

# HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

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The following statement by the physician Luke is either true or false—there is no middle ground. Concerning Christ’s resurrection from the dead Luke wrote: “To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). If what Luke calls “infallible proofs” are in actuality “proofs” without fallibility, they can be known by those who desire to know them. On the other hand, if what Luke calls “proofs” are not in actuality “proofs”, that too can be known. Of the importance of this point the apostle Paul wrote: “But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (1 Cor. 15:13-14). Furthermore, concerning the significance of this matter the church historian Philip Shaff wrote: “The resurrection of Christ is therefore emphatically a test question upon which depends the truth or falsehood of the Christian religion. It is either the greatest miracle or the greatest delusion which history records” (173). In this vein Paul also wrote, “Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:15). Paul did not say he and the other apostles were false witnesses. He said that if Christ was not resurrected they would be “found false witnesses.” Thus, Paul challenged not only the Corinthian Christians, but all people of that day and this to refute what he and the other apostles had testified to be the case concerning the resurrection of Christ. This study, therefore, concerns itself with what Luke called “infallible proofs” of Christ’s resurrection from the dead. However, before beginning it a brief theological history of relatively recent events

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covering pertinent matters connected thereto is essential.

The liberal theology of the Nineteenth Century vehemently opposed the historical resurrection of Jesus. That kind of thinking came out of the Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century, a movement composed of learned men, many of them Deists, who decided to leave God out of the answers to significant questions such as: “Where did I come from?” “Why am I here?” and “Where am I going—if there is a place to go?” It was a movement that greatly influenced almost all academia and, thus, theology. Therefore, as a logical consequence of their bias against miracles, theological liberals did not believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The rank liberal theology of the Nineteenth Century began to decline around WWI. It was replaced by the thinking of influential theologians such as Karl Barth, who believed in man’s resurrection but did not treat the resurrection of Jesus as an event of history (past time and space), and Rudolph Bultmann’s existentialism. Bultmann did not think the resurrection of Christ should be considered a historical reality either. Therefore, there was little practical change in the early Twentieth Century scholars’ thinking about the resurrection of Jesus as a historical fact from that of the extreme theological liberals of the Nineteenth Century.

During the second half of the Twentieth Century a change in theological thinking occurred. Certain scholars began to challenge the views of Barth and Bultmann about the resurrection of Christ. Thus, theology began to find its roots in the historical evidence for Jesus Christ’s existence in all that he did—including, of course, his resurrection from the dead. By approximately 1970 the skepticism previously noted was forced into reverse. It was forced to go on the defensive because of the historical evidence concerning the New Testament in general and Christ’s resurrection in particular. Specifically this thinking established itself in the record of the appearances of Jesus following his resurrection, Christ’s empty tomb and the historical foundation of the Christian system. This study will investigate the resurrection of Christ by examining some

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of the historical evidence pertaining thereto.

In view of the foregoing changes regarding the impact of the historical evidence directly bearing on the integrity of the New Testament in general and the resurrection of Christ specifically, the following question and its answer is important. The question is, “Why does this specific skepticism continue?” It seems the best answer to the preceding question is at least twofold—(1) *conjecture*—those who are skeptical of the veracity of the gospel accounts simply *suppose* them to be unreliable; and (2) they do not want to accept the *physical* resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, their skepticism is based, not on credible witnesses and adequate evidence, but on wishful assumptions and a strong bias—neither of which are supported by the historical evidence (facts) bearing directly on their case.

In addressing the previously referenced skepticism William Lane Craig contributes the following pertinent information bearing on the subject.

At the same time that biblical scholarship has developed a new appreciation for the historical credibility of Paul’s information, however, it must be admitted that skepticism concerning the appearance traditions in the gospels persists. This lingering skepticism seems to me to be entirely unjustified. It is based on a presuppositional antipathy toward the *physicalism* of the gospel appearance stories. But the traditions underlying those appearance stories may well be as reliable as Paul’s. For in order for these stories to be in the main legendary, a very considerable length of time must be available for the evolution and development of the traditions until the historical elements have been supplanted by unhistorical. This factor is typically neglected in New Testament scholarship, as A. N. Sherwin-White points out in *Roman Law and Roman Society in the New Testament*. Professor Sherwin-White is not a theologian; he is an eminent historian of Roman and Greek times, roughly contemporaneous with the NT. According to Professor Sherwin-White, the sources for Roman history are usually biased and removed at least one or two generations or even centuries from the events they record. Yet, he says, historians reconstruct with confidence what really happened. He chastises NT critics for not realizing what invaluable sources they have in the gospels. The writings of Herodotus furnish a test case for the rate of legendary accumulation, and the tests show that even two generations is too short a time span to allow legendary tendencies to wipe out the hard core of historical facts. When Professor Sherwin-White turns to the gospels, he

