

# THE LIFE OF CHRIST

## THE MISSION AND MESSAGE OF JESUS



*Challenge:*

Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

*Response*

### H E A R T

#### HONORABLE BURIAL

All four Gospels testify to the fact that Jesus was honorably buried in a known tomb: Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42

#### EMPTY TOMB

All four Gospels also report that three days later that known tomb was empty: Matthew 28:1-7; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-3; John 20:1-10

#### APPEARANCES

Matthew, Luke and John report post-resurrection appearances, Mark implies them. Paul reports that Jesus appeared to Peter, then the Twelve, then to more than 500 people at the same time. He makes a point to note that most of those 500 were still alive when Paul wrote his first letter to the church at Corinth, suggesting that if they did not believe him there was still ample eyewitness testimony to corroborate his claim (multiple attestation).

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

#### RISE OF CHRISTIANITY

One of the most significant incontrovertible facts is that Christianity, a Trinitarian belief, rose out of the one people group in the whole world we would least expect it to. The fact that faithful Jews, people whose very identity is tied to the worship of YHWH the Father alone, would begin to worship YHWH the Father *and* YHWH the Son, itself demands explanation.

"What are we to do about reconciling the two contradictory phenomena [Jesus' clear moral teaching and his claim to be God]? One attempt consists in saying that the man did not really say these things; but that His followers exaggerated the story, and so the legend grew up that he had said them. This is difficult because His followers were all Jews; that is, they belonged to that Nation which of all others was most convinced that there was only one God – that there could not possibly be another. It is very odd that this horrible invention about a religious leader should grow up among the one people in the whole earth least likely to make such a mistake. On the contrary we get the impression that none of His immediate followers or even of the New Testament writers embraced the doctrine at all easily."

C. S. Lewis, "What Are We To Make of Jesus Christ?" in *God in the Dock*

#### TRANSFER OF THE SABBATH

Within the first few decades of the early Church, perhaps even within the first few months, the Sabbath had firmly moved from Saturday to Sunday. The Didache, an early Christian document that dates to the time of the Gospels, instructs Christians to gather on "the Lord's day" (the day Jesus rose from the dead). Early Christian apologists also attribute the unlikely transfer of the Sabbath to the day of the resurrection:

"But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn; and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration."

*Justin Martyr (AD 100-165)*

## Resurrection Theories

### Stolen Body Theory

Some early opponents of Christianity claimed that the followers of Jesus secretly stole his body from the tomb and then invented the whole story of the resurrection. The Gospel of Matthew mentions this accusation in verses 27:64 and 28:13, and refutes it by saying that the tomb was guarded by Roman soldiers.

This accusation may have even prompted the Romans to enact a new ordinance known as the Edict of Caesar. This ordinance, which is engraved on a marble slab found in Galilee, prescribes the death penalty for anyone convicted of unlawfully removing a body from a tomb. It's possible that this law was enacted because of accusations against the followers of Jesus. The Stolen Body Theory is one of the oldest and best-known resurrection theories.

*Evidence Refuting Stolen Body Theory*

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### Swoon Theory

The basic assertion of the Swoon Theory is that Jesus wasn't completely dead when he was removed from the cross. In fact, many people have been mistakenly pronounced dead; even by modern doctors. If modern doctors can be fooled, then so could the Roman soldiers at the cross.

The gospels indicate that Jesus died much sooner than most victims of a crucifixion. According to Mark 15:44, Pontius Pilate was very surprised when he heard that Jesus was already dead. Proponents of the Swoon Theory often argue that this could indicate that he was actually still alive.

Also, according to John 19:34, a soldier thrust a spear into his side shortly before he was removed from the cross. Some scholars think that the story of the spear thrust is a fabrication, purposely invented by the author of John to try to refute the idea that Jesus wasn't completely dead. The other three gospels, which were probably written before John, say nothing at all about a spear thrust.

*Evidence Refuting Swoon Theory*

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### Twin Theory (aka Imposter Theory)

There are two main versions of this theory, both based on the idea that Jesus had a twin brother. In one version the twin dies on the cross instead of Jesus, and in the other version the twin appears as an imposter after Jesus dies.

There are other variations on the idea that a mistake in identity caused someone else to be crucified instead of Jesus. Some early Gnostic writings say that Simon of Cyrene, the man who carried the cross, was also the man who died on it

*Evidence Refuting Twin Theory*

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**Vision Theory (Hallucination Theory)**

The basic idea of this theory is that the earliest belief in the resurrection was based on illusory visions of a ghostlike apparition of Jesus.

Supporters of this idea argue that the severe emotional impact of the crucifixion would have made the followers of Jesus susceptible to such visions. Their expectations for him had been so high, and his arrest and execution had occurred so suddenly, that many of them could have found it difficult to accept the reality of what had happened. The experience was so traumatic that he was blind for three days.

The letters of Paul are the earliest known Christian writings. Yet he never explicitly says that Jesus was resurrected in bodily form. And in 1Corinthians 15:3-8, he adds his experience on the road to Damascus to the list of other post-resurrection appearances, suggesting that he thought they were all of the same nature.

*Evidence Refuting Vision Theory*

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**Spiritual Resurrection Theory**

Some modern Christians, and even a few theologians, believe in a spiritual (rather than bodily) resurrection of Jesus. According to this view, his human body either vanished or was removed by God, and he reappeared in his eternal spiritual form.

Some scholars think that this was also the original belief of the earliest Christians, and that the idea of a bodily resurrection didn't appear until later. Possible evidence for this can be found in some of the earliest writings, including the letters of Paul and the Gospel of Thomas. The best-known example is John 20:24-29, in which Jesus invites the disciple Thomas to touch the wounds made by the nails and the spear thrust. Some scholars doubt that this actually happened, especially since none of the other gospels say anything at all about nails or a spear thrust.

The belief that Jesus returned in a spiritual form is also consistent with the various gospel stories in which he suddenly appears and disappears, or passes through walls, and with the stories in which his followers don't initially recognize him, or are told not to touch him.

*Evidence Refuting Spiritual Resurrection Theory*

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Sources:

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*The Complete Bible Answer Book*, Hank Hanegraaff  
*Christianity for Skeptics, An Understandable Examination of the Christian Belief*, Steve Kumar  
Gospel-mysteries.net, web based