

Has Christ Actually Risen?
Was it really necessary for Him to rise?

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Introduction

A CROSS WITHOUT RESURRECTION

If the life of Jesus, our Lord, has ended with His death on the cross or His burial in the sepulcher, which is not possible, because in Him is the power of the resurrection and life and thus it is impossible for corruption to grab hold of Him. His mission would have failed and the cross would have not been able to reveal God's true and active love for mankind, able to forgive the sins and raise the dead.

Hence, the life of Jesus, our Lord, on earth would have become a mere humane story recorded by history, and the cross would have been considered a disgrace, and the disciples would have tried to hide its features or to remember it with sorrow and grief pitying poor Jesus for the oppression of the evil ones!

However,

a- Through the cross, the Lord has given Himself as an offering for us, **and through the resurrection, it was declared that this offering has been accepted!**

b- Through the cross our sins were judged, **and through the resurrection we were vindicated before God!**

c- Through the cross He granted us victory, **and through the resurrection we went out for worshipping and preaching!**

d- Through the cross death has died, **and through the resurrection the eternity was revealed to us!**

The resurrection of Christ is the greatest witness to His Person as the Incarnate Son of God, who is able to grant us the eternal life, and provide us with the spirit of strength and hope while we are still on our journey on earth.

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD CHRIST

THE RESURRECTION AFFIRMS GOD'S ALMIGHTY LOVE

All the forces of evil amassed against the mission of our Lord Jesus, the Lover of mankind, trying to stop and ruin it. They sentenced Him to the cross in disgrace and humiliation, so that everyone would be ashamed to relate to Him or proclaim Him. But, the more they gathered against Him to crucify Him, the more His love in a mysterious and wondrous way lead Him to the cross in power and glory!

On the cross He revealed His love for man. He bowed His head, so you may put your sinful hands on it, so He would bear your sins and transgressions, and judge sin in His body.

The enemy (Satan) realized this during the crucifixion, and thus asked Him immediately to descend from the cross so they would believe in Him; but the Lord has come for this matter, and the crucifixion was culminated with the destruction of the power of Satan and the gates of hell, and the opening of the gates of paradise before mankind!

Satan was scared and terrified as the control of the situation has escaped the grasp of his hands. He was no longer able except to try to suppress and deform the Lord's resurrection. In order that people would not believe in God's crucifixion or come to accept Him as a Savior and Redeemer. He utilized so many ways throughout the ages, trying to destroy the truth of the resurrection, yet these trials themselves became a witness to its truthfulness. That, in addition to all the other events that confirmed the Lord's resurrection.

THE PROPHETS AND THE RISEN CHRIST

There are more than one hundred prophecies in the Old Testament, some of which go back to more than 1000 years that were fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Peter Stoner¹, a professional statistician, stated that the probability that only 8

of these prophecies be realized in one person by accident is 1 out of hundred thousand trillion (10^{17}). Thus, what would be the case if we take in consideration that more than 50 prophecies among those which were fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, were just about His death and resurrection. Some of the other examples; His entry to Jerusalem riding on the back of a colt, that He would be betrayed and turned in for a mere 30 pieces of silver, that He would be crucified and buried in the sepulcher of a wealthy man, and that He would rise from the dead.

Several months before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples that He must suffer a lot, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again [Mark 8:31].

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CONFIRMING THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION²

1. THE EMPTY SEPULTURE

It was not possible for St. Mark the Evangelist to falsely record in his gospel that the sepulture, which belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, was found empty, because that sepulture was well known to the Jews and thus it would be easy for them to contradict that claim.

2. THE PIERCED SIDE

❖ It was possible for Jesus, our Lord, to be taken down from the cross without anything incident, especially that they wondered how He died so quickly; but the trembling Satan was so scared and terrified that he wanted to reassure himself that Jesus will not rise again. Thus, a soldier took a spear and pierced His side. But the pierced side did not become an obstacle to the resurrection; rather it became a witness, for **He has risen with the pierced side confirming that the One, who has risen, is the same One, who was pierced.** Through the pierced side, the disciples and Thomas

were convinced of His resurrection, for they have touched Him! Furthermore, the prophecy, which was recorded in Zechariah 12:10, was realized.

