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DID CHRIST REALLY RISE FROM THE DEAD?

So much depends on the answer to this question. The reliability of the Bible. The answer to your search for meaning. The destiny of all people. It all depends on whether or not Jesus is alive. Did His body ever leave the tomb?

No matter which side of the issue you are on—a Christian who has faith in the resurrection or a nonbeliever who finds this miracle too good to be true—we hope this booklet will help you. Explore with us why we can trust the biblical account of what happened on that first Easter morning.

Dave Branon, RBC Ministries

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WHY LOOK BACK?

Consider for a moment what mankind has accomplished.

We've built spaceships that can leave our solar system. We've transplanted hearts into week-old babies. We've computerized everything from architecture to zoology. We've made tremendous progress in many areas of life.

Then why go backward? Why step 2,000 years into history to put our faith in an event that violates the laws of science? Why insist that the resurrection is anything more than a myth? After all, isn't DEAD MAN COMES ALIVE the kind of headline we usually expect to find on those tabloids that litter the supermarket checkout lanes?

Can educated, refined people living in the 21st

century be convinced that Jesus really did come back from the dead? Many say no. They feel we have progressed too far to consider the resurrection of Jesus to be an authentic historical event. These skeptics say:

“Miracles are not scientific.” To people of science, dead means dead. They have no evidence that anything that was dead ever came back to life spontaneously. Therefore, they aren't easily convinced that in one special case the normal processes of decay were halted. It goes against their established data to believe that a dead man came back to life.

“It was spiritual, not physical, resurrection.”

Some “enlightened” modern-day skeptics maintain that the disciples did not really see Jesus with their eyes; they “saw” Him

with their hearts. They had a spiritual awakening because of Jesus' great sacrifice, and that spurred them on to preach about Him. Thus, He could be "resurrected" in the heart of anyone who accepted His teachings. To those who hold this view, Jesus was a great teacher whose ministry ended on the cross but whose influence continues through His words and philosophies.

"The biblical accounts are too contradictory." Some people think that if the Gospel writers could not agree on all the details, then we cannot be sure they got any part of the story straight. For instance, they point out that each of the four accounts of the morning scene at the tomb records a different number of women who were there. "A contemporary thinker," they say, "could never

accept as evidence a story with such discrepancies."

"The historical accounts aren't trustworthy."

Obviously, no reporters from the *Jerusalem Star* were at the garden on that resurrection morning to record the event. Therefore, the nonbiblical historical accounts we have concerning Jesus' resurrection were written some time after the event. To people who have grown accustomed to instantaneous news, that alone makes those accounts undependable.

So, the question remains. Can a technologically advanced society that continues to open new vistas of scientific knowledge believe in a miracle that 20 centuries of research have not been able to duplicate?

FACT OR FICTION?

Truth is not negotiable. Historical statements of fact are not open to question. When we read, for example, that George Washington and his men spent the winter of 1777 enduring wretched conditions at Valley Forge, we are obligated to believe it. Although none of us observed their long, deadly winter, what we know about it is supported by the written testimony of those who were there and by the scholarship of later inquirers who studied the Revolutionary War. The written accounts may differ on a few minor details, but we know that we can trust the record of the historians.

In a historical sense, the resurrection stands on ground that is just as solid as the story of George Washington's winter at

Valley Forge. Reliable witnesses wrote about meeting and talking with Jesus after His death. Skeptical enemies noticed His disappearance from the tomb. Extrabiblical, historical reports were given of His resurrection. Eyewitnesses of Jesus' post-death appearances died defending their belief in it.

In order for an honest historian to be convinced that something actually happened, he needs to see two specific criteria met: (1) The event in question must be supported by the testimony of believable, trustworthy witnesses. And (2) the circumstantial evidence must be authentic. When both of these demands are clearly supported by the evidence at hand, the inquirer is compelled by logic to believe that the event actually took place. We will see that each of these criteria is met by the

things we know about the resurrection.

“The Christian Savior had lived and associated with men whose minds and senses apprehended His person, acts, and character. These witnesses had transmitted their knowledge directly, and they had testified to the life of Jesus Christ and His teaching. Jesus was then a historical, not a mythical, being.”

