

# **“Strengthen Your Faith” Lesson Series**

## **“Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus”**

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**ROOM FOR DOUBT**

# Room For Doubt

**Room For Doubt** encourages questions, addresses doubts, and strengthens faith. It offers a variety of resources, including a great website and a cool mobile app, video and animation productions, live presentations, and a growing number of curriculum options. It is a grant-funded project at [Lincoln Christian University](http://www.lincolncristian.edu).

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## How To Use This Resource

This lesson plan includes the main outline with blanks already filled in for you. It also provides gray “explanation boxes” with detailed explanations of the material in the outline as well as online videos and other resources. You can use it for self-paced learning. **Just go through the lesson yourself (or maybe with a few friends or family), learn what you can, and watch videos as you have time.** If you have time, check your learning by seeing if you can answer the questions in the Discussion & Reflection Guide at the end of the lesson.

We encourage you to install and frequently use the **Room For Doubt app** (for iOS or Android). It offers great searchable resources and even allows you to submit questions. See <https://www.roomfordoubt.com/app/> or use the QR code.



# Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus

Room For Doubt: “Strengthen Your Faith” Curriculum  
Web Address: [www.roomfordoubt.com](http://www.roomfordoubt.com)

**Lesson Objectives:** “This lesson helps students...”

1. Learn why the resurrection of Jesus is so critical to the Christian faith.
2. Discover the concept behind the “minimal facts” approach to showing that Jesus rose from the dead—a simple way of making the historical case for the resurrection.
3. Become familiar with how to defend four basic facts that powerfully point toward the truth of the resurrection of Jesus.
4. See why the claim that God raised Jesus from the dead is by far the best explanation of the four basic facts.

- These are the main topics we will discuss.
- For resources that can be used in the lesson, see the “Relevant Resources” section at the end of the lesson.

## Introduction

- You could play one or both of these two short videos before you start the presentation to get your audience excited about learning about this topic:
- (<2 min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDlCFgy7KG4>
- (4 min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sChJUaU5W9I&feature=related>

- A. Have you ever thought that a person can only believe in the resurrection of Jesus by a blind leap of faith? Have you ever thought that it is not really possible to have evidence for a miracle that is said to have happened nearly 2,000 years ago?
- B. Many people do not realize that there is powerful evidence for the resurrection of Jesus—the historical event that is at the heart of Christianity.
- C. In this lesson you will be introduced to four facts that are widely accepted by nearly all scholars who study the historical Jesus (even scholars who are atheists).
- D. We will see that there is no good way to explain all of these facts unless Jesus rose from the dead.
- E. But we begin by examining why the resurrection of Jesus is so crucial to the truth of Christianity.

## I. The Importance of the Resurrection of Jesus

- A. The Apostle Paul says that if Jesus was not raised from the dead, then the Christian faith is “worthless” or “pointless.” *Everything* hinges on the truth of this *one* historical event!

Apostle Paul: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:17).

- Unlike other major world religions, the Christian Scriptures tell you that the entire Christian religion falls apart if one historical event did not happen. But fortunately, there is powerful evidence for this historical event!

B. The Bible consistently describes the resurrection as the most important evidence that our faith is true (Ac 17:2-3, 18, 31; 2:22-32; 3:11-16; 1 Cor 15:1-7).

C. The Bible also says that the resurrection of Jesus is what gives us hope that we will rise from the dead like He did (1 Cor 15:20-23; 1 Pe 1:3; Phil 3:20-21).

- If you want to take time to read any of the above verses, they are helpful in showing the importance of the resurrection; however, you will probably want to move through this section quickly. It is not hard to see that the resurrection of Jesus is critical to Christianity, but it is worth making the above points briefly—especially to an audience that is not composed mostly of mature Christians.

## II. The “Minimal Facts” Approach to Defending the Resurrection of Jesus

A. The “minimal facts” approach to defending the resurrection is a simple but effective way to show others that there is good evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

B. How many of you would be worried that you would get a response like the following if you tried to show an unbeliever that Jesus rose from the dead? “You only believe in the resurrection because you accept the Bible as God’s Word by faith. I don’t think the Bible is God’s Word or is even reliable, so I don’t believe what it says about Jesus.”

C. The neat thing about the minimal facts approach: It does not \_\_\_\_\_ **DEPEND** on the Bible being completely inerrant, inspired by God, or even generally reliable. The Bible *is* all of those things, but you can make the minimal facts argument without first *demonstrating* all of those things.

