

621 Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?

Phil Sanders

God's Answers to Life's Questions

Did Jesus rise from the dead? What proofs evidence do we have that Jesus came back to life after his resurrection? Stay tuned, and we'll look into the Bible to find the truth. Christianity is first and foremost a belief in the Deity of Jesus Christ, that He is Lord and the Son of God. That He is divine is proven by the miracles He worked and more importantly by His resurrection from the dead. Jesus predicted in Matthew 16:21 "that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." If there is no resurrection, then Jesus deceived us. But if there was a resurrection, then Jesus is worthy of our love and loyalty. He is truly is Lord. The question of the resurrection is crucial to our lives, so we want to take the time to see if Jesus arose from the dead.

The testimony of New Testament is clear and consistent that Jesus arose from the dead and is Lord of all. In recent days, people have talked a lot about various ancient gospels that suggest Jesus didn't really die on the cross and did not resurrect from the dead. Some are suggesting that we believe these ancient documents rather than the New Testament. But these supposedly "lost" or "hidden" were neither "lost" nor "hidden." They were not suppressed by church leaders; they were *rejected* because the people of the early centuries knew what the apostles and prophets of the first century taught. These supposed gospels are not first century documents but second and third century.

They come out of the imagination of a group of Gnostics, who began to flourish in the second century. While Matthew, Peter, John, and Paul, and James were eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, not one of the Gnostic gospels were written within a hundred years of the time of Jesus. The early church rejected them because they taught false doctrine and made-up stories about Jesus, which have no basis in fact. Long before Constantine, the second-century Christians were quoting from the four gospels as authoritative Christian writings. We have quotations of these writings as God-given even before most of the Gnostic gospels came along. The gospels were Scripture!

We can believe the four gospels. They were given at a time when people who were living could judge and verify the facts that they presented. If Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John had taught falsehoods, the early church would have known it and rejected them. But with one voice the early church approved of these gospels, because they knew them to teach the truth. The second century church, however, rejected the Gnostic gospels. Gnosticism is not really a form of Christianity; it is actually its own religion. It has many gods. It believes that the demiurge created the world. It has its own Scriptures. It denies the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It may speak of Christ; but it is not Christianity.

Jesus did indeed rise from the dead, and there are a number of Biblical truths that point to this fact. Luke said in Acts 1:3 that Jesus "presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a *period of forty days*." The New Testament records nearly a dozen appearances. Jesus appeared to women and men, to people alone, to two disciples, to the ten disciples in the upper room, then to the twelve, to the seven by the lake and to more than 500 at one time. The appearances occurred in different places and under different circumstances. Not one person who witnessed the appearances ever denied what he saw, heard and touched. Jesus proved his resurrection to them.

So convinced were they of the resurrection that they would endure persecution, prison, and even death for what they believed. They would not take it back. One has to account for such conviction on the part of so many, and the only thing that can account for such conviction is that they believed the truth! They were the ones who

knew Jesus best. The apostles had lived and worked with Jesus for three and a half years. They knew him well. They knew his speech, his laugh, his walk, his appearance. They knew the one who endured the cross and the one risen from the dead. So sure were they that he died that Jesus had to rebuke them for not believing that He was alive again.

He had to prove himself alive to them. In Mark 16:14, Jesus rebuked his disciples "for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen." John 20:19 has the disciples in the upper room with the doors shut for fear of the Jews. Thomas, one of the apostles said, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." Jesus knew what Thomas said and a week later said, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." (John 20:27)

When Thomas saw that Jesus truly was alive, he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed." (John 20:28-29). Jesus was not afraid to prove to His disciples that God has raised Him up. On the following Pentecost, less than 50 days later, all the apostles took their stand before thousands, saying, "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses" (Acts 2:32). They further said, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." (2:36) The frightened disciples became bold.

When the Sanhedrin, that is the Jewish Supreme Court, gave the apostles "strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross" (Acts 5:28-30). They could not "stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). They had changed from fear to faith, from unbelief to knowing for certain that God had raised Him from the dead. Nothing else can explain the change in the disciples.

None of the disciples ever denied the resurrection, but they died preaching it. According to the traditions of history, they were all martyred for their faith except John, who was said to have been boiled in oil. Would you die preaching something you knew was a lie? Would you endure beatings, imprisonment, and death to proclaim something you knew was a falsehood? It is certainly not in the character or teachings of Jesus that one should lie. The reason these men held so strongly to the gospel is because they had witnessed Jesus resurrected from the dead personally. They knew He arose! They knew He was indeed the Messiah and Lord! They knew that He was no fake. They died for Him.

When I think of proofs of the resurrection, I think of how the enemies of Jesus took Him seriously. After Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, some of the witnesses went to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done (John 11:46). Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. If we let Him *go on* like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." (11:47-48). So afraid were the leaders that Jesus would rise again, they went to Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I *am to* rise again.' Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise

His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone (Matt. 27:63-66). The Jews would not have been satisfied with having one or two Roman guards; they wanted the tomb so secure that no one could steal the body of Jesus. Some scholars estimate there were as many as thirty guards around the tomb.