Clifford Moore

Even so, some still don't believe. To make that

refusal, a person must not only reject the eyewitness accounts and the circumstantial evidence, but he must make an even greater leap. The person who thinks that the resurrection is a fraud or a hoax must reject the entire New Testament. There can be no picking and choosing. If the resurrection is a hoax, then so is the New Testament and everything Jesus said or did. Claiming that Christ was a great teacher or a prophet—as even most unbelievers attest—while rejecting His resurrection is an impossible position. Consider what Jesus said during His ministry—before the crucifixion:

The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day (Lk. 9:22).

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Mt. 12:40).

Think about it. Wouldn't we consider a man who made such wild claims to be untrustworthy if he couldn't follow through on his predictions? Instead of calling such a person a great teacher, wouldn't we call him a charlatan and a threat to mankind? There can be no middle ground. If Jesus did not do what He said He would do, He must be rejected completely. And along with Him go the Old Testament (because of its predictions of the Messiah's coming), the trustworthiness of Paul (who converted to Christ at the cost of beatings, imprisonments, and banishment from his former colleagues), and

2,000 years of church history (which rests solely on the resurrection).

“It may be said that the historical evidence for the resurrection is stronger than for any other miracle anywhere narrated.”

William Lyon Phelps,
Yale University

The evidence to be presented in the next few pages is based on the biblical and historical data as we know it. We will see why both secular and religious scholars find Jesus to be a captivating, historical person. So, let's get logical. Let's take a hard look at the evidence that gives us reason to believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

THE EVIDENCE FOR CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

Observation I: THE VERIFICATION OF JESUS' DEATH



We have to start with the bad news. Jesus' confrontation with the religious leaders of Israel cost Him His life. When the Roman soldiers removed Him from that awful cross of Golgotha, He was dead. As horrible as this fact is, the validity of the resurrection accounts hinges on it.

If, as some critics say, Jesus did no more than faint from the pain, there

would be no need for a resurrection. For a person to be raised from the dead, he must first have died. To deny Christ's death, therefore, is to remove all possibility of resurrection. But the Bible teaches that He died.

In the four Gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion, His death is spoken of in two distinct terms. In Matthew 27:50 and in John 19:30, the writers said He "yielded up" or "gave up" His spirit. The other accounts both record that He "breathed His last" (Mk. 15:37; Lk. 23:46).

Remarkably, Matthew, Mark, and Luke each recorded a simultaneous event that occurred some distance from Calvary. They wrote that as Jesus died, "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Mk. 15:38). This miraculous event signaled the end of the Old

Testament era of animal sacrifice and limited access to God. But that's not all it meant. It also verified Jesus' death, because it demonstrated that His complete sacrifice had satisfied God's demands. For centuries, God had required the death of an unblemished lamb as an atonement for sin. Now Jesus, the sinless Lamb of God, had become the new sacrifice. The veil was no longer needed, for access to God had been opened to all who would believe in Christ.

The following events at the site of the crucifixion help verify that Jesus was dead:

- The Roman soldiers did not break Jesus' legs, because they "saw that He was already dead" (Jn. 19:33).
- The soldiers plunged a spear into Jesus' side, and from it came both

water and blood (Jn. 19:34). Medical experts say that if He were not already dead, this in itself would have killed Him. Others have concluded that the pouring out of water and blood from His side was proof that Jesus was no longer alive.

- When Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Christ so he and Nicodemus could bury Him, Pontius Pilate ordered a centurion to verify that Jesus was dead (Mk. 15:43-45). The Roman governor would not release the body to Joseph until the centurion was certain that all signs of life were gone. You can be sure that an officer in the Roman army would not make a mistake about an important matter like this in his report to such a high official as Pilate.

- Joseph and Nicodemus prepared the body for burial according to Jewish custom. This included wrapping it “in a clean linen cloth” (Mt. 27:59), anointing the body with “a mixture of myrrh and aloes” (Jn. 19:39), and placing it “in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock” (Mk. 15:46). It seems obvious that any sign of life would have been detected by these bereaved friends. Surely they would not have buried a breathing Jesus.
- The Pharisees and chief priests met with Pilate to discuss what had occurred. They made such remarks as “while He was still alive” (Mt. 27:63). Soldiers were ordered to secure the tomb with a seal. In addition, guards were placed on duty to prevent the disciples

from coming to “steal Him away” (v.64). The Jewish leaders and the Roman authorities knew beyond a doubt that Jesus was dead.

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“[Jesus] was crucified and died under Pontius Pilate. He really, and not merely in appearance, was crucified, and died, and in the sight of beings in heaven and on earth, and under the earth He also arose again in 3 days.”

