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Resurrection

God Saves

Thirteen points every follower of Jesus should know. A study by Pastor Andy Cisneros.

Resurrection: *God Saves*

Jesus said . . . *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."* JOHN 11:25–26

If Jesus is dead, then Christianity is dead. If Jesus is alive, then Christianity is alive. Paul himself declared as much in 1 Corinthians 15:17*: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."*

Apart from the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there is no savior, no salvation, no forgiveness of sin, and no hope of resurrected eternal life. Apart from the resurrection, Jesus is reduced to another good but dead man and is of no help to us in this life or ever. Without the resurrection of Jesus, the few people today who understand and place their hope in Jesus Christ as Messiah are gullible; their hope for a resurrected life after this life is the hope of silly fools who trust in a dead man to give them life. Therefore, Jesus' resurrection is, without question, significant and worthy of the most careful, consideration and examination.

What Resurrection is and What It is Not

Defining what resurrection does and does not mean is incredibly important. Resurrection does not mean revivification. Revivification occurs when someone who dies comes back to life only to die again; revivification happens throughout Scripture (1 Kings 17:17 – 24; John 11:38 – 44). Unlike revivification, resurrection teaches that someone dies and returns to physical life forever, or what the Bible calls eternal life, patterned after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Resurrection does not mean there is a second chance for salvation after death, as both *reincarnation and purgatory* teach. Reincarnation is the belief that the soul is eternal and the soul individually migrates from one body to another through a succession of lives in pursuit of complete purification where the soul is finally joined to the ultimate reality of the divine. The idea of Purgatory also assumes the immortality of the soul and wrongly teaches that, following death, there is an extended period of potential maturation and purification of the soul that allows someone to then enjoy eternal life in spite of their sins. Hebrews 9:27 refutes both errors: *"It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment."*

Resurrection does not mean that everyone, believers and unbelievers alike, avoid the lake of fire in the end (Matt. 25:41 – 46; John 3:16). *Universalism* wrongly teaches that everyone is eventually saved and enters the kingdom. *Annihilationism* wrongly teaches that at some point following death unbelievers simply cease to exist rather than going into the lake of fire. Instead, Daniel 12:2 declares that both

believers and unbelievers will rise, some will go to everlasting life (Kingdom) and others to everlasting death (lake of fire), which refutes both errors*: "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."*

Death means what is often called "soul sleep," where the whole of a person lies at rest until the resurrection. (Eccl. 9:10; See also 2 Kings 4:18–37; Matt. 9:18–26; 27:52–53; Mark 5:22–43; Luke 8:40–56; John 11:1–44; Acts 9:36–42 and 20:9–12). The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* says:

"The Bible uses 'sleep' as a metaphor for the death of the righteous. *Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep'* (1Corinthians 15:20). In Christ, death is nothing more than a nap from which the righteous will awaken to the 1000 year reign."

Here there was no difference between pagans, Jews and Christians. They all understood the Greek word *anastasis* (a standing up, a resurrection) and all it entailed, and the other related terms, to mean . . . ***"new life after a period of being dead."*** Pagans denied this possibility; some Jews affirmed it as a long term future hope; virtually all Christians claimed that it had happened to Jesus and would happen to them in the future (Luke 18:29 – 30; 1 John 3:2).

Resurrection was also a way of speaking of a new life now and a new life after death following Christ's return. Many modern writings continue to use "resurrection" as a synonym for "life after death." In contrast, belief in "resurrection" for the ancients meant belief in a "two-step process":

1. New life is often called "born again" or "regeneration." When you accept Christ the old is gone, the new is here. In Romans 6:1 – 11 the apostle Paul likens our baptism to death, burial and resurrection. In verse 11 he says, *"Consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."*
2. Literal resurrection will occur at the return of Christ (1 Cor. 15:20 – 24). This meaning is constant throughout the ancient Christian world.

N.T. Wright reiterates what resurrection is and what it is not:

"Resurrection" was, by definition, not the existence into which someone might (or might not) go immediately upon death; it was not a disembodied "heavenly" life; it was a further stage, out beyond all that. It was not a redescription or redefinition of death. It was death's reversal." (source?)

