

# WAS JESUS REALLY RAISED FROM THE DEAD? (Part II)

## CHAPTER 12

*“I say unequivocally that the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt.” -- Sir Lionel Luckhoo (the world’s most successful attorney according to the Guinness Book of World Records)<sup>i</sup>*

“Maybe the 'resurrected Jesus'  
was really just a vision or a hallucination.”



### Problems with this theory

- 1) It doesn't explain the empty tomb.
- 2) Over 500 people saw the risen Christ at one time.  
(READ 1 Corinthians 15:1-8)
- 3) The Bible tells us that people ate with Jesus and touched him after he was resurrected.
- 4) It doesn't explain what happened to a man named Saul.

## "Who was Saul?"



Saul was an enemy of the Christian church. He was there, giving his approval, when a young Christian named Stephen was stoned to death and then he set out with extreme passion to exterminate the Christian religion.

*“While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he fell asleep. **And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.** On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. **But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.**” (Acts 7:59 - 8:3)*

**One day, Saul decided to go to a city called Damascus so that he could arrest Christians.**

*“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.” (Acts 9:1-2)*

**Saul wrote this about himself ...**

*“For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers... If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.” (Galatians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:4-6)*

Saul (which was his name in the Hebrew language) later changed his name to Paul (which was his Greek name). He became a Christian, an apostle of Jesus Christ and writer of 13 books in the New Testament.

Tertullian (A.D.160 -220) of Carthage, North Africa reports that Paul was beheaded in Rome because of his Christian faith.

Origen of Alexandria (A.D. 185-253) writes that Paul suffered martyrdom in Rome under Nero. He was a Roman citizen so he was beheaded rather than being burned to death with the thousands of other Christian martyrs killed by Nero.

Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea (3<sup>rd</sup> century church historian) tells us that *“after defending himself the apostle was sent again on his ministry of preaching, and coming a second time to the same city, suffered martyrdom under Nero.”*<sup>ii</sup>

“What happened to cause an enemy  
of Christianity to become a leader and a martyr  
in the Christian church?”



**Paul tells us what happened ...**

*“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins ... was buried ... was raised on the third day ...and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve ... and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.” (1 Corinthians 15:3-7)*

**If you would like to read more about how this happened you can find this story in the book of Acts 9:3-22.**

Paul not only had to convince non-believers that he saw the risen Lord – but he also had to convince the apostles and the new Christians --and he did! (See Acts 9:21; 9:26-27)

Saul was not the only one who changed after seeing the risen Christ.

## **Consider the changed lives of the apostles!**

When Jesus was arrested his apostles deserted him (Mark 14:50) and Peter even denied knowing him (Mark 14:66-72).

**Just 50 days later, Peter and these same men boldly and courageously went everywhere transforming the world with their message that Jesus was alive! (See Acts 2:32, 3:15, 10:41) They became powerful leaders of the early Christian church. They suffered and were killed for the cause of Christ.**

“What happened to cause this group of timid cowards to become so courageous?”



**Answer: They saw Jesus Christ alive! (See 1 Corinthians 15:3-8)**

At times, these men were arrested, beaten and sternly warned not to speak about Jesus and his resurrection. However, they would boldly and courageously go right back out to the people and preach about the resurrection. (READ Acts 5:17-42)

Josh McDowell writes this about the apostles:

*“You could imprison them, flog them, kill them, but you could not make them deny their conviction that on the third day he rose again.”*

### **What ever happened to the apostles?**

James, son of Zebedee, was killed with a sword. (Acts 12:1-2)

Matthew was killed by a sword.

Andrew was crucified.

James, son of Alphaeus, was crucified.

Philip was crucified.

Simon was crucified.

Thaddaeus was killed by a spear.

Bartholomew was crucified.

John was exiled to the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9).<sup>iii</sup>

### **What about Peter?**

Origen (A.D. 185-253) reports that Peter was “*crucified head downward, for he had asked that he might suffer that way...*” He felt unworthy to die in the same manner as Jesus Christ.

## **Do you really think these men would die for a lie?**

*“The response that is usually chorused back is this: ‘Why, a lot of people have died for a lie; so what does that prove?’ Yes, a lot of people have died for a lie, but they thought it was the truth. Now if the resurrection didn’t take place (i.e., was false), the disciples knew it. I find no way to demonstrate that they could have been deceived. Therefore these eleven men not only died for a lie – here is the catch – but they knew it was a lie. It would be hard to find eleven people in history who died for a lie, knowing it was a lie.”<sup>iv</sup>*

## **Consider the changed life of James, the brother of Jesus.**

We find out that Jesus had brothers in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3.

*“Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?’ they asked. ‘Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?’”*  
(Matthew 13:54-55)

As we see, one of his brothers was named James. We also learn from the Bible that Jesus’ brothers did not believe that he was the Christ during his lifetime.

*“...even his own brothers did not believe in him.”* (John 7:5)

Later, after Jesus had been killed, James became a leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem (See Acts 15:13-21 and Galatians 2:9).

He later wrote the letter of James in the New Testament and begins this letter by calling himself, “*a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*” (James 1:1)

He was later recognized as an apostle of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:19). In fact, Paul ranked James right up there with Peter and John as “pillars” of the Christian church in Galatians 2:9.

Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian/philosopher wrote (around A.D. 93) that James was stoned to death by Ananias, the high priest because of his Christian teachings.

## **What happened to cause this kind of transformation?**

*“...Christ died for our sins ... was buried ... was raised on the third day ...**Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles...**”* (1 Corinthians 15:3-7)

## **OTHER EVIDENCES THAT THE RESURRECTION REALLY HAPPENED:**

### **1. The large number of witnesses**

1 Corinthians 15 says that "...*Christ died for our sins ... was buried ... he was raised on the third day ... After that, he appeared to **more than five hundred** of the brothers at the same time, **most of whom are still living**, though some have fallen asleep.*"

This letter was written and was being circulated during the lifetimes of the men and women who saw Jesus alive after he had been killed. If anyone wanted to make sure that this letter was true, all they had to do was to find one of these 500 people and ask them.

After Jesus was killed and buried, he appeared ...

To Mary Magdalene – John 20:10-18; Mark 16:9

To the women returning from the tomb – Matthew 28:1-10

To Peter later in the day – Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5

To the disciples on the road to Emmaus - Luke 24:36-43

To the apostles, with Thomas absent – John 20:19-23

To the apostles, with Thomas present – John 20:24-29

To the seven by the Lake of Tiberias – John 21:1-23

To more than 500 people at one time -- 1 Corinthians 15:6

To James – 1 Corinthians 15:7

To the eleven apostles -- Matthew 28:16-20

As he was taken up to Heaven - Acts 1:3-12

To Paul – Acts 9:3-6; 1 Corinthians 15:8

To Stephen – 7:54-60

To Paul in the temple – Acts 22:17-21, 23:11

To John on the island of Patmos – Revelation 1:10-19

J.N.D Anderson writes of the testimony of the appearances:

*"Think of the number of witnesses – over 500. Think of the character of the witnesses - men and women who gave the world the highest ethical teaching it has ever known, and who even on the testimony of their enemies lived it out in their lives. Think of the psychological absurdity of picturing a little band of defeated cowards cowering in an upper room one day and a few days later transformed into a company that no persecution could silence – and then attempting to attribute this dramatic change to nothing more than a lie. That simply wouldn't make sense."*<sup>v</sup>

## **2. The silence of the Roman and Jewish leaders**

These men were powerful and hostile to the Christian faith. If they proved that the resurrection was not true, they could have destroyed Christianity forever.

In Acts chapter 2, Peter stood up in front of a large crowd of Jewish people and told them...

*“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him...God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.” (Acts 2:22-32)*

### **Why didn’t the Jewish leaders say that he was lying?**

Because Jesus’ body was not in the tomb. The empty tomb was there for anyone to examine it.

## **3. The rapid and massive growth of Christianity**

Christianity began in the very place it could be most easily stopped. In less than sixty days after Jesus was killed, the Christian church had 3,000 members and then it rapidly spread all throughout the Roman world. Today, Christianity is the largest religion in the world.

## **4. The absence of mourners at the tomb**

The tomb that Jesus was buried in never became a monument or an important place for people to come. **Why?** His body was not there.

## **5. Worship on the first day of the week**

One of the Ten Commandments is to keep the Sabbath day holy (see Exodus 20:8, 31:12-17, 35:1-3). The Jewish Sabbath day is Saturday. At the time of Christ’s death the Sabbath was a 1,500 year old tradition and a very important and sacred part of a Jewish person’s life. A great number of the early Christians were Jewish people. Yet, they began to worship on Sunday, the first day of the week. **Why would they break a 1,500 year old tradition that God Himself ordained?** To honor the resurrection of Jesus.

## **6. The phenomenon of the Lord’s Supper**

The Lord’s Supper is a memorial of Jesus’ death (see Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). However, we read in Acts 2:46 that this was a time of joy and happiness. The memory of the meal which led directly to the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus, their Lord and friend, would have been unbearably painful. **What changed the sorrow and anguish of the Last Supper into a communion of joy the world over?** Because He is risen!

## **7. The symbolism and meaning of Christian baptism**

From the very birth of the Christian faith, baptism was recognized as symbolically reenacting the death, burial (going under the water; dying to the old sinful nature) and resurrection of Jesus Christ (raising out of the water to share a new resurrected life with Christ). The New Testament explains that when a person believes and confesses that Jesus is Lord and Savior, repents of their sins and is baptized, they are united with Christ in his death and resurrection.

*“...don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.” (Romans 6:3-5)*

How are we to account for the symbolism and meaning of Christian baptism if the resurrection didn't really happen?

## NOTES

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<sup>i</sup> Ross Clifford, ed., *The Case for the Empty Tomb: Leading Lawyers Look at the Resurrection* (Claremont, CA: Albatross, 1991), 112. Cited in Ravi Zacharias and Norman Geisler, *Who Made God?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 2003), 97.

<sup>ii</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, ii. 22.

<sup>iii</sup> Josh McDowell, *More than a Carpenter* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1977), 61.

<sup>iv</sup> Josh McDowell, *More than a Carpenter* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1977), 62.

<sup>v</sup> J.N.D. Anderson, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ," *Christianity Today*. March 29, 1968. Cited in Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict Vol. 1* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, Inc.), 224.