Ignatius, second-century
historian

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Observation 2: THE EMPTY TOMB



The Sabbath had ended, and Jesus' friends could now come to visit the tomb. As morning broke on the new day, the women who had watched Joseph and Nicodemus bury Jesus came back to anoint His body. It was Sunday now—a somber day that, as far as the women knew, would be followed by many more days just like it. They were undoubtedly resigned to a future of sad pilgrimages such as this one. They knew of nothing else they could do for their fallen loved one but to grieve at His tomb and to put spices

on His body. But what a surprise lay ahead!

As they walked toward the garden, they worried aloud about who could roll away the heavy stone so they could go inside the tomb and apply their spices. But when they arrived, they saw that the stone had already been moved! They were greeted by an angel, who told them that Jesus had risen.

With this background in mind, let's look at the evidence that the tomb was empty. First, we can depend on the historical record. Surely the authorities of Jesus' day wanted nothing more than to have Jesus stay where Joseph had put Him. The mere fact that they sealed the tomb and placed guards to protect it—a highly unusual act—indicated that they were determined to keep the body behind that stone barrier. Suppose they had

been able to do that. You can be sure the Sanhedrin and other officials would have been the first to use the knowledge of an occupied tomb as evidence

“The resurrection proclamation could not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact.”

Paul Althus

when the disciples began to announce to everyone that they had seen Jesus alive. Yet no historical evidence exists to suggest that those officials knew where the

body was. As we will see, the evidence shows that it was no longer in the tomb.

Second, there is something even more conclusive than the officials' inaction—the actions of several eyewitnesses. The first to see and report the empty tomb were the women with the spices. Mark's account sets the scene for us:

Entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here” (16:5-6).

John and Peter were the next to see that Jesus was gone. When they heard the unbelievably good news from Mary and the other women, they raced to the tomb. John got there first but didn't go in. Instead,

he peered through the opening and saw the linen wrappings that Jesus had left behind. Characteristically, Peter was not content with a long-distance view. He

If you need an eyewitness to convince you that the tomb was empty, you have one in John.

charged right into the tomb and spied the linen wrappings and the face cloth lying undisturbed and neatly arranged. Then John entered and saw the wrappings. John, it should be noted, is the one who wrote this account as recorded in chapter 20 of his Gospel. If you need an eyewitness to convince you that the tomb was empty,

you have one in the apostle John. He was there, and he wrote down what he saw. That is solid historical evidence in anyone's book.

A third strong piece of evidence that the tomb was empty is the reaction of the authorities when the guards reported the events in the garden. They wanted to destroy the credibility and influence of Jesus. Therefore, they would surely have been foolish to spread the rumor that the disciples had stolen the body—if Jesus were still in the tomb. No, Jesus' disappearance was the sole cause for their concern. Surely their collusion with the guards is solid proof that there was no body in the tomb.

We are faced with two facts. (1) Jesus died and was buried. (2) In a short time, His tomb became empty. The question remains: Where was Jesus?

Observation 3: THE APPEARANCES OF JESUS



Jesus' friends weren't looking for what they were about to see. Although they had heard and closely followed Jesus' teaching for 3 years, they just never fully understood that He was going to rise from the dead. Therefore, they would have had no reason to make up stories in which they claimed to have seen Him. To them, that wasn't even an option. Sure, they missed Jesus. And just as anyone who has lost a loved one or friend longs to see him, so also they had the desire to see Jesus. But they did not

expect that they ever would (see Jn. 20:9).

Yet see Him they did! First at the tomb. Then on the dusty Emmaus road. Then in the upper room. Over and over, in different settings, Jesus appeared to His friends. For 40 days He made His presence known throughout the land. Let's look at *who* saw Jesus and *where* He appeared. It's one more piece of evidence for the resurrection.

To Mary Magdalene At The Tomb (Jn. 20:11-18). Mary had been standing outside the empty tomb crying because, as she said, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him" (v.13). His death, combined with her fear that His body had been stolen, had engulfed her in heart-wrenching despair. But when Jesus startled her into recognizing Him by calling out, "Mary!" she rushed to

Him in joy and relief. Then she ran to tell the disciples that she had seen the Lord.

To Several Women As They Ran From The Tomb (Mt. 28:9-10).

