

Did Jesus Really Rise From the Dead?

The most successful lawyer in history was Sir Lionel Luckhoo. If you go to Guinness World Records under “Most Successful Lawyer” his name is there. As a defense attorney he won 245 murder trials in a row either before a jury or on appeal. He died in 1997 at the age of 83 after a distinguished career. www.hawaiichristiansonline.com/sir_lionel.html.

What kind of skill do you need to achieve this level of success? He must have such tremendous analytical powers that when the prosecutor presents what appears to be an air-tight case against his client, he was able to find the flaws. He must be able to know what to ask to make a case fall apart. He must know what constitutes reliable and convincing evidence. All this was true of Sir Lionel Luckhoo, twice knighted by Queen Elizabeth. He became a noted diplomat and a member of the highest court in his country.

There is one tough question at the center of Christianity, “**Did Jesus really rise from the dead?**” Wouldn’t it be great if we could have the legal opinion of Sir Lionel Luckhoo about the resurrection? Well, we do. Sir Lionel Luckhoo was challenged to take his legal powers of analysis and apply them to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He spent years studying the historical record. Here is his conclusion.

“I say unequivocally that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt.” Sir Lionel Luckhoo

We know the dead don’t come back to life. Here’s a man who studied the record and applied the legal test of evidence and came to the conclusion that Christ did return from the dead. Let’s examine some of the evidence that convinced Sir Lionel Luckhoo, because the resurrection is the heart of Christianity.

If there is no resurrection of Christ, there is no Christianity. Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 15:17**, “**If Christ did not rise, your faith is futile and your sins have never been forgiven.**” This is an important issue. The fact that Jesus returned from the dead authenticated His claims of being the one and only Son of God. If that is true, then He deserves our worship and allegiance.

Dr. Gary Habermas is a leading expert on the evidence of the resurrection and author of "*The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*." He received his Ph.D. from a secular university on the resurrection.

Several years ago he had a two-day debate with Anthony Flew, a leading atheist on the resurrection. Five independent judges heard the debate, four of them, after hearing the cases for both atheism and Christianity, said the case for Christianity was the most compelling and Habermas won the debate.

When Dr. Habermas was asked, "Why do you spend so much of your life studying the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus? He said, "Every shred of evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is also evidence for my eventual resurrection." Jesus said in John **11:25**, "***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live even though he dies.***" We have confidence, based on the evidence of Jesus' resurrection, that we who believe and follow Him will be resurrected as well."

Let's look at how Jesus died. This is important because some people make the claim Jesus didn't die on the cross, and we must establish his death before we can talk about His resurrection.

For example, many Muslims do not believe that Jesus died on the cross. There have been books written making this claim and this week. One lady in our church received a letter from a Muslim friend that read tells clearly how Muslims see Jesus. She wrote, "Muslims love and revere Jesus, and believe in him as a Prophet and Messenger of God, a great teacher and guide for people. But Muslims do not believe that Jesus was God or the Son of God. Nor do Muslims believe that he was slain on the cross, as some early sects of Christians had once believed."

As I describe the historical evidence concerning crucifixion you'll see that the evidence is overwhelming that Jesus did die on the cross.

Jesus was whipped.

After Jesus' trial, a trial in which He was convicted of blasphemy because He claimed to be God, it says in **John 19:1**, "***Then Pilate laid open Jesus' back with a leaded whip.***"

Medical experts, like Dr. Alexander Metherell, have studied the crucifixion from a medical perspective regarding what happened to Christ and others in the first century when flogged by a Roman centurion. He said there's no question after this brutal beating that Jesus was on the edge of death even before He got to the cross.

Jesus was tied to a post and beaten with a leather whip that had embedded in it sharp jagged pieces of sheep bone and balls of lead. The whip was brought down on His bare back, shoulders and legs, first the metal balls would create deep contusions and bruises which would then be broken open by later blows. The whip cut through the skin and there was profuse bleeding and in some cases the spine itself was exposed.

Dr. Metherell said Jesus' back would have been left hanging in ribbons, a mass of bleeding and torn tissue. Jesus would have been in serious to critical condition even before the crucifixion started. The Bible tells us Jesus wasn't able to carry His own cross to the execution site, and now you know why.

Execution

Spikes five to seven inches long were first driven through His wrists. There's a large nerve that runs down your arm into your wrist. The spike that was driven through His wrist would have crushed the nerve. So intense was the pain of crucifixion there was no word to describe it. They had to invent a word to describe it. The word "excruciating" in Latin means "out of the cross" and was created to describe this otherwise unexplainable and indescribable pain that takes place in crucifixion.

