

The resurrection of Jesus



Every year thousands of Muslim pilgrims visit Muhammad's tomb at Medina in Saudi Arabia. However, there is no spot you can visit to pay homage to the body of Jesus Christ.

The reason: Jesus was raised from the dead and transformed to an immortal, God-like nature. He is alive today!

Not just an academic question

Did Jesus Christ really live and teach in Israel at the beginning of the Christian era? Was he crucified? Did he literally come back to life after being dead for three days?

You may find it easy to say "yes" to the first two questions, but do you accept the miracle of his resurrection?

The whole Christian hope stands or falls on the historical truth of the resurrection. In the words of the apostle Paul:

"If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain..."

1 Corinthians 15, verse 17

Christ's resurrection is the example of what God has in store for all true believers—to be raised from death and given a perfect, undying nature.

"...we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."

Romans 6, verse 5

"...even so in Christ shall all be made alive...Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."

1 Corinthians 15, verses 22 and 23

"...but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him..."

1 John 3, verse 2

If Christ is still dead, the promise that "we shall be like him" holds no hope. (You may want to look up the quotations and read them in context for yourself.)

Jesus' death—the basic facts of the Bible account

Jesus of Nazareth, a Jewish teacher, claimed to be the Messiah foretold in the Jewish Scriptures. After a three-and-a-half year ministry he was arrested, accused, and condemned as a political criminal. Deserted by his followers, he died a cruel and painful

death by crucifixion.

Jesus had openly predicted that he would be killed and rise from the dead. Because of this the religious authorities did not want to take any chances. Perhaps his disciples would steal the body and then claim their leader was alive.

Taking extra precautions, they set armed guards at the tomb containing Jesus' body. Then they firmly sealed the huge stone which was rolled over the mouth of the cave-like burial place.

After the Jewish holiday day was over, some of Jesus' followers went to the tomb. The stone which had been sealed over its opening had been miraculously rolled away. When they looked inside they saw the linen grave clothes with which his dead body had been wrapped.

Graveclothes, but no body. An empty tomb.

A dead Savior?

Put yourself in the place of John, a disciple of Jesus.

During more than three years with him, you grew very close to this wise, loving, totally God-centered man.

You had seen him perform miracles. You believed he was the Messiah you had been waiting for, that he would soon rid the country of its Roman conquerors and set up God's kingdom on earth. You believed he had chosen you to help him rule Israel when he declared himself king.

How could he be dead?

Your hopes were shattered. You wondered what to do next. Was he an impostor after all? No, he couldn't have been. Everything he did rang true...

The third day after his death, some news comes from Mary Magdalene. Breathless, she has just run all the way back from the tomb. His body is gone!

You run to see for yourself.

Hardly noticing the stone has been moved, you look in and see the graveclothes, wrapped around—nothing. What could it all mean?

Jesus appears, alive

That evening some of Jesus' disciples huddled behind locked doors, afraid the same people who crucified their leader would be after them next. Suddenly, they were stunned to see Jesus in the room with them, his hands and feet still showing the marks from his wounds.

Jesus had risen from the dead—the last thing they ever expected!

Before his crucifixion Jesus had tried in vain to make it clear to them that he would be killed and then rise from the dead.

"Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.

For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on:

And they shall scourge him and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.

And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken."

Luke 18: 31-34

Only after they saw Jesus alive again did the disciples begin to understand what he had meant. He spelled out for them the Old Testament prophecies that had to be fulfilled, so that at last they realized the Messiah had to die and be raised in order to redeem his people. Puzzling chapters like Isaiah 53 now took on their true meaning.

"...he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her

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shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth...for he was cut off out of the land of the living..."

Isaiah 53: 7,8

That is a quick summary of the facts around the resurrection. To obtain a more complete picture, take the opportunity to go through the Bible accounts given in the recommended readings.

You may be surprised to find out how downhearted Christ's followers were when he died. They honestly had not grasped the prediction of his resurrection - though, ironically, Jesus' enemies had understood this part of his message very well!

What happened to the body?