These women had already heard that Jesus was alive, even though they had not yet seen Him. They had just left the tomb, where an angel had told them that Jesus had “risen from the dead.” When they saw the Lord, they “held Him by the feet and worshiped Him” (v.9). Jesus told them to spread the news that He was alive and to tell the disciples to meet Him in Galilee.

To Two Disciples On The Emmaus Road (Lk. 24:13-32).

Imagine the drama of this scene. Two disciples were walking the 7 dusty miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus when a fellow traveler caught up with them and struck up a conversation, asking what

they were talking about. Apparently, they had been discussing the death and entombment of Jesus, because they were surprised that the stranger wasn't familiar with their topic. They said, in effect, “Do you mean to say that you don't know about Jesus' death?” The two then explained why they were so sad—that though some women had seen the empty tomb and claimed that Jesus was alive, they had not yet seen Him. These disciples would not believe without seeing the evidence for themselves.

An exciting surprise awaited the pair when they arrived at Emmaus. The three of them stopped to eat, and as they ate, the disciples' “eyes were opened” and they recognized that this mysterious stranger was Jesus. But before they could speak again, He “vanished from their sight” (v.31).

To Peter At An Unknown Location

(Lk. 24:33-35). In this passage, we are not given a direct look at the meeting between Peter and Jesus. All we know is that when the disciples who had been to Emmaus returned, they learned that Peter had seen the Lord too. Imagine the excitement that must have been generated in that place!

To 10 Disciples In The Upper Room

(Lk. 24:36-43). Suddenly this praise meeting of the disciples was interrupted. As they sat comparing notes about the thrilling reality of seeing Jesus, He suddenly appeared. As might be expected, the men were startled because they thought they were seeing a spirit (v.37). Jesus quickly laid that idea to rest by offering to have them touch His hands and feet, and by eating supper with them.

To 11 Disciples In The Upper Room

(Jn. 20:26-31). It must have been a long week for Thomas. The other 10 disciples had met with Jesus in the upper room, but he had not. Surely they had spent time trying to convince Thomas that they really had seen Jesus. But he reacted the same way they had when they heard from the women who first saw Jesus. They were not convinced without hard evidence, and Thomas wanted the same advantage. Now he was about to get it. Jesus suddenly appeared to the men and said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands" (v.27). Then Thomas believed, exclaiming, "My Lord and my God!" (v.28).

To Seven Men At The Sea Of Galilee

(Jn. 21:1-25). Things had begun to return to normal for the disciples. They had

gone back to work. Some went on an all-night fishing trip on the Sea of Galilee. But the fish weren't cooperating, and the men had an empty boat. As daylight broke over the water, they saw a man standing on the shore, shouting advice to them. The seven seamen did what He suggested and nearly capsized their boat with all the fish they dragged ashore.

When John informed Peter, "It is the Lord!" (Jn. 21:7), Peter jumped in and swam to shore. When they all arrived on the beach, they saw that Jesus had prepared a hot breakfast of fish and bread for them. Jesus then offered to cook a few of the fish they had just caught.

To 11 Disciples On A Mountain (Mt. 28:16-20). This is the first planned meeting between the disciples and Jesus recorded after the

resurrection. Matthew wrote that the disciples proceeded "into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them" (28:16). There He met with the Eleven, and probably some others. Perhaps this included the "500 brethren" mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:6.

What is significant is that even though the Eleven worshiped Jesus when they saw Him, "some doubted" (Mt. 28:17). Although it is possible that a few of these men were still doubting Jesus' resurrection, it is more probable that the skeptics were disciples who didn't have the advantage of touching Jesus and eating with Him. They would naturally have been more hesitant to believe that this was the same man who had been crucified a few weeks before. Yet the fact that doubters are mentioned shows that the disciple

who wrote the account was not afraid to talk about the skepticism of some of the observers.

To His Disciples Near Bethany (Acts 1:9-12). The final appearance of Jesus to His disciples ended with His disappearance. As He stood talking with them about the command He had just given them to be His witnesses, “He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (v.9). This turned out to be a commencement of sorts for the disciples. Just a few weeks earlier, they had been a disheartened group whose leader was dead. Now they were enthusiastic evangelists. They “returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Lk. 24:52), and “they went out and preached everywhere” (Mk. 16:20).

The evidence was clear. Jesus was alive. Now their job was to go and tell people about it.