Old Non-Christian Views of the Afterlife

It is commonly spoken that the entire idea of a bodily resurrection was, in fact, not a novel idea but one borrowed from other ancient philosophies and spiritualities. Wright has done an exhaustive and revolutionary study of ancient beliefs regarding resurrection that is incredibly helpful. Most books on the resurrection of Jesus begin by studying the Gospel narratives and then work outwardly from this vantage point to an analysis of the appropriate pagan and Jewish sources found in the ancient past. Wright takes

the exact opposite approach. He begins with a study on resurrection (or, better, the lack thereof) in ancient paganism and then narrows the scope of his investigation tighter and tighter, concluding with a study of the resurrection as recorded by the writers of the canonical Gospels. Wright concludes, “In so far as the ancient non-Jewish world had a Bible, its Old Testament was Homer. And in so far as Homer has anything to say about resurrection, he is quite blunt: it doesn’t happen.” (source?)

The idea of resurrection is denied in ancient paganism from Homer all the way to the Athenian dramatist Aeschylus, who wrote, “Once a man has died, and the dust has soaked up his blood, there is no resurrection.” Wright provides a helpful summary: “Christianity was born into a world where its central claim was known to be false. Many believed that the dead were non-existent; outside Judaism, nobody believed in resurrection.” (source?)

One of the most influential writers in ancient times was Plato. Wright summarizes Plato’s views on the soul and body as follows:

“The soul is the non-material aspect of a human being, and is the aspect that really matters. Bodily life is full of delusion and danger; the soul is to be cultivated in the present both for its own sake and because its future happiness will depend upon such cultivation. The soul, being immortal, existed before the body, and will continue to exist after the body is gone.” (source?)

This dualistic view promoted a tendency to see the body as a prison of the soul that made death something to be desired. According to Wright, “in Greek philosophy, care for and cure of the soul became a central preoccupation.” Furthermore, “neither in Plato nor in the major alternatives just mentioned [e.g., Aristotle] do we find any suggestion that resurrection, the return to bodily life of the dead person, was either desirable or possible.” This view is also evident in the writings of Cicero.

Cicero is quite clear, and completely in the mainstream of Greco-Roman thought: the body is a prison-house. A necessary one for the moment; but nobody in their right mind, having got rid of it, would want it or something like it back again. At no point in the spectrum of options about life after death did the ancient pagan world contemplate that the denials of Homer, Aeschylus and the rest would be overthrown. Resurrection was not an option. Those who followed Plato or Cicero did not want a body again; those who followed Homer knew they would not get one.

After surveying several other ancient pagan writers and philosophers, Wright concludes: “Nobody in the pagan world of Jesus’ day and thereafter actually claimed that somebody had been truly dead and had then come to be truly, and bodily, alive once more.” (source?)

Death, in ancient paganism, was a one-way street. According to Wright:

“The road to the underworld ran only one way. Throughout the ancient world, from its ‘bible’ of Homer and Plato, through its practices (funerals, memorial feasts), its stories (plays, novels, legends), its symbols (graves, amulets, grave-goods) and its grand theories, we can trace a good deal of variety about the road to Hades, and about what one might find upon arrival. As with all one-way streets, there is bound to be

someone who attempts to drive in the opposite direction. One hears of a Protesilaus, an Alcestis or a Nero redivivus, once or twice in a thousand years. But the road was well policed. Would-be traffic violators (Sisyphus, Eurydice and the like) were turned back or punished. And even they occurred in what everybody knew to be myth."

Wright also notes:

"We cannot stress too strongly that from Homer onwards the language of 'resurrection' was not used to denote 'life after death' in general, or any of the phenomena supposed to occur within such a life. The great majority of the ancients believed in life after death. Many of them developed . . . complex and fascinating beliefs about it and practices in relation to it; but, other than within Judaism and Christianity, they did not believe in resurrection."

In the middle of history not even Judaism believed in the resurrection of an individual from death. Rather, their understanding was that their entire nation would rise from death together at the end of history. William Lane Craig's lengthy studies of the resurrection of Jesus Christ culminated in the publishing of two scholarly books on the issue. Craig asserts:

"Jewish belief always concerned a resurrection at the end of the world, not a resurrection in the middle of history. . . . The resurrection to glory and immortality did not occur until after God had terminated world history. This traditional Jewish conception was the prepossession of Jesus' own disciples (Mark 9:9–13; John 11:24). The notion of a genuine resurrection occurring prior to God's bringing about the world's end would have been foreign to them. . . . Jewish belief always concerned a general resurrection of the people, not the resurrection of an isolated individual." (source?)