Now Christ was hoisted vertically on the cross. How do you die of crucifixion? Since you are hanging on the cross, with your arms outstretched, there is incredible stress on your diaphragm and chest muscles? You are locked into an inhaled position. You can breathe in but you can't breathe out. The only way you can breathe out is to push up to release the stress.

Think about this: Your back is a bloody mass of tissue and you're scraping it up against the wooden cross. You've got spikes in your feet and you push up to exhale. So there's a constant pushing up and down until exhaustion would set in.

If the Romans wanted to hurry death, they would shatter the shin bones with a steel mallet. That of course meant you couldn't push up any more. Your lungs would slowly fill with carbon dioxide and you would die. That's just what happened to the two thieves who were being crucified on either side of Jesus.

But look what the Bible says in **John 19:33-34**, ***“When they came to Jesus they found that He was already dead. So instead of breaking His legs, one of the soldiers pierced His side with a lance.”***

Medical evidence indicates that the spear was thrust between His ribs puncturing the sack surrounding His heart and the heart itself. Then four Roman experts who killed for a living declared officially that Jesus was dead. The truth is nobody came down from the cross alive in the first century, not even Jesus Christ.

A team of medical doctors studied the historical record and wrote an article for the ***Authoritative Journal of the Medical Association***. Their conclusion: **“Clearly the weight of the historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to His side was inflicted . . . assumptions that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge.”**

Let's say *somehow* Christ did not die by crucifixion. He is then wrapped in linen with 75 pounds of spices and *somehow* He's able to escape and roll away the rock at the tomb and He was *somehow* able to get past the elite Roman guard. What condition would he have been in when He appeared to His disciples?

Let's say hypothetically, *somehow* He survived the cross. And let's say that *somehow* He decided to go against all of His teaching and deceive the world into thinking He was resurrected. Would the disciples have looked at Him and said, “He's overcome death and the grave!” Would they be excited that someday they would have a resurrection body like Him too?

They would not triumphantly declare that Jesus has conquered death and start a worldwide movement. Their reaction would be pity and they'd get Him medical attention. The truth clearly refutes the swoon theory. No reputable scholar believes it any more, yet it's raised often by skeptics.

Early accounts

Some people write off the resurrection is by saying it's a legend or mythology. They believe that since Jesus was crucified in 33 A.D. and the New Testament wasn't written until 50 or 60 years later, this provides a huge time gap. Certainly in that gap legends grew and distorted what had actually happened. When the New Testament was finally written it probably bears no resemblance to what actually had taken place.

Let's look at the evidence. What we've discovered is the New Testament writings about Jesus were written much closer to the life of Jesus Christ than critics had once charged. In fact, they were written well within the lifetimes of eyewitnesses. This means that they could have corrected false or exaggerated information.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 15:3-4** ***"I've passed on to you what I have received which is of the greatest importance that Christ died for our sins as written in the scripture, that He was buried and raised to life on the third day as written in the scriptures."***

Paul was passing to the Christians in Corinth a creed recited by the earliest Christians which he had received. They had no Bible and doctrine was recited and learned through creeds. This creed confirms Jesus died for our sins, was buried and resurrected on the third day. It then talks about eyewitnesses and so forth.

Scholars can date this creed to as early as two-three years after the life of Jesus Christ. The beliefs that make up this creed go to the cross. There wasn't a huge time gap between Jesus' resurrection and the time it was written down.

After Paul's given this creed, he mentions that 500 people saw Jesus at the same time, after He was resurrected. Specifically stating they're alive as of that writing. In effect Paul is saying check out the eyewitnesses who are still alive.

He couldn't have done that if this had been written so much later that these people weren't around. But because they were around, there were still witnesses present who could testify to the reality of the resurrection of Jesus.

Empty tomb of Jesus

During Jesus' trial His chief accuser was Caiaphas the high priest. Caiaphas was the one who declared Jesus guilty of blasphemy and turned Him over to Pilate to be executed.

Some time ago Jerusalem archaeologists found the burial place of Caiaphas, the first person from the New Testament to have their burial place uncovered by archaeologists. It's fascinating that the chief accuser of Jesus has his tomb discovered and yet the body of Jesus Christ has never been found in His tomb. His tomb is empty.

Some of you saw the three hour Peter Jennings special this week. Although they spent very little time on the resurrection, they did interview an expert. He said that, "part of the Roman punishment was to leave the bodies on the cross as a deterrent to rebellion." It was clear he not only didn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus, he didn't even believe in the burial of Christ.