Observation 4: THE REACTION OF THE JEWISH OFFICIALS



A Roman soldier was no coward. He was a specially trained, tough-minded, well-equipped warrior. But notice the reaction of the soldiers who were protecting Jesus' tomb when they felt the earth move and saw an angel roll back the stone (Mt. 28:2). They “shook for fear of him, and became like dead men” (v.4).

They probably realized that they had more to be afraid of than an angel. Their training told them that keeping watch was an important commission.

They knew that various punishments were handed out to soldiers who couldn't stay awake on guard duty. Sometimes they were beaten; other times they were set afire. Most of the time they were executed. These brave, well-armed men had no way to stop the angel, so they had double reason to be afraid.

But look what they did next. They turned themselves in! Facing sure punishment, they still felt that they must report this amazing event to their superiors. Once they had spilled their story to the chief priests and elders, their fears turned to relief. The officials, realizing that sending Jesus to His death had not accomplished their purpose, decided to concoct a story. They bribed the soldiers to spread the news that "His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept" (v.13).

The soldiers must have done what they were told, for Matthew commented that the story begun by those chief priests was "commonly reported among the Jews until this day" (v.15). Devised in the face of the fact of the resurrection, this fabrication stayed alive for many years among those who refused to believe that Jesus had risen.

It wouldn't have taken much effort to refute their story. First, if the disciples had indeed been able to steal the body of Jesus, how would the guards have known that it was they who had stolen it? Didn't the story go, "while we slept"? Second, it seems preposterous that a group of men could have sneaked up on highly trained, albeit slumbering, soldiers without waking them. And then to think that they could have moved the stone, unwrapped 100 pounds of graveclothes,

folded them neatly, lifted the body, and carried it away while the soldiers slept is even more ridiculous.

Yes, the officials knew that Jesus had risen. Their reaction proves it. Their bribe verifies it. And their hastily concocted story authenticates it.

Observation 5: THE OUTLOOK OF JESUS' DISCIPLES



Sometimes you have to wonder about the disciples. They certainly didn't seem to be the kind of men you would recruit if you wanted to promote a revolutionary concept.

For instance, when Jesus

tried to explain to them what would happen in the days ahead, they often misunderstood. When He asked some of them to stay with Him during His all-night prayer vigil, they kept falling asleep. When He talked of servanthood, they argued about their own greatness. When He tried to tell them that He would be raised up after 3 days, they didn't get it.

On the night Jesus was arrested, the disciples ran for their lives. Peter couldn't even stand up to a servant girl when she identified him as a friend of Jesus. The disciples just didn't seem like the men of action you would need if you wanted to win a following and influence the world.

But something happened to change all that. What would change a cowardly group of mourners into a courageous band of evangelists who were

willing to stand up and testify that the crucified Jesus was alive? What changed them into willing martyrs for their faith?

Some would say that the disciples had nothing stronger to spur them on than a story they had made up. But can you imagine what it would take to believe this? Just picture Peter standing up before the disciples, who had remained safely hidden behind locked doors after Jesus' death for fear of their lives, and saying, "Well, the entire weight of the Roman government was just used to put Jesus to death by crucifixion. Even though He is still dead, we are going to start a rumor that He isn't. We are going to say that He rose from the tomb and that we all saw Him."

Did they make up the story? If so, why would they later risk their lives for nothing? If they hadn't even

understood for sure that Jesus planned to rise from the dead, why would they break out of their anonymity with such a far-fetched scheme? And why would they record their fabrication in the Gospel accounts, complete with details?

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“Nothing less than a witness as awesome as the resurrected Christ could have caused those men to maintain to their dying whispers that Jesus is alive.”

Charles Colson

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A fictional story can't possibly account for the changes in the disciples. Take, for instance, the transformation of Thomas. Of all the

disciples, he seemed the least likely to be convinced. His pessimism was first revealed earlier, when Jesus mentioned His plans to go to Bethany where Lazarus had just died. Thomas had suggested to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (Jn. 11:16). Although this statement suggests a degree of courage, it also implies that Thomas was resigned to martyrdom. If that was his typical response, it is no wonder he responded to the disciples' claim that they had seen Jesus after His death by saying, "Unless I see . . . I will not believe" (Jn. 20:25). Does this sound like someone who is willing to rekindle the anger of the Roman officials by claiming that Jesus was alive if He really wasn't?

Now look at Thomas a week later. In the upper room, surrounded by his 10 friends who had already

seen Jesus, he saw the Savior face to face. Finally, Thomas was convinced. His statement "My Lord and my God!" (Jn. 20:28) is the ultimate proclamation of belief in Jesus' resurrection. Here was victory that could be won only through hard evidence. It's the only thing that could have changed this skeptic into a believer.

