

716 Can We Really Believe in Jesus?

Phil Sanders

God's Answers to Life's Questions

A recent Harris Poll says that 96 percent of Christians believe that Jesus arose from the dead, and 80 percent of all Americans believe that. Some are saying that the resurrection was spiritual but not bodily. Can we really believe Jesus arose from the dead? Jesus claimed to be the Lord and the Son of God, claimed to die for our sins, claimed that he would rise from the dead on the third day, claims to be coming again for us, and claims that He will judge every person according to His teachings. Can we believe Him? Anyone who makes such claims and demands that people follow Him must give some convincing reasons. Well, the evidence about Jesus in the Bible gives us very convincing evidence that He is everything He claimed to be. What we want to do is to review that evidence for ourselves to see what the Bible says about Jesus.

The Bible teaches clearly that Jesus arose from the dead. It doesn't just claim it; the Bible gives numerous facts that give us evidence of the resurrection. We are going to look at just eight of those evidences. I believe once you have seen them, you will agree that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, risen from the dead. First, **the stone was rolled away**. Mark 16:1-4 says: When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. Here is a stone so large that several strong women could not move it. They were worried about it but were quite surprised to find that it had already been rolled back so that they could enter the tomb. Matthew tells us how it was rolled back in Matt. 28:2: "And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it." Stones that large don't move by themselves, the Bible says an angel rolled it back. Whether we believe that or not, the stone was rolled away.

Second, **the seal over the stone was broken**. Matthew 27:62-66 says: Next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard. The seal of the governor made this tomb a Roman matter. Anyone who broke that seal not only broke a Jewish law but also broke a Roman one. The guard was placed there to make sure no one tampered with the tomb—especially the disciples. They made this tomb "as secure as they could." The presence of several guards and the governor's seal meant that this dead body was going to remain there! But all the power of Rome and Jerusalem could not stop the angels from rolling away the stone.

Third, **the tomb was empty**. Matthew reports in Matthew 28:5: But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay." Luke gives us even more information about this conversation in Luke 24:5-7. The angel said, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." What happened to the body? How did they roll away the stone, get the

body past the guards who made the tomb as "secure" as they can? Something took the body of Jesus out of that tomb. The disciples didn't; the women who came to the tomb didn't. The guards had no reason to do it. The Jews did everything they could to stop it, but tomb was empty!

Fourth, **there is something in the tomb that is most unusual**. If you were going to snatch a dead body and get it away securely, you would probably want to do it as quickly and as quietly as possible. Explain to me, then, the rolled up grave clothes. John 20:3-9 says: So Peter (after hearing from the women) went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had wrapped the body of Jesus with myrrh and aloe in preparation for burial on Friday, and it was now Sunday, the Lord's day. Why would anyone stealing the dead body of Jesus unwrap it? And why would they bother to fold the face cloth back again? If the disciples were going to steal the body and bury it elsewhere, they would have left it wrapped. The linen wrappings were left in the tomb, because Jesus had risen from the dead and didn't need them. There is no other satisfactory explanation.

Fifth, **we must deal with the frightened guard**. Now, these men were soldiers. They would not have been frightened by a group of poorly armed Galileans trying to rob the tomb. Matthew reports in Matthew 28:4, "And for fear of him (the angel) the guards trembled and became like dead men." Such things do not happen to men unless there is an overwhelming reason. The earthquake and seeing the angel move the very large stone woke them up as to just who Jesus is! Well, they knew there could be trouble if that body went missing. Matthew tells the story in Matt. 28:11-15: While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day. The chief priests heard the testimony of the guards and knew the truth. That's the reason they didn't go looking for the dead body of Jesus. All they would have had to have done to stop the disciples' lie was to produce the body. They, however, knew the truth. An angel opened the tomb, and Jesus came forth!

