

Is Jesus Just A Myth?

The Historical Jesus And The Case For The Resurrection

I. Introduction: In grade school, I was very much into Greek myths and legends. I would spend my recess with library books studying different gods and goddesses. I was the class nerd. But I was vindicated the day we started to study the subject in class and had to write reports. All of a sudden, everyone wanted to be my friend. But the thing is, there was never any question in my mind as to whether it was true or not. It was all pretend. Unfortunately, many in our world today view Jesus the same way. **Did Jesus Exist? Did He Die? Did He Rise? Was He God?**

II. Importance Of The Resurrection: **1 Corinthians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4;** This is a very important text because Paul says he is passing along what he had received. Ultimately, this saying can be dated to within 5 years of the death of Jesus. **1 Corinthians 15:13-18**

A. The Resurrection Confirms The Claims Of Jesus To Deity: In Mark 14:61-62; John 8:54-59; 10:30-33 Jesus claimed to be God and that His death and resurrection would prove it.

B. The Resurrection Makes Christianity Uniquely Testable And Falsifiable, As Compared To Other Religions

III. The Claim Of The Resurrection: It is hard to miss that the Bible teaches the resurrection.

A. The Old Testament: There are several texts which indicate the resurrection of the Messiah and of believers in Him.

B. The Gospels: All four Gospel accounts include the death and resurrection of Jesus.

C. The Epistles: Each book in the New Testament, except 3 John, either states or implies the resurrection of Christ.

IV. The Facts Of The Resurrection: The New Testament writings are dated between 48 and 95 A.D. The following are declarations of resurrection facts supported by the New Testament. In red are references to the writings of Paul, most commonly accepted by secular scholars. Each of these facts is abundantly evidenced from the writings of the church fathers, who lived during the same period and wrote extensively in support of these facts.

1. Jesus Of Nazareth Was A Real Person (Matthew 1; Galatians 4:4).

2. Jesus Was Crucified (John 18-19; 1 Corinthians 15:3).

3. Jesus' Tomb Was Found To Be Empty Three Days Later (John 20; 1 Corinthians 15:4).

4. Jesus' Disciples Did Exist, And All Believed Themselves To Have The Exact Same Experiences Of A Resurrected Jesus, Despite Their Consequent Torture, Exile, And/Or Death (Matthew 26:56; John 20:19-20; 1 Corinthians 3:22; 15:7).

5. James, The Half Brother Of Jesus (Matthew 13:55), Was A Skeptic Before The Alleged Resurrection And A Pastor In The Church After, Claiming A Personal Visit From Jesus, Though He Was Killed For It (Mark 6:3; John 7:2-9; James 1:1; 1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19).

6. Paul, Who Had Been A Persecutor Of The Church, Became An Evangelist, Though He Too Was Killed For It (Acts 7-9; Philippians 3:4-7).

7. The Resurrection Was Immediately Preached In Jerusalem, Where Jesus Was Crucified And Buried (Acts 1).

8. Jesus Was Immediately Worshipped As God In The Earliest Years After His Resurrection (John 20:28; Philippians 2:5-11).

V. Non-Christian Sources- I will be using 8 ancient non-Christian sources, as well as modern sources written from popular atheists and critical scholars who deny the physical resurrection of Jesus.

Fact 1- Jesus of Nazareth Was A Real Person.

1. Josephus, a famous Jewish historian who lived from 37-100 A.D.: "At this time there was a wise man called Jesus, and his conduct was good and he was known to be virtuous." Maier, Paul L. *Josephus: The Essential Writings*. Kregel Publications, 1988. Pg. 264.

2. Bart Ehrman, a non-Christian agnostic New Testament Scholar: "He certainly existed, as virtually every competent scholar of antiquity, Christian or non-Christian, agrees." Ehrman, Bart. *Forged: Writing In The Name Of God*. HarperCollins, 2011. Pg 285.