3. THE FEAR OF THE JEWS AND THEIR BREAKING OF THE SABBATH

❖ They sealed the sepulture as they chose, and they put guards, not caring to do so on the Sabbath day, for they only saw one thing: their fear that they would be defeated. This was extreme ignorance, for it revealed a deep fear that was still shuddering and trembling within them: For they who seized Him, when living, are afraid of Him when dead! **If He was actually a mere human being, (and not an incarnate God), they ought to have felt at ease.** However, all that has transpired for one and only one reason, which is for the event of His burial to become well known and for His resurrection to be believed in.

St. John Chrysostom

4. THE SEALING OF THE SEPULTURE PREVENTS ANY MANIPULATION

What did Pilate tell them? He said: "Take a guard of soldiers. Go and make it as secure as you can." And so the Jews went and sealed the sepulture in the company of the guards. He did not allow the guards to seal it on their own, rather he told them to go seal it as they pleased, so that they won't have any excuse, nor could they protest against anyone. For if the guards have sealed it on their own, the Jews could have claimed that the guards had allowed the body to be stolen, and thus the disciples were able to come up with the scheme of the resurrection.

St. John Chrysostom

5. HIS BURIAL IN A NEW SEPULTURE

❖ That was not randomly done, rather it was planned, that the

body be placed in a new sepulture, where no one else was buried before, so that no one would think that someone else has risen – not Him -, and so that His disciples could easily come and witness what happened. They became witnesses to His burial along with the enemies. That is why He was buried in a nearby sepulture.

St. John Chrysostom

6. BRIBING THE GUARDS CONFIRMS THE RESURRECTION

St. John Chrysostom argued that the Jews gave the guards some silver to publicize that the disciples stole the body while they were sleeping. This act itself assured the whole city that the body is not there and that the sepulture is empty. Thus, the bribe itself unconsciously became a public testimony to the resurrection.

7. HIS RESURRECTION WITHIN THREE DAYS

❖ If He had risen after the guards had left, i.e. after the third day (Sunday), they would have had something to say, and to speak against it, although falsely. Therefore, He hastened and preceded them, for it was necessary for the resurrection to occur while they were still watching!

St. John Chrysostom

8. HE LEFT THE NAPKIN AND THE LINEN CLOTHES

❖ **If a thief – other than the disciples - stole the body, he would want these valuable clothes** and spices more than taking Him alone without the linen clothes.

And if the disciples were the ones who took Him, **it would be very improper for them to take Him naked**, as their objective would have been to honor Him, not to

humiliate Him!

St. Botros Sudmanty

9. HE HAD RISEN CARRYING THE MARKS OF THE WOUNDS AND HE ATE, TOO

❖ If after the general resurrection, there will be no eating or drinking, and if anyone was wounded, he will rise without his wounds... yet the Lord has done so to prove to us all that the Body, which had suffered and died, is the same One that had risen from the dead. When they thought He was a ghost, as He entered the upper-room with the doors closed, He allowed them to touch Him saying that ghosts don't have flesh and bones like He did.

St. Paul El-Boushi

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Refuting the most important Protestations to the Truth of the Resurrection³

It is natural for the liberal theology to refuse discussing the resurrection of Jesus Christ on a historical basis, because it refuses any possibility for a miracle to happen⁴.

FIRST OBJECTION: THE BODY OF CHRIST WAS STOLEN

Jesus' enemies took many precautions to prevent the disciples from stealing His body, such as sealing the sepulture and putting watch guards on it [Matthew 27:64]. Furthermore, how could the soldiers have known that the disciples have stolen Jesus' body if they were all asleep? Knowing how one of the disciples lacked the courage during the Lord's trial and did deny Him in front of a girl servant; thus, how could we expect them to be able to walk in front of the guards, steal the body from the sepulture, and leave without being noticed?

SECOND OBJECTION: THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST WAS FABRICATED BY HIS FOLLOWERS

The ex-journalist Lee Strobel wrote "People die for the sake of their religious convictions, if they believe that they are true; but they will not die for those convictions, if they know that they are false!"⁵ **Jesus' followers doubted His resurrection till Jesus appeared to them in a tactile form;** only then they did believe. Thus, they were joyfully willing to die for a truth that they came to accept after doubt.