Historian and professor Edwin Yamauchi researched and said this from his studies: "There is no possibility that the idea of a resurrection was borrowed because there is no definitive evidence for the teaching of a deity resurrection in any of the mystery religions prior to the second century. In fact, it seems that other religions and spiritualities stole the idea of a resurrection from Christians! For example, the resurrection of Adonis is not spoken of until the second to fourth centuries. Attis, the consort of Cybele, is not referred to as a resurrected god until after AD 150." (source?)

Some have thought that the taurobolium ritual of Attis and Mithra, the Persian god, is the source of the biblical doctrine of the resurrection. In this ritual, the initiate was put in a pit, and a bull was slaughtered on a grating over him, drenching him with blood. However, the earliest this ritual is mentioned is AD 160, and the belief that it led to rebirth is not mentioned until the fourth century. Princeton scholar Bruce Metzger said that the taurobolium was said to have the power to confer eternal life only after it encountered Christianity.

The myths of pagans are admittedly fictitious events centered on the annual death and rebirth of vegetation and harvest cycles. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is put forth as an historical fact in a place, at a time, with eyewitnesses and numerous lines of evidence. Not only is the theory that Christianity

borrowed the concept of resurrection untrue, but it also completely ignores the historical facts of the empty tomb and post-resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ.

As you can see the question of what happens at death has created a plethora of false ideas. I have to assume that the fear of the unknown has driven the adoption of all kinds of wild solutions. In spite of Paul's warning in Colossians 2:8: *"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ,"* much of Christendom has fallen into this trap.

The apostle Paul ran into this problem while visiting Athens. (Read Acts 17:16 – 34). Sadly, by the middle of the second century some of these foolish ideas had made their way into the church and have continued to remain a disturbing concept throughout most of the Christian world.

How could that happen? Two men who are considered the most influential scholars in all Christendom were Origen (c. 180 – 255 A.D.) and Augustine (354 – 430 A.D.). Both men were strongly influenced by Greek philosophy. Hans Kung, a noted Catholic scholar, said that Origen didn't realize how much he was influenced by such thinking. Origen was able to integrate those Greek philosophical teachings through an *allegorical* interpretation of scripture. Augustine openly taught what he called a *Neo-platonic* view of the scriptures. Their teachings became the norm for the church, so generally accepted that even the reformers didn't question them. We must note that while there are many allegorical stories (types and shadows) in the scriptures, we would prefer a literal interpretation. The Bible says what it means and means what it says.

Biblical Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection

The biblical evidence for Jesus' resurrection can be quickly summarized in ten points. Each of these points is consistent, and together they reveal that the Bible is repeatedly clear on the fact of Jesus' resurrection.

1. Jesus' resurrection was prophesied in advance. Roughly seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah promised that Jesus would be born into humble circumstances to live a simple life, die a brutal death, and then rise to take away our sin (Isaiah 53:8-12

2. Jesus predicted his resurrection. On numerous occasions Jesus plainly promised that he would die and rise three days later (Matthew 12:38-40; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34; John 2:18–22. 35John 19:34–35).

3. Jesus died. Before Jesus died he underwent a sleepless night of trials and beatings that left him exhausted. He was then scourged—a punishment so horrendous that many men died from it before even making it to their crucifixion. Jesus was crucified, and a professional executioner declared him dead. To ensure Jesus was dead, a spear was thrust through his side and a mixture of blood and water poured out of his side because the spear burst his heart sac. Jesus' dead body was wrapped in upwards of one hundred pounds of linens and spices, which, even if he was able to somehow survive the beatings,

floggings, crucifixion, and a pierced heart, would have killed him by asphyxiation. Even if through all of this Jesus somehow survived (which would in itself be a miracle), he could not have endured three days without food, water, or medical attention in a cold tomb carved out of rock. In summary, Jesus died.-*M. Metzger, Historical and Literary Studies: Pagan, Jewish, and Christian (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1968).*

4. Jesus was buried in a tomb that was easy to find. Some seven hundred years before Jesus was even born, God promised through Isaiah that Jesus would be assigned a grave "with a rich man in his death." This was incredibly unlikely, because Jesus was a very poor man who could not have afforded an expensive burial plot. Following Jesus' death, though, a wealthy and well known man named Joseph of Arimathea gifted his expensive tomb for the burial of Jesus. As a result, the place of Jesus' burial was easy to confirm. Joseph who owned the tomb, governmental leaders and their soldiers who were assigned to guard the tomb, and the disciples and women who visited the tomb and found it empty all knew exactly where Jesus' dead body was laid to rest. Had Jesus truly not risen from death, it would have been very easy to prove it by opening the tomb and presenting Jesus' dead body as evidence.