- Emphasize that you are *not* calling into question whether the Bible is inerrant or reliable or inspired by God. You are just saying that you don’t have to prove any of those things in order for the minimal fact argument to work. It relies only on the truth of a small number of “minimal facts” that are widely accepted even by skeptics. So nobody can dismiss this argument by saying that they don’t trust the Bible. Also, this approach has the advantage of having fewer facts to prove to the unbeliever in order to show that Christianity is true. You don’t have to show that the entire Bible is accurate in order to make a strong case that Jesus rose from the dead and Christianity is true. You can give the minimal facts argument and convince them to be a Christian. Then, once they are a Christian, you can work on showing them that the Bible is reliable and inerrant (and there is much value in doing that). But the most important thing is getting the unbeliever to become a Christian.

D. The minimal facts approach involves defending a small (minimal) number of facts (in this presentation, we will look at four facts). Together, these facts powerfully point to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. Each minimal fact: (a) is widely \_\_\_\_\_ **ACCEPTED** by scholars who study the historical Jesus (even skeptical scholars) and (b) has very strong \_\_\_\_\_ **EVIDENCE** supporting it.

E. Here are the four minimal facts we will examine:

1. Jesus \_\_\_\_\_ **EXISTED** and was crucified to death by the Romans.
2. Jesus’s empty \_\_\_\_\_ **TOMB** was discovered.
3. People believed they saw Jesus \_\_\_\_\_ **APPEAR** to them after He died.

4. Jesus's disciples \_\_\_\_\_ **SINCERELY** believed in His resurrection, and this led to the \_\_\_\_\_ **START** of Christianity.

- We will briefly examine some of the evidence for each fact, starting with the first.

### III. Fact #1: Jesus Existed and Died by Roman Crucifixion

- A. Essentially \_\_\_\_\_ **ALL** historians accept that Jesus lived and was crucified to death by the Romans.
- B. Numerous books of the Bible state this, and so do multiple secular (non-Christian) sources from the first century.

- In the Bible, there are: four Gospels, Acts, and multiple epistles (letters) that speak of Jesus and His crucifixion. These are independent sources, and they are all recognized as being written in the first century.
- Beyond the Bible, there are about a dozen and a half secular sources that mention Jesus and His crucifixion—and they often give details that agree with the biblical accounts. We will look at some of these briefly.

- C. Even Bart \_\_\_\_\_ **EHRMAN**, a famous scholar who does not believe in God, wrote a book called *Did Jesus Exist?* that defends the existence of Jesus.

“The reality is that whatever else you may think about Jesus, he certainly did exist. ... The view that Jesus existed is held by virtually every expert on the planet” (Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, pp. 4-5).

“One of the most certain facts of history is that Jesus was crucified on orders of the Roman prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate” (Ehrman, *The New Testament: An Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, pp. 261-2).

- You might want to read parts of the Introduction of Bart Ehrman's *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*. The top quote above comes from this Introduction. It explains why he wrote the book and how it is ridiculous to doubt the existence of Jesus. Ehrman is an agnostic who leans toward atheism. He is a famous skeptical New Testament scholar. You can read the Introduction for free online at: <http://books.google.com/books?id=hf5Rj8EtsPkC&pg=PT432&dq=ehрман+jesus+existed&hl=en&sa=X&ei=C5aHUu3dGuTA2gW0vIHYDA&ved=0CD4Q6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=ehрман%20jesus%20existed&f=false>

- D. A first-century \_\_\_\_\_ **JEWISH** historian named Josephus wrote about Jesus being crucified.

Josephus: “When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not cease...” (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.3.3).

- This was written during the same century that Jesus lived by a Jew named Josephus who recorded many historical events of the day. Josephus was not a Christian, yet he wrote about Jesus and His crucifixion.
- It comes from a writing called the *Antiquities of the Jews*. While there is dispute about the authenticity of a couple of things Josephus wrote about Jesus (it is rightly suspected that later Christian scribes added certain phrases to what Josephus wrote), the above quote is widely accepted by scholars. There is no basis for doubting the authenticity of this part of the passage.

- In this passage, which refers to Jesus (him), we see that Pilate ordered him crucified after being accused by the Jewish leaders, and Jesus continued to have followers.

E. A first-century \_\_\_\_\_ **ROMAN** historian named Tacitus also wrote about Jesus being crucified.

Tacitus: "Nero fastened the guilt [of the burning of Rome] and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular" (Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.38-39, 42-44).

- You might ask the audience how this brief quote agrees with details from the Bible. In this brief quote, we see that: Christians were named after Christus (Christ); Christ was executed during the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius (we know he reigned from 14 to 37 AD); and this happened in Judea and spread to Rome.
- The above quote continues, but I have shortened it for brevity. It goes on to say: "Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired."