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states for these to be legends, the rate of legendary accumulation would have to be ‘unbelievable’; more generations are needed. All NT scholars agree that the gospels were written down and circulated within the first generation, during the lifetime of the eyewitnesses. Indeed, a significant new movement of biblical scholarship argues persuasively that some of the gospels were written by the AD 50’s. This places them as early as Paul’s letter to the Corinthians and, given their equal reliance upon prior tradition, they ought therefore to be accorded the same weight of historical credibility accorded Paul. It is instructive to note in this connection that no apocryphal gospel appeared during the first century. These did not arise until after the generation of eyewitnesses had died off. These are better candidates for the office of ‘legendary fiction’ than the canonical gospels. There simply was insufficient time for significant accrual of legend by the time of the gospels’ composition. Thus, I find current criticism’s skepticism with regard to the appearance traditions in the gospels to be unwarranted. The new appreciation of the historical value of Paul’s information needs to be accompanied by a reassessment of the gospel traditions as well (89-95).

Of the significance and force of those of who witnessed the resurrected of Jesus in proving his resurrection, J. N. D. Anderson, professor of oriental law at the University of London, wrote:

The most drastic way of dismissing the evidence would be to say that these stories were mere fabrications, that they were pure lies. But, so far as I know, not a single critic today would take such an attitude. In fact, it would really be an impossible position. Think of the number of witnesses, over 500. Think of the character of the witnesses, men and women who gave the world the highest ethical teaching it has ever known, and who even on the testimony of their enemies lived it out in their lives. Think of the psychological absurdity of picturing a little band of defeated cowards cowering in an upper room one day and a few days later transformed into a company that no persecution could silence - and then attempting to attribute this dramatic change to nothing more convincing than a miserable fabrication they were trying to foist upon the world. That simply wouldn’t make sense (“The Resurrection” 5-6).

At this point in this study it is important to consider what the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was

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seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time (1 Cor. 15:3-8).

Added to the list of those who saw the risen Christ are Mary Magdalene (John 20:14) and those women returning from Jesus' tomb (Mat. 28:9-10). Later the same day Peter (Luke 24:34) and then the disciples on their way to the Emmaus saw him (Luke 24:13-33). Also, the apostles without Thomas (Luke 24:36-43) and the apostles with Thomas saw him (John 20:26-29). Then seven disciples by the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:1-3), an audience of over 500 believers in Galilee (1 Cor. 15:6), James (1 Cor. 15:7), the eleven (Mat. 28:16-20), and those present at His ascension (Acts 1:3-12). After his ascension Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6), to Stephen at his death by stoning (Acts 7:55), to Paul again (Acts 22:17-21), and to John on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:10-19).

Prior to writing I Cor. 15:3-8, Paul made general reference to the suffering brought upon him because he preached and defended the gospel facts found in the previous quotation. He wrote:

For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church (1 Cor. 4:9-17).

To those same Corinthians Paul wrote in greater detail in his second epistle of the terrible persecutions he suffered because of his proclamation and defense of the facts recorded in 1 Cor. 15:3-8. Of

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his sufferings he wrote:

[I]n labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands (2 Cor. 11:23-33).

If what Paul sated in 1 Cor. 15:3-8 constitutes premeditated contrived lies by the apostles preceding Paul, with Paul being an accessory to their lies after the fact, why would he and the other apostles continually bring upon themselves the extreme persecution that was common to them? By honest and serious students the preceding question cannot be summarily dismissed with the simple wave of the intellectual snob's hand and/or the pseudo scholar's facial sneer.

Paul recorded many other facts contained in the New Testament. These are facts that according to William Lane Craig modern "biblical scholarship has developed a new appreciation for the[ir] historical credibility." This same apostle recorded the facts about the resurrection of Christ. Paul also preserved the facts of his own persecution brought on by his routine adamant presentation and defense of those same gospel facts. Furthermore, he wrote that he taught the same thing "every where in every church (1 Cor. 4:17). Moreover, those facts concerning the resurrection of Jesus are the same facts recorded by those men who were apostles before Paul. It is absurd to declare Paul's facts to be "historically credible", except when he writes about the facts of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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For reasons already noted, it is also ridiculous to the extreme to think, after Paul had been with Peter and, thus, each man could know what the other had witnessed regarding the risen Christ, that they would agree to lie about the matter. Especially is this the case when all of the apostles of Christ as well as many other Christians could testify to the same events to which the apostles testified. And, they too were willing to suffer persecution for their testimony concerning Christ's resurrection. Furthermore, Paul instructed others to expect persecution when they conducted their lives according to the doctrine of Christ, a significant part of which involved teaching the facts involved in the resurrection of Christ (1 Tim. 3:12; Acts 4:33; 7:57-60).