5. Jesus appeared physically, not just spiritually, alive three days after his death. Following Jesus' resurrection, many people touched his physical body: his disciples clung to his feet, Mary clung to him, and Thomas the doubter put his hand into the open spear hole in Jesus' side. Jesus also appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, but they were uncertain if he had truly physically risen from death. Still, Jesus was emphatic about his bodily resurrection and went out of his way to prove it:

"As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them" (Luke 24:36 – 43).

Jesus appeared physically alive over the course of forty days to crowds as large as five hundred people at a time. It is also significant to note that no credible historical evidence from that period exists to validate any alternative explanation for Jesus' resurrection other than his literal bodily resurrection.

6. Jesus' resurrected body was the same as his pre-resurrection body. His disciples recognized him as the same person who had been crucified, and Mary Magdalene recognized him by the sound of his voice. While Jesus' resurrection body was the same, it was transformed. This explains why Jesus was not always immediately recognized after his resurrection, and seemed to appear and reappear mysteriously. As James Orr spoke of, "In the narratives . . . it is implied that there was something strange— something unfamiliar or mysterious—in his aspect, which prevented his immediate recognition . . . which held them in awe." Paul explains this phenomenon in the lengthiest treatment of the nature of a resurrection body in

all of Scripture (1 Corinthians 15): *"It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."* This "spiritual body" refers to a resurrected body that has been perfected to its glorious state by the power of the Holy Spirit.

7. Jesus' resurrection was recorded as Scripture shortly after it occurred. Mark's Gospel account of the days leading up to Jesus' crucifixion mentions the high priest without naming him. It can logically be inferred that Mark did not mention the high priest by name because he expected his readers to know who he was speaking of. Since Caiaphas was high priest from AD 18–37, the latest possible date for the tradition is AD 37. This date is so close to the death of Jesus that there would not have been sufficient time for a "legend" of his resurrection to have developed. This proves that the biblical record of Jesus' resurrection was penned while the eyewitnesses were still alive to verify the facts. Thus, his resurrection is not a mythical legend that developed long after the time of Jesus. In fact, John Rodgers, says, "This is the sort of data that historians of ancient times drool over."

8. Jesus' resurrection was celebrated in the earliest church creeds. In 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, Paul says, "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." This statement is widely accepted as the earliest church creed, which began circulating as early as AD 30–36, shortly after Jesus' resurrection. Considering the early age of this creed, there was not sufficient time between the crucifixion and the creed for any legend about Jesus' resurrection to accrue. In addition, the witnesses mentioned were still alive and available to be questioned about the facts surrounding the resurrection. The early date of this creed also proves that the church did not corrupt the truth about Jesus with fables and folklores. Rather, the early church simply clung to the plain and facts of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

9. Jesus' resurrection convinced his family to become Christians. James, Jesus' half-brother, was originally opposed to the claims of his brother (John 7:1 – 5). A transformation occurred in James, though, after he saw his brother resurrected from death. James went on to pastor the church in Jerusalem and authored the New Testament epistle bearing his name. He was also actively involved in shaping the early church, which suffered and died to proclaim to everyone that Jesus is the Son of God. Also, Jesus mother Mary was part of the early church that knew Jesus to be the Son of God, as was Jesus' other brother Jude, who wrote a book of the New Testament entitled, you guessed it, Jude. While it is not impossible to imagine Jesus convincing some people that he was the Son of God if he were not, it is impossible to conceive of Jesus convincing his own mother and brothers to suffer persecution in this life and risk eternal life for following him and the one true God unless he truly was the Son of God.

10. Jesus' resurrection was confirmed by his most bitter enemies, such as Paul. Paul was a devout Jewish Pharisee who routinely persecuted and killed Christians. After an encounter with the risen Christ, Paul was converted and became the most dynamic defender and expander of the church. Had Jesus not truly risen from death, it is absurd to assume that Paul would ever have followed him. Simply, Paul hated Jesus and

would never have changed his religious practice unless Jesus had risen from death to prove him wrong. Furthermore, Paul insisted that Jesus had risen in almost all of his letters that are saved for us in the New Testament.

Circumstantial Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection

Effects have causes. Jesus' resurrection is no exception. This is evident by eight effects caused by it. Together, they are circumstantial evidence for Jesus' resurrection. For those wanting to deny Jesus' resurrection, the burden of proof remains on them to account for these multiple effects with a reasonable cause. Craig explains, "Anyone who denies this explanation is rationally obligated to produce a more plausible cause of Jesus' resurrection and to explain how it happened." He goes on to say, "The conclusion that God raised him up is virtually inescapable. Only a sterile, academic skepticism resists this inevitable inference." (source?)