3. Richard Dawkins, a popular atheist zoologist: "Although Jesus probably existed, reputable biblical scholars do not in general regard the New Testament (and obviously not the Old Testament) as a reliable record of what actually happened in history." Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, NY, 2006. Pg. 97. Dawkins goes on to later state in a debate with Christian apologist John Lennox, "Maybe I alluded to the possibility

that some historians think that Jesus never existed. I take that back, Jesus existed.” Dawkins, Richard. *Richard Dawkins Admits Jesus Existed*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5EjA-JNiVk>.

Fact 2- Jesus Was Crucified.

1. Josephus: “Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die.” Maier, Paul L. *Josephus: The Essential Writings*. Kregel Publications, 1988. Pg. 264.

2. Tacitus, a Roman historian who lived from 57-117 A.D.: “Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, 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 Pilatus...” Tacitus. *Annals*: Book 15, Chapter 44. AD 116.

3. The Babylonian Talmud, a collection of Jewish rabbinical writings compiled between approximately 70-200 A.D.: “On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald . . . cried, "He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy." Epstein, I. *The Babylonian Talmud*. London: Soncino, 1935. vol. III, Sanhedrin 43a, 281.

4. Mara Bar Serapion, a Syrian man and stoic philosopher, writing to his son shortly after 75 A.D.: “What advantage did the Athenians gain from murdering Socrates? Famine and plague came upon them as a punishment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise king?” Voorst, Robert E. *Jesus Outside The New Testament: An Introduction To The Ancient Evidence*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2000. Pg.55.

5. John Dominic Crossan, a liberal New Testament scholar: “That he was crucified is as sure as anything historical ever can be.” Crossan, John Dominic. *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*. San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1991. Pg. 145.

Fact 3- Jesus’ Tomb Was Found To Be Empty Three Days Later.

1. Michael Grant, a skeptical historian at Trinity College, Cambridge: “True, the discovery of the empty tomb is differently described by the various gospels, but if we apply the same sore of criteria that we would apply to any other ancient literary sources, then the evidence is firm and plausible enough to necessitate the conclusion that the tomb was, indeed, found empty.” Grant, Michael. *Jesus: An Historian’s Review Of The Gospels*. Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, NY, 1977, Pg. 176.

2. Jacob Kremer, a leading Austrian specialist and critic of the resurrection: “By far most exegetes hold firmly to the reliability of the biblical statements concerning the empty tomb.” Kremer, Jacob *Die Osterevangelien—Geschichten um Geschichte* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), pp. 49-50.

Fact 4- Jesus’ Disciples Did Exist, And All Believed Themselves To Have The Exact Same Experiences Of A Resurrected Jesus, Despite Their Consequent Crucifixion, Torture, And/Or Exile.

1. Josephus: “Many people among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples.... But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive.” Maier, Paul L. *Josephus: The Essential Writings*. Kregel Publications, 1988. Pg. 264-265.

2. Emperor Trajan, Roman Emperor from 98 A.D. until his death in 117 A.D., responding to the letter of Pliny the Younger, demonstrating that the Apostles could have escaped punishment, had they recanted: “They are not to be sought out; if they are informed against, and the charge is proved, they are to be punished, with this reservation- that if any one denies that he is a Christian, and actually proves it, that is, by adoring our gods, he shall be pardoned as a result of his recantation, however suspect he may have been with respect to the past.” Bettenson, Henry. *Documents Of The Christian Church*. 2nd Ed. Oxford University Press. London, 1963. Pgs. 3-4.

3. Suetonius, a Roman historian who lived from 69-122 A.D.: "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome...after the great fire at Rome (during Nero’s reign)... Punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief.” Suetonius, Catharine Edwards. *Lives of the Caesars*. Oxford University Press; Reissue edition, 2009. Pg. 184, 203.

4. Gert L,demann, a leading critic of the resurrection: “It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus’ death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ.” L,demann, Gerd. *What Really Happened to Jesus?* Trans. John Bowden. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1995. Pg. 80.

