



## BIBLICAL TRAINING CENTER

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### The Case for the Resurrection

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#### Importance of Christ's Resurrection

- We must believe it to be saved:

Romans 10:9 – “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that **God raised him from the dead**, you will be saved.”

- Our faith is meaningless without it:

1 Corinthians 15:14, 17 – “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in **vain** and your faith is in **vain** ... And if Christ has not been raised, **your faith is futile**, and you are still in your sins.”

Christians believe there's strong evidence for Christ's resurrection.

#### Evidence #1 – The detailed, eyewitness testimony of the events.

- Death, burial and resurrection of Christ are central to gospels.
- Early followers of Christ testified these **EVENTS** happened: (1) Jesus lived; (2) was crucified; (3) died; (4) was buried; (5) tomb became empty; (6) was seen by witnesses.
- Can prove resurrection if: (1) Jesus died and placed in tomb; (2) tomb became empty; (3) there were post-death encounters.

#### **Looking at the account:**

- **Jesus died** and was placed in tomb.
  - Jesus had no sleep the night before (praying in Garden, taken, trials throughout night into morning).
  - Beaten and forced to carry cross until could not stand up.

- Crucified (death by suffocation).
  - Bleeding from nail in hands and feet, crown of thorns beaten into head, and cat o' nine tails whip.
  - Jesus was killed by professional Roman executioners.
  - Stabbed in side with spear and blood flowed out.  
John 19:34- "When they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead... One of the soldiers **pierced Jesus' side** with a spear."  
Pilate double-checked to make sure was dead (Mk. 15:44-45)
  - Entire body wrapped in 75 pounds of cloth and placed in sealed tomb (Matt. 27:60; Jn. 19:39-40)
- Jesus' tomb **became empty**.
- Matthew 28:6 –He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.
- Roman guard of 16 soldiers deserted their posts! (Mt. 27:62-66)
  - Angels at tomb said Jesus was risen. (Mt. 28:1-8; Mk. 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-10)
- Many **post-death encounters** with Jesus.
- 12 post-death encounters with Jesus, including:
    - Women at Tomb
    - Peter and John
    - All 12 Disciples (more than once)
    - James, Jesus' Half-Brother
    - Over 500 People at Once
    - Paul
  - NT says people interacted with him:
    - Saw him
    - Heard him
    - Touched him
    - Talked to him
    - Saw him eat food
    - Saw him work miracles
  - All this in a physical body
    - It was "flesh and bones" (Lk. 24:39; Acts 2:31; 1 Jn. 4:2; 2 Jn. 7).
    - He still had physical wounds (Lk. 24:39; Jn. 20:27).
    - He ate food 4 times as proof (Lk. 24:30, 41-43; Jn. 21:12-13; Acts 1:4 cf. Acts 10:41)

- People could touch/handle him (Jn. 20:17; Mt. 28:9; Lk. 24:39; Jn. 20:27)
- Could be seen with eyes and heard with ears (Mt. 28:17; Jn. 20:15-16)

## Evidence #2 – The NT as reliable documented history.

- Christ’s resurrection details are found in Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) and very early creeds. Details are repeated in Acts and NT letters – as well as apostolic fathers like Clement of Rome (d. AD 99), Ignatius (d. AD 108, disciple of John), Polycarp (AD 69-155, disciple of John), Papius (AD 70-163, knew apostle John), etc.

Good example from Paul early creed – 1 Corinthians 15: 1-9 – “**The Gospel** I preached to you. . . what I also received: that **Christ died for our sins**. . . that he was **buried**, that he was **raised** on the third day . . . and that he **appeared** to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he **appeared** to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive . . . Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all . . . he **appeared** also to me.”

- Therefore, the question about whether these events happened (e.g., resurrection) becomes a historiographical question (a question about the reliability of the NT manuscripts).

**(Historicity of the gospels was covered in previous lecture; if you missed it, see summary in Q & A)**

## Evidence #3 – The Gospels are filled with self-incriminating testimony.

The Gospels do not put the disciples in a favorable light:

- Peter **denies the Lord** three times (Lk. 22:54-62).
- Jesus called Peter “**Satan**” (Mt. 16:23).
- Peter often **spoke before thinking** (Lk. 9:33).
- All **disciples abandoned Jesus** in Garden of Gethsemane (Mk. 14:50).
- Jesus called them “**dull of hearing**” (Mt. 15:16; 16:11; Mk. 7:18; Lk. 18:34).
- They couldn’t grasp **Jesus’ basic mission** of the cross (Mt. 16:21-22).
- First witnesses at tomb were **women** (Lk. 24).
- They were **extremely prideful**, arguing often which was greatest (Mk. 9:33-34).

