

Evidence for the Resurrection Part I



The empty tomb.

I found got this text from a PDF file. I don't know who the author is but I think it's excellent information we can share to anyone who doubts the historical reality of Christ's resurrection.

If the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a fabricated hoax, it was the *greatest deception, and a vicious and cruel lie created by despicable, heartless men*. If so, Christians are to be pitied above all people, for our hope would then be based on that lie.

But, if the resurrection of Jesus Christ is real, it was the greatest miracle, the greatest feat in all of human history, and its implications impact every individual from past to present.

As Dr. William Lane Craig, Research Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology says:

"Without the belief in the resurrection the Christian faith could not have come into being. The disciples would have remained crushed and defeated men. Even had they continued to remember Jesus as their beloved teacher, his crucifixion would have forever silenced any hopes of his being the Messiah. The cross would have remained the sad and shameful end of his career. The origin of Christianity therefore hinges on the belief of the early disciples that God had raised Jesus from the dead."¹

Of all the important doctrines of the Bible, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an essential Christian doctrine that must be believed as a condition of salvation.

The apostle Paul said as much in Romans 10:8, 9:

"But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God *raised Him from the dead, you will be saved*." (emphasis added)

In other words, in order to have eternal life, we must acknowledge and be devoted to Jesus Christ as Lord and believe that God raised Him from the dead. !

J. Vernon McGee puts it this way:

“‘Believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead’ means that the resurrection of Christ is the heart of the gospel.”²

Dr. John MacArthur says:

“Men must believe the resurrection of Christ [in order to be saved] because it proves that He accomplished their salvation on the cross.”³

For the writers of the New Testament, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was an extremely important issue, the cornerstone of the Christian faith.

- 1 Peter 1:3-4 says that we have “a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”
- Paul believed so firmly in the resurrection that he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:13, 14 that “if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and [our] faith is also empty.”
- And to make sure we didn’t miss it the first time, Paul repeats it in verses 16 and 17, “For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, our faith is futile; you are still in your sins!”

Even two of Christianity’s most celebrated practices are seen and reflected in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- Water Baptism celebrates the resurrection:

Romans 6:4 says, “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life.”

Colossians 2:11-12 says, “In Him you were...buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”

- Christians eat the Lord’s Supper in memory of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. This should be a time of joy for the Christian since we recognize that with the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we also have eternal life:

In Luke 22:14-23 Jesus institutes communion, “Then He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This is the cup of the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.’”

And after the resurrection in Luke 24:30-31, it’s recorded, “Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew; and He vanished from their sight.”

Even though the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an issue that has been thoroughly documented, researched and discussed, there are still those who would reject the evidence before them. For example:

John Dominic Crossan, co-founder and co-director of the Jesus Seminar, believes that Jesus was executed for revolutionary activities and, instead of being resurrected; his body was devoured by wild dogs.⁴

Islam believes that Jesus was never crucified and therefore could not have been resurrected.

- In fact, when confronted with Luke 24:39 where Jesus, after His resurrection, told His disciples, "Behold My hands and feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."
- The Muslim will say something to the effect of "See, Jesus asked the disciples to touch him so he could not have died and been resurrected in a spiritualized body."

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead physically, but that it was a spirit body. They teach that He used "different" spirit bodies than the one that was laid in the tomb, to appear to His followers.

On Sunday, March 4, 2007, a documentary on the Discovery Channel, by "Oscar-winning" director of the *Titanic*, James Cameron, claimed that the tomb of Jesus and his family had been found.

- Bar-Ilan University Professor Amos Kloner, the first archaeologist to examine the Jerusalem site, commented that the idea fails to hold up by archaeological standards, since Jesus' family was Galilean with no Jerusalem ties, but says that it makes for profitable television.

"They just want to get money for it," Kloner said. "It was an ordinary middle-class Jerusalem burial cave," he added. "The names on the caskets are the most common names found among Jews at the time."⁵

And of course there is the swoon theory or the apparent death theory – the theory that Jesus really didn't die but was close to death on the cross and then, when in the tomb, was brought back from the brink of death by the coolness of the cave.

