

This is from Study Section 8 from the course, Bible Doctrines Survey I

The Doctrine of Christ

Was Jesus a Historical Person?

For us as Christians the question is not so much whether Jesus really existed - we have no doubt about that - but what evidence we have for our belief. Well, there is plenty of evidence from a variety of different sources:

The Bible gives clear evidence for Jesus' existence.

The gospels describe his birth and date it at the time of the Roman census decreed by Caesar Augustus (**Luke 2:1-7**) and in the last years of Herod the Great (**Matthew 2:1, 19**). They describe his life, acts, and teachings at great length. Luke points out (**Luke 3:23**) that he was about 30 years old, when he began his public ministry. John tells us (**John 2:20**) that this was in the 46th year of the construction of the temple (roughly AD 26). The events of his public ministry span about three and a half years. All gospels describe his death on the cross at the beginning of the Jewish Passover, while Pilate was the Roman governor. All four gospels clearly describe that he rose on the third day.

Since the Bible is totally reliable, then the history of Jesus Christ presented in the Gospel is reliable.

Further, secular historians make especially good witnesses for the fact that Jesus was a historical person.

Many of the early Roman historians refer to him as a real person.

Thallus was an early historian who wrote in Koine Greek. He wrote a three-volume history of the Mediterranean world from before the Trojan War to the 167th Olympiad, c. 112-109 BC. The works are considered important by some Christians because they believe them to confirm the historicity of Jesus and provide non-Christian validation of the Gospel accounts: a reference to a historical eclipse, attributed to Thallus, has been taken as a mention of the darkness described in the Synoptic gospels account of the death of Jesus, although an eclipse could not have taken place during Passover when this took place.¹

Cornelius Tacitus (A.D. 55-120) is generally viewed as the greatest historian of ancient Rome, known for his integrity and accuracy. His *Annals*, one of his two most acclaimed works, cover the period from Augustus' death in AD 14 to the time of Nero (AD 68). They mention the existence of Christians in Rome and allude to the death of Christ under Pontius Pilate to explain who they are. Here is a quote from his *Annals* 15:44:

*"Christus (Christ), the founder of the name, was Put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign Of Tiberius:..."*²

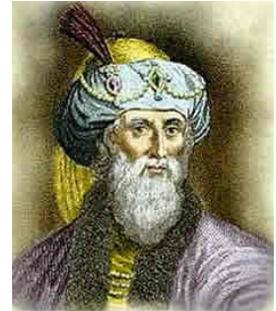
Plinius, governor in Asia Minor in AD 112, wrote a short letter to the Roman emperor, Trajan, to seek counsel how to treat Christians, since there were so many that he was putting to death. He as well tries

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thallus_\(historian\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thallus_(historian))

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontius_Pilate#:~:text=Pilate's%20role%20in%20condemning%20Jesus,Pontius%20Pilate%2C%20and%20the%20pernicious

to explain their belief and points out that he found it impossible to force them to curse this Christ (as a means to humiliate them), even if it cost them their lives. He mentions Christianity, Christians, and the name of Christ ten times in the short letter, even remarking that Christians "addressed a form of prayer to Christ, as to a divinity."³

Flavius Josephus (AD 37-100), a Jewish general and historian who shortly after the time of Christ (1st Century historian), penned a controversial paragraph about Jesus:



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 then ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct to this day. (Antiquities of the Jews, XVIII.3. 3)

4

Second Century writers

First and second century writers provide additional testimony. People like Eusebius, Papias, Clement of Rome, Irenaeus (about AD 130) confirm the biblical account. For them this was recent history and there was a chain of witnesses from the time of Jesus to them, which they could track down.