This does not seem like a story that people would invent.

## Evidence #4 – The witnesses maintained their testimony in face of extreme persecution.

- Initially all the disciples were **afraid** and **unbelieving** (normal human behavior).
- But suddenly became motivated to:
  - Publicly **share their faith**.
  - Be **put out** of synagogue (Jn. 9:22).
  - Receive **shunning** from their communities.
  - **Leave all** and travel to distant lands spreading faith around the world.
  - Become **imprisoned** (Acts 5:18, 12:5, 24:27)
  - Subject to **torture** (Acts 5:40, 16:23, 2 Cor. 11:24-25)
  - **Face death**:
    - **Stephen** was stoned (Acts 7:55-58)
    - **James** killed with sword (Acts 12:2)
    - **Peter** crucified (John 21:18-19)
    - **Paul** faced much persecution (2 Cor. 11:23-28; Acts 9:16); Eusebius says decapitated under Nero.
- Witnesses maintained testimony through waves of persecutions:
  - Nero (AD 67); Domitian (AD 89-96); Trajan (AD 109-111); Hadrian (ruled 117-138); Decius (AD 249); Valerian (AD 257); Emperors Diocletian and Galerius (AD 303)

“Nero . . . executed with the most exquisite punishments those people called **Christians**. . . Therefore, first those were seized who admitted their faith, and then, using the information they provided, a vast multitude were convicted. . . And perishing they were additionally **made into sports**: they were killed by dogs by **having the hides of beasts attached to them [cf. Heb. 11:37]**, or they were **nailed to crosses or set aflame.**” (Tacitus, *Annals*, 15:44; written AD 100)

## Evidence #5 – Christianity began in the area where people were most familiar with the events.

- Christianity started in **Jerusalem** (to those most familiar with Jesus’ life/events).
  - Jesus was crucified publicly in Jerusalem.
  - Gospel was centered here for first 15 years.
  - It was so Jewish, Christianity was even called a Jewish sect (Acts 24:5).
- If you were going to start a myth about the resurrection, you would **go far away** from those who could disprove it (i.e., don’t start with Jews in Jerusalem).

- Witnesses were not afraid to witness to chief priests/elders/rulers because they were telling the truth (Acts 4:1-22; Acts 5:27-41; Acts 25, 26)

Acts 26:26 – Paul witnessing to King Agrippa: “For the king knows about these things, and to him **I speak boldly**. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for **this has not been done in a corner.**”

## Evidence #6 – Extreme scoffers became extreme believers.

### *Before resurrection...*

- **Jesus’ own brothers** (Mk. 6:3; Mt. 13:55-56) did not believe in him (Jn. 7:5).

John 7:5 – For not even his brothers believed in him.

### *After resurrection, they believed:*

- **James** (Jesus’ half-brother) wrote letter of James, and was killed for belief:

Josephus (AD 94):

“[Ananus, the High Priest] assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the **brother of Jesus**, who was called Christ, whose name was **James**, and some others, . . . he delivered them to be **stoned.**” (Antiquities Book 20: chapter 9)

- **Jude** (Jesus’ half-brother) wrote letter of Jude:

Jude 1,21 – “Jude, a **servant of Jesus Christ** and a brother of James... keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of **our Lord Jesus Christ** to bring you to eternal life.”

- **Saul/Paul** formerly persecuted the church; became its biggest supporter.
  - Was a wealthy, powerful Jewish pharisee who persecuted Christians.
  - Became principal leader of early church; wrote 13 NT books.
  - What happened? Per his testimony: he encountered the risen Jesus (Acts 9:1-8; Acts 22:1-21).

## Evidence #7 – OT predicted Messiah’s resurrection.

- OT predicted Messiah would **die** (Dan. 9:26; Isa. 53:10; Gen. 3:15; Zech. 12:10)

Daniel 9:26 – “... anointed one shall be cut off...”

Isaiah 53:10a – “Yet it was the will of the LORD **to crush him [speaking of Messiah]... when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days...**”

- But OT also predicted Messiah would **live forever** (Ps. 16:8-11; Isa. 9:6-7; 1 Ki. 9:5).