No, the disciples were not the type of men who could have lived a lie as far-reaching as one that claimed a dead man wasn't dead anymore. They might have misunderstood Jesus on occasion, but they were basically honest men. They had no reason to devise such a scheme, and they didn't have the courage it would take to defend such a bald-faced lie. Peter would never have been hanged upside down for a trumped-up story. Mark would not have been dragged through the streets to his death if he

had been defending fiction. James would not have been beheaded for a falsehood. Thomas wouldn't have been pierced with a lance for a lie. Yet tradition says that these men died the horrible deaths just described. What a testimony to the truth of their claims! They were willing to die for the One who overcame death for them—and for us!

Observation 6: THE START OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH



The Christian church was not born nor does it exist today on the basis of Jesus' life and teachings. The

church that began less than 2 months after Jesus' death is the result of something more significant than His great sayings, parables, and philosophies. It began because a group of people in Jerusalem testified that they saw Jesus alive after He had been killed. Without the faith of those resurrection witnesses and the new faith of those who believed their testimony about it, there would be no Christian church today.

Let's see what the people were told when they were first given the opportunity to embrace this new faith. This will help us to see what caused the church to take hold in the first century.

Standing before people from all over the Roman Empire, including many from Jerusalem, Peter described Jesus as the One "God raised up" (Acts 2:24). He also said, "This Jesus God has raised up, of

which we are all witnesses” (v.32). As a result of this clear, straightforward message, 3,000 people believed Peter and were baptized that very day.

In a later sermon, this man who had earlier denied that he knew Jesus now called Him the “Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead” (Acts 3:15). After hearing of Peter’s testimony, the rulers and priests in Jerusalem put him on trial. Even when he faced the wrath of the religious leaders, Peter stood by his story that “the God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree” (Acts 5:30).

These are the kinds of statements that led to the start of the church. No one could hedge on the reason for Peter’s fervor. He was not preaching a creed nor advocating a philosophy. He was telling people that

the crucified Christ was alive. That was the essence of his message. And that was the only message the Christian church needed to catch fire. For 2,000 years, it’s been the driving force behind the church.

Observation 7: THE EXPECTATION OF CHRIST’S RETURN



One of the most important activities of the early church was to share in what we now call the communion service. It was a time to remember Jesus’ death and to reflect on His sacrifice. It was a time of celebration. But what would the early

Christian have had to celebrate if Jesus were still dead? These people were living in Jesus' generation. They would have known if the resurrection story were not true. Yet they listened and obeyed when Paul said:

As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes (1 Cor. 11:26).

This verse makes it obvious that the first-century believers were eagerly awaiting Jesus' return. They could not have believed in His second coming without first knowing that He was alive. Otherwise, how would He be able to come back?

This idea that Jesus would return to be with His people again was taught throughout the New Testament. Jesus Himself taught it when He said:

I will come again and receive you to Myself; that

where I am, there you may be also (Jn. 14:3).

Paul emphasized the same theme when he said:

Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:20).

And John said:

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him (Rev. 1:7).

Without the resurrection, these claims would all be useless, frivolous, unfounded lies. No one would dare predict such an event as Jesus' return if He were in fact lying in a tomb, or if His body had been taken away and hidden. No, John and Paul knew exactly what had transpired on that resurrection day. What would have been the purpose of telling about His return if they were harboring the knowledge of a dead Jesus?

WHAT THE OPPOSITION SAYS

A premise that cannot stand up against opposing views is not worthy of our trust. Therefore, it is only fair that we mention some of the theories that have been proposed to explain away the resurrection. Looking carefully at the logic of these ideas, we will be able to see how they fare when stacked up against the evidence already presented.

THEORY: The body was stolen from the tomb. In this theory, the disciples are the culprits. They sneaked up to the stone, rolled it away, and walked off with Jesus' body. That's why it wasn't there when the women, John, and Peter arrived at the tomb on the first day of the week.

OBJECTIONS: Why would the disciples want

Jesus' body? Who was it who appeared to all those people later? How did the disciples sneak past the guards? Why would an angel lie about the reason for the tomb being empty?

THEORY: The authorities took the body. Knowing that the disciples had an unusual interest in Jesus, the authorities—both governmental and religious—made sure they would not see Him again. They opened the tomb and took the body.