F. Virtually no scholar (aside from \_\_\_\_\_ **MUSLIM** scholars) deny Jesus's death by crucifixion. So this first minimal fact is quite certain.

- Muslims are forced to deny that Jesus was crucified or even killed. This is because the Koran, in verses 157-158 of the 4th chapter (or surah) says: "But they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them so ... and they killed him not for sure... Nay! Allah took him up to Himself; and Allah is Mighty, Wise."
- But history is clear: Jesus was crucified. And people who were crucified did not survive. The Romans were quite good at killing people. This is a very awkward fact for Muslims. Their view of Jesus is contrary to what is unanimously accepted in scholarship (even by atheists like Bart Ehrman).
- Optional video... William Lane Craig addresses what the Koran says about the crucifixion of Jesus (4 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQbKXfi5EXQ>
- Optional video... a medical doctor discusses crucifixion, showing why people do not survive a crucifixion (6.5 min): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-EVfxABSoU>

#### IV. Fact #2: Jesus's Tomb was Discovered Empty

- We will now provide three key reasons why most historians accept that Jesus left behind an empty tomb: (1) Jesus was buried in a known tomb. (2) The tomb was discovered empty by women. (3) The earliest response of the Jews admits the empty tomb.

A. Evidence 1 of 3 for the empty tomb: Jesus was buried in a \_\_\_\_\_ **KNOWN** tomb by Joseph of Arimathea. Why is this evidence for the empty tomb?

- Ask: If true, why would this fact be evidence that Jesus's tomb was found empty?
- Answer: It means the location of the tomb was known to all. So if the body was still in the tomb, Christianity could not have started. The Jews and Romans surely went to the tomb

because its location was known. Since they could not produce the body of Jesus and squash Christianity before it got started, the tomb must have been empty.

1. Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Jewish \_\_\_\_\_ **SANHEDRIN** and is unlikely to be a person Christians made up.

- The Sanhedrin was the high court of the Jews (the 70 leading men in Judaism). There was hostility between the Sanhedrin and early Christians (after all, they condemned Jesus to death). So it would be embarrassing to the disciples that only a Jewish leader was brave enough to go to Pilate and ask to bury Jesus. Yet, despite being embarrassing, this is what the NT reports. The embarrassment factor adds to its credibility. Also, there is no competing burial story (no other first century account of what happened to Jesus). Also the gospel writers surely could not get away with making up a detail like this (saying that a specific, well-known Jewish leader buried Jesus) if that were not true. As a member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph would be a well-known individual.

2. If Jesus was buried in a known tomb, then it is hard to deny the empty tomb. If the location of the tomb was known, Christianity could not \_\_\_\_\_ **GET STARTED** in the very same city where Jesus was buried.

- Again, the Jews could just produce the corpse of Jesus. If the location of the tomb was known, nobody would accept the resurrection without an empty tomb.

- B. Evidence 2 of 3 for the empty tomb: the empty tomb was discovered by \_\_\_\_\_ **WOMEN**.

1. Women were second-class citizens in first-century Palestine.
2. The account given in the Bible of the discovery of the empty tomb is much more credible because women were said to be the first eyewitnesses of the empty tomb.

- Women could not even testify in a court of law in that culture. To give you an idea of the way women were viewed in Jewish culture at that time, here are some quotes: “Sooner let the words of the Law be burnt than delivered to women” (Talmud, Sotah 19a). “But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex...since it is probable that they may not speak truth, either out of hope of gain, or fear of punishment” (Josephus, *Antiquities* 4.8.15). Rabbinical sayings like “Blessed is he whose children are male, but woe to him whose children are female.”
- So why would the early Christians make up this embarrassing detail that women were first to discover the empty tomb? If you were trying to make up a credible story, you would not make women your primary eyewitnesses. The reason that women were said to be the first eyewitnesses is surely because that is simply what happened.

- C. Evidence 3 of 3 for the empty tomb: the Jewish leaders (the enemies of Christianity) \_\_\_\_\_ **ADMITTED** the tomb was empty.

1. Read Matthew 28:11-15. What story do the Jews make up about what happened to the body of Jesus? Why is that significant evidence for the empty tomb?

- The earliest Jewish response to the resurrection admits the empty tomb. They say that the disciples stole the body. This shows that they were forced to admit that the body was not in the tomb, and they tried to explain why the body was missing.