Fact 5- James, The Half Brother Of Jesus, Was A Skeptic Before The Alleged Resurrection And A Pastor In The Church After, Claiming A Personal Visit From Jesus, Though He Was Killed For It.

1. Josephus, in reference to Ananus, the high priest: "Convening the judges of the Sanhedrin, he brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law, and condemned them to be stoned to death." Maier, Paul L. *Josephus: The Essential Writings*. Kregel Publications, 1988. Pg. 276.

2. Bart Ehrman: "But anyone who was an apocalyptic Jew like Jesus' closet follower Peter, or Jesus' own brother James, or his later apostle Paul, who thought that Jesus had come back to life, would naturally interpret it in light of his particular apocalyptic worldview." Ehrman, Bart. *How Jesus Became God*. Harper Collins, 2014. Pg. 203.

Fact 6- Paul, Who Had Been A Persecutor Of The Church, Became An Evangelist, Though He Too Was Killed For It.

1. John Shelby Spong, a liberal bishop who denied the bodily resurrection: "In our quest to determine as best we can what really occurred when Easter broke into human consciousness, there is no doubt that Paul is a crucial witness. Paul said that his 'seeing of the risen Christ' was different from the others in no way except that his 'seeing' was last." Spong, John Shelby. *Resurrection: Myth Or Reality?: A Bishop's Search For The Origins Of Christianity*. Harper Collins, 1994. Pg. 56.

2. Richard Dawkins: "During the Roman occupation of Palestine, Christianity was founded by Paul of Tarsus as a less ruthlessly monotheistic sect of Judaism and a less exclusive one, which looked outwards from the Jews to the rest of the world." Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006. Pg. 37.

3. D. Landsborough, atheist neuropsychologist: "This took place about AD 34, while he was still using his Hebrew name Saul. While this event on the road to Damascus was of cataclysmic significance to him and profoundly changed the course of his life and of world history, a question arises as to whether there was an ictal component in this experience." D. Landsborough, "St. Paul and Temporal Lobe Epilepsy," *J Neurol Neurosurg Psychiatry* 1987; 50; 661.

Fact 7- The Resurrection Was Immediately Preached In Jerusalem, Where Jesus Was Crucified And Buried.

1. Tacitus: "Christus, 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 Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, 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." Tacitus. *Annals*: Book 15, Chapter 44. AD 116.

Fact 8- Jesus Was Immediately Worshipped As God In The Earliest Years After His Resurrection.

1. Pliny the Younger, the Roman governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor, in his letter to the Emperor Trajan, dated around A.D. 112: "They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath..." Bettenson, Henry. *Documents of The Christian Church*. 2nd Ed. Oxford University Press, London, 1963. Pgs. 3-4.

2. Lucian of Samosata, a Greek satirist who lived from 125-180 A.D.: "The Christians . . . worship a man to this day-the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account. . . . [It] was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws." Lucian, *The Death of Peregrine*, 11-13, in *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, transl. by H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler. Oxford: Clarendon, 1949. vol. IV.

3. John Shelby Spong: "Something created a revolution in the consciousness of Jewish people in the first century that meant that those amount them who shared that experience could no longer think of God without including Jesus in their very definition of the word, and they could no longer think of a man named Jesus without his being a part of the meaning of God." Spong, John Shelby. *Resurrection: Myth Or Reality?: A Bishop's Search For The Origins Of Christianity*. Harper Collins, 1994. Pg. 29

VI. The Dismissal Of The Resurrection: Many of these ideas are used in a cumulative way.

A. The Legend Theory

1. The Theory: The accounts of Jesus are mythical stories, like the story of King Arthur or Hercules. The Jesus Myth probably borrowed many of its concepts from earlier myths like Horus and Osiris, Mithras, Dionysus, or Krishna.

