



The mind of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. Proverbs 18:15

Was Jesus really resurrected?

General question: Is the message of Christianity true?

Also asked as:

Wasn't this whole Resurrection thing a hoax?

Didn't Jesus just pass out on the cross and recover in the tomb?

Is it possible that the Resurrection was spiritual but not physical?

Why is the Resurrection important?

Similar questions answered separately:

Are miracles real?

Is the Bible reliable?

Does God exist?

Is Jesus God?

A caution: The Resurrection of Jesus Christ was more than a spiritual extension of His life. His Resurrection was spiritual and physical. His physical Resurrection was more than recovery of consciousness from a comatose state. It was more than resuscitation of life from apparent death ... more than when someone's heart function is restarted by the use of cardiac defibrillation paddles. The physical part of His Resurrection miraculously brought Him back from actual death to an imperishable life ... to an imperishable state greater than normal physical life.

The short answer:

The Resurrection of Jesus is the decisive proof of His power over death for Himself and for us. It was a central theme of the First Century church and of the church in every century since then. Jesus predicted it and His contemporaries believed it. Many people saw the actual empty tomb. Hundreds of people saw Jesus after His Resurrection. They did not enshrine His tomb ... He was not there. Moreover, their day of celebration changed from the Saturday Sabbath to Sunday in celebration of His Resurrection day ... the tradition continuing to today. The reality of the Resurrection was foundational for so many of His peers who were persecuted, tortured, and martyred for their faith in His message. There is no argument against the documented historical fact of the Resurrection of Jesus that stands up under honest investigation of the evidence.

The longer answer:

The importance of the Resurrection. Christianity is based on the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ being factual. In Him, deity became humanity so that humanity could know true deity. Jesus came to us to pay for our sins on the cross. He died a brutal death Then He was buried. After three days in the ground, Jesus was resurrected physically and spiritually. It was much more than a simple resuscitation. It was a miraculous Resurrection to an imperishable state. Many eyewitnesses saw the resurrected Jesus. Eleven appearances of the post-resurrected Jesus are documented in the New Testament. His Resurrection is central to Christian beliefs and hope. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also ... Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no Resurrection of the dead? But if there is no Resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied,"* 1 Corinthians 15:1-19.

Jesus predicted it. Many times, Jesus predicted that He would come back from the grave.

"From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day," Matthew 16:21.

"As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, 'Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead,'" Matthew 17:9.

"But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee," Matthew 26:32.

Other of His predictions about His Resurrection include: Matthew 12:38-40, 17:22-23, 20:18-19, & 27:63, and Mark 9:31, 14:28, & 10:34, and Luke 9:22, and John 2:19-22.

Peter and Paul spoke and wrote of it. The reality of the Resurrection was central to their beliefs and message. It was proof of His identity and power. Many people witnessed His Resurrection.

Peter said, *"The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to*

you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses," Acts 3:13-15.

Peter also said, "We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead," Acts 10:39-41.

Paul said, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead," Acts 17:30-31.

His Resurrection was a constant theme and central message of the First Century church as seen in Acts 2:22-24 (in Peter's first public message 7 weeks after the Resurrection of Jesus), Acts 2:30-32, 3:26, 4:8-10, 5:30, & 13:28-31, and Romans 4:23-25, 6:4-7, 8:11, & 10:9, and 1 Corinthians 6:14, 2 Corinthians 4:14, and Galatians 1:1, Ephesians 1:20, Colossians 2:12, and 1 Thessalonians 1:10, Hebrews 13:20, and 1 Peter 1:21.

The sequence of events.

The arrest, interrogations, trials, beatings, and brutal execution of Jesus are well documented in the Gospels. The Roman soldiers were expert in the brutality of scourging (whipping) and the finality of execution by crucifixion. The scourgings of His naked body left His shoulders, back, sides, buttocks, and legs laid open with lacerations deep into subcutaneous tissue and muscle. The crucifixion left torn nail wounds penetrating through His hands (wrists) and feet. His expert executioners were convinced that they had been successful in killing Him. They saw no need to break His legs to accelerate death by asphyxiation. Instead, they thrust a spear into His side. Blood and water flowed from that spear wound in His dead body indicating a heart rupture. The record of the burial, grave-time, Resurrection, and appearances of Jesus is documented in the Gospels beginning in Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19, and in 1 Corinthians 15.

1. Down from the Cross. Late on Thursday (or possibly Friday), Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea took the dead body of Jesus from the cross and placed it in Joseph's own tomb. They wrapped His body in linen grave clothes with a mixture of about 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes.