2. There is no reason for Matthew to say that the Jews were still claiming this if that were not true.

- Matthew says this story is being reported up to the day that Matthew wrote his Gospel. Why say that the Jews have always been circulating this false story if they weren't? Matthew would have nothing to gain by responding to a claim that was not even being made.
- So many scholars see this as evidence for the empty tomb. If the enemies of Christianity accept the empty tomb, then we have excellent reason to believe it. Any time an enemy admits something, it is likely true. If my enemy says I'm ugly, stupid, etc., BUT he admits that I am brave, then one can be pretty sure that I'm brave.

## V. Fact #3: People Believed They Saw Appearances of Jesus After His Death

A. The \_\_\_\_\_ **CREED** Paul quotes in 1 Cor 15 is key. Nearly all scholars think Paul received the information in it within \_\_\_\_\_ **5** years of Jesus's death. It lists witnesses to the appearances of Jesus.

- A creed is a statement of key beliefs.
- Read verses 3-8 in 1 Cor 15. Paul, as he says, is quoting information that he was given. Without getting into all the details about why, scholars very widely agree that in these verses Paul is quoting an early Christian creed (an early statement of belief that would be easy to remember and recite). Even skeptical scholars admit that Paul must have received the information in this creed within no more than 3-5 years after Jesus died. (Paul's meeting in Gal 1 was within 3-5 years after Jesus died, and Paul would certainly have known the information in this creed once he had this meeting with Peter and James.) Note that basically no scholars dispute that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (where this creed is quoted) and Galatians (where Paul describes meeting with Peter and James).
- The fact that this information was so early shows that what it says about the resurrection and appearances is not a legend that developed over decades or centuries.
- We will examine each appearance that is described in this very early creed and discuss why scholars find it plausible that these people did believe that they saw appearances of Jesus alive after He died...

1. The appearance to \_\_\_\_\_ **PETER** is widely accepted. Paul knew Peter (Gal 1:18) and spent two weeks with him.

- Thus, Paul could confirm that Peter had seen Jesus.
- A special appearance to Peter is also mentioned independently in Lk 24:34.
- Plus, the appearance to Peter is mentioned in this early creed.
- So virtually all NT critics agree: Peter claimed to see an appearance.

2. The appearance to \_\_\_\_\_ **THE TWELVE** is widely accepted. Paul knew some of them, and this appearance is mentioned in Lk 24:36-42 & Jn 20:19-20.

- By the Twelve, this means the remaining 11 (since Judas had killed himself). "The Twelve" is a title for the group of Jesus's close disciples. The Big Ten conference no longer has ten teams but keeps its name, and the same is true of Jesus's disciples.
- Again, Paul met members of the Twelve (e.g., Peter, as noted above) and could confirm this appearance with them.
- Plus, it is part of this early creed.
- An appearance to the Twelve is also mentioned independently in Lk 24 and Jn 20.

3. The appearance to over \_\_\_\_\_ **500** people is widely accepted. Paul apparently had contact with these people and knew some were still alive.

- Paul adds a comment about them to the creed. He notes that some had died (fallen asleep), but others were still alive. This shows Paul had some contact with them. Paul also goes out of his way to say that most of these people were still alive so that his readers knew that these people could be questioned.

4. The appearance to \_\_\_\_\_ **JAMES** (the half-brother of Jesus) is widely accepted. There is good evidence that he did not believe in Jesus before the crucifixion (Jn 7:1-10; Mk 3:21, 31-35), but after the crucifixion he became a Christian leader (Gal 1:19, 2:9; Ac 1:14, 12:17, 21:18; comments from Josephus).

- James and Jesus's other brothers did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah before Jesus died. In Jn 7:1-10, Jesus's brothers actually try to get Jesus killed, and it says they did not believe in Jesus. It is unlikely that Christians would make that up, since it admits the embarrassing fact that Jesus's own brothers did not believe in Him. (Again, facts that are embarrassing to the author are seen as more credible by scholars.)
- Yet after Jesus's death, we have great evidence that James became a key leader of the Church. The Bible and Josephus attest to this. So, something huge happened!
- Also, Paul met James (Gal 1:19) and could confirm that this part of the creed is accurate. James did claim to see an appearance, and this is widely accepted by scholars.

5. Finally, \_\_\_\_\_ **PAUL** adds to the creed the appearance to himself. Scholars do not doubt that Paul discusses his conversion here and elsewhere (e.g., Gal 1:11-16).

- Paul's life definitely changed. He's accepted by essentially all scholars as a historical person—a person who describes how his entire life changed after seeing Jesus. The book of Acts also describes this. Paul ultimately died for his belief in Jesus.