History tells us, though, that Jesus was laid in a tomb belonging to a prominent member of the Jewish council named Joseph of Arimathea. He was like a famous senator in Israel's culture. The tomb was then sealed and elite guards were placed around the tomb. Yet on that first Easter morning:

Luke 24:3 says *"A contention of His followers went into the tomb but the Lord Jesus' body was gone."*

A powerful fact in the discovery of the empty tomb is a subtle but significant thing. It says women discovered the tomb of Jesus was empty. Why is that important? In the first century, women's testimony was considered worthless. They were not allowed to testify in a court of law. Their word was not considered to have any credibility in Jewish culture.

Here's the implication: If the writers of the resurrection of Jesus were making this stuff up, embellishing or exaggerating, they would never have said women discovered the empty tomb. Why did the disciples say women discovered the empty tomb, if it would hurt their case in trying to prove the resurrection?

Apparently that's what happened and they were so committed to the truth they wrote down that the women discovered the tomb empty. It shows how committed to accuracy the writers of the New Testament were.

The most powerful fact about Jesus' tomb is that everybody admitted that it was empty. Even His opponents conceded the tomb was empty on Easter morning. They tried to bribe the guards into saying they'd fallen asleep and while they were asleep His disciples stole the body.

This doesn't make sense because the disciples didn't have a motive to steal the body and if they were asleep how did they know the disciples came to steal the body? The point is when the disciples declared the tomb of Jesus was empty what did people say back to them, "You've got the wrong tomb!" No, they said, "You're right the tomb is empty." The question is how did it get empty?

The Roman authorities weren't about to steal the body, they just wanted Jesus dead. The Jewish leaders weren't about to steal the body, they wanted Jesus to stay dead. The Romans and the Jews could have crushed Christianity by simply displaying the body of Jesus, but they couldn't because there wasn't a body to display.

The disciples had no motive to steal the body. They had nothing to gain and everything to lose by stealing the body. Why would they lie about Jesus being resurrected and steal the body and then die for it?

Maybe the women went to the wrong tomb. It was dark and there were lots of tombs around Jerusalem. Maybe they just got lost and went to a tomb that was empty and boom! Christianity got started and it was all a mistake. Then Peter and John came afterwards and confirmed the tomb was empty. What are the odds they went to the wrong tomb? Don't you think they would have made sure the tomb was empty before they risked their lives proclaiming the resurrection?

And Joseph of Arimathea knew where his tomb was, he owned it. If there was collective amnesia and everybody suddenly forgot where this tomb was, the Romans knew, they had guards there. There was no motivation for anyone to steal the body. The unanimous testimony was the tomb was empty. The best explanation that fits the facts was Jesus really did return from the dead.

Eyewitness Testimony

Let's go back to the ancient creed Paul mentions 1 Corinthians 15:5-8. It goes on to say, "***Jesus appeared to Peter and then to the twelve. After***

that He appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. [in other words, they're still around. Question them if you want.] Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me."

That's just one report of the resurrected Jesus. In all Jesus appeared a dozen different times over forty days to more than 515 individuals. He appeared to women and men, individuals and groups, indoors and outdoors, to skeptics and believers. He talked and ate with people, He even invited Thomas – the skeptic, to see and touch the evidence himself.

Some skeptics tried to explain the appearance of Christ away as a hallucination. But if 500 people simultaneously had the same hallucination, it would be bigger than the resurrection itself. Maybe it wasn't hallucination but what psychologists call "group-think." Group-think is when a group of people encourage each other by the power of suggestion to see something that isn't there.

Dr. Jerry Collin's been a university professor of psychology for over twenty years. He's served as the president of a national association of over 15,000 psychologists. He's written 40 books on psychology and is well qualified.

When Dr. Collin was asked if group-think could explain the resurrection away he said, **"It's not possible. None of the conditions for group-think to take place were present among the disciples in the first century. For instance, the disciples were not anticipating a resurrection. This is contrary to their Jewish beliefs so they weren't primed for it."**

Besides, Jesus ate and talked with them. He appeared numerous times in different settings to different kinds of people. All of this is contrary to group-think." Then he said, **"Hypothetically, even if group-think were true, where did the body go? The tomb is still empty."**

The appearance of Jesus was not a hallucination or wishful thinking or legend. It was historical reality that revolutionized the lives of those who encountered Him.

The Emergence of the church

This is powerful evidence for the reality of the resurrection. Look at what happened to the disciples. After the crucifixion they are depressed and in hiding. Peter denied Jesus three times. They thought, "That's it! It's over!" but history shows that after Easter these same people who were cowardly are now boldly proclaiming Jesus is resurrected.

