

# Why I Believe Jesus Rose

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The Bible claims that a man named Jesus lived, died, and rose from the dead in ancient Israel nearly two-thousand years ago. Few scholars doubt the first two claims. There is just too much evidence both in the Bible and in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Century Jewish and Roman literature verifying His life and death. What they doubt is the resurrection, because while life and death are common in this world, resurrection is not!

So how do we know that Jesus rose from the dead? Is the resurrection simply a blind leap of faith, or is it based on solid historical data? I believe the latter. God has provided abundant evidence for the resurrection. And based on that evidence, here are the top five reasons why I believe that it is *more reasonable* to believe that Jesus rose from the dead than that He did not. These five lines of historical evidence are why I believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus really did rise bodily from the dead two-thousand years ago.

## How do we know that Jesus rose from the dead?

### 1) Jesus wasn't the only "Messiah"

- **read Acts 5:34-39**
- It might surprise you to learn that Jesus wasn't the only man in Israel in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century who claimed to be the Messiah. There were actually *many* of them! They each attracted a crowd of followers and built a movement... and then they died. And as soon as they died, their movements died out and their followers went home.
- None of their followers, not a single one, claimed that their messiah rose from the dead. No one built a religion around any of these guys.
- Why? Because in the minds of 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jews, the death of a "messiah" proved that he wasn't the messiah! Death was proof that he was a fraud.
  - o **Matthew 16:21-22**
  - o Peter, like all 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jews, could not conceive of a messiah who would die. The messiah would be God's King. How could God's King die? That just didn't make sense.
- Skeptics of Christianity often claim that the apostles made up the resurrection story and people bought in to it because everyone in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century expected miracles like resurrection to happen. They were pre-modern. They lived before the scientific age. They were conditioned to see miracles in everyday life so it was no big deal to believe that Jesus rose from the dead.
- No! That is a naïve and insulting view of 1<sup>st</sup> Century people. No one expected a body to rise from the dead. Gentiles found the concept of resurrection laughable. Jews thought there may be a resurrection at the end of time when God comes to earth. But no one expected a body to rise. They weren't idiots. They knew that when a body dies, it stays dead.
- That's why it's not at all surprising that all the other messiahs were forgotten as soon as they died. What's surprising is that *this* Messiah was not forgotten. His followers did not disband. His movement did not die out... it grew exponentially around a claim that no one

had ever made before for any of those other messiahs, the claim that *this* messiah rose from the dead.

- How do you explain that Jesus' followers didn't disband? How do you explain this ridiculous, unheard of claim that they make – that a messiah who died – which should prove that he was a fraud – had actually risen from the dead?
- The only reasonable explanation is that their claim is true – that they really did believe that they had seen the risen Jesus with their own eyes.

## 2) Women were the first witnesses

- read **Luke 23:55-24:7**
- In all four Gospels the first witnesses of the resurrection were women.
- That might seem trivial. But here's why it matters:
  - o In the first century, women were not eligible to testify in a Jewish court of law.
  - o Josephus, a first century Jewish writer, explained that even if multiple women claim to have seen the same thing, their testimony should be rejected, "because of the levity and boldness of their sex."
  - o Celsus, the second-century critic of Christianity, mocked the idea of Mary Magdalene as an alleged witness of the resurrection, referring to her as a "hysterical female . . . deluded by . . . sorcery."
- First century Jewish and Roman views of women were incredibly chauvinistic. Non-Christian society assumed that women were unintelligent, unreasonable, and unreliable.
- So that forces us to ask, if you were making it all up, inventing this story of the resurrection to try to get people to buy into your new religion and follow you, why would you choose witnesses who were regarded as unreliable and ridiculous in the eyes of your culture?
  - o For illustration sake, imagine that I'm trying to fool you into buying into a fake investment so I can make money off of you. I'm not going to tell you, "Hey I've got this great investment opportunity, it's a guaranteed win, my 4-year-old told me all about it!" No. 4-year-olds aren't thought of as reliable judges of investment opportunities! If I want to fool you I'm going to tell you it's an investment that I read about in the Wall Street Journal. I'm going to quote a witness you believe to be reliable if I'm trying to deceive you.
- So if the apostles were trying to deceive their contemporaries, why did they choose witnesses whom their society assumed to be unreliable?
- The only reasonable explanation is that they're not making it up. It really happened this way. The women really were the first to see the resurrected Jesus.