The women were fearful before the empty sepulture and thought that someone has stolen the body; **but when Jesus appeared to them, they went and preached the news to the disciples** [Matthew 28:1-10]. However, the disciples did not

trust what the women said about the empty sepulture, and they did not believe until Jesus appeared in front of them.

Thomas did not trust the testimony of the other disciples and demanded to see and touch Jesus' body, and as soon as he saw Jesus, he believed [John 20:28].

The Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, has severely persecuted the Christians and fought this new wave; but when He, who rose from the dead, appeared to him on the road to Damascus [Acts 9:4], he became an apostle to the risen Christ and he endured persecution and prison due to his preaching of this new faith.

THIRD OBJECTION: THERE WERE NO NEUTRAL TRUSTWORTHY WITNESSES TO CONFIRM HIS RESURRECTION

The validity of the resurrection is supported by many witnesses, while its oppositions lack any evidence to substantiate their claims.

Anybody who wants to fabricate a certain story taking place in the first century would not use women as lead witnesses, because the testimony of women, at that time among the Jews, was considered worthless. Thus, if the first believers would have wanted to fabricate the story of the resurrection, and to make it more convincing, they would have used the testimony of men, who have political and religious influence in their communities. On the contrary, the four gospels documented that the actual witnesses to the resurrection were women, along with close friends of Jesus. The gospel writers were seeking full accuracy of what they wrote.

We never heard that any of the disciples' opponents were able to recover His body.

The faith of the preachers was not based on the empty sepulture alone, rather they themselves saw Him alive after His burial not just once or twice, but at least ten times, not just individually, but also in groups of two, seven, ten, eleven and

five hundred⁶ [1 Corinthians 15:6].

FOURTH OBJECTION: CHRISTIANITY STARTED AS A MORAL PHILOSOPHICAL MOVE, WHILE JESUS' RESURRECTION IS MORE A MYTHOLOGICAL THEORY THAN A HISTORICAL FACT

The center of faith of the first Church was "Jesus, the One who has risen from the dead." This trend was apparent from the first sermon on the Pentecost [Acts 2:31] and in Athens, where the apostle preached the resurrection [Acts 17:18]. It was due to the intensive focus on His resurrection that many people looked upon the Christians as a group of fanatics⁷.

The great social change that occurred among the believing Jews is a strong evidence to the resurrection. For thousands of years, the Jews had suffered persecution and oppression and they were scattered all over the face of the earth; but, despite the multi cultures surrounding them, they never lost their own culture or their religious identity. However, after only a few years from the incident of crucifixion and resurrection, about ten thousand Jews accepted the teachings of Christ, the Lord. Those first Christian Jews continued to sanctify the Sabbath, but started to pray and worship on Sundays too to reveal the power of the resurrection of Christ. There is no reasonable explanation for the conversion of such a huge number of Jews to Christianity except that they were certain that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead.

Originally, the early churches celebrated the resurrection, by accepting baptism. That baptism through the submersion in water, where the believer participates in Jesus' burial and death, and by emerging from the water, the believer announces his partaking with Jesus in the resurrection to a new life. [Romans 6:4, Colossians 2:12]

FIFTH OBJECTION: THE NEW TESTAMENT

IS NOT AUTHENTICATED AS A HISTORICAL BOOK

Both archeology and history confirm that the Bible is a trustworthy book⁸. It was proven that St. Luke the physician, who wrote the Gospel of Luke, was a very thorough historiographer. The theologian, Norman Geisler⁹, studied the references of Luke to 32 countries, 54 cities and islands, and did not find any mistake.

Furthermore, the famous archeologist and historian, Sir William Ramsey states, "The historical accuracy of Luke, which is supported by ancient evidences, gives credibility to Jesus Christ as presented in Luke's precise writings. Luke is a first class historiographer capable of recording reliable facts. In my opinion, this writer should have been put among the greatest historians. The Gospel of Luke is unprecedented in terms of its trustworthiness¹⁰." Thus, if Luke was so thorough and precise in the small details, he would likely to be so in the important events.