Other Historical Evidence:

In October 2002, archaeologists found an ossuary near Jerusalem used for burying only during the first and second century. Its inscription mentions James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus. The latter is highly unusual, because one hardly mentions a brother, so this brother must have been very important. Most scholars believe that this is one of the strongest historical evidences for the fact that Jesus lived exactly in the time and family that the Bible describes. Some skeptics have stated that the inscription is a later addition to the ossuary but In 2008, an archaeometric analysis conducted by Amnon Rosenfeld, Howard Randall Feldman, and Wolfgang Elisabeth Krumbein strengthened the authenticity contention of the ossuary. It found that patina on the ossuary surface matched that in the engravings, and that microfossils in the inscription seemed naturally deposited.⁵



³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pliny_the_Younger_on_Christians

⁴ <http://www.biblicaljesus.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/basics.tour/ID/2/Historical-Jesus.htm>

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Ossuary



Even the strongest critics cannot deny that Jesus Christ existed, as the evidence is beyond doubt.

People confronted with the above evidence may admit that Jesus really existed but will then go on to say that was just a man, not God. They state that he never claimed to be God, or that he deliberately misled people, or that he himself believed to be God but obviously was not. Can there be any truths to these arguments?

The deity of Christ has been challenged by skeptics for thousands of years. Some say Jesus was just a great teacher, but not divine. Others say Jesus was the first creation of God and is not deity, but only a created being. Some say he did not die on a cross, but rather escaped. Others say he was married and had children. As you see, all kinds of fabricated stories exist which must be dispelled. Let's look to see what the Bible says about the identity of Christ Jesus.

The Bible says He was and is God!

John 1:1-3 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning. 3Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

This verse is talking about the Word (Greek word, **logos**) which means “**expression of God.**” In context, it is talking about Jesus Christ coming to earth as the Word of God and it clearly says that He was God. Other verses claim Him as God: Rom 9:5, I John 5:20.

Two verses later, John declares that the Word “made all things and without Him was not anything made that has been made. (vs. 3). In other words, Jesus was the CREATOR of the universe. We know from Genesis 1:1 that GOD created the universe.

Hebrews 1:8 *But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.*

In this verse, God the Father addresses Jesus, the Son as God. He not only is called God directly, Scriptures say He possess the attributes of God.

Colossians 2:9 *For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,*

The Greek phrase “fullness of Deity” is more literally translated, “fullness of **Godhead** (theotatos)” “Fullness” in Greek = “full measure”, “completeness,” “totality,” “sum total.” **Jesus is fully absolute divinity.** A word for word translation in Greek is *theotatos somatikos*: “Godhead in the FLESH”

Here are some of His divine attributes:

1. Self-existence (Heb.7:3; [John 5:26](#))
2. Immutability (Heb.1:10; 13:8)
3. Infinity: Eternality (Heb.7:3); Omnipresence (Matt.28:20)
4. He **created** the world ([John 1:3](#)).
5. He sustains the world (Col.1:15-17).
6. He **forgives** sins (Matt.9:1,2)
7. He performs final judgment ([John 5:22](#); Rev.19:16).

He not only has the attributes of God, but He receives the worship that only God deserves. In Hebrews 1:6 God the Father commands all the angels to **worship** the Son. Cross reference that with Isaiah 42:8a “*I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another...*” and God would not command anyone to worship and glorify another, yet in Hebrews 1:6 all are commanded to worship the Son. In John 9:38; 20:28, and Matthew 28:9 men worship Him as God and are not rebuked in doing so.

One of the most significant verses to validate His deity is a verse in **John 8:24**.

John 8:24 ²⁴“*Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.*”

The literal word for word translation of the Greek reads “I said therefore to you that you will die in the sins of you, for if you believe not that I AM (*ego eimi*), you will die in the sins of you.

The word “Yahweh” occurs some **5,300** times in the OT and is connected with the verb, “**to be.**” In Ex. 3:14, God declared His name as “I AM WHO I AM.” The I AM in verse 14 and the name for “Yahweh” in verse 15 are both derivatives of the same verb, “**to be.**” I AM (*ego eimi*) is God’s name in that the name expresses the full nature of God’s eternal nature. I AM and Yahweh have the same root meaning and can be considered interchangeable. Both mean “**eternal self-existence.**”

In John 8:24, Jesus told the crowd, that if they do not believe that Jesus is the I AM (eternal God), they will die in their sins. He was claiming to be God, and the reaction of the crowd was to take him out of the city and stone Him for blasphemy. They totally understand His claim but would not believe!

