertain whether or not Jesus is who He says He is, and furthermore to ascertain whether the scriptures can be believed as the true Word of God. A key Scripture which points this out is [1 Corinthians 15:12-19](#).

*"If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith...you are still in your sins...[you] are to be pitied more than all men."*

I love the way the Scripture always says it like it is. Paul was clear, if Christ was not raised, faith was of no benefit to those who believed in Jesus. Thus, in order to have true faith in the scriptures, which maintain not only that Jesus is the Son of God, but that He is our saviour, we must believe in his BODILY RESURRECTION, because Christ's bodily resurrection proves what Jesus claims for Himself, and proves the scriptures to be accurate, and therefore, authoritative! (the scriptures claim that when He was seen by people after the resurrection, He had a body that bore the scars of the Crucifixion, He could eat fish yet had the ability to pass through a wall! This points to a resurrection body which had different properties but the same essence and it was clear from the eye witnesses that He was not a "spirit" or "ghost")

We then come to the question of how we can know the authenticity of the resurrection. Is it only by faith? For if the resurrection proves who Jesus is, and by so doing also gives credibility to the scriptures, it is imperative that it can be shown to be historically trustworthy. And it is. Let me share with you eight Key reasons why:

## 1: The Prophets Spoke of it in the Old Testament

There are numerous places where the prophets spoke of the Messiah who would come - first to suffer - and then to triumph over that suffering, pointing to the death and resurrection. There are three passages in particular which speak of the Messiah's death, followed by his victory:

1. [Psalm 22:1-31](#): we read about agony and desolation in verses 1-21, words spoken by Jesus as He was dying on the cross, followed by deliverance and faithfulness in verses 22-31.
2. [Psalm 69:1-36](#): we read of a suffering man and death in verses 1-29, verse 21 being played out in Jesus' experience on the cross, but then find praise and triumph in verses 30-36.
3. [Isaiah 53:1-11](#): probably the most well-known chapter in the Old Testament which refers to the death and resurrection. Here in verses 1-9 we find some of the most vivid descriptions of a suffering and sacrificial servant. Yet, this is followed in verses 10-11 by the promise that the servant would see His offspring, that His days would be prolonged, and that He will see the fruit of His labours, all inferring a resolution to the misery and death which He would suffer.

All three point to the coming death and resurrection.

In addition, the **Prophets of the Old Testament spoke** of where He was born, what He would be called and His ministry – all fulfilled and evidenced by Jesus Christ Himself.

1. [Isaiah 9:1-7](#): It speaks of



# Evidence for the Resurrection

- a. One to come who would bring Light to the land in darkness. Jesus acknowledged He was the Light of the World ([John 8:12](#); [9:5](#)),
- b. A child would be born who would shoulder God's form of government, born to David's line and a King (referring to David's Throne) – we know Jesus was a direct descendent through Mary, and although not his earthly father, also through Joseph's line. [Matthew 1:1-18](#); [Luke 1:26-38](#) – also as foretold - One would bring the justice and the righteousness of the Kingdom of God to bear and this would be accomplished by God, because of His Zeal (passion, desire, purpose).
2. [Micah 5:2-4](#): That He would be born in Bethlehem, the legal place for the Census at that time, and King David's home town ([Matt 2:1-15](#)) – and so in [Hos 11:1](#) provides the prophet's insight that God's chosen One would be called out of Egypt, which is exactly what happened - but He would be called a Nazarene due to being brought up in Nazareth. ([Matt 2:19-23](#); [Acts 10:38-48](#)). But no one expected the Messiah to be coming from Nazareth! [John 1:43-46](#).
3. [Isaiah 11:1-12](#): The reference that He would be that "Root of Jesse" (David's father) who would be the One on whom the Spirit would rest – full of wisdom and understanding, counsel and strength and the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord, not judging by what His eyes see but in righteousness. All of which Jesus demonstrated and fulfilled throughout His life on earth.
  - a. **The "Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me"** – He comes back to Nazareth to reveal this in [Luke 4:16-21](#); Jesus reading from [Isaiah 61:1-3](#).
  - b. **Not judging by what His eyes saw** but acting righteously, obeying His Heavenly Father in everything – [John 5:19-24](#); [6:33-40](#); [7:24](#); [John 8:14-18](#); [1 Sam 16:7](#).
  - c. **Proclaiming Justice to the Gentiles** – [Matt 12:17-21](#) as recorded in [Isaiah 42:6-13](#).

## 2: Jesus Foretold His death in the New Testament

A number of times Jesus spoke of His impending death and resurrection before His death. He mentioned it:

1. To the Pharisees at the Temple, in [John 2:19-21](#)
2. On His way to Jerusalem He talked about it in [Matthew 16:21](#) and [Luke 9:22](#).
3. After Peter's confession He referred to it in [Mark 8:29-31](#).
4. At the Mount of Olives after the Last Supper, He spoke about it in [Mark 14:22-31](#).