In **Acts 2:14 & 32**, just a few weeks after the resurrection, says "**Then Peter stood up, he raised his voice and addressed the crowd and said . . . 'God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses to this fact.'**" We saw it. We know it's true.

The once cowardly disciples are now bold and willing to die for their faith. That's pretty powerful. They must have really believed it if they were willing to die for what they believed. Maybe there's a hole here. The problem is that religious fanatics have died for their faith all through history.

Not long ago a terrorist who went to a crowded market place in Tel Aviv with explosives and he killed himself and a bunch of people. He believed he would instantly go to paradise to be with his god. He sincerely believed and he died for his faith. So what if the disciples died for their faith?

There's a huge difference between what the disciples did and, what that terrorist did. People will die for their beliefs if they sincerely believe they are true. When the terrorist sincerely believed he'd go to heaven he was willing to die for it. Contrary to that, nobody will die for their faith if they know their faith is false.

Think about it. Of all people, the disciples were in a unique position to know whether Jesus really did return from the dead. They're the ones who talked to Him and touched Him and ate with Him. They knew it wasn't a hallucination or trick, but the truth. Knowing it was true they were willing to die for their faith. They didn't just believe it, they knew it. If they'd been lying, would they have allowed themselves to be tortured to death for a lie? **Nobody knowingly and willingly dies for a lie.**

Can you think of anybody in history who knowingly and willingly allowed themselves to be tortured to death for something that isn't true? I can't. So when I put all this together, just like Sir Lionel Luckhoo, it formed a very powerful conclusion.

I want to end with a story that I hope will clarify the implications of what I've been talking about. It's not a true story it's actually based on a program by written by Alfred Hitchcock, but it's got a great lesson to it.

A woman was sent to prison, with no possibility of parole, for killing her husband. She was determined not to spend the rest of her life in jail; she just had to figure a way out. As the bus arrived at the prison she looked out and there outside the prison walls was an elderly gentleman burying a casket. An inmate had died and this elderly worker buried the inmates outside the prison walls when they died.

She thought, "This is a possible way I could escape." She got into prison and made friends with this elderly man. She found out he had problems with cataracts in his eyes and had trouble seeing. She said, "I've got money and I could pay for you to have an operation to restore your sight and you could see well. I will do that if you'll help me escape." He said ok.

Here's the plan he said. The next time an inmate dies, come down to the little room where I build the caskets and get into the casket with the dead body. We'll bury you and then I'll come out in the middle of the night and dig you up and set you free."

A few weeks later, in the middle of the night, the bell rang which meant an inmate had died. She got out of her cell went to the workroom and found the casket. She climbed in with the body and put the top of the casket over her and waited. A few hours later she could feel the casket being wheeled outside, then being lowered into the ground and then the dirt hitting the casket.

She waited for the worker to come. A long time passed. Where is he? Why isn't he here to dig me up? What's going on? Why isn't he coming? She started to panic. She lit a match to see and sure enough the body next to her was the body of the elderly worker. Her only hope had been buried with her.

This woman had placed her faith and trust in another human being who she sincerely thought could rescue her from the grave. He had died and had taken her to his grave with him.

What kind of fear would you fear at that moment? What would you do?

Here's the point, every founder of every great religion is in their grave right now. Confucius, Buddha, Mohammed and Joseph Smith are all in the grave. The only one in history who has the power to overcome the grave and the power to rescue you from the grave is Jesus Christ.

Who are you putting your faith in for eternity?

The question I want to ask is, "Who are you putting your trust in to rescue you from the grave? Unless your faith is in Jesus Christ, the one and only individual, fully God and fully man who proved it by returning from the dead Himself then there's no hope. But if you put your trust in Him, He's the one who said, ***"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though He dies."***

I hope you take the time to check out the evidence yourself. As you're checking it out, keep a picture in your mind of that woman and think about the kind of fear that she would have felt. You don't have to live in that kind of fear.

You can know the assurance and peace that comes from a living faith in Jesus Christ and a personal relationship with Him. If you would like to have that kind of relationship with Christ and be free of fear and know where you are bound for eternity, take a moment and honestly say the prayer below.

Dear Father,

Thank you for sending your son to die for my sin and for raising him to life again. I believe you did this for Jesus and I believe you will do it for me to.

Jesus, I proclaim you to be the leader of my life. Thank you for forgiving my sin and setting me free from fear. From now on, my life is not my own, it belongs to you. I declare you to be my lord and savior forever.
Amen.