Isaiah 41:4

⁴“*Who has performed and accomplished it, Calling forth the generations from the beginning? 'I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last, I am.'”* (*ego eimi*)

Moses asked God who he should tell the Israelites who sent him, and...

¹⁴God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” In the Greek translation of the OT, *ego eimi* is used to translate God’s name, I AM. God told Moses to tell the Israelites that the I AM, the Eternal One, sent him.

In this verse, Jesus told those who heard him in the temple, **UNLESS YOU BELIEVE THAT I AM, YOU WILL DIE IN YOUR SINS!** According to this verse, every person must believe that Jesus is the Christ, Immanuel, God with Us, and receive Him as his Savior and LORD, he will die in his sins.

E. Jesus claimed to be **God** ([John 5:18](#); [8:24,28,58](#); [10:30-33](#)).

F. Other explicit claims ([John 1:1](#); Rom.9.5; [1 John 5:20](#)). Also there are four texts with grammatical forms proving that Jesus Christ = God (2 Thess.1:12; 1 Tim.5:21; Tit.2:13; 1 Pet.1:1 each fit the "Granville Sharp" grammatical rule proving 2 titles describe the same person).

CHECK THIS OUT! *Did JESUS CLAIM to be GOD | Bible teaching about JESUS CHRIST*



The Bible says He was and is fully human!

In the Bible, Jesus is not only declared God, but He is fully **human**. He was and is God in a human body. But why would God inhabit a human body? He possessed all the characteristics of a human and deity. He was born and had to learn. As He did, the Luke 2:40, 52 said he "increased in wisdom and stature." His mind and body developed from a child to a man. He had human needs. He had to eat food (Matt 4:2), drink water (John 19:28), and sleep (John 4:6) just like all humans do.

When He came to earth, He took on **humanity**. This is called the **incarnation**. He came to mankind to reveal to man who God is (John 1:18). He came to serve as our high priest before God (Heb. 4:14-16) and to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of all men (Heb. 4:14-16). The Scriptures say that the only way God can forgive sin is for a perfect sacrifice is offered up by the shedding of blood on behalf of those who have sinned. The sacrifice required the **death** of the lamb. How could God die, other than if He was willing to become fully man who came and willingly gave up His life as a sacrifice? God cannot die, but man can. So Jesus took upon Himself flesh to make our reconciliation possible.

Philippians 2:6-8 *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

The Life of Christ can be broken down into three major divisions:

1. The **Preparation** Years – Birth to Baptism ([Luke 1-3](#)) Through age 30 (1 B.C. – A.D. 29, [Luke 3:1,2,23](#))
2. The **Ministry** Years – Age 30-33/34 (A.D. 29 – A.D. 33)
 - a. The early Judean and Samaritan Ministry ([John 2:13](#) – 4:42)
 - b. The Galilean Ministry (Matt.4:12 – 18:35; [Mark 1:14](#) – 9:50)
 - c. The Perea Ministry ([Luke 10:1](#) – 19:28)
3. The **Passion** Week (including post-resurrection appearances – Matt.21:1 – 28:20; [Mark 10:1](#)– 16:20; [Luke 19:29](#) – 24:53; [John 11:55](#) – 21:25). Age 33/34 (March – April A.D. 33).

The Functions of His earthly life: While on earth Christ fulfilled the functions of Prophet, Priest and King:

1. Christ was God's **Prophet** (Matt.13:57; [Luke 13:33](#)). Christ was the ultimate fulfillment of the office of prophet as predicted by Moses (Deut.18:15; [Acts 3:22-26](#)). He delivered God's message to man by constant teaching and preaching (Matt.7:29, 11:1 etc.).
2. Christ was man's **High Priest** (Heb.4:14-16; 6:20-7:3; 7:26-28; 9:11-14; 10:11-14). As our human High Priest Christ could experience our weaknesses and temptations (Heb.4:14-18). As the sinless Son of God, Christ was the unique High Priest who could offer Himself as the once-for-all sacrifice for our sins (Heb.7:26-28; 10:11-14).
3. Christ came as **King** (Matt.27:11). The prophets and the angel Gabriel predicted that Jesus would come as the King of Israel (Is.9:6,7; [Luke 1:31-33](#)). He did (Matt.2:2; 3:2). He came offering the Davidic Kingdom to Israel, but they rejected it (Matt.22:1-14). So the kingdom age was postponed (humanly speaking). Someday the many kingdom promises of the Old Testament will be fulfilled in the Millennium after Christ returns to judge the earth ([Psalm 110](#); Matt.25:31; Rev.19:15,16; 20:4,6).