1. Jesus' disciples were transformed. Prior to the resurrection, his disciples were timid and fearful, even hiding when Jesus appeared to them. Following the resurrection, however, they were all transformed into bold witnesses to what they had seen and heard, even to the point of dying in shame and poverty for their convictions, including Peter.

Regarding the apostles' eyewitness testimony to Jesus' resurrection, Simon Greenleaf, professor of law at Harvard University and a world renowned scholar on the rules of legal evidence, said that it was "impossible that they could have persisted in affirming the truths they have narrated, had not Jesus actually risen from the dead, and had they not known this fact as certainly as they knew any other fact."

2. Jesus' disciples remained loyal to Jesus as their Messiah. Modern-day "messiahs" include, for example, politicians who propose to save and deliver us from a terrible fate such as terrorism, poverty, or unreasonable taxation. Supporters flock around their messiah in hopes that he will deliver on his promise to make their dreams come true. However, when a messiah fails to deliver as promised, his followers either abandon both the cause and the messiah, or they retain the cause and abandon the messiah to instead pursue another messiah. Either way, a failed messiah is a forgotten messiah.

Jesus' disciples did not abandon their cause of forgiven sin and life with God or their devotion to Jesus as their Messiah. Their devotion to both their cause and Messiah grew in numbers and devotion. They endured widespread persecution and even martyrdom, which would have been unthinkable had Jesus merely died and failed to rise as he promised he would. On this point, the historian Kenneth Scott Latourette has said:

"It was the conviction of the resurrection of Jesus which lifted his followers out of the despair into which his death had cast them and which led to the perpetuation of the movement begun by him. But for their profound belief that the crucified had risen from the dead and that they had seen him and talked with him, the death of Jesus and even Jesus himself would probably have been all but forgotten."

3. The disciples had exemplary character. To claim that the disciples preached obvious lies and deluded people into dying for the world's greatest farce, one would have to first find credible evidence to challenge the character of the disciples. Also, these men were devout Jews who knew that if they followed a false Messiah and encouraged others to do the same, they would be sentenced by God to the Lake of Fire for lying and bearing false witness. Lastly, does not such egregious lying conflict with the character of men and women who gave their lives to feeding the poor, caring for widows and orphans, and helping the hurting and needy?

4. Worship changed. The early church stopped worshiping on Saturday, as Jews had for thousands of years, and suddenly began worshiping on Sunday in memory of Jesus' Sunday resurrection. The Sabbath was so sacred to the Jews that they would not have ceased to obey one of the Ten Commandments unless Jesus had resurrected in fulfillment of their Old Testament Scriptures. Yet, by the end of the first century, Sunday was called "the Lord's Day."

According to even non-Christian historians, multitudes began announcing Jesus as the Messiah after his resurrection. For example, Lucian of Samosata was a non-Christian Assyrian-Roman satirist who, around AD 170, wrote:

"The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account. . . . You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains their contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then 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."

Additionally, the early church rejected the observances of the law because they saw it as having been fulfilled in Jesus; thus, the law was no longer binding upon them in the same way as it had been for over a thousand years. This was a cataclysmic shift in belief that was only considered possible because a new time period had been ushered in by the resurrection of Jesus.

God's people welcomed the sacraments of Communion and baptism into their worship. In Communion the early Christians remembered Jesus' death in their place for their sins. In baptism they remembered Jesus' resurrection in their place for their salvation and anticipated their personal future resurrection.

5. Women discovered the empty tomb. The women who discovered the tomb were mentioned by name, were well known in the early church, and could have easily been questioned to confirm their findings if they were untrue. Moreover, since the testimony of women was not respected in that culture, it would have been more likely for men to report discovering the empty tomb if the account was fictitious and an attempt were being made to concoct a credible lie about Jesus' resurrection. Therefore, the fact that women are said to have been the first to arrive at Jesus' empty tomb is confirmation that the account of Scripture is factual, not contrived.

