

Study Guide #11: Was Jesus Resurrected?

Introduction

The crucial issue concerning the truthfulness of Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus was not resurrected from the dead, then it would not be rational to adopt Christianity as one's spiritual pathway. To evaluate a claim of His resurrection, we need to identify all of the alternate explanations and eliminate each of those that can be eliminated. However, if His resurrection is the most rational option left, then we should believe that He was resurrected—and that would be the acid test of His divine nature (He would be God).

Question #1: Isn't it possible that Jesus did not really die in the first place?

Answer: This question assumes that the ancient Romans were not medically advanced and thus didn't always know when someone died. The soldiers at the cross are said to have falsely believed Jesus was dead, but in reality, He was buried alive in the tomb. This is known as the Swoon Theory—that Jesus lost consciousness, was only *thought* to be dead, and then He revived in the cool temperatures of the tomb. *First*, ancient peoples were not nearly so ignorant about numerous things as modern people often think they were. *Second*, the Romans were very experienced and experts in crucifixion; they knew when a man was dead. In Jesus' case, they didn't even break His legs (to prevent escape) because they saw that He was already dead (John 19:33). Instead, a soldier thrust his spear into Jesus' side to make absolutely certain that He was dead (John 19:34). Modern medical experts have studied all that had happened to Jesus, from His being beaten to the events on the cross and have concluded that Jesus could not possibly have lived through all of that. So, yes, Jesus definitely died on the cross. [NOTE: Even *if* somehow Jesus managed to survive the cross ordeal, it would have been at least as miraculous as a resurrection if He had been able to revive after His excruciating ordeal and bound with 100 pounds of spices by linen cloths (John 19:39-40) in the smelly, damp, dark environment of a Judean tomb.]



Jesus suffers

Question #2: Isn't it possible that in their frightened and gloomy mood, Jesus' followers went to the wrong tomb, and when they found it empty, jumped to the wrong conclusion that Jesus had been resurrected?

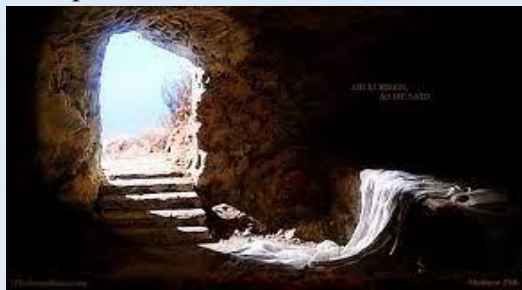
Answer: No, that doesn't sound reasonable when you think carefully about it. Even if they did go to the wrong tomb initially, they would not have ended the matter there. Surely the owner of the tomb, the respected member of the Jewish Sanhedrin named Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-54) knew where his own tomb was and would have led them to the correct tomb at some point. There's no escaping the fact that the tomb where Jesus had been laid was empty on Sunday morning.

Question #3: Couldn't some of the followers of Jesus have stolen His body and hid it in order to spread the myth that He had risen from the dead?

Answer: No, several reasons make that possibility virtually impossible. *First*, it's common knowledge to historians that when Roman soldiers guarded a place where a Roman seal had been placed (Matthew 27:62-66), they would be executed if they allowed anyone to mess with that seal. *Second*, rolling away a large stone at the entrance of the tomb could not have happened without waking even sleeping soldiers. *Third*, even if somehow the stone could have been rolled open, the soldiers there would have overpowered the would-be grave robbers. *Finally*, if the disciples stole the body of Jesus, that couldn't account for the historical fact of their sudden change from pessimism and fear to optimism and fearlessness. Ultimately, Christian history tells us that that all but the apostle John died as martyrs for their faith in the resurrection of Jesus. No sane person will willingly die for what he *knows* is a lie.

Question #4: Then why is there no record of the Roman soldiers being executed after the tomb was found empty and the Roman seal broken?

Answer: According to Matthew 28:11-15, the soldiers were evidently so afraid that they first went to the chief priests in Jerusalem instead of the Roman governor or their commanders. This account says that the



Jesus' empty tomb

religious leaders bribed the soldiers to say that Jesus' body had been stolen while they slept. The very fact that the Roman authorities apparently never executed these soldiers may well be explained by a unanimous testimony that a glorious being (an angel) really did roll away the stone and supernaturally paralyze the soldiers with brilliant light (Matthew 28:2-4). Such a unanimous testimony from obviously frightened soldiers, along with the influence of Jewish leaders, could have been the reason that the soldiers were not executed. [(NOTE: Remember it was the Jewish

leaders who stirred up the crowd and caused Pilate to condemn Jesus to death.)]

