

# *Resurrection*

## **The Resurrection of Christ an in-depth look**



# The Resurrection of Christ – an in-depth look

Christianity is unique. No other religion has such a supernatural claim and the Bible clearly states that the Christian faith stands or falls on this one issue:

**■ If Christ did not rise your faith is futile** (see 1 Corinthians 15:17-19)

But is Jesus really alive? Is there any evidence that the resurrection was an historical event, not simply a fiction, or a fantasy?

Historians agree on five compelling facts<sup>1</sup>:

- 1. A Death by crucifixion.**
- 2. Ladies Find tomb empty.**
- 3. Independent appearances of Jesus after death.**
- 4. Violence endured by the apostles.**
- 5. Enemies of Christ converted.**

# 1. A DEATH BY CRUCIFIXION

Jesus's crucifixion is recorded in early secular history by Tacitus<sup>2</sup> and Josephus<sup>3</sup>. That Jesus might have survived the ordeal is impossible, given the nature of his punishment.

- **He was scourged** – a brutal whipping by a flagrum which consisted
- of small pieces of bone and metal attached to a number of leather strands.
- Extreme blood loss occurred, often causing death, or at least unconsciousness.
- **He was crucified** – an excruciating means of execution ('excruciating' literally means 'from the cross') designed as a terrifying deterrent for criminals
- and the enemies of Rome. The victim died eventually from suffocation once
- he was too exhausted to breathe by pushing upwards with his feet.
- **His body was pierced with a spear** – the release blood and water which followed, we know today, is medical evidence of death.
- **He was executed** by Roman soldiers who were skilled in that task.
- **He was buried.** The tomb entrance was blocked by a 1-2 ton stone, was sealed
- and guarded by soldiers who faced the death penalty if it was disturbed.

# 2. LADIES FIND THE TOMB EMPTY

This interesting detail from the gospels lends credibility to the narrative.

- Women were considered less reliable as witnesses and a fabricated account would be unlikely to rely on them as first finders.
- Even the disciples didn't believe them. (see Luke 24:11).
- Jewish lie would not have started this way.

One of the undisputed details of the resurrection is that the tomb was indeed empty. It is clear that Jesus' body had somehow disappeared but there is not one eyewitness account of its having been found. If such had been the case, his enemies would have quickly exposed the resurrection as a fraud. Instead of producing the body the Jewish authorities bribed the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb to say that the disciples had stolen the body (Matt 28:11-15).

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion on the reliability of the New Testament documents see Are the Bible Documents Reliable? on this website.

<sup>2</sup> Tacitus: Annals (15.44)

<sup>3</sup> Josephus: Antiquities (18:63)

### **3. INDEPENDENT APPEARANCES OF JESUS**

Christ appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles (see 1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

This passage is safely dated to within 5 years after the crucifixion.

- Many people were eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus.
- Most of them were alive at the time to verify the claim.
- 500 people together are most unlikely to suffer from hallucination.
- It is clear from the accounts that this was a physical resurrection, not a ghostly appearance.
- They held his feet and worshiped him (Matthew 28:9).
- 'Doubting Thomas' was invited to touch his wounds. (John 20:20-28)
- Jesus said, 'A ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.' (Luke 24:39)

### **4. VIOLENCE ENDURED BY THE APOSTLES**

Something must have happened to change Jesus's disciples from cowering deserters to confident martyrs.

- When Jesus was arrested, they ran away.
- Peter denied knowing Jesus three times.
- Depressed, discouraged and terrified they hid behind a locked door.

After the resurrection, the apostles proclaimed the resurrection despite persecution even to point of suffering violent death. If the resurrection had been a lie, they would have known it and would not have been prepared to endure the gruesome fates they suffered:

- Matthew killed in Ethiopia.
- Mark died in Alexandria after being dragged through the city.

- James beheaded in Jerusalem.
- James (son of Alphaeus) thrown from temple wall and then stoned to death.
- Philip hung in Phrygia.
- Bartholomew flayed alive.
- Andrew bound to cross with ropes and left to die.
- Jude shot to death with arrows.
- Thomas run through with a lance in east India.
- Matthias stoned and then beheaded.
- Barnabas stoned to death by Jews in Thessalonica.
- Paul beheaded in Rome.
- Peter crucified.

NONE of them stopped preaching about the resurrection.

## **5. ENEMIES OF CHRIST**

**James and Jude (see John 7:5)**

These two brothers of Jesus did not believe in him during his ministry. They became radical Christians after the resurrection. Both wrote books in the New Testament.

(What would it take to convince anyone that their brother is the Messiah?!)

**Saul (aka Paul)**

Saul was a persecutor of the church going from town to town to arrest Christians. His is the most impressive conversion.

He didn't claim a change of heart; he claimed an experience of seeing the risen Christ and went on to preach the gospel across the Mediterranean world.

## Additional Notes

# MESSIANIC PROPHECY

There are over 300 prophecies concerning the life of Jesus recorded in the Old Testament dating from hundreds of years before his birth. Many of these, including the place of his birth, his parentage, his betrayal and death, he could not have arranged himself.

The mathematical probability of one person in the first century fulfilling just eight of the most clear and straightforward Messianic prophecies<sup>4</sup> is 1 in  $10^{17}$  (i.e. 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000). This is much more unlikely than winning any national lottery!

The probability of one person fulfilling only 48 prophecies: 1 in  $10^{157}$ . An estimate of the number of atoms in the known universe is only  $10^{82}$ !

- There is a remarkable prophecy of Jesus's suffering and death in Psalm 22, centuries before crucifixion was invented by the Persians.
- Jesus's resurrection is foretold in Isaiah 53:10 and Psalm 16:10.

These prophecies point not only to the truth of the resurrection, but to the very existence of God, who is outside of time and knows the end from the beginning (see Isaiah 46:10).

# SECULAR HISTORY

In 115 AD, Roman historian, Cornelius Tacitus, described the suffering of early Christians at the hands of their tormentors. The emperor, Nero, in order to expand his Palace, had fires set to portions of Rome. These fires blazed out of control and became known as “the Great Fire of Rome.” He then blamed these fires on the Christians and sparked a wave of persecution throughout the Roman Empire.

Tacitus writes:

“Consequently, to get rid of the report [that Nero ordered the fire] Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus (Christ), from whom the name had its origin, suffered 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, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much for the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of charioteer or stood aloft on a cart. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man’s cruelty, that they were being destroyed.”

Jesus’ resurrection and/or the persecution of His followers were also documented outside of the Bible by the following historical authorities: Gaius Suetonius Tranquillas, Flavius Josephus, Thallus, Pliny the Younger, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and the Jewish Sanhedrin. Beyond these ancient historians, there are documents from other sources such as the 2nd century Greek satirist Lucian.

# CONCLUSION

The men who witnessed Jesus' resurrection testified to it with their lives. Their testimony, besides the compelling evidence presented in the Bible itself (such as fulfilled prophecy), has inspired millions more to follow suit—to find the reality of a relationship with God through Jesus Christ and even, like them, to suffer persecution and death at the hands of an unbelieving world. They proclaimed their beloved gospel:

- Christ came to earth to die for our sins as was foretold in the Bible hundreds of years before His miraculous birth.
- He died upon the cross and rose again.
- He presented Himself to hundreds of disciples before returning to heaven.
- He will return again at the end of the age.

These men cried out to the world with their very lives. Thus, mankind the world over has the opportunity to accept or reject the Resurrection. It is not for a lack of witnesses to the event, nor a lack of evidence.