A door or tomb was sealed by stretching a cord over the stone which blocked the entrance, spreading clay or wax on the cord, and then impressing it with a seal. The seal would make any tampering obvious. With such precautions, the only way the tomb could be emptied would be for Jesus to rise from the dead. The Pharisees failed to understand that no rock, seal, guard, or army could keep the tomb secure, nor could any power prevent the Son of God from rising again. In spite of this, some people think Jesus didn't really die but revived in the cool of the tomb. But even a revived Jesus would be very weak after the loss of so much blood from his beatings and crucifixion.

The idea that a beaten, crucified Jesus could have revived in the tomb enough to roll that very heavy stone away, breaking the seals, and frightening the hardened soldiers is a conjecture harder to believe than the resurrection itself. How could a man who had undergone all that Jesus endured in a day when there was no medical help as we know it recover to the point he could move a stone so large that it required several men to move? He had lost a great deal of blood from the scourging and crucifixion; a spear pierced His side; He had been sealed in the strips of linen filled with the myrrh and aloe. Jesus did not revive on His own; He was raised from the dead by the power of God.

When Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, and the other women came to the tomb, they did not expect to find the stone rolled away. They were wondering whom they could ask to help them roll that very large stone away, so they could anoint the body of Jesus with their spices. The soldiers were in the presence of an angel that morning. Matthew said, "The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men" (Matt. 28:4). The angels said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying" (Matt. 28:5-6). What would lead soldiers to be so scared?

When Peter and John ran to the tomb and entered it, they saw "the linen wrappings lying *there*, and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself" (John 20:6-7). They saw and believed. If Jesus' body were stolen, as some have suggested, why did they leave the grave clothes behind? If you were stealing a body in front of a number of soldiers whose job it was to guard the tomb, why would you take the time to undress the body? Why would you take the time, after you had undressed that body to take the head piece and roll it up again and lay it in a place by itself? No one did that. Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of God!

Nothing else can explain the empty tomb! The Roman guards could have been punished with death had they allowed Jesus' body to

be stolen by the disciples. The Roman guards fled. They left their place of responsibility. How can their attrition be explained, when Roman military discipline was so exceptional? All the Jewish and Roman authorities had to do to disprove the resurrection was to produce the dead body of Jesus, but they did not do this. They could not! Paul argued in 1 Cor. 15:6 that Jesus appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time and that many were still living to verify his claim. The evidence was too strong for anyone to dispute. Jesus arose from the dead!

Then there is Saul of Tarsus, the man who fought Christianity with all his might. He persecuted the church savagely, held the garments of those who stoned Stephen, imprisoned men and women, and confiscated houses in order to put a stop to Christianity. He traveled to Damascus to imprison some who had fled there. It was on the road that the risen Jesus appeared to Saul. From that time forward Saul became Paul, the apostle gave his life preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. What caused this change? The only credible answer is that Saul believed in the resurrection of Jesus. When he faced the facts, he understood that Jesus is Lord, risen from the dead and the one who will judge the world.

Whether we believe in the resurrection of Jesus matters greatly. If Jesus arose from the dead, we too should call Him 'Lord' and live by His teaching. If Jesus arose from the dead, His promises are true, His commands are to be obeyed, His way is the only way, and we ought to bow the knee to Him and Him alone. If Jesus is Lord, He is not merely another moral teacher; we must one day stand before Him to be judged for our deeds, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). I hope you regard Jesus as Lord and live in a way that honors Him and shows that you love and believe in Him. The gospel is indeed good news. Obey it today!

The gospel is the story of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 1:16 says that the gospel is God's power unto salvation. The Scriptures speak of "obeying the gospel" in Rom. 10:16; 2 Thess. 1:8; and 1 Peter 4:17. One obeys the gospel by believing that Jesus is the Christ with all one's heart, repenting of every sin, confessing the name of Jesus as the Christ and Lord, and by being baptized in water into Christ. In baptism, a person dies with Christ, is buried with Christ, and is raised with Christ to walk in newness of life and freed from every sin (Rom. 6:3-7). Without the gospel none of us has any hope of ourselves being raised from the dead and living eternally with the Lord.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:16-19, "For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." But Christ has been raised, and we can rejoice in that. It means we can trust the Lord Jesus to fulfill every promise of our resurrection and life with Him forever in heaven. The resurrection is the very center of our faith, and we should be thankful there is so much evidence that it took place so long ago. I pray that you have obeyed the gospel so you can share the promises.

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Concord Road Church of Christ
8221 Concord Rd., Brentwood, TN 37027
1-877-226-5747

phil@God-answers.org

www.tv.God-answers.org