Question #5: Could the Roman soldiers have stolen the body of Jesus, perhaps in order to prevent the tomb from becoming a shrine for His followers?

Answer: If the Romans, with or without the Jewish leaders' knowledge, took the body of Jesus to an unknown place, all they would have had to do was to produce the corpse, and that would have quelched the Christian movement on the spot. The fact that they did not do this is virtually proof that they did not move His body to an undisclosed location. Therefore, we conclude that the tomb was empty but that no one took the body away.

Question #6: Couldn't the various sightings of Jesus after His crucifixion be the result of hysteria or hallucinations?

Answer: Medical experts report that aside from direct brain stimulation, as from a surgeon's electrode, hallucinations can only occur in people with one or more of the following kinds of serious illnesses or under extreme conditions:

- Schizophrenia
- Parkinson's disease
- Alzheimer's (or some other form of dementia)
- Brain tumor (if affecting a person's vision)
- Charles Bonnet Syndrome
- Epilepsy
- Narcolepsy (a nervous system disease that can cause extreme sleepiness)
- Sensory Defects (such as visual or hearing impairment)
- Severe Illnesses (such as kidney and liver failure, AIDS, brain cancer)
- High Fever (particularly in the very young and very old)
- Hallucinogenic Drugs
- Sensory Deprivation (as when a person has been kept in extreme isolation for an extended time)
- Extreme Anxiety
- High Mental Expectation

Furthermore, experts tell us that hallucinations are experienced by only *one* person at a time, not by a group.

Question #7: What facts does the New Testament give us that relate to any of the conditions necessary for hallucinations to occur?

Answer: According to Acts 1:3, Jesus spent 40 days after His resurrection with His apostles and other believers doing a variety of things. Luke's gospel reports that Jesus ate bread and fish and allowed His followers to touch His hands and feet to prove that He was not a spirit (Luke 24:30-43). The apostle Paul openly declared in I Corinthians 15:3-6 that Jesus was seen after His resurrection by more than 500 persons at one time. Then the record in Acts declares that Jesus ascended up to heaven in the sight of His apostles (Acts 1:1-11).



Jesus eats with Disciples

Do the critics want us to believe that everyone who claimed to see the resurrected Jesus had one of the serious illnesses or was experiencing one of the extreme physical or mental conditions listed under Question #6—those illnesses and conditions known to be the cause of hallucinations? Are they further asking us to believe that the reports of multiple witnesses of Jesus experienced the same hallucinations at the same time in defiance of all medical knowledge? Moreover, please note that

hallucinations cannot touch physical objects or be touched by anything physical. Yet the gospels report that Jesus broke bread, ate it, and that He also ate fish and honeycomb in the presence of multiple witnesses (Luke 24:30, 42-43; John 21:1-14).

Question #8: How would you summarize the case for the resurrection of Jesus?

Answer: The logic we have used in this Study Guide is called the historical-legal method of investigation. It's the same kind of logic that we ask juries to use every day in order to reach a verdict in a criminal trial. Do juries sometimes reach faulty conclusions with this method? Yes. But overwhelmingly, they make the *correct* decision when the facts and closing arguments by both attorneys are robust and the juries apply the "beyond a reasonable doubt" standard fairly.

Using this historical-legal method of investigation, we conclude the following facts:

- *First*, Jesus was quite dead when He was taken off the cross.
- *Second*, the tomb in which Jesus' body was laid was really empty the next Sunday morning.
- *Third*, all of the alternate possibilities for the empty tomb (different people stealing the body) are completely unreasonable.
- *Fourth*, the allegation that the post-crucifixion appearances of Jesus were all hallucinations violates every condition for hallucinations to occur and is therefore completely unreasonable.
- *Finally*, most of the followers of Jesus were dejected when Jesus died. Then suddenly, when they saw Jesus again, these men and women became fearless leaders to proclaim that Jesus had risen from the dead. In fact, most of them died for their faith in the resurrection of Jesus.



Jesus is Risen

The only rational explanation for all of these facts is that Jesus rose from the dead. If the apostles had died for what they knew was a lie, this would have been a greater miracle than their reports of a resurrection itself. Therefore, by the famous skeptic David Hume's own criteria for accepting an alleged miracle as a fact, we are compelled to conclude that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. This reinforces our belief that (a) there is a God, and (b) Christianity, or at least one version of it, must be the true religion. In the final analysis, this is the reason we are Christian.