The Resurrection of Christ

Christ died on Calvary. He was removed from the cross, treated for burial, and was placed in a borrowed tomb not far from Golgotha. On the third day, He arose from that tomb and took life unto Himself once again. His physical body was resurrected ([Luke 24:39-43](#); [John 20:27](#)). Christ's resurrection body was not merely a "spiritual" or immaterial body. It was His physical body literally raised and gloriously transformed ([John 20:19](#)). Here are some "proofs" of His resurrection:

1. The tomb was **empty** (Matt.18:1-4 etc.). If the body had been stolen by the Romans, they could have produced it to disprove the resurrection (Matt.28:11-15). If the disciples had stolen the body it is impossible that they would have been willing to die for a lie ([Acts 4:1-22](#); [5:17-42](#); [7:54-60](#); [12:1,2](#)).
2. Christ appeared **numerous times** ([John 20:11-18](#); Matt.28:8-10; 1 Cor.15:5; [Luke 24:13-32](#); [36-43](#); [John 20:26-29](#); [21:1-14](#); 1 Cor.15:6, 7; [Luke 24:44-49](#); [Acts 1:9-12](#)). The sheer numbers of witnesses explains why 2 months later Peter's claim that Christ was raised were not contradicted ([Acts 2:14-42](#)).

Christians say Jesus rose from the dead three days after being crucified and placed in a tomb? Could His resurrection have been a colossal hoax, or can it be verified historically?



The apostle wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:12-14, 17-19, 32 *“But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.*

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

If the dead are not raised “let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to a Christian’s hope of eternal life. Paul says that without the resurrection our testimony of Christ is nullified and worthless. Our faith in Him is of no value since our salvation in Him is invalid. If Jesus did not raise from the dead, everyone person pity a Christian’s beliefs.

According to Paul, people who do not believe in the resurrection have no reason to live according to God's Word. It doesn't make sense to resist our human nature if there is no afterlife. If we cling to a hope that is not true, we are truly to be pitied - and this is how many unbelievers look at Christianity. Christianity is boring and takes away all the fun. We restrain ourselves for nothing. Why shouldn't we simply enjoy life in the fullest - after all, that’s all there is! As a popular beer commercial used to say, “You only go around once in this life, so you had better get all the gusto you can!”

Some say that Jesus was a prophet or a great teacher and a good man. However, to say He came back to life in three days is a bit too fantastic to believe. For them, the Christian claim that there is life after death is a wicked hoax foisted upon the minds of men. It is just a crutch. They believe that Christianity lets people hope in something that will never happen and forego all the joys of life for this empty hope. And they are right in seeing it that way ... if there is no resurrection.

But does an empty grave really prove that Jesus rose from the dead?

Skeptics of the resurrection claim it is a myth that people constructed out of the real events. “People don't come back from the dead”, they say, “so there must be some other explanation for the empty grave”. There are a few typical arguments that are proposed:

1. Jesus never died in the first place - it just seemed that he was dead.
2. He died, but somebody removed his body from the grave. This is probably the most popular idea, which got started by the Jewish authorities right after the resurrection (Matthew 27:62-65, 28:11-15).
3. The women, and subsequently everybody else went to the wrong tomb.
4. He rose from the dead, but not in bodily form - so his body still decayed.
5. The testimony of the witnesses is not valid. All of Christ's post-resurrection appearances were just hallucinations.

We will discuss each of these arguments more specifically after we have looked at the factual evidence. To show that Jesus was really resurrected from the dead, we have to find evidence that he was really dead in the first place, that his body didn't just disappear after he was buried, and that he rose with a material body - not just a spiritual one. Only then can we be sure that he actually overcame death.

So let's begin dealing with these claims...

Was Jesus really dead after the crucifixion?