The Bible that we have in our hands today is noticeably accurate and matching with the original copies. Among the thousands of copies that were scribed before 1500 B.C., there are more than 5300 Greek manuscripts about the New Testament that still exist today. The scripts of the Bible are well-kept and preserved better than those of Plato and Aristotle.

Furthermore, the dead-sea scrolls have proven that the books of the Old Testament are trustworthy, as well.

SIXTH OBJECTION: ALL THE LIVING OF JESUS' APPARITIONS AFTER HIS DEATH WERE JUST HALLUCINATIONS

Some might wonder whether their vision of Him after the resurrection was only some a sort of hallucination in their part? or a state of astonishment? or even a dream? or just out of their

own imagination?

However, science proved that it was impossible for two people, in a state of hallucination, to have identical imaginations¹¹. Thus, it is not possible for 500 people to have the same imagination, or the exact same dream or to fantasize the exact same hallucination, especially that they were not expecting His appearance. The psychiatrist, Dr. Gary Collins, wrote, "Hallucinations are individual occurrences. By their very nature only one person can see a given hallucination at a time."

Most psychiatrists agree that hallucination requires expectation. It is apparent, that those, who saw Jesus after His death, didn't expect then to see Him, and they were even surprised by His presence. Some of them were even doubting the whole matter, before He appeared to them.

SEVENTH OBJECTION: JESUS DIDN'T DIE ON THE CROSS, RATHER HE FAINTED AND WAS BROUGHT DOWN FROM THE CROSS AND PUT IN A SEPULTURE, AND WAS AWAKENED THEREAFTER AND LEFT THE SEPULTURE IN A STATE OF WEAKNESS:

The fact that blood and water came out of His side revealed that the blood cells have started to separate from the plasma; and that never happens until the blood stops moving.

How could He still be alive after losing such a huge amount of blood, due to the torturing and the stabbing with the spear?

The Roman soldiers were well-trained in crucifixions; and if we assume that they have failed to kill Him, they would have been sentenced to death.

They broke the legs of the two thieves that were crucified with Jesus to speed up their deaths; that means they were certain of Jesus' death, otherwise they would have broken His legs too.

Furthermore, no one doubted His death when they were preparing the body for burial by wrapping it in linen.

According to the studies made on the first-century tombs, the sepulture was kept closed by rolling a great stone –which weighs almost 2000 pounds - on a downward tilting path until it rests on its entrance. That is why, it was impossible for one man to move it from within the sepulture. Thus, while Jesus Christ was suffering great pains from the wounds in His back, side, feet, and hands, how could he have moved the stone away, sneaking out from four or more guards, and walking several miles on the road to Emmaus?

If it was just a state of fainting, then how did He reveal such a great power beyond what they have seen before? For example His coming in while the doors were closed and His being taken up above the clouds before the eyes of 120 people.

Furthermore, nobody has ever testified or recorded that Jesus has died at any later point of time.

Dr. Alexander Mitheril, who is a medical doctor and a scientific researcher, comments on this theory saying, "After suffering such a brutal and gruesome treatment and losing so much blood that leads to shock and death, He would have appeared to His disciples in a very pitiful state. In this case, they would have never cried to Him as a Defeater and Conqueror of death, rather they would have felt sorry for Him and tried to nurse Him so He could regain His health.¹²"

EIGHTH OBJECTION: EVERYONE WENT TO ANOTHER SEPULTURE, BY MISTAKE, OTHER THAN THE ONE WHERE JESUS WAS BURIED

The women saw where the body of Jesus was laid a few days before; and after what they told the disciples, Peter and John hurried to the sepulture without any directions from the women; thus, it is very unlikely for them to have made the same mistake.

If Jesus' body was in another tomb, His enemies - knowing where He was placed - would have exposed Him right away, in order that the belief in Jesus Christ would be demolished completely.

Furthermore, if everyone has gone to the wrong sepulture, Joseph of Arimathea, the owner of the sepulture, would have had a chance to correct their mistake.