## 3) The Apostles looked foolish

- If you were going to make up a religion to get people to follow you, presumably you would make yourself look good in that story. If the apostles, the men who wrote the NT were making it all up, we would expect them to cast themselves in a favorable light.
- That's why it's shocking to see just how foolish the disciples looked throughout the Gospels, including right after the resurrection. Let me give you a few examples.
  - o Right after Peter told Jesus that the messiah could not die... **Matt 16:23**
    - If I'm making it all up... I'm going to leave that out!
  - o Or how about this one from the night Jesus was arrested... **Matt 26:69-75**

- Peter's a coward in that story. He's no hero. He's scared of a young servant-girl. He betrays Jesus and runs away crying.
  - If I'm making this all up... I certainly wouldn't include that!
- But it's not any better even after the resurrection!
  - The women witness the resurrection and come and tell the Apostles, but... read Luke 24:11
  - Luke 24:36-38
- The women come across in a favorable light, but the Apostles look foolish and weak! Not only were they not expecting the resurrection – they don't even believe it when they're told it's happened. They don't even believe it when they first see Jesus.
- If I'm making up a religion to get people to follow me, I'm going to make myself look good, strong, wise, and smart. That's precisely the opposite of what we have in the Gospels. The Apostles present themselves as weak, cowardly, and doubting. They present themselves in a very unfavorable light. Why? The only reasonable explanation is because it's true. This is what really happened. They were actually weak, cowardly, and doubting – they're not making it up. They are faithfully, accurately telling us the real history surrounding the resurrection of Jesus.

#### **4) Their enemies never brought out the body**

- **Acts 4** – Peter and John stir up all of Jerusalem with their claim that Jesus had risen from the dead, and 5000 men believe. The church in Jerusalem grows massively overnight. That terrifies the religious leaders. They'd just crucified Jesus to maintain their hold on power, and now they feel it slipping away. It seemed as though the entire city was converting to Christianity overnight.
- So they ask themselves, "What shall we do with these men?" What shall we do to silence their teaching about Jesus?
- If the Apostles made it all up, then there's an extremely easy answer to that question: just bring out the body!
  - It had only been a few weeks since Jesus' death. The body would still be recognizable. Everyone in Jerusalem had seen Jesus during His trial and crucifixion. Just bring out the body and everyone would know: these guys are making it all up.
- And yet as Christianity grows and spreads in Jerusalem, in Judea, and throughout the Roman world, the enemies of Christianity – the Jewish and Roman authorities – never brought out the body! That would have ended Christianity, instantly! It would have been game-over for our religion.
- So why didn't they bring the body out and parade it through downtown Jerusalem? The only reasonable explanation: they couldn't find the body! The tomb was empty. There was no body to parade through the streets.
- Now critics of Christianity have an answer ready: the reason there was no body to parade through the streets of Jerusalem was that the disciples stole the body. They stole it so they could claim Jesus rose from the dead and gather lots of followers and lots of attention for themselves. Seems like a reasonable answer until you realize that...

#### **5) The apostles chose to suffer and die for their claim**

- Acts 5 – Peter and John were flogged ("to beat, to whip")
- Acts 12 – James, the brother of John, was beheaded

- Acts 14 – Paul was stoned. They literally pummeled him with stones till he fell unconscious, at which point they assumed he was dead.
- Acts 16 – Paul was beaten with rods.
- Shortly after writing 2 Peter, Peter was crucified upside down.
- Shortly after writing 2 Timothy, Paul was beheaded.
- Eleven of the twelve disciples were martyred for their allegiance to Jesus. The only one to escape martyrdom was John and he was imprisoned and tortured for his faith.
- Now if I had made up this whole story of about seeing the resurrected Jesus, why would I choose to be beaten, imprisoned, tortured, and executed for something I knew was a lie?!
  - o If I was Peter and I saw soldiers coming to crucify me, that's when I would throw up my hands and say, "Fellas, fellas, there's been a huge misunderstanding! That whole story about Jesus rising from the dead... yeah, I made that all up. Sorry. I thought it'd make me popular. Obviously I was wrong! So can we just forget about all of this?!"
- Who willingly chooses to be persecuted, beaten, tortured, and killed for something they knowingly made up?!
  - o Before Paul was a Christian he was a high-ranking Pharisee with Roman citizenship. He was a man of privilege and wealth. From a human perspective he had nothing to gain and everything to lose by becoming Christian. Yet he willingly chose to suffer and die because he claimed to have seen the resurrected Jesus.
- There's no way to explain the apostles' willingness to suffer and die unless they really believed that they themselves had seen the resurrected Jesus.

These five verifiable facts are why I believe that Jesus truly rose from the dead. There's simply no other reasonable explanation for all the historical data. Two-thousand years ago on that first Easter morning something happened that had never happened before and has never happened since: a man who died conquered death and rose from the grave. That's not just a fairytale we tell our children. It's not just a metaphor for spiritual rebirth. It's not just a story we've inherited from our forefathers. It's a historically verifiable FACT.

On my darkest days this is what I cling to. I hang my whole life, my reality, my actions, my thoughts, my attitudes, my hopes on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It really happened. He really rose from the dead! And because He rose, everything God promised us in the Bible will one day come true. Sin will end, death will be cursed, the world will be made right, and love will win!