How about the *twin theory* – the theory that Jesus had a twin, that they were separated from birth and that when Jesus died, the twin carries out the plot to steal Jesus' body and masquerade around as the risen Christ.

Even the *hallucination theory* – the theory that the people who had seen the risen Christ hallucinated the whole thing.

Then we have the *theft theory* – the theory that Jesus' body was stolen by the disciples so as to appear that He had been resurrected from the dead.

And finally, the *wrong tomb theory* – in this theory, everyone went to the wrong tomb; they went to an empty tomb and assumed that He had been resurrected.

Tonight, we're here to lay out the case for the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ as taught by the Bible, our *Final Court of Appeal*.

Jesus Often Spoke of His Resurrection

Jesus said in John 2:19-21, "'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.'...*but He was speaking of the temple of His body.*" (emphasis added)

Jesus spoke often of His physical resurrection from the dead and emphasized that it would be a "sign" that He was the promised Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament:

- Matthew 12:38-40 says, "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, 'Teacher, we want a sign from You.' But He answered and said to them. 'An evil and adulteress generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'"
- Matthew 16:21 says, "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem...and be killed, and be raised on the third day."
- Matthew 17:9 says, "Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, 'Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.'"
- Matthew 17:22-23 says, "Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, 'The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up.'"
- See also Matthew 20:18, 19; 26:32; 27:63; Mark 8:31-9:1, 10, 31; 10:32-34; 14:28, 58; Luke 9:22-27; John 2:18-22; 12:34 and John Chapters 14-16.

Clearly, Jesus spoke often of His death and every time mentioned His resurrection, not once or twice but many times.

So, how can we as Christians, counter claims that Jesus' "coming back from the dead" was a legend or a myth or His body was stolen or that He really didn't die?

What *Evidence* do we have that shows beyond a reasonable doubt that Jesus was raised from the dead after three days as He predicted?

In order to help us better remember the *Evidence for the Resurrection*, I've chosen the acronym F. E. A. T. S. since this is the greatest feat in recorded human history.⁶

1. Fatal Torment
2. Empty Tomb

3. Appearances of Jesus
4. Transformation of the Apostles
5. Skeptics Conversions

Let's start with the first letter in the acronym **F. E. A. T. S** – Fatal Torment.

1. Fatal Torment

In order to demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt that Jesus rose from the dead, we obviously have to demonstrate that He died.

And thus, we will look at His scourging, crucifixion, and the Roman spear that was thrust into His side.

The Scourging of Jesus

Jesus faced false testimonies (Mark 14:56) in front of the Sanhedrin and was then sent to Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea (Luke 23:1), and sentenced to die at the hands of Roman soldiers on the cross. But first, the beatings and the scourging took place.

Mark 15:15 says, "So Pilate...delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified."

Dr. Gary Habermas and Dr. Michael Licona explain the scourging process:

"The usual instrument was a short whip...with several single or braided leather thongs of variable lengths, in which small iron balls or sharp pieces of sheep bones were tied at intervals...the man was stripped of his clothing, and his hands were tied to an upright post...The back, buttocks, and legs were flogged...The scourging...was intended to weaken the victim to a state just short of collapse or death...As the Roman soldiers repeatedly struck the victim's back with full force, the iron balls would cause deep contusions, and the leather thongs and sheep bones would cut into the skin and subcutaneous tissues. Then, as the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles."⁷

Dr. John MacArthur further explains:

"Often there were two scourgers, one on either side of the victim, who took turns...Muscles were lacerated, veins and arteries were torn open, and it was not uncommon for the kidneys, spleen, or other organs to be exposed and slashed."⁸

Often times, many died before being crucified just from the scourging.

To further humiliate and weaken the victim about to be crucified, the Roman soldiers would make them carry their own cross (the cross bar) to the execution site.

There can be no doubt that the scourging of Jesus left Him so weak and worn down, that He was not able to carry His own cross.

Mark 15:21 says that the Roman soldiers “compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian...as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross.”