2. Women watching. A group of women followed and watched His burial. They went home to prepare more burial spices and perfumes for their return visit to the tomb on Sunday.

3. The tomb closed. A large stone was rolled into place against the entrance of the rock tomb.

4. The tomb guarded. The Pharisees and guards sealed the tomb ... and stationed guards at it.

5. An earthquake. In the early hours of Sunday morning, a severe earthquake occurred and an angel of the Lord rolled the stone away from the entry to the tomb. Jesus was resurrected.

6. Frightened guards. The guards were frightened and fell like dead men.

7. Sunday at dawn. Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James), Salome, and Joanna came to the tomb with more burial spices at early dawn on Sunday ... wondering who could roll the large stone away for them. They expected that the dead body of Jesus was in the tomb.

8. The empty tomb. The women discovered the open tomb. Angels told them that Jesus had arisen, showed them the inside of the empty tomb, and told them to tell His disciples.

9. Initial doubt. At first, His disciples did not believe the women's report that Jesus had risen from the tomb. Apparently, they had not believed or expected Him to be resurrected.

10. The race to the tomb. John outraced Peter to the tomb. They saw the empty tomb, the linen grave-clothes lying where His body had been, and His grave face-cloth rolled up in a place of its own. The orderliness of the tomb showed no signs of a stolen body or grave robbers.

11. To the women. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene ... then to other women.

12. The guard's alibi. The guards reported to the Jewish Chief Priests all that had happened at the tomb. The priests and the elders bribed them with a large sum of money to spread the story that they had fallen asleep while on guard ... and to say that while they were sleeping, the disciples of Jesus had stolen the body. If sleeping, how could they identify the thieves?

13. To Peter. Jesus appeared to Peter.

14. On the road to Emmaus. Jesus appeared to two men on the road to Emmaus just outside of Jerusalem.

15. To ten disciples. At the end of that Resurrection Sunday, He appeared to ten of the eleven disciples.

16. To all eleven disciples. Eight days later, Jesus appeared to all eleven disciples.

17. Breakfast by the sea. He appeared to 7 disciples by the Sea of Galilee ... cooking and eating with them.

18. To 500 at one time. Jesus appeared to more than 500 on a mountain in Galilee.

19. To James. He appeared to His half-brother James.

20. In Jerusalem. He appeared to all eleven disciples in Jerusalem.

21. His Ascension. He appeared to His disciples and ascended from the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem, Acts 1:1-11.

Challenges to the factual account of His Resurrection.

It was a hoax made up by Jesus. Some have said that Jesus conspired to fake His death via a knockout drug in the sour-wine sponge at the end of His crucifixion. Those who suggest this have no explanation as to why Jesus would do this contrary to all of His teaching on being truth. Moreover, no one would think that someone could survive the scourgings and crucifixion. He would have known the custom of breaking one's legs on the cross to assure death via final asphyxiation. Death from crucifixion was a sure thing.

Jesus did not die. It was resuscitation rather than Resurrection. This is the claim made by some of those who say it was a plan contrived by Jesus. Others say it was unplanned and that He swooned on the cross ... passed out from the pain. Then in the cool, damp, sealed tomb, wrapped in grave clothes soaked in 100 pounds of burial spices, He recovered from His brutal scourgings, torn open hands and feet, and spear wound in His side. He carefully left His linen grave-wrappings where they had laid Him ... and rolled up His burial face-cloth and set it in a place of its own. With renewed strength, He rolled the large stone away from the entry to the tomb (the stone which several women knew they could not move). Coming out of the grave, He obviously frightened the guards. Then He walked on His pierced feet ... used His pierced hands ... and was unaffected by the spear wound into His side, blood loss, and muscle-deep lacerations that crisscrossed His entire body. In that condition, He who claimed to be truth convincingly lied to His disciples that He was resurrected from the dead. This is an illogical, irrational suggestion.

His post-Resurrection appearances were by a look-alike impostor. Jesus was too well known for this to be the case. He was a very popular figure in Judea and Galilee ... known to His family, disciples, enemies, and the populace. The two men on the road to Emmaus were not part of His inner circle ... but they did recognize Him. Others, who were close to Jesus, recognized Him readily. A significantly large number of people were thoroughly convinced of His identity. Moreover, an impostor would have had to be a crucifixion survivor who had been speared rather than had his legs broken ... one who had swooned and been resuscitated. The possibility of this is desperately remote.