B. So almost every scholar who studies this area agrees that many individuals and \_\_\_\_\_ **GROUPS** of people—both followers of Jesus and \_\_\_\_\_ **SKEPTICS**—believed that Jesus appeared to them after His death.

“It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus' death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ” (atheist Gerd Lüdemann, *What Really Happened to Jesus?*, p. 80.)

“Why, then, did some of the disciples claim to see Jesus alive after his crucifixion? I don't doubt at all that some of the disciples claimed this. . . . Paul, writing about twenty-five years later, indicates that this is what they claimed, and I don't think he is making it up. And he knew at least a couple of them, whom he met just three years after the event” (Bart Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted*, p. 177).

- Gerd Lüdemann is a leading German critic of the resurrection and an atheist. Although he admits that the disciples believed they saw appearances of the risen Jesus, he has suggested that these appearances were hallucinations. We will see later why that suggestion has not proven convincing to very many scholars at all. The above quote comes from Lüdemann's 1995 *What Really Happened to Jesus?* (translated by John Bowden).
- Ehrman also does not believe in God and yet admits that 25 years after Jesus died (when Paul wrote 1 Cor) Paul cited an early creed. In the creed Paul says that the disciples claimed to see appearances of Jesus, and Ehrman admits that Paul must have received this information within a few years after Jesus died.

- Optional video... Resurrection expert Gary Habermas talks about dating the creed in 1 Cor 15 and why skeptics accept Paul (see 26:47-38:30): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pV5XxZQDLs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pV5XxZQDLs)
- Optional video... William Lane Craig discusses the appearances in 1 Cor 15 (8 min): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=96Wla3pZISE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96Wla3pZISE)

## VI. Fact #4: The Disciples' Sincere Belief in the Resurrection is Needed to Explain the Origin of Christianity

- Jesus's disciples sincerely believed in His resurrection despite this being an un-Jewish idea. Their sincere belief is needed to explain how Christianity ever got started.

### A. Why is belief in Jesus's resurrection an un-Jewish idea?

1. Their view of the \_\_\_\_\_ **MESSIAH**
2. Their view of rising from the dead to an \_\_\_\_\_ **IMMORTAL** existence

- The Jews did not expect the Messiah to be shamefully executed by their enemies; rather, they expected the Messiah to be a strong military leader who would rescue them from the control of the Romans. That is what Jewish writings of the time indicated.
- Also, the Jews didn't expect anyone to rise from the dead in an immortal body before the end of the world (e.g., see Jn 11:23-24). Some people were revived from the dead in the OT, but these people would eventually die again. But Jews had no idea of anyone (much less the Messiah) rising from the dead to an immortal existence before the end of the world. The Sadducees had no belief that humans would rise from the dead. The Pharisees only thought that there would be a general resurrection of the dead to an immortal existence at the end of the world.
- So, for the above two reasons, Jesus's disciples (who were Jewish) clearly came to believe some un-Jewish ideas. This demands an explanation, and the resurrection would certainly explain how these faithful Jews would come to believe un-Jewish ideas. And now we'll discuss why we can be sure they were sincere in these un-Jewish beliefs...

### B. Did the disciples really seem to believe that Jesus rose from the dead? Why?

- History shows that they went to their deaths for this belief, and people don't die for what they know is a lie. What would cause them to die for an un-Jewish belief? Seeing the resurrected Jesus would—and that is the reason they gave for their beliefs.
- What if a skeptic says: "What's the big deal? Just because they were sincere, that doesn't mean much. People die all the time for wacky, false beliefs. For example, Muslims blow themselves up for their beliefs." ... But the difference is that Jesus's disciples were in a position to know for sure whether their beliefs are true. They either saw Jesus (as they claimed), or they didn't. The Muslim, by contrast, does not know for sure that his faith is true. People don't generally die for what they *know for sure* is a lie. So the disciples were not only sincere in their belief—they were in a position to know for sure whether that belief is true.
- Someone might say: "But we don't know that all of the disciples were martyred." That's true. But even if we don't know that all of them were martyred, many of them were and they all put themselves in a position to be martyred. All of these Jewish men were willing to put themselves at great risk for promoting this un-Jewish idea.

### C. Apart from the disciples' sincere belief in the resurrection, it is difficult to see how Christianity could begin.

- The crucifixion of Jesus was a total disaster for the disciples. According to the OT, a crucified person like Jesus was considered under God's curse since crucifixion was considered a form of hanging on a tree (Deu 21:22-23; Gal 3:13; see also Ac 5:30). Without the resurrection, the disciples had no reason to go to their deaths for a crucified Jewish Messiah.