The Crucifixion of Jesus

Luke 23:33 says, “And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.”

As noted above, the scourging of Jesus would have been enough to kill a man let alone the horrific torment of the Roman cross.

Roman crucifixion was one of the worst deaths ever imagined. The Romans had decades to perfect their techniques of punishment. The cross allowed the Romans to get the most effective way of torture and death that they could possibly extract from an individual. Its purpose was to extend the suffering of the victim as long and excruciatingly as possible; to enhance an already horrific death.

We often underestimate the Roman cross. We see representations of our Lord on the cross and we’ve become so desensitized to it that it’s no wonder false theories like the “swoon theory” arise and we wonder how a person could possibly come up with this – do they not know what kind of torture and death that the Roman cross inflicted?

Crucifixion would have involved laying Jesus on His open lacerated bleeding back on a huge rough splintery cross. The Roman soldiers would take spikes, five to seven inches long and hammer them between the two arm bones at the wrist crushing the median nerve.

“The pain was absolutely unbearable...In fact, it was literally beyond words to describe; they had to invent a new word: excruciating. Literally, excruciating means ‘out of the cross.’...they had to create a new word, because there was nothing in the language that could describe the intense anguish caused during crucifixion.

At this point Jesus was hoisted as the cross bar was attached to the vertical stake, and then nails were driven through Jesus’ feet. Again the nerves in his feet would have been crushed...Crushed and severed nerves were certainly bad enough...his arms would have been immediately stretched, probably about six inches in length, and both shoulders would have been dislocated...This fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy in Psalm 22, which foretold the Crucifixion hundreds of years before it took place, ‘My bones are out of joint.’”⁹

Often, death was caused by asphyxiation. Because of the position and tension on the diaphragm, the victim would have to push up on the spike in their feet, ripping flesh until it lodged against a bone, to take a breath of air. Pushing up would have meant that Jesus’ raw lacerated back would have been scraping the course wood of the cross.

After a few hours of this, with exhaustion and intense, excruciating pain

from pushing up, unable to do it anymore, respiratory acidosis would set in – “the carbon dioxide in the blood is dissolved as carbonic acid, causing the acidity of the blood to increase. This eventually leads to an irregular heartbeat...[and] cardiac arrest.”¹⁰

Whether dying from cardiac arrest or from asphyxiation, crucifixion was 100 percent fatal.

The Spear Thrust into the Heart

John 19:33, 34 says, “But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead...one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.”

Let there be no doubt, Jesus was dead. John 19:30 says, “[Jesus] said, ‘It is finished!’ And bowing His head, *He gave up His spirit.*” (emphasis added)

John’s detail of the account in verse 34 only confirms Jesus was already dead when the soldiers came to break His legs (John 19:31-33):

“We are told on eyewitness authority that “blood and water” came out of the pierced side of Jesus...The eyewitness clearly attached great importance to this. Had Jesus been alive when the spear pierced His side, strong spouts of blood would have emerged with every heart beat. Instead, the observer noticed semi-solid dark red clot seeping, distinct and separate from the accompanying watery serum. This is evidence of massive clotting of the blood in the main arteries, and is exceptionally strong medical proof of death...The “blood and water” from the spear-thrust is proof positive that Jesus was already dead.”¹¹

Clearly, the type of abuse that Jesus took was enough to kill any man and we can concur with the apostle John in 19:35 when he says, “And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.”

Dr. Alexander Metherell, a medical doctor and research scientist, comments...“After suffering that horrible abuse, with all the catastrophic blood loss and trauma, he would have looked so pitiful that the disciples would never have hailed him as a victorious conqueror of death; they would have felt sorry for him and tried to nurse him back to health.”¹²

John Ankerberg and John Weldon conclude:

“Indeed, survival from crucifixions was unknown; just as today, men simply do not survive the firing squad, electric chair, lethal injection, or gas chamber. Because the law decreed the prisoner’s death, even if a first attempt fails, procedures are repeated until death occurs. Death by crucifixion was just as certain as by any modern method of execution; there was no escape.”¹³

The bottom line is this; the Roman soldiers were meticulous executioners. They had experience with possibly hundreds of executions under their belts and they would have been particularly knowledgeable when it came to death.