He said that He would rise on the third day – [Luke 24:1-9,36-49](#); [Matt 17:22-23](#); [Luke 18: 31-34](#); [Matt 20:17-19](#); [Mark 10:32-34](#) – and lo and behold He did! [Luke 24:1-53](#). And that was just the beginning!

## 3: The Historical Record Implies It

We also have Jewish and Roman Historians who refer to the crucifixion of Jesus:

- **Thallus**, a Greek writer from around 50 AD talks of the Crucifixion, and even mentions the darkness and earthquakes which followed it. About the year 800 the Byzantine chronicler Georgius Syncellus cites a passage from a book, no longer extant, entitled *A History of the World*, which was written around 220 by the church father Julius Africanus, himself an able historian, who in turn reports that the Roman historian Thallus, who wrote on the history of the Ancient Near East, tries in the third book of his *History*, a work also no longer extant, to explain away the darkness at the time of Christ's death as due to a solar eclipse. We shouldn't be overly troubled by this chain of citations of works now lost, for in many cases we know of what ancient authors wrote only through such citations, and there's no reason to think that Syncellus or Africanus do not accurately cite the works known to them. What is unfortunate is that Africanus does not actually quote Thallus' words, leaving us in the dark, so to speak, at to what he actually said. Here is the passage from Africanus reproduced by Syncellus:



## Evidence for the Resurrection

“On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus in the third book of his *History*, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun. For the Hebrews celebrate the Passover on the 14th day according to the moon, and the passion of our Saviour falls on the day before the Passover; but an eclipse of the sun takes place only when the moon comes under the sun. And it cannot happen at any other time but in the interval between the first day of the new moon and the last of the old, that is, at their junction: how then should an eclipse be supposed to happen when the moon is almost diametrically opposite the sun? Let that opinion pass however; let it carry the majority with it; and let this portent of the world be deemed an eclipse of the sun, like others a portent only to the eye. Phlegon records that, in the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the sixth hour to the ninth—manifestly that one of which we speak. But what has an eclipse in common with an earthquake, the rending of rocks, and the resurrection of the dead, and so great a perturbation throughout the universe? Surely no such event as this is recorded for a long period. But it was a darkness induced by God, because the Lord happened then to suffer.”

Africanus, who cites Thallus on other matters as well, *is exercised to expose as erroneous Thallus' explaining the darkness as due to a solar eclipse*. He points out that such an explanation is unreasonable because Passover always occurs at the time of the full moon, and the full moon cannot come between the earth and the sun. So, the explanation, according to Africanus, must be that the darkness was miraculous.

- **Josephus** (Born 37AD), a Jewish historian who lived in Rome around 93 A.D., and who became a Pharisee at the age of 19. He was the commander of the Jewish forces in Galilee and was captured by the Romans and attached to the roman Headquarters. He mentioned not only Jesus's death but in other places the work of John the Baptist and Jesus's brother, James.

*“Now there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works. A teacher of such men as to receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us had condemned to the cross, those that loved him, at first did not forsake, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and 10,000 other wonderful things concerning him, and the tribe of Christians, so named after him, are not extinct at this day.”*

- **Lucian of Samosater** (a satirist of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century) – spoke scornfully of Christ and the Christians. He connected them with the synagogues of Palestine and alluded to Christ as “the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world and refused to worship the Greek gods”.
- **Plinius Secundus**, governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor (AD 112) – who wrote to emperor Trajan seeking counsel about how he should treat the Christians. He was a man who hated Christians so that he would murder them, he did not care whether they were men, women, boys or girls. He tried to make Christians bow to the statues of Trajan and tried to make them curse Christ.
- **Justin Martyr** – in about AD 150 Justin addressed his defence of Christianity to the Emperor Antoninus Pius, and was referred to Pilate's report, which read “they pierced his hands and feet, and after they crucified him, they cast lots for his garments and divided them among themselves.” Justin at first did not believe in Jesus, he really wanted to search for the truth, but later he met an old man who was a Christian, who led him to Christ. As for the resurrection, we know it was referred to by first and second century Jews because of the writings of the early church father, Justin Martyr. He details how the Jews in the diaspora were fomenting the story that the empty tomb was caused by the disciples of Jesus who stole the body. They wouldn't need the story if the tomb hadn't been empty.