Those who put Jesus to death would have loved to rid themselves of the threat they saw in Christianity. The whole story could be proven false if they just produced the body of Jesus. It was that simple. But they could not.

Did the disciples steal the body? In their distressed state, with an armed guard at the tomb and a tremendous stone sealing it? Hardly likely.

Had Jesus merely swooned on the cross, appearing dead but really still alive? Had he then wriggled out of the grave clothes and escaped? The Romans had made very sure he was dead by thrusting a spear through his side. Besides, could a man so close to death push away a stone that had taken several healthy men to move into place - then walk to safety past the Roman soldiers, on badly wounded feet? Impossible.

Maybe the disciples, convinced their leader would be resurrected, only dreamed they saw him. The problem with this explanation is that they did not expect him to rise. Moreover, many people saw the risen Christ. The chart at the top of page 3 shows a few of his appearances after his resurrection.

To the New Testament writers Christ's resurrection was no just a

myth symbolizing some spiritual truth. It was FACT. They had seen him alive with their own eyes!

An unwilling convert

The earliest Christians often had to put their lives in danger for their faith. They were laughed at, jailed, whipped, even killed.

One of their worst opponents was a Jewish religious leader named Saul. First mentioned in the account of the death by stoning of the apostle Stephen, he watched over Stephen's death. (Acts 7: 57, 58)

Saul was highly educated, respected by his peers, devoted to serving his God by observing and preserving the Law of Moses and the Jewish traditions that stemmed from it. His zeal led him to spearhead the campaign to wipe out the new Christian movement.

Jesus appeared to Saul while he was on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians. Dazzled by the intense light, Saul had three days of blindness to think about the fact Christ was indeed alive.

Saul must have gone through great mental turmoil after seeing Jesus. Confronted with one single irrefutable fact - the risen Christ - he gave up everything to become a persecuted Christian preacher.

After his dramatic conversion, he was known as Paul. Christianity's greatest enemy had become its greatest advocate.

"And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God."

Acts 9:20

Acts 9 describes the turning point in Paul's life. Take a few minutes to read the account for yourself.

Facing the facts

Numerous skeptics have denied the fact Jesus rose from the dead or have tried to explain it away.

One such skeptic was Dr. Frank

Morison, a lawyer. Morison was convinced that Jesus did not rise from the dead. In 1930 he set about to examine the evidence; he intended to expose the resurrection to be nothing more than the happy ending to a fairytale story about a good man called Jesus. So Morison did a thorough study of the facts.

He ended up writing a book quite different from the one he had planned. He had to. The evidence overwhelmed him. Using the last seven days in the life of Jesus and focusing on the trial as recorded in Mark, Morison began to examine the Bible account. He ended up accepting what he had formerly denied: that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead.

The introductory chapter of his book is fittingly titled "The Book that Refused to be Written".

What about you?

The resurrection poses a disturbing challenge to the unbeliever. It is a miracle, and miracles don't fit into a world view that is limited by what can be observed in nature.

To those who know what the resurrection means, this one event almost 2000 years ago has great personal impact TODAY. It is assurance the God can and will give the true believer an immortal, perfect nature, as He has given His son Jesus.

Your faith in a risen, living Christ opens the door for you to be made "like him".

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EYEWITNESSES	BIBLE REFERENCE
1. Mary Magdalene	John 20:14, Mark 16:9
2. Women returning from the tomb	Matthew 28:9-10
3. Simon Peter	Luke 24:34
4. Two disciples on their way to Emmaus	Luke 24:13-33
5. The disciples, without Thomas	Luke 24:36-43, John 20:19-24
6. The disciples, Thomas present	John 21:1-24
7. A crowd of over 500	I Corinthians 15:6
8. James	I Corinthians 15:7
9. The apostle Paul	Acts 9:3-6
10. The apostle John, in exile on the Isle of Patmos	Revelation 1:1

Recap

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis of the Christian hope of resurrection for all true believers.

The fact the resurrection took place cannot be explained away.

Recommended Bible Readings

The four gospel accounts of the resurrection: John 19, 20 and 21; Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24

Saul's conversion: Acts 9