His appearances were hallucinations. Nothing in the record is consistent with this theory. His followers were not expecting that He would rise from the dead. Sorrowful grief may cause a few to hallucinate. However, hallucinations are seldom as widespread in geography or numbers of people as were the post-resurrected appearances of Jesus. People saw Him in Judea ... then in Galilee ... and then back in Judea. Five hundred people saw Jesus at one time. However, 500 people do not hallucinate at one time.

It was a lie told by His disciples after they stole His body. Why would the disciples lie about this? What could their motives have been? They proceeded to tell people of His death and Resurrection ... were persecuted for their belief and message ... and all but John were martyred. Some people might die for what they think to be true ... but few suffer and die for what they know to be a lie. No evidence suggests that this theory is a real possibility.

It is a fictitious legend created by Christians of later centuries. This claim is without factual evidence and is discredited by the authenticity of the First Century record of the Resurrection of Jesus and by the early Church's recorded belief that it was true.

The emotional, teary-eyed, map-challenged women went to the wrong tomb. This sexist claim is without fact or logic. What about the disciples, His other followers, and His hostile enemies? The tomb was a short walk away. Did no one else go to the right tomb?

The disciples went to the wrong tomb. Many people knew of the location of the right tomb including Joseph (it was his own tomb), Nicodemus, the women, the guards, the Jewish leaders, the Romans, and numerous others in Jerusalem. This is an impossibility.

The Romans stole the body. If they did, they would have done it to produce His dead body in four days to put an end to the unrest His followers were causing in the region. However, they never produced the body because they did not have it.

The Jewish leaders stole the body. Like the Romans, they would have stolen the body to prove that He was not resurrected. They had tried in many ways to stop Jesus ... that is why they had Him killed. They also guarded the tomb. After the Resurrection, they tried to persecute Christianity out of existence. If they had taken His body, they would have produced it on the fourth day to discredit His claims and put an end to Christianity.

They crucified and buried the wrong man. This is contrary to all the evidence. The Jewish and Roman leaders knew the identity of the man they had in custody and on trial. His mother Mary and close disciple John were at the foot of the cross ... He spoke to them. His identity was obvious to a vast number of people who saw Him regularly.

Grave robbers stole the body. Grave robbers would not have chosen to rob the sealed and guarded tomb of a man with no earthly possessions. If they did, that would have been the report of the guards to the Jewish leaders ... *robbers overpowered us and stole the body*. Additionally, the scene inside the empty tomb was inconsistent with this theory. His linen wrappings were left where He had been laid. His burial face-cloth was rolled up and left in a place of its own. Moreover, grave robbers steal possessions of value ... not broken, beaten, crucified bodies. There is neither fact nor logic to support this claim.

The only logical explanation. The physical and spiritual Resurrection of Jesus is the logical explanation of what happened on that Sunday morning. His actual Resurrection is supported by the facts, by eyewitness testimony, and by the impact that event had on His contemporaries and has had on His followers throughout the world through all of the following centuries until today.

How does Friday to Sunday morning add up to 3 days and nights? A Friday crucifixion with a Sunday Resurrection does not seem to allow for a literal 3 days and 3 nights in the grave. The Bible does give the 3 days and 3 nights time frame. It also states that it was on the 3rd day ... and after the 3rd day (meaning any time after the 3rd day had begun). This could be idiomatic or literal.

The Biblical references.

"Three days and three nights in the heart of the earth," Matthew 12:40.

He will *"after 3 days rise again,"* Mark 8:31.

"From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day," Matthew 16:21.

"And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day,'" Matthew 17:22-23.

"Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first," Matthew 27:63-64. Note: this conversation took place on the day after the crucifixion. Therefore, when they said "until the third day" it meant *until the fourth day* after the crucifixion.

"Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken," John 2:19-22.

The idiomatic explanation. *Three days and three nights* could be idiomatic (a colloquial metaphor) for being in the grave any part of each of three 24-hour days. Consider the following example. "I was asleep *all day*" could mean that I was sleeping for 24 hours or idiomatically for just the daylight hours of one day. If Jesus was crucified on Friday, He was in the grave part of Friday, all Saturday, and part of Sunday before His Resurrection. Then it could idiomatically be said that He was in the grave for 3 days and 3 nights.