OBJECTIONS: Why didn't the authorities produce it to disprove the claims of Peter and others just a few weeks later? What turned the disheartened disciples into fiery proponents of a new cause if they had not seen Jesus again?

THEORY: Jesus' friends went to the wrong tomb. It had

been a terrifying week for the disciples and the others who had grown so close to Jesus. Therefore they became disoriented and went to the wrong grave. That's why they found an empty tomb.

OBJECTIONS:

Whose graveclothes did John and Peter find? What was an angel doing at someone else's gravesite? Is it possible that they all forgot their directions at the same time?

THEORY: Jesus only fainted. This theory says that Jesus didn't die on the cross. Instead, He fell into a deep swoon. Then, when He was placed in the tomb, He was revived by the cool, damp air. That explains His later appearances.

OBJECTIONS:

What caused the soldiers to misinterpret the evidence and certify that Jesus was dead? Why didn't Joseph

notice that Jesus wasn't dead when he wrapped Him in linen? How did Jesus, who had been nearly dead just days before, push away the stone and walk about town in perfectly good health?

THEORY: Jesus' friends saw

hallucinations. The resurrection makes a nice story, says this theory, but the disciples never saw any of the things they thought they saw. In fact, some say, they hallucinated, seeing images in their minds that corresponded with what they wanted to see.

OBJECTIONS:

Is there evidence that suggests that 11 people can hallucinate the same image? How about 500 simultaneous, identical hallucinations? Can people drag out hallucinations over 7 weeks, in many locations, and under various circumstances?

ALL THE SAVIOR'S MEN

Former presidential counsel Charles Colson tells how his Watergate experience can be used to support the testimony of the first-century men who said they saw the resurrected Jesus.

How do we know that Jesus was resurrected?

We have the eyewitness accounts of the 11 apostles who were with Him and, of course, the apostle Paul who saw Him. They were with Him before His crucifixion and for the 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension. They lived for as long as 40 years thereafter, never once denying that they had seen Jesus raised from the dead.

What does that have to do with Watergate? I'll tell you. In June 1972, I was home on a weekend with my wife and children. We had a

few days off because President Nixon was in Key Biscayne, Florida. My phone that was connected to the White House rang. It was John Erlichmann. He told me that some burglars had broken into the Democratic National Headquarters in Washington. I started laughing hysterically because I thought to myself, "Of all the ridiculous places for anybody to break into in Washington, DC."

I went away from that phone call shaking my head and feeling a little despair. I thought, "Now we have a campaign issue, but it will go away after the election." Well, as you know, it didn't!

The log showed that in the months immediately following the 1972 election, I was with President Nixon more than any other aide. Watergate never came up. We first started to discuss it in February 1973, when the Ervin hearings started. On

March 21, 1973, John Dean walked into the Oval Office and said, “Mr. President, there is a cancer growing on your presidency.” That’s the first time the President really knew there was a conspiracy in the White House. That’s the first time it became a criminal act inside the White House.

John Dean’s memoirs record that 3 days after that meeting in the Oval Office he began to get nervous about his own role. That’s when he hired a lawyer. On April 8, Dean went to the prosecutors to bargain for immunity so that he would not be prosecuted. In turn, he would testify against the President. Later, he said, “I did it to save my own skin.” When he went to the prosecutors to bargain for immunity, it was all over.

Then the other aides started to go in. I took a lie detector test, and my lawyers leaked it to the

New York Times. Everybody started to scramble for cover. The Watergate coverup was actually over because Mr. Nixon’s presidency was doomed. Now, if you stop and figure it out, you will see that the Watergate coverup actually lasted 3 weeks or less—from March 21 to April 8, 1973.

Now put yourself in our position. Here we were, the 12 most powerful men in the United States. All the power of government was at our fingertips, but we could not keep a lie together for 3 weeks. The most powerful men in the world could not hold on to a lie. So weak is man that we couldn’t do it.

Are you going to tell me that those powerless apostles who were outcasts in their own land could be stoned, persecuted, and beaten, some for 40 years, never once denying that Jesus was raised from the dead? Impossible, humanly

impossible—unless they had seen the risen Christ face to face. Otherwise, the apostle Peter would have

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Charles Colson

been just another John Dean. He'd have gone in to turn state's evidence. He had already done it three times.