The fact that Jesus was no longer pushing up to exhale also would have been a tell-tale sign that He was no longer breathing and thus, dead. Between the scourging, the crucifixion and the spear thrust into His side it's very obvious that the Jewish leaders had fulfilled their desire "to kill Him" (John 5:16, 17; 7:25; 8:37; 8:40).

Let's move on to the second letter in the acronym F. E. A. T. S – Empty Tomb.

2. Empty Tomb

Jesus had just been crucified and His words of 'rising again after three days' were still ringing in the chief priests and the Pharisees ears.

This worried them so they decided to talk to Pilate.

- Matthew 27:62-64 says, "On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, 'Sir, we remember while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So that the last deception will be worse than the first.'"

Pilate's response in Matthew 27:65 is very revealing.

- "'You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how.' So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard."

There are three things to take notice of in the above verse.

1. The Soldiers. The word *guard* or *watch*, in the KJV, [Greek: *koustodia*] means a "Roman sentry." For an important political figure like Jesus, it's highly possible that there were as many as 30, no less than 10 but likely 16 highly trained, able bodied, and fully armed Roman soldiers guarding the tomb.

The guard would have slept in shifts with at minimum 4 awake directly in front of the tomb during the night hours with the rest sleeping at the entrance.

These men were "instruments of conquest and domination"¹⁴ and were hard core military men, disciplined and dedicated to their tasks, cold enough to gamble over a dying victims clothing (Matthew 27:35).

It is important to note that if "any guard...deserted his post or fell asleep [he] would face crucifixion."¹⁵

There are recorded instances in Roman military history of soldiers who were executed for "sleeping on duty" and "negligence" but one could also be punished or executed for "leaving the night watch."

Bottom line is this, even if someone had planned to steal the body of Jesus, there would be no getting past these guys and these hard core soldiers would not have deserted their post for fear of execution.

2. The Stone. The Bible tells us that the stone that covered the entrance to

the tomb where Jesus was laid, was of formidable size as indicated by the following verse:

- Mark 16:1-3 says, "Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves. *'Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?'*" (emphasis added)

Scholars tell us that the stone could have weighed possibly as much as two tons, thus the comment by the three women wondering who would move the stone for them.

Josh McDowell explains further:

- "The opening to the central chamber was guarded by a large and heavy disc of rock which could roll along a groove slightly depressed at the centre, in front of the tomb entrance."¹⁶

Indeed, concerning the massive weight of the rock, "a phrase written in parenthesis, within the text of Mark 16:4 as found in a (fourth) century manuscript...adds, 'And when he was laid there, he (Joseph) put against the tomb a stone which twenty men could not roll away.'"¹⁷

It's worth noting that once the stone was rolled into place, it could not have been moved from the inside since it would have been impossible, not only because of the weight, but there would be no leverage and no handholds since the stone would have thoroughly covered the entrance.

Scholars and evidence point to the fact that the stone at the entrance of the rock-hewn tomb was so massive that the three women knew they would not be able to move the stone, let alone a man who had gone through what Jesus went through just three days earlier.

3. The Seal. The seal would have been more symbolic as a deterrent than the actual 16 Roman guards or two-ton stone.

- Matthew 27:66 says, "So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard."

As to the method of setting the seal:

- "The sealing was by means of a cord or string passing across the stone at the mouth of the sepulcher, and fastened at either end to the rock by sealing clay."¹⁸

Although the seal could be easily broken, the psychological factor that was associated with breaking an official seal of the Roman government would have been formidable in and of itself.

- "The 'seal' of the administrative authority in charge pressed into the wax, signifying its importance. Only the captain of the guard was

permitted to give permission for the breaking of the seal. Anyone breaking it without permission would be executed.”¹⁹

The overall impact of these three security measures only increases the case for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It would have been impossible to tamper with or steal the body of Jesus, not to mention explain away the resurrection by the “*swoon theory*.”