The literal explanation. Friday is traditionally assumed to be the day of the crucifixion of Jesus. However, He may have been crucified on Thursday. Jesus was crucified on the day before the Passover (a high Sabbath, John 19:31). Passover is celebrated on the 15th day of the Jewish month Nisan (annually in March or April). The Passover could be on any day of the week. If Jesus was crucified on Thursday, He was in the grave literally 3 days and 3 nights. His Resurrection was on Sunday ... the first day of the week after the Saturday Sabbath, Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1-2, Luke 24:1, and John 20:1. Neither the day of the week of the Triumphal Entry nor that of the crucifixion is identified in the Bible. However, the Bible clearly states that Jesus arrived in Bethany (about two miles from Jerusalem) six days before the Passover. On the next day, He entered Jerusalem in the Triumphal Entry fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. Two public days followed in which He cursed the barren fig tree, cleansed the Temple for a second time, confronted the scribes and Pharisees, and prophesied about both the destruction of Jerusalem

and His return. The events of the following private day with His disciples included the Last Supper, His Gethsemane prayer, and His arrest. On the next day, after a night of six trials, He was crucified ... on the day before Passover. A Sunday Triumphal Entry (Palm Sunday), with a Friday crucifixion, is simply inconsistent with the Biblical record. The only choices consistent with the Biblical record are a Monday Triumphal Entry with a Friday crucifixion (idiomatically 3 days and 3 nights in the grave) ... or a Sunday Triumphal Entry with a Thursday crucifixion (with a literal 3 days and 3 nights in the grave). The latter choice, as listed below, is the more likely.

Saturday. This day was 6 days before the Passover, John 12:1.

Sunday. The Triumphal Entry was on the next day, John 12:12.

Monday. This was a public day.

Tuesday. This was also a public day.

Wednesday. Jesus then spent a private day with His disciples.

Thursday. Jesus was crucified on the day of Passover preparation.

Friday. This was the Passover high Sabbath.

Saturday. This was the regular weekly Saturday Sabbath.

Sunday. His Resurrection was after a literal 3 days and nights in the grave.

Aren't there contradictions in the accounts of the Resurrection? No. Four Gospel authors document the events of the Resurrection. They, individually and collectively, record only some of the details rather than every detail. Moreover, their accounts are not identical in which events and people are included. However, all the recorded events of that Sunday morning can be interleaved into one non-contradictory account. As an example, Matthew 28 and Mark 16 mention one angel being at the empty tomb. Luke 24 mentions two angels. John 20 records nothing about an angel or angels. These are partial accounts rather than contradictions. All we can conclude is that at least two angels were present. I had breakfast with a famous Dallas Cowboy's football coach. I also had a very nice lunch with him at a hotel in New York City. If I ended my story there, both statements would be accurate but incomplete in the details. To give another perspective, I need to mention that my son was with us at both meals. I did have breakfast and lunch with the coach ... as did my son. However, my story is still incomplete. How many of us were at each meal? At this point, all you can say is *at least three*. Actually, the entire Cowboy team and sideline staff were with us at the breakfast. And over 500 Manhattan business people were with us at lunch. The Resurrection accounts are accurate, thorough enough, but necessarily abridged.

Was His Resurrection spiritual only or also physical? It was both. Some claim that the Resurrection was spiritual only. However, such a claim contradicts the Biblical record, which clearly states that the Resurrection was physical as well as spiritual. The disciples touched Him. "*Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him;*

behold, I have told you.' And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him," Matthew 28:7-9. Jesus said He was flesh and bones and ate food to prove it. "'See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate it before them," Luke 24:39-43. Peter testified to this. "God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead," Acts 10:40-41.

Were His post crucifixion appearances theophanies? A theophany is a special manifestation of God in which there is the appearance of physical being but no actual physical being. Some people have claimed that God instantly and miraculously destroyed the body of Jesus in the tomb ... and that Jesus appeared, as theophanies, between the Resurrection and the ascension. There is no Biblical evidence for this teaching. Moreover, why would God deceive people in such a way? In addition, how could this be tested or proven? I heard a comedian jokingly claim that someone had broken into his apartment, stolen all of his stuff, and then left exact replicas in their place. Such a comedic claim is as non-provable as is the theophany appearances claim.

A concluding challenge:

The factual, documented Resurrection of Jesus is proof that He had and has power over death. The sting of death is gone, I Corinthians 15:53-57, not just for Him, but also for you and for me. Jesus said to Lazarus' sister Martha, "*I am the Resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?*", John 11:25-26. That question is eternally important for you ... *do you believe this?* However, intellectual assent is not the issue. *Believing that* Jesus died on the cross ... and believing that He conquered death for Himself and for us is not enough. We need to *believe in* Him. To find out how to be sure that you will live even if you die, visit www.911GOD.org.

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