All four gospels describe what happened to Jesus until he died. First, he was flogged, then he had to carry his cross to Golgotha, then he was nailed to the cross and left hanging until he died (**Matthew 27:26-35,46-50**).

Flogging itself is already a brutal procedure. The Romans didn't just use a simple whip, which already would have been very painful, but a device that scourged the victim with long pieces on metal and bone. Imagine what a single stroke with such a *flagrum* causes to the skin muscles and bones. Since the Romans showed no mercy and didn't necessarily stop at the Jewish limit of 40 lashes, victims of a Roman flogging often did not survive. So Jesus was probably half dead after that, and he certainly didn't receive medical treatment.

Add to that the beating Jesus received from the soldiers and it is no wonder that Jesus couldn't carry his cross all the way to Golgotha. So the Romans grabbed a man, Simon from Cyrene, to carry the cross for Jesus (**Mark 15:21**).

The crucifixion is another brutal punishment that the Romans inflicted on their victims. It was so brutal that many Roman citizens didn't even want to know what it really was like.

Death on a cross was the most painful death that the Roman mind could conceive. The giant nails pierced through the wrist and feet next to very sensitive nerves. Hanging by the arms prevented the victim from breathing so the legs were bent so that the victim could push himself up to breath, causing untold pain in his feet. Crucifixion brought dizziness, cramps, thirst, starvation, traumatic fever, tetanus, and untold agony to the body. The death was so painful, every nerve in the body cried aloud in anguish. Death suddenly becomes your friend, but it takes hours and sometimes days until it is over.⁶

All four gospels declare that Jesus gave up His life and died. In fact, John 19:31-35 records that he died even earlier than expected (at 3:00 PM), probably as a result of the awful scourging He endured. The Jews wanted the bodies to be removed before the Passover began at 6:00 PM, the Roman soldiers came and broke the legs of those crucified which asphyxiates the victim almost immediately. When the soldiers came to Jesus, he was already dead, so they chose NOT to break His legs. To validate His death, a Roman soldier rammed a spear in His side, piercing His heart. The fact that there was a sudden flow of blood and water didn't just prove that he was dead but even tells anatomists *how he had died* - rupture of the heart.

In Mark 15:42-46 we read that, when Joseph of Arimathea came and asked for the body of Jesus, Pilate was quite surprised that he was already dead. He asked the centurion if that was so and the centurion confirmed it. The Roman centurion who was an expert in killing people validated His death.

Joseph and Nicodemus removed Jesus' body from the cross and had to quickly anoint His body with burial spices and placed Him in Joseph's tomb.

⁶ Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, p. 205

The religious leaders responsible for Jesus' death and crucifixion knew that Jesus has foretold that after three days, He would come alive again. So to prevent Him from doing so, or from His disciples stealing His body and claiming that He had raised from the dead, asked Pilate for a Roman guard to be stationed at the tomb. Pilate ordered three things to be done to prevent the resurrection or possible disturbance to the tomb:

1. A large stone was rolled over the entrance of the tomb. The entrance to Jewish tombs was low, probably around 5' (the disciples had to stoop down to enter). That would mean that the stone covering the tomb would be probably 5 to 6 feet in diameter and at least 2 inches thick or more. Depending on the type of stone used, if it was granite, it would weight in between one and two tons (between 2000 to 4000 lbs.).⁷ A single person could not move the stone, as it would take at least two to three men to roll it into place.



Generally speaking, the rolling stone was set inside a groove in front of the entrance, and secured from falling over by a stone wall that stood in front of tomb opening (the rolling stone was sandwiched between the tomb entrance and stone wall as the pictures below illustrate). Often, the groove was not level, but slightly sloped. To close the tomb, the stone would be rolled down the groove at a decline and come to rest in front of the entrance. To open the tomb, the stone would have to be rolled up the groove at an incline, requiring more manpower to move it. Certainly, a couple of women could not move the stone.

2. The Roman Seal was place over the tomb. The seal was a sign of authentication that the tomb was occupied, and the power and authority of Rome stood behind the seal. Anyone found breaking the Roman seal would suffer the punishment of an unpleasant and immediate death. The Roman seal was a soft, moldable substance, probably clay, and was imprinted with the Roman imperial seal and attached to the stone with a rope. Should the stone be moved, the rope would break the seal.