6. The early church preaching was centered on the historical fact of Jesus' resurrection. If the empty tomb were not a widely accepted fact, the disciples would have reasoned with the skeptics of their day to defend the central issue of their faith. Instead, we see the debate occurring not about whether the tomb was empty, but why it was empty. Also, nowhere in the preaching of the early church was the empty tomb explicitly defended, for the simple reason that it was widely known as an agreed-upon fact. Furthermore, a reading of the book of Acts shows that on virtually every occasion that preaching and teaching occurred, the resurrection of Jesus from death was the central truth being communicated because it had changed human history and could not be ignored. Jesus' resurrection appears in twelve of the twenty-eight chapters in Acts, which records the history of the early church.

7. Jesus' tomb was not enshrined. Craig says, "It was customary in Judaism for the tomb of a prophet or holy man to be preserved or venerated as a shrine. This was so because the bones of the prophet lay in the tomb and imparted to the site its religious values. If the remains were not there, then the grave would lose its significance as a shrine."

Of the four major world religions based upon a founder as opposed to a system of ideas, only Christianity claims that the tomb of its founder is empty. Judaism looks back to Abraham, who died almost four thousand years ago, and still cares for his grave as a holy site at Hebron. Thousands visit Buddha's tomb in India every year. Islam founder Mohammed died on June 8, 632, and his tomb in Medina is visited by millions of people every year.

Additionally, Yamauchi has discovered evidence that the tombs of at least fifty prophets or other religious figures were enshrined as places of worship and veneration in Palestine around the same time as Jesus' death. Yet, according to James D. G. Dunn, there is "absolutely no trace" of any veneration at Jesus' tomb. The obvious reason for this lack of veneration is that Jesus was not buried but instead resurrected.

8) Christianity exploded on the earth and a few billion people today claim to be Christians. On the same day, in the same place, and in the same way, two other men died, one on Jesus' left and one on his right. Despite the similarities, we do not know the names of these men. Why? Because they remained dead and Jesus alone rose from death and ascended into heaven, leaving the Christian church in his wake. On this point, C. F. D. Moule of Cambridge University says, "The birth and rapid rise of the Christian Church . . . remain an unsolved enigma for any historian who refuses to take seriously the only explanation offered by the Church itself."

Historical Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection

Because Jesus' death is a historical fact, the corroborating evidence of non- Christian sources in addition to the Bible helps to confirm the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The following testimony of Romans, Greeks, and Jews is helpful because these men are simply telling the facts without any religious devotion to them.

Josephus (AD 37–100)

Josephus was a Jewish historian born just a few years after Jesus died. His most celebrated passage, called the "Testimonium Flavianum," says:

"Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."

Suetonius (AD 70–160)

Suetonius was a Roman historian and annalist of the Imperial House. In his biography of Nero (Nero ruled AD 54–68), Suetonius mentions the persecution of Christians by indirectly referring to the resurrection: "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition [the resurrection]."

Pliny the Younger (AD 61 or 62–113)

Pliny the Younger wrote a letter to the emperor Trajan around AD 111 describing early Christian worship gatherings that met early on Sunday mornings in memory of Jesus' resurrection day:

"I have never been present at an examination of Christians. Consequently, I do not know the nature of the extent of the punishments usually meted out to them, nor the grounds for starting an investigation and how far it should be pressed. . . . They also declared that the sum total of their guilt or error amounted to no more than this: they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day [Sunday in remembrance of Jesus' resurrection] to chant verses alternately amongst themselves in honor of Christ as if to a god."

The Jewish Explanation

The earliest attempt to provide an alternative explanation for the resurrection of Jesus did not deny that the tomb was empty. Instead, Jewish opponents claimed that the body had been stolen, thus admitting the fact of the empty tomb. But this explanation is untenable for the following reasons. (1) The tomb was closed with an enormous rock and sealed by the government, and there is no explanation for how the rock was moved while being guarded by armed Roman soldiers. (2) If the body had been stolen, a large ransom could have been offered to the thieves, and they could have been coerced to produce the body. Or if it had been taken by the disciples, then the torture and death they suffered should have been sufficient to return the body. (3) Even if the body was stolen, how are we to account for the fact that Jesus appeared to multiple crowds of people, proving that he was alive? In conclusion, the theft of the body is unlikely and still fails to account for it returning back to life.

Summarily, the historical testimony of those who were not Christians stands in agreement with Scripture that Jesus died and rose because those are the historical facts.