A. T. Robertson, Professor of New Testament Interpretation Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1895-1934) said:

- “The sealing was done in the presence of the Roman guards who were left in charge to protect this stamp of Roman authority and power. They did their best to prevent theft and the resurrection, *but they overreached themselves and provided additional witness to the fact of the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus.*”²⁰ (emphasis added)

The Testimony of Women

Matthew 28:1-8 says, “Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it...[and] the angel answered and said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. *He is not here, He has risen.*’” (emphasis added)

After three days in the tomb, Jesus Christ was resurrected according Scripture (Matthew 28:6; Acts 17:18; Romans 6:5) as well as His own predictions in John 11:25 “I am the *resurrection* and the life”

John 20:1 also tells us that it was Mary Magdalene who Jesus first appeared to, which is highly significant as Ron Rhodes explains:

- “If the resurrection story were a fabrication by the disciples, no one in the first-century Jewish culture would have invented it this way. The fact is that in Jewish law a woman’s testimony was unacceptable in any court of law except in a very few circumstances. A fabricator would have been much more likely to place Peter or one of the other male disciples at the resurrection tomb.”²¹

We can see several evidences of the low view of women in the first century in the following quotes: ²²

- “Sooner let the words of the Law be burnt than delivered to women.” (Talmud, Sotah 19a)
- “Any evidence that a women [gives] is not valid (to offer), also they are not valid to offer. This is equivalent to saying that one who is Rabbinically accounted a robber is qualified to give the same evidence as a woman.” (Talmud, Rosh Hashannah 1:8)

If the resurrection of Jesus was a fabricated story, the writers would not have used women as the first people at the tomb given the low place that women held in the first-century; they would have used men of high reputation to be the first at the tomb to further bolster the resurrection story.

When you take into account **the soldiers, the stone, and the seal**, you find it impossible for the body of Jesus to have been stolen by a band of scared, frightened and confused disciples (Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:50), or that He was revived and rolled the stone away Himself.

And the **testimony of the women** at the tomb only bolsters or reinforces that the story was not fabricated but was indeed a true event.

Let's move on to the third letter in the acronym F. E. A. T. S – Appearances of Christ.

3. Appearances of Christ

As stated earlier, Jesus said in John 2:19-21, "'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.'...but He was speaking of the temple of His body."

It must be pointed out that there is a one-to-one correlation between the body that dies and the body that is resurrected.

When we die and are eventually resurrected, it is still us, we are still recognizable as Jesus was, but it is a new glorified body.

We know it's the same body based on John 20:27 when Jesus appeared to His disciples and told Thomas specifically to "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving but believing."

It was His same body yet, it was a glorified body.

One of the strongest evidences for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the physical appearances in the days that followed His crucifixion and resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 contains one of the earliest creeds in the New Testament.

- 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 says, "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: *that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.*" (emphasis added)

It is believed, and with good reason, that this creed developed within five years of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- “In fact, many critical scholars hold that Paul received it from the disciples Peter and James while visiting them in Jerusalem three years after his conversion. If so, Paul learned it *within five years of Jesus’ crucifixion* and from the disciples themselves.”²³ (emphasis added)

This is extremely important due to the fact that not only were the disciples around to dispute this statement if it was incorrect, but also the people mentioned in the next verses were still around to also dispute the statement if it was not correct:

- 1 Corinthians 15:6 says, “After He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.”

Lee Strobel and Dr. Gary Habermas discuss the importance of this verse in *The Case for Christ*:²⁴

1. Even though it’s only reported in one source, it just so happens to be the earliest and best-authenticated passage of all.
2. Paul apparently was in close contact or knew people still in close contact with these five hundred people since he knew some “of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.”

Dr. Habermas says, “Now, stop and think about it: you would never include this phrase unless you were absolutely confident that these folks would confirm that they really did see Jesus alive. I mean, Paul was virtually inviting people to check it out for themselves! He wouldn’t have said this if he didn’t know they’d back him up.”

And finally, Paul says that Jesus was seen by James and by himself.

- 1 Corinthians 15:7-8 says, “After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.”

(Continued in [part II](#).)