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What the Fathers say About the Resurrection of Christ

- ❖ The Word, being God, did not suffer in His nature (Divinity), but the pains of His body were of His own planning. How else would He become the Firstborn of all creation, through Whom all headships, powers, thrones and reigns come together; or how else would He become the Firstborn from the dead or the Firstborn of all who slept, if He is not the Word - being God -, who has made His body borne to suffer?
- ❖ He tasted death in His body for the sake of every human being; He, who would have been able to suffer death without His Being losing life. Although it was said that He has suffered in His body, yet He did not accept pain in the nature of His divinity but in His suffering body.

St. Cyril of Alexandria

- ❖ What a terrible crime for us not to believe in the rising of the dead; for if we will not rise, then Christ's death would be void and He would not have risen. If He did not rise for us, then He did not rise at all; for there is no reason for Him to rise for the sake of Himself.
- ❖ We know Him as the Firstborn of those who rested, Firstborn of the dead. Without question or doubt, the

firstborn has the same nature and features as the rest of the fruits... thus, just as the firstborn of death was in Adam; likewise the firstborn of resurrection is in Jesus Christ.

St. Ambrose

- ❖ St. Paul laid his proof about the resurrection of the dead upon the resurrection of Christ, since the latter guarantees and proves the first. What then? Did not this Man die either? He died, indeed, but He was not harmed by death, rather He put an end to it.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ If the cross was a false idea, then the resurrection would be a deceitful idea; and if Christ did not rise, then we are yet in our sins. If the cross was fallacious, then the ascension would also be a deceit; and finally, everything would become meaningless and void.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

- ❖ Indeed, man has brought death upon himself as well as upon the Son of Man; but the death and resurrection of the Son of Man brought life to man.

- ❖ Where does death reside? Look for it in Christ, for it does not exist anymore; and if it still exists, then death has died now....

Let us have good hearts so that death would die in us, too.

What has happened to our Head will also occur to His members; death will die in us, too, but, when? At the end of the world; at the resurrection of the dead, in which we all believe and never doubt.

St. Augustine

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The Apparitions of Christ

1. To Mary Magdalene very early in the morning [Mark 16:9-

- 10].
2. To the other women very early in the morning [Matthew 28:9-10].
 3. To the two disciples on the way to the village of Emmaus [Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-32].
 4. To Peter, the Apostle, maybe on the same day [Luke 24:34].
 5. To ten disciples at the same night [Luke 24:36; John 20:19].
 6. To the eleven disciples, the Sunday after the resurrection, while Thomas was present [Mark 16:14; John 20:26-31].
 7. To seven disciples at the sea of Tiberias [John 21].
 8. To eleven disciples (& possibly to more than 500 brethren all at once in Galilee [John 21 & 1 Corinthians 15:6].
 9. To James the Apostle, yet the place and time are not known [1 Corinthians 15:7].
 10. The final apparition before His ascension [Mark 16:19; Luke 24: 50; Acts 1:9].
 11. We can add the Lord Jesus appearance after His ascension to Saul the Tarsusian [Acts 9]

¹ Peter W. Stoner: *Science Speaks*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1969, p. 109.

^٢ القمص تادرس يعقوب ملطي: الحب الإلهي، فصل: أقامني معه، الإسكندرية ١٩٧٦.

³ For more details see: *Rose Publishing: Evidence for the Resurrection and Hallay's Bible Handbook*, Zondervan, 1992, p. 556-557; *Monastery of St. Mary (The Syrian) in Egypt, Memers in Arabic*.

⁴ Cf. William Lane Craig: *Contemporary Scholarship and the Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*.

⁵ Cf. Lee Strobel: *The Case for Christ*, Zondervan, 1998.

⁶ Hallay s *Bible Handbook*. Zondervan, 1992, p. 556-557.

⁶ J. I. Packer: *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Bible Facts 1995*, p. 551.

⁸ Kaiser, Davids, Bruce, Brauch: *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, 1996. p. 61 ff.

⁹ Geisler, Norman and Thomas Howe: *When Critics Ask, Wheaton, III, Victor, 1992*.

¹⁰ W. M. Ramsay: *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, Baker Book House, 1953

¹¹ Pat Zukeran: *The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?*

¹² Lee Strobel: *The Case for Easter*, Zondervan, 1998, 2003.