3. The Roman Guard. This was either the Roman guards or the Jewish temple guards. The context of Matthew 27 favors the Roman guard. This guard was composed of a sixteen-man unit that was governed by very strict rules. Each member was responsible for six square feet. The guard members could not sit down or lean against anything while on duty. If a guard member fell asleep, he was beaten and burned with his own clothes. But he was not the only one executed; the entire sixteen-man guard unit was executed if only one of the members fell asleep while on duty.⁸

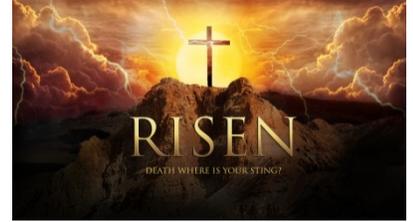
These precautions made the religious rulers feel secure that the excitement around Jesus would soon go away. Jesus lay dead in the tomb, and His frightened disciples had scattered and gone into hiding. They thought that they had won.

⁷ <https://theosophical.wordpress.com/2011/03/24/the-size-of-the-stone-covering-jesus%E2%80%99-tomb-2/>

⁸ https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_247.cfm

The Amazing Event

But the story was not over. The Bible says that after three days and three nights, early Sunday morning certain women came to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. The stone had been removed, the seal had been broken, the guards had fled, and the body was gone. An angel at the tomb asked:



Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen ([Luke 24:5,6](#)).

They went back to tell the other disciples, who at first did not believe their report. *And these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them* ([Luke 24:11](#)). However, they were persuaded to look for themselves, and they also found the tomb empty. This caused them confusion. The confusion vanished as the resurrected Christ first appeared to Mary Magdalene, then to some other women, and finally to the disciples. After being with the disciples for forty days, Jesus ascended into heaven. Ten days later, the disciples publicly proclaimed to all Jerusalem, and to the world, the fact that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead.⁹

Skeptics say that the disciples perhaps stole His body and told people that He raised from the dead. After the resurrection, the guards were in big trouble. Their negligence was covered by the religious leaders and they were paid to tell others that the disciples stole the body. The problem with this argument is that the body in the tomb was not only missing, but Jesus was alive and walking around the city showing Himself to His disciples and followers. He showed Himself to Mary Magdalene (John 20:10-17), to the women who returned from the tomb (Matthew 28:9-10), to Peter (Luke 24:34), to the disciples on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-33), and to all of the apostles (Luke 24:36-43, John 20:19-29). According to Paul in I Corinthians 15:6, 500 people at one time saw the resurrected body of Christ.

So Jesus' body didn't just disappear after he died – it came alive! And His body was not merely an illusion or aberration, but He arose in his physical body, recognizable to those who knew Him. It was His same body, but alive! He told Mary to stop holding on to him after his resurrection (John 20:17). He asked Thomas to place his hands into His side and touch His hands (John 20:24-28). He ate with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), cooked and ate breakfast for his disciples in Galilee (John 21:9), and physically ascended up to Heaven forty days after His resurrection which was observed by His disciples (Luke 19:29). He did things that only a physical person could do.

So the Bible clearly states that Jesus did in fact die and rise again, and that he rose in bodily form. We wouldn't need any more proof, but it is sometimes helpful to know that there is a lot of external evidence which confirms what the Bible says.

1. Ignatius (AD 50-115), Bishop of Antioch attests to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and that he rose again after three days. He relies on accounts of eyewitnesses that he personally spoke to.¹⁰
2. Both Jewish and Roman historians record that there were many eyewitnesses to the resurrection.