## VII. The Minimal Facts Can't Be Adequately Explained Without the Resurrection

- Recommended video (7 min)... This outstanding animated video from William Lane Craig's ministry Reasonable Faith does a fine job of summarizing everything that we have covered so far (minus the first fact about Jesus being real and crucified): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qhQRMhUK1o>
- Another recommended video (7 min)... This additional Reasonable Faith animated video does an outstanding job of summarizing what we are about to cover in the rest of the lesson, noting why the most popular naturalistic explanations (attempted explanations of the minimal facts that don't appeal to God supernaturally acting) do not adequately explain the minimal facts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6SbJ4p6WiZE>
- In what follows, we will examine the most popular non-supernatural theories about what might have happened to Jesus. We will see that none of them do a good job of explaining all of the minimal facts, and that's why none of them have been adopted by a large number of scholars. These theories include: the hallucination theory, stolen body theory, swoon (fainting) theory, wrong tomb theory, legend theory, and twin theory.

- A. Hallucination Theory: Jesus's disciples, in their grief, saw hallucinations of Jesus that caused them to believe that He appeared to them. Problems?
1. Hallucinations occur only in \_\_\_\_\_ **ONE'S MIND**. They are not experienced by groups. But the appearances of Jesus were seen by different people (including skeptics) in various locations & circumstances.
  2. It does not explain the \_\_\_\_\_ **EMPTY TOMB**.
  3. It does not explain the \_\_\_\_\_ **PHYSICALITY** of Jesus (eating, touching, etc.).
- B. Stolen Body Theory: Jesus's disciples stole the body of Jesus and then lied by claiming that Jesus rose from the dead. Problems?
1. It does not explain the \_\_\_\_\_ **APPEARANCES** of Jesus (which are especially critical in explaining the transformation of James and Paul).
  2. It does not account for the disciples' \_\_\_\_\_ **SINCERE BELIEF**. They had no reason to continue believing in a dead Messiah.
  3. Why would the disciples \_\_\_\_\_ **MAKE UP** a story that leads them to a life of suffering, poverty, persecution, and death?
- C. Swoon/Fainting Theory (aka Apparent Death Theory): Jesus fainted and was not actually dead when He was taken down from the cross. He then revived in the tomb and came out alive to appear to His disciples. Problems?
1. A \_\_\_\_\_ **HALF-DEAD** Jesus would not convince the disciples to believe that He \_\_\_\_\_ **MIRACULOUSLY** rose from the dead.
  2. It's medically impossible to \_\_\_\_\_ **SURVIVE** crucifixion. The Romans know how to kill people. The Jews wanted Jesus dead.

D. Wrong Tomb Theory: The women and disciples went to the wrong tomb and mistakenly thought Jesus had left the tomb. Problems?

1. It does not account for the \_\_\_\_\_ **APPEARANCES** of Jesus or the \_\_\_\_\_ **CONVERSION** of skeptics like James and Paul.
2. The burial by Joseph of Arimathea means the \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ **BURIAL SITE** was known to all.
3. Christianity's \_\_\_\_\_ **OPPONENTS** could have easily refuted Christianity by going to the right \_\_\_\_\_ **TOMB** and producing the body.

E. Legend Theory: The resurrection is a legend and never happened. The story was later embellished and became a legendary tale. Problems?

1. It does not explain the \_\_\_\_\_ **EMPTY TOMB**, the \_\_\_\_\_ **APPEARANCES**, or the disciples' \_\_\_\_\_ **SINCERE BELIEF**.
2. This theory conflicts with the \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ **EARLY DATING** of the material.  
\_\_\_\_\_ **EYEWITNESSES** were still around, so a legend could not develop.

F. Twin Theory: Jesus had an unknown identical twin who appeared to people after Jesus died and claimed to be the risen Jesus. Problems?

1. It does not account for the \_\_\_\_\_ **EMPTY TOMB**. The crucified Jesus would still be there.
2. It does not explain how James the brother of Jesus would become convinced that Jesus rose from the dead. James would be in a position to know if Jesus had a twin and if the twin was really Jesus. It is hard to believe everyone would be unaware that Jesus had a twin.

G. The theory that God raised Jesus offers best explanation for all of the known historical facts, and it fits with what is known about the life and radical claims of Jesus.

“The proposal that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead possesses unrivaled power to explain the historical data at the heart of early Christianity” (N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 718).

- We have great reason to believe that Jesus rose from the dead! This offers the best explanation for the empty tomb, the postmortem appearances, the transformation of the disciples and skeptics to believers in the resurrection, and the origin/growth of Christianity in the first century. All of these are to be expected if God raised Jesus. It also fits with Jesus predicting His death and resurrection and the claims he made about Himself to be the divine Son of God.