Ancient Objections to Jesus' Resurrection

Some have argued that Jesus did not in fact die on the cross but rather swooned or basically passed out and therefore appeared dead. This is also what the Muslim Koran teaches as fact. Regarding this claim, theologian John Stott has asked if we are to believe:

"that after the rigours and pains of trial, mockery, flogging and crucifixion he could survive thirty-six hours in a stone sepulchre with neither warmth nor food nor medical care? That he could then rally sufficiently to perform the superhuman feat of shifting the boulder which secured the mouth of the tomb, and this without disturbing the Roman guard? That then, weak and sickly and hungry, he could appear to the disciples in such a way as to give them the impression that he had vanquished death? That he could go on to claim that he had died and risen, could send them into all the world and promise to be with them unto the end of time? That he could live somewhere in hiding for forty days, making occasional surprise appearances, and then finally disappear without explanations? Such credulity is more incredible than Thomas' unbelief."

Crucifixion is essentially death by asphyxiation because the prisoner grows too tired to lift himself up and fill his lungs with air. This explains why the Romans would often break a prisoner's legs, thus preventing him from continuing to fill his lungs. Since the professional executioners did not break Jesus' legs they must have been convinced of his death. The only way Jesus could have deceived the executioners would have been to stop breathing, which in itself would have killed him.

John 19:34–35 tells us that the Roman soldier thrust a spear into Jesus' side to confirm his death. The water that poured out was probably from the sac surrounding his heart, and the blood most likely came from his heart as well. Even if he had been alive this would have killed him.

The original explanation given for the empty tomb by those Jews who did not choose to accept him as Messiah was that the tomb was indeed empty, but not because of a resurrection but rather because of a theft of Jesus' dead body. For this to be true a number of impossibilities would have had to occur:

1. Despite the fact that it would have cost them their lives, all the guards positioned at the tomb would have had to fall asleep at the same time.
2. Each of the guards would have had to not only fall asleep but also remain asleep and not be awakened by the breaking of the Roman seal on the tomb, the rolling away of the enormous stone which blocked the entrance, or the carrying off of the dead body.
3. Even if Jesus' body was stolen, there is no way to account for its returning to life.

The issue of motive is also a key factor in refuting this hypothesis. What benefit would there be for the disciples to risk their lives to steal a corpse and die for a lie as a result? What motive would there be for the Jews, Romans, or anyone else to steal the body? And, if the body were truly stolen, would not a bounty have been offered and someone enticed to provide the body in exchange for a handsome cash reward?

4. A twin brother, or a look-alike, died in Jesus' place. It has been suggested by some Muslim scholars, along with various other people, that Jesus was not the one crucified but rather a brother or some other man who looked like him. However, there is not a shred of evidence to prove that someone who looked like Jesus existed at that time. Additionally, Jesus' mother was present at his crucifixion, and the likelihood of fooling his mother is minimal. Also, the physical wounds he suffered during the crucifixion were visible on Jesus' resurrected body and they were carefully inspected by the disciple Thomas. He had been very doubtful that Jesus had risen until he touched the scars on Jesus' body from the crucifixion evident. In addition, the tomb was empty and the burial cloths were left behind.
5. Jesus' followers hallucinated his resurrection. Some people have suggested that the disciples did not actually see Jesus risen from death but rather hallucinated, or projected, their desires for his resurrection into a hallucination. One example is John Dominic Crossan, cochairman of the Jesus Seminar. He told Time magazine that after the crucifixion, Jesus' corpse was probably laid in a shallow grave, barely covered with dirt, and eaten by wild dogs. The subsequent story of Jesus' resurrection, he says, was merely the result of "wishful thinking."

John Shelby Spong, an Episcopal bishop, denies the resurrection and believes Jesus' body was thrown in a common grave along with other crucifixion victims. He says the "Easter moment" happened to Peter, not to Jesus. Peter saw Jesus alive in "the heart of God" and began to open the eyes of the other disciples to this reality. Spong writes, "That was the dawn of Easter in human history. It would be fair to say that in that moment Simon felt resurrected."

This idea is unbelievable for five reasons.

1. A hallucination is a private, not public, experience. Yet Paul clearly states that Jesus appeared to more than five hundred people at one time.
2. Jesus appeared in a variety of times at a variety of locations, whereas hallucinations are generally restricted to individual times and places.
3. Certain types of people tend to be more prone to hallucination than others. Yet Jesus appeared to a great variety of personalities, including his brothers and mother.
4. After forty days Jesus' appearances suddenly stopped for everyone simultaneously. Hallucinations tend to continue over longer periods of time and do not stop abruptly.
5. A hallucination is a projection of a thought that preexists in the mind. However, the Jews had a conception of resurrection that applied to the raising of all people at the end of history, not the raising of any particular individual in the middle of history. It is inconceivable that the witnesses to the resurrection could have hallucinated Jesus' resurrection.