Is it likely, then, that a deliberate coverup, a plot to perpetuate a lie about the resurrection, could have

survived the persecution of the apostles and the purge of the first-century believers who were cast by the thousands to the lions for refusing to renounce Christ? Is it not probable that at least one apostle would have “confessed” rather than being beheaded or stoned? Is it not likely that some “smoking gun” document might have been produced exposing the “Passover plot”? Surely one of the conspirators would have made a deal.

If Jesus was raised from the dead, as I am absolutely, intellectually positive that He was—and the evidence of history is overwhelming—it's not only a matter of faith but a matter of deepest intellectual conviction.

Taken from a speech by Charles Colson and from his book *Loving God*, Zondervan, ©1983.

WHY IS THIS SO IMPORTANT?

Think of the key world events of the last couple of decades. The fall of the Berlin Wall. The Persian Gulf War. The conflict in Bosnia. The El Niño weather events. The terrorist destruction of New York's Twin Towers and attack on the Pentagon.

Or go back to an earlier era. Watergate. The oil crisis of the 70s. The Vietnam War. Man landing on the moon. Perhaps you've been around long enough to recall the assassination of President Kennedy. Hiroshima. The Holocaust. Pearl Harbor. Whatever comes to mind, you can be sure of this: No event in the last 100 years has affected every human on earth—no matter where he or she lives.

Now think back through

history. The Civil War. The Fall of the Bastille. The American Revolution. The discovery of the New World. The invention of the printing press. The signing of the Magna Carta. The Battle of Hastings. The Fall of the Roman Empire. Each of these events had extraordinary historical significance. But none of them has the kind of monumental, worldwide, eternal effects that one event almost 2,000 years ago claims to have. This event? The resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Bible says that God came to earth as a man to pay the penalty of death for the sins of the world (Jn. 1:1-29; Rom. 6:23). But the Bible also says that if Jesus did not overpower death's grip to escape that cold, rocky tomb, He would not be able to provide us with victory over death (1 Cor. 15:12-19).

The implications of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

“If Jesus is, as the resurrection asserts, God Himself who has come to our rescue, then to reject Him, or even to neglect Him, is sheer folly. That is why Jesus is not, never has been, and never can be just one among the religious leaders of mankind.”

Michael Green

must be considered honestly. Everything depends on it. Here is what Paul said:

[God] commands all men everywhere to repent,

because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

According to the Bible, the eternal destiny of every human is at stake. Because of what Jesus did, each of us has two choices. We can live forever under God's blessing in heaven, or we can be separated from Him eternally in the torment of hell. It all depends on our response to Jesus' resurrection.

Our destiny is in God's hands. He alone must be satisfied. Not scientists. Not philosophers. Not educators. That's why what you believe about the resurrection is a matter of eternal life or eternal death.

IT'S YOUR DECISION

Perhaps the most tense moment in a courtroom trial is the reading of the verdict. The judge calls on the jury foreman as he stands nervously before the jury, the judge, the gallery, the lawyers, and the defendant. No sound is heard except the wrinkle of paper as he unfolds the jury's decision. With hesitation in his voice, he reveals to the breathless crowd the fate of the accused.

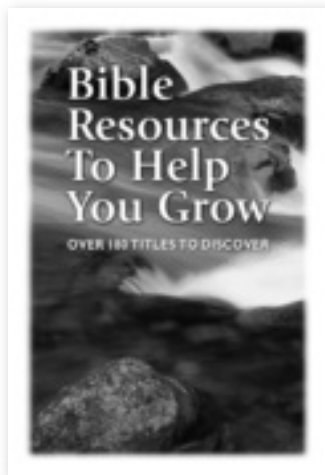
After reading the evidence in this book, you too stand ready for a decision. But the Judge who awaits your choice is not a fellow human who has worked his way to the bench. The One who wants to know your decision has the authority to sentence you to an eternity of confinement

in a prison called hell. Why? You are the defendant. You have been charged with sin (Rom. 3:23), and you face a sentence that is irreversible (Rom. 6:23). But here's the switch. You are also the jury. You get to make the decision based on the evidence.

So now it is time to make your decision. Do you believe that Jesus died as a sacrifice for your sins? Do you believe that He rose from that garden tomb to prove His deity and to establish Himself as the only mediator between God and you?

It's your choice. You've read the evidence. You've seen the historicity of the Bible's claims. Are you ready to put your faith in Jesus? Are you willing to accept His gift to you? He is waiting for your answer.

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