## Relevant Resources

A short video to build excitement about the topic of the resurrection (<2 min):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDICFqy7KG4><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDICFqy7KG4>

A short video to build excitement about the topic of the resurrection (4 min):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sChJUaU5W9I&feature=related>

This outstanding animated video from William Lane Craig's ministry Reasonable Faith does a great job of summarizing the minimal facts (minus the first fact about Jesus being real and crucified) that we covered (7 min):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qhQRMhUKIo>

This additional Reasonable Faith animated video does an outstanding job of summarizing why the most popular naturalistic explanations do not explain away the minimal facts (7 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Sbj4p6WiZE>

Room For Doubt Q&A articles related to the resurrection of Jesus:

<https://app.roomfordoubt.com/category/51/Resurrection>

William Lane Craig addresses what the Koran says about the crucifixion of Jesus (4 min):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQbKXfi5EXQ>

A medical doctor discusses crucifixion, showing why people do not survive a crucifixion (6.5 min):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-EVfxABS0U>

As noted in the lesson, you may want to refer to the Introduction of Bart Ehrman's *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*. You can read the Introduction for free online at:

<http://books.google.com/books?id=hf5Rj8EtsPkC&pg=PT432&dq=ehrman+jesus+existed&hl=en&sa=X&ei=C5aHUu3dGuTA2gW0vIHIDA&ved=0CD4Q6AEwAO#v=onepage&q=ehrman%20jesus%20existed&f=false>

Resurrection expert Gary Habermas talks about dating the creed in I Cor 15 and why skeptics accept Paul (see 26:47-38:30): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pV5XxZQDLs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pV5XxZQDLs)

William Lane Craig discusses the appearances in I Cor 15 (8 min): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=96Wla3pZISE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96Wla3pZISE)

# Discussion & Reflection Guide: Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus

A Resource Provided by Room For Doubt

[www.roomfordoubt.com](http://www.roomfordoubt.com)

1. What significance does knowing this historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus have to you personally? How has this study impacted your faith and your relationship with Christ?

- E.g., in terms of your hope, joy, moral and spiritual motivation, the way you think about God and His love and forgiveness, etc.

2. Why is Jesus's resurrection often pointed out as THE most crucial piece of evidence that Jesus was everything He claimed to be? Elaborate. (See 1 Cor 15:12-19)

- If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then the Christian faith is pointless (1 Cor 15:17). The resurrection is the most important evidence that our faith is true (Ac 2-3, 17; 1 Cor 15); it gives us hope that we will rise from the dead like Jesus did (1 Cor 15:20-23; 1 Pe 1:3; Phil 3:20-21). Also, Jesus would be a lunatic or a liar if He did not back up His claims about Himself—claims that He would rise from the dead to prove He is the Son of God.

3. What is the idea behind a “minimal facts” approach to showing that the resurrection is historical?

- It simplifies the argument that Jesus rose from the dead. One does not have to show that every truth claim in the Gospels or in the Bible is true in order to show that Christianity is true (not that we deny that it is all true). The “minimal facts” that we identified are all widely accepted by scholars (even skeptical ones), and there is powerful evidence for each fact. So, when presenting this “minimal facts” argument to unbelievers, the unbeliever cannot just dismiss the facts because they come from the Bible. These are well-accepted facts, and a strong case for the resurrection can be built on these facts alone.

4. Do you remember the four “minimal facts”?

- They are: (1) Jesus existed and was crucified to death by the Romans; (2) Jesus's empty tomb was discovered; (3) Jesus appeared alive after His death to a variety of people; and (4) Jesus's disciples sincerely believed in His resurrection, and this led to the start of Christianity.
- A good way to remember the four facts is that the evidence should help our fears and doubts to C.E.A.S.E.
- Crucified (Fact #1)
- Empty tomb (Fact #2)
- Appearances alive after death (Fact #3)
- Sincere belief of disciples (Fact #4)
- -----
- Explanation: The best explanation of these facts is that God raised Jesus from the dead.

5. What reasons do you remember about why we can be confident of the first fact (that Jesus existed and died by Roman crucifixion)?

- Essentially all historians accept this; numerous ancient sources from the first century (in the Bible and not in the Bible) report this; atheist scholar Bart Ehrman wrote a book arguing that Jesus was real and was crucified.

6. Muslims disagree with essentially all historians by denying the crucifixion of Jesus. The Koran specifically says Jesus was not crucified, which goes against overwhelming historical evidence. How might this fact be useful when witnessing to a Muslim?