### 4: The Empty Tomb Provides Us With Evidence



## Evidence for the Resurrection

This then leads us to the greatest evidence which we can point to: the empty tomb itself. What is as clear today as it has been for almost two thousand years, is that **NO BODY HAS EVER BEEN PRODUCED!** Only some empty clothes. There has never been any dispute by the Jews, or the Romans or the Christians over the fact that the tomb was empty. Everyone is agreed on this point. The alternative would have been too difficult to prove. What is so amazing about this simple fact are the implications behind the empty tomb. In order to understand these implications, it might be good to remind ourselves of the scenario surrounding the tomb. Consider the following:

- a. According to archaeological evidence a two-ton **STONE** would have been used as a doorway for the tomb. This would have been wedged into a slanted groove above and to the left of the entrance to the tomb. Once the body had been placed inside the tomb, the wedge would have been removed and the stone would have been rolled over the doorway to block any potential grave robbers. Yet this enormous stone was found laying up and away from the entrance of the tomb (see Mark 16, and John 20). It has been suggested that it would have taken almost twenty men to have accomplished such a feat.
- b. A Roman **SEAL** (made up of a rope slung across the surface of the stone and attached to the sides of the tomb wall) would have been fastened, to warn away robbers (Matthew 27:66). The punishment for defacing a Roman Seal was death, carried out by being crucified upside-down. This seal was missing when the empty tomb was discovered.
- c. Sixteen **GUARDS** would have been stationed at the sepulchre (Matthew 27:66). Four immediately in front of the tomb, and the remaining twelve in groups of four fanning out in a semi-circle. These were not Jewish temple guards, but Roman legionnaires; the most disciplined fighting force of their era; the "creme-de-la-creme!" They would have all known that the penalty for sleeping on the job was execution, by being burned to death with their own clothes. The scriptures tell us that these guards, upon realizing that the tomb was empty, did not go back to their barracks, but went to the Jewish priests. Why? Because they knew they would not be believed by their own superiors and would have been executed for sleeping on the job. They went to the temple priests to have them plead their case for them. And we know that the temple priests bribed the soldiers to tell the people that the disciples stole the body (refer to [Matthew 28:11-15](#)).
- d. Recently in the town of Nazareth, a **MARBLE SLAB** was discovered, written in the name of Caesar (thus dating it to around the time of Jesus). On it was inscribed the penalty of death for anyone robbing or defacing a tomb. Yet, we know that prior to this time the crime for grave robbery only warranted a fine. It seems a stiffer penalty was suddenly imposed in the 1st century, due possibly to the embarrassment of Christ's empty tomb.

So, we have an empty tomb, in which lay some empty grave garments. We have a two-ton stone moved up and away from the entrance, and the seal broken. On top of that we have sixteen of the best soldiers in the world befuddled as to how the stone, the seal, and the body could have been moved while they were standing on guard just a few feet away. On these points not too many people dispute.

There are however a few theories which are being bandied about by those trying to come up with excuses for the empty tomb. Some of them are quite comical. Let me just list them below:

- a. The tomb was unknown to the disciples. Yet, Joseph of Arimathea must have known as it was his tomb. The authorities and others must have known.
- b. The women found the wrong tomb. If that were so, then did the whole world also find the wrong tomb? Because till this day no alternative has ever been produced.
- c. The disciples and the women were only hallucinating. Why then did the Roman guards have to make such a fast retreat to the Jewish priests? Were they hallucinating too, at risk to their lives?
- d. The body was stolen by the disciples. What then about the guards, and their witness? Can anyone imagine the timid disciples overpowering the Roman guards, moving the two-ton stone, and reviving a dead Jesus?
- e. The Swoon theory is the favourite among some sceptics. Jesus, once in the cool cave, came to, with no wounds, and no garments. He then moved the two-ton stone, overpowered the guards and went about preaching a new religion!



## Evidence for the Resurrection

- f. The newest theory is called the Passover plot. Jesus, who knew he would be killed had himself drugged, and like the swoon theory, though wounded, came to, moved the stone, overpowered the guard, and changed the world?

### 5: The Many Post-Resurrection Appearances (15)

Along with this evidence are the many post-resurrection appearances. In all there were fifteen, over a period of forty days, and at different times of the day:

- Mary Magdalene in the morning – [John 20:1-17](#); [Mark 16:1-11](#)
- Amongst the 11 apostles in the evening – [John 24:36-49](#)
- At the Sea of Tiberias where He restored Simon Peter – [John 21:1-25](#)
- The two Emmaus travellers in the afternoon – [Luke 24:13-32](#)
- In Galilee at the mountain Jesus had indicated the disciples would see Him again – [Matthew 28:16-20](#)

According to Paul, Jesus even appeared to **500 witnesses** at one time ([1 Corinthians 15:1-10](#)). If each of them were to give six minutes of testimony, we would have 50 hours of testimony. Some of the witnesses were even hostile witnesses, such as Thomas (who doubted to start with) and Saul (who later became Paul).