Each of these objections is predicated upon the assumption that people in Jesus' day were less intelligent and more gullible than we are today. It can be argued persuasively that in their world with fewer hospitals, medicines, and hospices to care for dying people, they were more personally aware of the finality of death than we are. They did not even believe in resurrection, and because of the influence of Greek dualism upon them, which considered the body an unwanted husk to be discarded so the soul could truly live, the entire idea of resurrection was undesirable. It is apparent that this reveals more about the character of those moderns who appeal to this argument than those ancients who are dismissed by it.

What Has the Resurrection Accomplished for Christians?

Jesus' resurrection reveals him as our messiah king. In the Davidic covenant, God promised that his Son, Jesus Christ, would be raised up from David's lineage to rule over an everlasting kingdom. Paul reveals that this was fulfilled at the resurrection of Jesus: "Concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." Now that the risen Christ has been installed as our messiah king, we can rest assured that one day Jesus will return to establish his throne on the earth and rule over his kingdom, which extends to all of creation.

Following Jesus' resurrection, an angel declared, *"He is not here, for he has risen, as he said"* (Matt. 28:6). Therefore, the resurrection is proof that Jesus' teaching was and is truth that we can trust. Jesus' resurrection gives us confidence in his other promises that we are waiting to see fulfilled, such as his returning one day to judge sinners and reward the saints.

The Bible often speaks of our being united with Christ by his resurrection, being raised with Christ, and enjoying the same powerful Holy Spirit that raised Christ. In so doing the Bible is stressing the blessings and benefits conferred on believers because of Jesus' resurrection.

Paul stresses the fact that through Jesus' death and resurrection we have forgiveness of sins. Because of Jesus those with faith in him can live with the great joy of knowing that all their sins—past, present, and future—have been forgiven once and for all by Jesus Christ. Furthermore, as the power of Jesus' resurrection works itself out in our sanctification, we grow in holiness, learning to live in victory over sin, until one day upon our own resurrection we will live forever, free from the presence, power, and practice of all sin. Elsewhere Jesus' resurrection is spoken of as the source of our justification thereby enabling us, though sinners, to be declared righteous in the sight of God. Paul explicitly states that Jesus was "raised for our justification" (Rom.4:25.

Regarding our future, Jesus' resurrection is the precedent and pattern of our own: "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." As his body was resurrected in complete health, so too will we rise and never experience pain, injury, or death ever again. This is because through his resurrection, Jesus has put death to death.

Additionally, Wright says that “the message of the resurrection is that this present world matters.” Because Jesus rose from death physically, we learn that God through Christ intends to reclaim and restore all that he made in creation and saw corrupted through the fall. Our eternity will be spent in a world much like the one enjoyed by our first parents in Eden because the earth will have been reclaimed and restored by God through Jesus’ resurrection and return.

The full effects of Jesus’ resurrection will be seen one day, following Jesus’ return. The time between Jesus’ resurrection and our resurrection is a lengthy season of love, grace, and mercy as news of the gospel goes forth, inviting sinners to repent of sin and enjoy the present and future salvation of Jesus Christ. Paul preached just this fact and the urgent need for sinners to repent: *“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead”* (Acts 17:30 – 31).

No one can remain neutral regarding Jesus’ resurrection. The claim is too staggering, the event is too earthshaking, the implications are too significant, and the matter is too serious. We must each either receive or reject it as truth for us. To remain indifferent or undecided is to reject it. Here is a list of results that have accompanied Jesus resurrection:

1. A savior who can never die again. "For we know that Christ having been raised from the dead will never die again." (Romans 6:9)

2. Repentance. "The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel." (Acts 5:31)

3. New birth. "By his great mercy we have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1:3)

4. Forgiveness of sin. "If Christ has not been raised, your hope is futile and you are still in your sins." (1 Corinthians 15:17)

5. The Holy Spirit. "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear." (Acts 2:32–33)

6. No condemnation for the elect. "Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God." (Romans 8:34)

7. Fellowship and protection. "I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

8. Proof of coming judgment. "God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:31)

9. Salvation from the future wrath of God. "We wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." (1 Thessalonians 1:10; Romans 5:10)

10. Our own resurrection from the dead. "We know that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence." (2 Corinthians 4:14; Romans 6:4; 8:11; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 15:20)

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Notes & Reflections

What stood out to you in this study? Write down questions, verses to look up, and what God is teaching you.