Sixth, **there was an amazing change in the disciples**. Before the resurrection the disciples were unbelieving and fearful. They hid in the upper room. Luke says of the apostles, the apostles, in Luke 24:10-11: "Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." The apostles didn't believe the women; they had to be convinced. Mark says in Mark 16:14, "Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and

hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.” Jesus rebuked his apostles, who had seen him work miracles for three and half years. He rebuked them because they didn’t believe his promise to rise again. They were like that disciple Cleopas on the road to Emmaus who said in Luke 24:21, “But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” The apostles and disciples lost hope when Jesus went to the cross; they forgot or didn’t understand his promise to rise on the third day. They figured that this whole effort was over, that the kingdom of God could not come!

But Jesus showed himself alive by many convincing proofs to the apostles and others for a period of forty days (Acts 1:3). It would take forty days and many convincing proofs to persuade them! But once persuaded, these timid men and women became bold as lions. They could not and would not be stopped. They would rather die than take back their testimony that Jesus arose from the dead. Luke tells us in Acts 4:18-20: So they [the Sanhedrin] called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” God had raised up Jesus and had given them their marching orders. They weren’t going to listen even to the chief priests. They kept on teaching and preaching, even when they suffered for it. Luke writes in Acts 5:40-42, “and when they [the Sanhedrin] had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” A beating could not stop the apostles. Not even the deaths of Stephen and James would stop the apostles from teaching and preaching Jesus. My friend, do you honestly think these men would keep on telling the story of Jesus, if they had stolen the body? or if Jesus had not really risen from the dead? Would you preach a lie, knowing that it could mean prison or death?

Seventh, **there is the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.** Saul was one of the Jews who held the garments of those who stoned Stephen (Acts 7:58) Saul heartily agreed with putting him to death. After Stephen’s death Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison (Acts 8:3). Saul did this, because he wanted to put a stop to Christianity. I don’t know how a man can consent to stone another man or to put God-fearing people into prison, but Saul did. On his way to Damascus, however, Christ appeared to Saul; and Saul changed his life, becoming the apostle Paul. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:8-10, “and last of all, as to one untimely born, He [Jesus] appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.” Only convincing proof would have turned the persecutor Saul into the apostle Paul, the great

evangelist. Saul of Tarsus, the apostle Paul, said in Philippians 3:7-8, “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.” Only the truth could have convinced the apostle Paul, and the truth did convince him!

The resurrection means Jesus did what the prophets said He would. He arose from the dead. David prophesied in Psalm 16:8-10, “I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.” In Acts 2:29-32, Peter quoted David’s prophecy and explained, “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.” Jesus fulfilled the prophecy in the Old Testament and arose from the dead. The resurrection also means Jesus did what he promised to do. The cross and the resurrection were not surprises to Jesus; they were all part of God’s plan. Jesus promised in Matthew 16:21, “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” Jesus did what He promised, and that is why we can believe in Him. Further, the resurrection means Jesus is who he claimed to be. Jesus told Martha John 11:25-27, “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. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.” He is indeed Lord, and we are all accountable to him. Brethren we can believe! We can believe that Jesus is Lord, that His Word is true, that His promises will be kept, that our sins are forgiven by his blood, that God hears our prayers in His name, that our bodies will one day be raised, and that we have a home in heaven forever.

But believing means we put our trust in Him in obedience. We must demonstrate our faith in Jesus by repenting of our sins, confessing Him publicly, and being baptized in water, so that our sins might be washed away. Believing in Him means committing our lives to Him in service and faithfulness to worship and live for Him. I hope you are putting the Lord first in your life every day. If you are not a Christian, become one by obeying the gospel. If you have quit the church, why not come back. If you as a Christian have gotten your life in a sinful mess, repent and ask God to forgive you. He will, because God always keeps His promises.

*Copyright 2007, Phil Sanders
Concord Road Church of Christ
8221 Concord Rd., Brentwood, TN 37027
1-877-226-5747*

phil@God-answers.org

www.tv.God-answers.org