- It is awkward for Muslims that their holy book, the Koran, denies a fact about Jesus that is widely considered to be historically indisputable. This counts strongly against the truth of Islam.

7. The second minimal fact is that Jesus left behind an empty tomb. What do you remember about the evidence for this?

- (1) Jesus was likely buried in a known tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea, so Jesus had to have been missing from the tomb in order for Christianity to get off the ground. (2) The tomb was discovered empty by women, and this gives credibility to the empty tomb story because women had little credibility in that culture; it is not likely to be a fact that early Christians would make up. (3) The earliest response of the Jewish opponents of Christianity admits the empty tomb by saying that the disciples stole the body of Jesus.

8. Why do the vast majority of historians accept the third key fact (that numerous individuals and groups believed that they saw Jesus appear to them alive after He had died)?

- A huge reason is that the Apostle Paul cited what is widely considered to be an early Christian creed (or statement of belief) that even atheist historians date to within five years of the death of Jesus. This creed lists numerous individuals and groups who claimed to see an appearance of Jesus, and there is powerful evidence that Paul knew these people personally and could confirm that they saw these appearances.

9. The fourth key fact is that Jesus's disciples sincerely believed in His resurrection despite this being an un-Jewish idea, and their sincere belief is needed to explain the origin of the Christian faith. Why was belief in the resurrection an un-Jewish idea? Why think that the disciples of Jesus sincerely believed in His resurrection?

- First-century Jews did not expect the Messiah to be shamefully executed by their enemies; they expected a military ruler. Also, they didn't expect anyone to rise from the dead in an immortal body before the end of the world... The disciples sincerely believed in the resurrection, as evidenced by the fact that these Jewish men went to their deaths for an un-Jewish idea. People don't die for what they know for sure is a lie, and they were in a position to know whether Jesus rose from the dead or not.

10. What is the hallucination theory? Why is this not a good theory?

- The theory: Jesus's disciples, in their grief, saw hallucinations of Jesus that caused them to believe that He appeared to them.
- Problems with the theory: (1) Hallucinations occur only in one's mind. They are not experienced by groups. BUT the appearances of Jesus were seen by different people (including skeptics) in various locations & circumstances. (2) It does not explain the empty tomb (3) It does not explain the physicality of Jesus (eating, touching, etc.).

11. What is the stolen body theory? Why is this not a good theory?

- The theory: Jesus' disciples stole the body of Jesus and then lied by claiming that Jesus rose from the dead.]
- Problems with the theory: (1) It does not explain the appearances of Jesus (which are esp. critical in explaining the transformation of James and Paul). (2) It does not account for the disciples' sincere belief. Jewish disciples had no reason to continue believing in a dead messiah. (3) Why would the disciples cook up a story that leads them to a life of suffering, poverty, persecution, and death?

12. What is the swoon theory (aka the "apparent death" theory)? Why is it not a good theory?

- The theory: Jesus fainted and was not actually dead when He was taken down from the cross. He then revived in the tomb and came out alive to appear to his disciples.
- Problems with the theory: (1) A half-dead Jesus would not make the disciples believe that He rose from the dead. (2) It's medically impossible to survive crucifixion. The Romans know how to kill people. The Jews wanted Jesus dead.

13. What is the wrong tomb theory? Why is this not a good theory?

- The theory: The women and disciples went to the wrong tomb and mistakenly thought Jesus had left the tomb.
- Problems with the theory: (1) It does not account for the appearances or the conversion of skeptics like James and Paul; (2) The burial by Joseph of Arimathea means the burial site was known to all; (3) It'd be easy for opponents of Christianity to refute Christianity (just go to the right tomb and produce the body).

14. What is the legend theory? Why is this not a good theory?

- The theory: The resurrection is a legend and never happened. The story was later embellished and became a legendary tale.
- Problems with the theory: (1) It does not explain the empty tomb, the appearances, or the disciples' sincere belief and the origin of Christianity; (2) many sources about the life of Jesus were written during the lifetime of the eyewitnesses who could refute legend; the creed in 1 Cor 15 goes back to within 5 years of Jesus; (3) historians show it takes at least two generations before legend can replace a historical account.

15. What is the twin theory? Why is this not a good theory?

- The theory: Jesus had an unknown identical twin who appeared to people after Jesus died and claimed to be the risen Jesus.
- Problems with the theory: (1) It does not account for the empty tomb since the crucified Jesus would still be in the tomb; (2) it does not do a good job of explaining how James the brother of Jesus would become convinced that Jesus rose from the dead. James would be in a position to know if Jesus had a twin and if the twin was really Jesus.