2. Response: This theory either ignores the facts we have discussed or seeks to discredit them as unreliable sources. However, the sources cited are from the most well-known historians of the time period, such as Josephus or Tacitus.

B. The Swoon Theory

1. The Theory: Jesus survived the ordeal on the cross and, in the cool of the cave, revived.

2. Response: Jesus was crucified by expert executioners and would have been too weak to pull off an escape.

C. **The Twin Theory**

1. **The Theory:** Jesus was crucified, and his long lost twin brother then emerged as the “risen” Savior.
2. **Response:** This does not acknowledge Mary in the ministry of Jesus, nor does it acknowledge the disciples. Such a twin would not have been able to know their intimate conversations, nor would they have given their lives.

D. **The Hallucination Theory**

1. **The Theory:** The visions of Jesus to the disciples, James, and Paul were figments of their imaginations due to grief.
2. **Response:** This view fails to address the empty tomb and the lack of evidence that multiple people can experience identical hallucinations, especially when the content of such hallucinations is shared by people not in equal proximity, such as the disciples, Paul, and James. It also does not account for the multiple hallucinations that would be taking place. According to the DSM IV, pages 823-825, a hallucination is “A sensory perception that has the compelling sense of reality of a true perception but that occurs without external stimulation of the relevant sensory organ.” There are four minimum hallucinations that must be accounted for:
 - a. **Auditory** – “A hallucination involving the perception of sound.” The disciples believed they heard Jesus.
 - b. **Mood-Congruent** – “Delusions or hallucinations whose content is entirely consistent with the typical themes of a depressed or manic mood.” The disciples experienced rapid mood change from extreme depression to joy.
 - c. **Tactile** – “A hallucination involving the perception of being touched.” The disciples touched and felt Jesus.
 - d. **Visual** – “A hallucination involving sight.” The disciples saw Jesus.

E. **The Stolen Body Theory**

1. **The Theory:** Jesus’ disciples stole and hid the body and claimed a resurrection. **(Matthew 28:12-13).**
2. **Response:** While this idea accounts for the empty grave, it does not account for the commitment of the disciples to their beliefs, even being willing to be tortured and killed.

F. **The Unknown Grave**

1. **The Theory:** Jesus was crucified and was buried in an undisclosed location and probably eaten by wild animals.
2. **Response:** This fails to account for the various experiences of a resurrected Jesus. Further, the disciples all had a very strong orientation as to where Jesus body had been buried.

VII. **The Application Of The Resurrection**

- A. **The Great Commission:** Because Jesus rose, we are to share this message **(Matthew 28:18-20).**
- B. **The Great Enablement:** Because Jesus rose, we can have victor over sin **(Ephesians 1:19-23).**
- C. **The Great Expectation:** Because Jesus rose, we have hope for the life to come **(1 Corinthians 15:20; 54-58).**

-**Example:** In 2011, my wife and I found out that she was pregnant with our second child. In August, we went to the doctor and found at that our baby was another little girl and they couldn’t see all of the heart. She had Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome, meaning there wasn’t a left ventricle to pump the blood to the body. She was born December 20 and died February 2, 2012. My heart, and my faith, crashed. At the same time, for various reasons, I began to learn more about evolution than I had been told in my Bible training. I began to question everything I had believed. Even to the point of offering my resignation as a pastor because I didn’t know if I believed. But what turned me around was this one question: Did Jesus rise from the dead? As I researched this from the facts we see today, I became convinced that He did. And if He did, He is God. And If He Is God, what He said is true. He said He loves us and loved my daughter, that those who are His will rise again, and that He is in control and has purpose for the suffering of our loves. If Jesus is alive, my daughter is too and my suffering is not without meaning or purpose.

VIII. **Resources:**

- A. Gary Habermas And Michael Licona, The Case For The Resurrection
- B. Josh And Sean McDowell, The Evidence For The Resurrection
- C. N.T. Wright, The Resurrection Of The Son Of God