⁹ [Ibid](#)

¹⁰ <https://jamesbishopblog.com/2015/11/24/jesus-fact-4-crucifixion-full-historical-investigation/>

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus records Jesus' crucifixion and that he had been seen by many eyewitnesses afterwards.¹¹

Tertullian (AD 160-220) writes that the Jews almost forced Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Syria, to sentence Jesus to death by crucifixion. He also states that Christ's ascension is far more certain than the alleged resurrection of some other well-known person (Romulus). That is as close to a historical proof as one can get from a non-Christian.¹²

Plinius, governor in Asia Minor in AD 112, writes to the Roman emperor that Christians were willing to die for their testimony, since he doesn't know how to handle the fact that he had to put so many of them to death.¹³

3. Ten thousands of researchers have gone through the records to see if they couldn't come up with at least one piece of evidence against the resurrection. They found nothing. Instead they found repeatedly accounts of steadfast first- and second-century Christians who accepted contempt, opposition, persecution, imprisonment, torment, and even death. These early Christians had every reason to check out the basis for their beliefs. Some claimed to be eyewitnesses; others could track down a chain of people back to those witnesses, each checking out the reliability of the one before him. The fact that none of them wavered in his testimony indicates that they didn't just rely on some fictitious narration but on something that they had found to be the truth - the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For centuries it suffered from severe persecution, but no attempt to erase Christianity has ever succeeded. There would have been no Christianity if the belief in the resurrection wouldn't have a thorough foundation on truth.

Think of the many Christians over the past 2000 years whose life was radically changed after they turned from unbelief to Christ. No other reason than that Christ is alive can sufficiently explain that. No indoctrination, no matter how thoroughly can account for so many transformed lives.

Now let us go back to the specific objections that people raised. We have enough evidence to prove them wrong. But if that shouldn't be enough to make people at least think about the possibility that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead, we can even show that these objections don't make sense - given the historical facts that we know about these times.

There are four common theories suggested by skeptics who deny the bodily resurrection of Christ:

1. The Swoon Theory

This theory claims that resurrection is a myth because Jesus never died in the first place. He only swooned - didn't show any visible life signs but was still alive when he was placed in the tomb. After several hours, he was revived by the cool air of the tomb, got up, took off his burial cloth and departed. The problem with this theory is that the Roman centurion declared to Pilate that Jesus was truly dead, and a spear was thrust into His heart to validate that He was dead before removal from the cross. Besides, if Jesus did resuscitate in the tomb, it would be impossible for Him to have gotten out of the tomb because of the stone, and the guards would have stopped him. This is a ridiculous claim.

¹¹ *Jewish Antiquities*, 18.3.3 §63 by Josephus Flavius (Based on the translation of Louis H. Feldman, The Loeb Classical Library.

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontius_Pilate

¹³ <https://reasonabletheology.org/jesus-outside-the-bible-2-pliny-the-younger/>

2. The Theft Theory

This theory is the most popular attempt to deny the resurrection. According to this view, the disciples came during the night, stole the body from the tomb, and made it disappear. Later they spread the rumor that Jesus had risen from the dead and used the empty tomb as proof for their false claims. This theory is invalid for several reasons. First, the Roman guard would have prevented the disciples from stealing the body of Jesus. Second, the disciples were filled with fear and hiding after the crucifixion. They would never have had the courage to do such a thing (Mark 14:50). They were hiding out. And even if they did sneak past the guards and removed the body of Jesus, the grave clothes give a silent testimony that the body wasn't stolen secretly. No one, who sneaks past a Roman guard, sleeping or not, to steal Jesus' body would have taken the time to unwrap the body, fold the clothes properly (John 20:6-7) and then leave with the body. They would have left as quickly as possible. But the orderliness of the scene indicates that this didn't happen - it is inconsistent with the whole concept of secretly snatching a body out of the grave.

3. The Hallucination Theory

This theory is an attempt to disregard the Biblical testimony without explicitly stating that the Biblical account is wrong. It doesn't question that the disciples had seen Jesus appear to them, but it claims that these appearances weren't for real - they were just hallucinations. After all, the disciples had been under a lot of stress. They had lost their beloved Lord, remembered that he had predicted to rise on the third day, and then their mind was just playing tricks with them - they saw him, because they so deeply desired to see him.

As we have already discussed, Jesus rose in a physical body which was recognizable. He was handled and clung to physically. He ate food with his disciples. He did things only a physical body could do. And it is not possible for 500 people all at one time to imagine the same vision. And his multiple followers who saw him were willing to lay their lives down in testimony that they saw the risen Christ. Everyone who observed Him could not possibly have the same hallucination and be willing to die for their dream.