Isaiah 53:10b – “Yet it was the will of the LORD **to crush him [speaking of Messiah]... he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days...**”

Isaiah 9:6–7 – “For **to us a child is born**, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of **his government** and of peace **there will be no end**, on the throne of David and over his kingdom... from this time forth and **forevermore.**”

- What’s the only way for both to happen? **Resurrection!**
- Jesus claimed to be the OT Messiah, hence he died and was resurrected per the prophecies.

## Conclusion

There are only 4 possibilities regarding the resurrection of Christ:

- It’s a **legend**
  - It’s a legend that crept in over time.
  - But not enough time between events and writings (see Q & A, question #1).
  - Too much manuscript evidence.
- It’s a **deliberate lie**
  - The disciples intentionally lied.
  - But coordinated lie among all disciples not likely.
  - What would motivate apostles to lie?
  - Wealth? Power? Fame? ... Instead they faced death!

- People do not willingly die for hoax.
- They were **deceived**
  - Jesus never really died or somebody else took body.
  - But surely his followers and family could not have mistaken him.
- It's the **truth**
  - Jesus' resurrection is an event in history that really happened.

## Recommended Resources

Note: Much of today's material is based on "The Resurrection," a PowerPoint by David Geisler from Meekness and Truth Ministries.

- Geisler, Norman L. *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. Baker Reference Library. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.
- Hemer, Colin J. *Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*. Place of Publication Not Identified: Eisenbrauns, 2016.

## Deeper Q & A

### Question #1 – What evidence do we have for reliability of NT documents?

#### *The NT as Reliable Documentation*

- NT was from **eyewitnesses** or associates of eyewitnesses.
  - Matthew – one of Jesus' disciple.
  - Mark – Wrote Peter's gospel from his notes listening to Peter.
  - Luke – Paul's Gospel + careful research.
  - John – one of Jesus' disciples.

Luke 1:1–4 – Inasmuch as **many** have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were **eyewitnesses** and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, **having followed all things closely for some time past**, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, **that you may have certainty** concerning the things you have been taught.

Heb. 2:3-4 – "This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was **confirmed to us by those who heard him**" (Heb. 2:3-4).

2 Pet. 1:16 – “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but **we were eyewitnesses** of his majesty.”

1 Peter 5:1 – “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and **a witness of the sufferings of Christ...**”

1 John 1:1 – That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which **we have seen with our eyes**, which **we looked upon** and have **touched with our hands**, concerning the word of life—

- Not enough time for **legends**.
  - Legends take centuries to form (long after eyewitnesses die)
  - But there’s evidence Gospels were written soon after events they speak about.
  - John A. T. Robinson (extremely liberal scholar) dated:
    - Matthew – AD 40 to about AD 60 - as early as **6 years from Jesus!**
    - John – about AD 40 to 65AD - as early as **6 years from Jesus!**
    - Mark – about AD 45 to AD 60 - as early as **11 years from Jesus!**
    - Luke - before AD 57 to 60AD
  - William F. Albright (former liberal archaeologist)
    - “...there is no longer any solid basis for dating **any book** of the New Testament after about **AD 80**” (*Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands*, 136, emphasis mine.)
  - Christian creeds go back to less than 20 years after Christ (some seen in NT: 1 Cor. 15:14,17; Rm. 10:9)
  - Evidence the NT contains very early creeds going back to within months of resurrection (e.g., James Dunn argues 1 Cor. 15:3-8 is a creed from no later than a month after Jesus’ resurrection; Phil. 2:6-11 another early creed taught by Paul to Philippian church).
- Manuscripts are more numerous than any other.
  - **5,800** partial and complete copies of the original Greek NT manuscripts
  - Early translations into Syriac, Coptic, Arabic, Latin, etc. add another **19,000 copies**.
  - **36,289** quotations by the early church fathers (can reconstruct every book/chapter of NT if had to).
  - Next best is Homer’s *Iliad* (643 manuscripts), *Demosthenes* (200), Herodotus (8) and Plato (7).



- Early and wide circulation.
  - E.g., earliest undisputed NT manuscript is John Ryland Papyri (P<sup>52</sup>) dated 117-138 AD.
  - Discovery location in Egypt suggests it had been in circulation for quite some time
  - Also suggests original date of composition in the first century AD.
  