### 6: It Changed Their Lives

Further evidence, is the change which came over the disciples. You might reasonably ask why should these disciples speak up about the resurrection? They were not sophisticated. They had no prestige, no wealth, and no social status. These disciples, who had fled when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, had denied him and hid in the upper room over the next few days, were now being beaten, stoned, thrown to the lions, tortured, and crucified for what they now knew. They were giving their lives to preach Christ's resurrection. They certainly would not have changed so dramatically for a lie. Certainly, this movement had something unique about it that other movements did not have.

We know of about a dozen other movements that arose in Palestine within a hundred years before and after the time of Jesus. One of the best known was an uprising led by a man called Judas the Galilean at about the time of the birth of Jesus. He along with hundreds of his followers were picked up by the authorities and crucified (Josephus, Antiquities, 17:271-298). About a hundred years after the death of Jesus another charismatic individual, Simeon ben-Kosiba, led a revolution which attracted hundreds of followers, all believing he was the promised Messiah. They too were hunted down by the authorities and killed. In all these movements, the death of the leader signalled the death of the movement.

The rule was, that if your "messiah" was killed then obviously he was not the true messiah, and the best solution was to give up the cause or choose another from his family. Like the movements of that time, they could have chosen James the brother of Jesus as their new Messiah, since he was a leader at the centre of the early Jerusalem church for thirty years, until his death; but the early Christians refused to give him that status. That was the rule, yet the followers of Jesus continued to follow Jesus long after his death for one simple reason; their Messiah had not been defeated by death but had really risen from the dead. It was this fact alone which separated Jesus from all those who came before or since, and for whom the disciples were willing to die. In fact, all of the apostles except one died for this man who some say no longer lived, yet whose message had so changed their lives because His Life was changing them from the inside, just as Jesus had said:

*"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified'". – [John 7:38-39](#).*





# Evidence for the Resurrection

Yet it wasn't only the apostles who were changed, for we find that even hostile Jewish witnesses believed. Take the many Jewish priests who became Christians, according to [Acts 6:7](#), as well as the thousands of early converts who were all Jerusalem Jews. They were right there where the tomb was situated. They could easily have looked for the tomb themselves and could have talked to the witnesses who had claimed to have seen Jesus, as I'm sure many did. Yet, they too chose to be persecuted for what they knew was true.

## 7: It Was the Foundation for a New Faith

This resurrection became the foundation for our faith today. That is why we worship on Sundays and not on Fridays (like the Muslims), nor on Saturdays (like the Jews). That is why we participate in the ritual of baptism (symbolizing the dying/living of Christ and our public testimony of accepting our dying to our old life and embracing this new life through Him). And that is why we celebrate communion, to commemorate not only the death on the cross but the joy of resurrection from the grave.

## 8: Today, Learned Men Believe It

And finally, the resurrection can be believed because learned men, who have studied and researched it believe in it. Take for example:

- **Brooke Foss Wescott** (a textual critic) who says: "There is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ."
- **Dr. Paul L. Maier** (professor of ancient history) maintains: "No shred of evidence has yet been discovered in literary sources, epigraphy or archaeology that would disprove that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was actually empty on the morning of the 1st Easter."
- **Dr. Simon Greenleaf** (a Harvard University professor of Law) states: "According to the laws of legal evidence used in courts of law, there is more evidence for the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ than for just about any other event in history."
- **Dr. Frank Morrison** (a rationalistic lawyer) decided to take three years off from his practice to disprove the resurrection. After three years of study, he found that the sheer weight of the evidence compelled him to conclude that Jesus actually did rise from the dead. As a consequence he wrote the book: ***Who Moved the Stone?***
- **C.S. Lewis** (a literary genius) was also interested in the accuracy of the resurrection. After evaluating the basis and evidence for Christianity, Lewis concluded that in other religions there was 'no such historical claim as in Christianity.' He was too experienced in literary criticism to regard the Gospel as myth. He had no other choice but to accept the resurrection as fact.

## Conclusion

So, what then can we say concerning the resurrection? Can it be believed? If we add the testimony of the Old Testament prophets with those of Jesus, as well as all the historical data which we possess on the death and resurrection of Christ, and if we contemplate all the ramifications of the empty tomb, the many post-resurrection appearances, the changed lives of the disciples and the opinions of learned men today, we come away with a hugely well supported case for the validity of the resurrection.

Consequently, the evidence for the resurrection overwhelmingly supports the contention that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. This fact alone gives us substantial confirmation that the validity for our scriptures is likewise sound, which in turn encourages us in our preaching, knowing that what we say has and can be supported with evidence. It is this which undergirds not only our faith but moves us on and out to share "Christ crucified and resurrected" with those who have yet to hear.