4. The Wrong Tomb Theory

The basic idea of this theory is fairly simple. The women, and subsequently everyone else, went to the wrong tomb. The neighborhood of Jerusalem is full of rock tombs and you need precise notes to find a specific grave. Given all the confusion on the day of the crucifixion the women weren't careful enough to take precise notes where they laid him. After all, they could only watch from a distance. So when they went back after the Sabbath, they probably went to the wrong tomb, found it empty, and were really confused. A gardener, working in the tomb guessed their intentions and tried to tell them that they had made a mistake. He said, *"You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He is not here - see the place where they laid him"*, and probably pointed to the right tomb. But the women were frightened and fled the scene.

The problem with this theory is that the women knew exactly where the tomb was. Both Matthew 27:61 and Luke 23:55 record that Mary, the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene observed carefully where the tomb was. They weren't at a distance. Matthew writes that they were sitting opposite the tomb. Luke makes clear that the women followed Joseph of Arimathea to the grave. One of the women was His mother; don't you think she would remember exactly where he was?

Also when the rumor of the resurrection began to surface, all the religious leaders would have to do is go to the right tomb and demonstrate the false claim by producing the body. That would have silenced the disciples forever and quailed the spread of his resurrection.

The Wrong Tomb Theory makes little sense. It doesn't arise from evidence but contradicts both evidence and common sense. Like all other theories that try to explain away the resurrection it arises from a disbelief in the possibility of God interfering with the natural course of events.

Summary

The Bible, the reliable and infallible Word of God, *attests* to the physical resurrection of Christ.

There are *hundreds of eyewitnesses* which couldn't all have been liars or lunatics.

1. There are many *visible consequences*, which can't be explained unless resurrection is for real.
2. All theories that try to refute the resurrection are inconsistent - they don't make sense.

If we take all this together, there remains only one logical conclusion: **The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is a proven fact.**

Why is physical resurrection so important?

The resurrection of the Christ and the promised resurrection of the saints is one of the key pillars of the Christian faith (1 Corinthians 15). Peter's first sermon on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:32-36**) is wholly and entirely founded on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Bible says that the resurrection was proof for the fact that Jesus had overcome death and opened the door to eternal life and that the Heavenly Father had accepted Christ's sacrificial death for our sins. Jesus himself had predicted his death and resurrection as sign (Matthew 12:38-40, 16:21, 17:9, 17:22-23, 20:18-19) and the Jews very well remembered this after his crucifixion (Matthew 27:62-65). Old Testament prophecies pointed to the resurrection as a sign of the Messiah:

Psalm 16:10 (ASV) *For thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol; Neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption*

The fact that the grave could not keep Jesus validates several things.

1. Jesus is the Messiah, Emmanuel, God with us!
2. Jesus has the power to do everything he promised, even though death, which again proves that *He is God*.
3. The *resurrection of the saints*, at this time already questioned by the Sadducees, *is a fact*, not a myth.
4. It was the cause for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which would come to believers permanently after Jesus had left this earth. Jesus said if He did not depart, the Holy Spirit could not come.
5. Without the resurrection it would have been impossible to establish the Kingly position of Jesus. It validated the fact that He was God in flesh and rightful King of kings.

On the third day after His death, Jesus's actual body came to life again and He walked among His followers. He touched them, ate with them, and taught them. Some people imagine resurrection to be something that happens only to the soul or the spirit. Jesus raised up His physical body so that His

followers recognized who He was. His resurrection validated who He was and the work He did on behalf of all men.

So, for the Christian it is important to know that Jesus did in fact rise in bodily form. If he rose as he promised, then we can be raised from the dead as well and life doesn't end with the physical death. His resurrection gives us hope that someday our bodies will be raised from the dead and we will receive a glorified body, just like Christ's resurrected body. Christ's resurrection justifies our hope in eternal life, and this makes all the difference in the world.

CHECK THIS OUT! *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? – Video 1*



CHECK THIS OUT! *The Resurrection of Jesus*