- Luke as a first-class historian.
  - Luke wrote Acts with great accuracy and care (Lk. 1:1-4).
  - Colin J. Hemer (noted 1<sup>st</sup> c. scholar) confirmed 100 details in Acts – not a single error!
    - Correctly named ports (Acts 13:4-5)
    - To correct language spoken in Lystra—Lycaonian (14:11)
    - Cultural association of two gods—Zeus and Hermes (14:12)
    - Correct order of approach from Cilician Gates into Derbe, then Lystra (16:1; 15:41)
    - Description of Philippi as Roman colony (16:12)
    - The altar to an “unknown god” (17:23)
    - Ananias being high priest at that time (23:2)
    - The right route to sail in view of the winds (27:7)
    - (For 84 of these see Geisler and Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, 256-260).
  - Luke (who carefully wrote Acts) also wrote the Gospel of Luke with great accuracy and care.  
 Acts 1:1–2 – In the **first book [i.e., Gospel of Luke]**, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.
  
- Extra-biblical corroboration
  - **Vast majority of scholars** say Jesus lived:  
 “...with very few exceptions... **critics generally do support the historicity of Jesus** and reject the Christ myth theory that Jesus never existed.”  
 (“Historicity of Jesus.,” *Wikipedia*, accessed March 28, 2019.)
  - **Josephus** (writing in A.D. 94):  
 “There was at this time a wise man who was called **Jesus**. . . Pilate condemned him to be **crucified** and to **die**. And 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**.” (Arabic version of *Testimonium*; c.f. Greek version of *Antiquities* 18:3:3).

- **Cornelius Tacitus** (writing in A.D. 100):  
“**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** broke out not only in **Judea**, the first source of the evil, but even in **Rome**.” (*Annals*, 15:44).
- **Lucian** (writing in A.D. 170):  
“The **Christians**, you know, **worship a man** to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was **crucified** on that account. . . . [They] deny the gods of Greece, and **worship the crucified sage**, and live after his laws.” (*The Death of Peregrine*, 11–13)
- Babylonian Talmud (A.D. 200):  
“It has been taught: On the eve of the Passover **Yeshu was hanged [on a cross]**. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going to be stoned because he has **practiced sorcery** and **enticed Israel to apostasy**.” (*Sanhedrin* 43a).

## Question #2 – What are the common objections to Christ’s Resurrection from unbelievers?

- Theft theory
  - Somebody stole Jesus’ body.
  - But the stone weighed 3-4000 pounds; 4.5 ft in diameter; 1 foot thick (would need several men and lever to move; cf. Mk. 16:3-4)
  - Why would the disciples lie? What’s their motivation? Remember persecution.
  - Taking bodies was not trivial. Emperor Claudius (AD 41-54) ordered: “[If anyone] has in any other way **extracted the buried** or has maliciously transferred them to other places... or has displaced the sealing on other stones, against such a one I order that a trial be instituted ... I desire that the offender be sentenced to **capital punishment**...” (Nazareth Inscription)
  - The chief priests and Pharisees anticipated this and Pilate secured the tomb with Roman soldiers and a seal to prevent (cf. Matt. 27:62-66)
- Apparent-death theory (AKA “Swoon Theory”)
  - Jesus never fully died.

- But Roman soldiers were professionals.
- See “Jesus really died” under #2 above.
- Non-Christian liberal David Strauss (d. 1874) provided strongest critique.
  
- Hallucination theory
  - They all hallucinated!
  - Absurd to think all the details were hallucinations: experiences of women, disciples, road to Emmaus, Thomas, James, 500 people at once, Paul, etc.
  
- Wrong-tomb theory
  - They went to look for Jesus at the wrong tomb.
  - But everybody would have had the wrong tomb: the women, disciples, Jewish leaders, Romans, etc.
  - Joseph of Arimathea would have known his own tomb (Mat. 27:57-60; John 19:38-42)
  
- Body-eaten-by-dogs theory
  - Dogs somehow got into tomb and ate Jesus’ body.
  - But stones were meant to keep animals out.
  - There would have been evidence of torn clothes, etc.
  - Does not explain encounters with Jesus.
  
- Twin theory
  - Somebody that looked like Jesus was crucified instead (or perhaps Jesus was swapped with Judas).
  - But family members such as Mary, James and Jude surely would know if Jesus had a twin.
  - The resurrected Jesus challenged people to touch his wounds in his hands and side (Jn. 20:27). These wounds were on Jesus, not somebody else.
  
- Resurrection theory
  - Jesus really rose from the dead!