Paul also mentions that he saw "James, the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:15-20). Remember, that it was James, who along with the other half-siblings of Jesus, believed Christ to be the Son of God *only after Jesus' resurrection from the dead* (John 7:5; Acts 1:14). Are we to suppose that Paul decided to propagate as the truth what Peter, James and the rest of the apostles knew (as well as himself) to be a lie? In his book, *Man Alive*, Michael Green comments:

Christianity does not hold the resurrection to be one among many tenets of belief. Without faith in the resurrection *there would be no Christianity at all*. The Christian church would never have begun; the Jesus-movement would have fizzled out like a damp squib with His execution. Christianity stands or falls with the truth of the resurrection. Once disprove it, and you have disposed of Christianity (Emphasis his, 61).

*Thus, what are the grounds upon which the skeptics can successfully discredit the appearances of the resurrected Christ as recorded in the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John?*

This study of the resurrection of Christ continues with the question—Are the records of the gospel accounts of Jesus' burial historically reliable? In answering this question the tomb of Jesus has much to offer. Obviously, the leaders of the Jews feared a report that Jesus had been raised from the dead to circulate throughout the populace. Thus, they did all that they could to prevent it from developing by doing their best to make sure that Jesus' body remained in his tomb (Mat. 27:64-66). A seal was placed on Jesus'

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tomb. To break the seal was significant and serious act. It is a fact that for the most part Jesus' disciples had displayed their great fear and confusion during Christ's arrest, trial, crucifixion and burial. Would such troubled men possess the state of mind and the courage demanded of them to cunningly devise a scheme to steal Jesus' body from its tomb and successfully carry the contrivance out? This would be a great effort on the disciple's part, demanding that the guards in some way be neutralized before the official Roman seal could be broken and the stone rolled away from the entrance to the tomb by the fearful disciples. If such had transpired, the official arm of the Roman government would have been dispatched to arrest those who had broken the seal, the punishment for their actions being death. Rome did not tolerate violations of her authority. If anything, Rome's power, willingness and swiftness to cooperate with the Jewish leadership and to punish those who violated its laws were fresh on the disciples' minds. However, following the burial of Jesus on a Friday afternoon, the gospel accounts declare the fact that Jesus' tomb was found empty on the following Sunday morning.

The first attempt by the Jewish leaders to account for the empty tomb, while at the same time seeking to discount the resurrection of Christ, was recorded by the apostle Matthew. He wrote:

Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day (Mat. 28:11-15).

The point from Matthew's account that must not be missed is this—although the Jews by their story were attempting to refute the resurrection of Christ, *in actuality they were testifying to the fact of the empty tomb*. If the Jews could have done so, they would have produced the dead body of Jesus and successfully and forever have erased any possibility of the successful establishment of Christianity, but they could not do it—and no one else could do it either. Thus,

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the story concocted by the Jews became the tale to which they would stick and it was circulated despite the facts to the contrary.

Attention must also be given to the soldiers who guarded the tomb. At the request of the chief priests and the Pharisees, Pilate gave them permission to place a guard on Jesus' tomb. Pilate replied to them with the following words: "Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch: (Mat. 27:65, 66). It is important to notice that Pilate said to them: "**Ye** have a watch...make it as sure as **you** can" (Emphasis mine, DPB).

Were, then, the soldiers comprising the guard Roman or Jewish? We know that the soldiers who arrested Jesus were Jewish (Mat. 26:46). When Saul of Tarsus set about to arrest Christians in Damascus, Syria he did so by the authority of the high priest (Acts 9:1, 2). Seemingly there was no need for the Roman government formally to authorize Saul to go into another country to search out and arrest Christians on behalf of the Jews. May we not correctly conclude from these two accounts that the Jews had considerable liberty to deal with matters pertaining to and people involved in their own religion? The Jews freedom to act as they did in the previous matters seemingly was due to the Roman government's tolerance of the various and diverse religions of the Empire. Thus, the answer Pilate gave to the chief priests and Pharisees concerning a guard for Jesus' tomb may not necessarily be a request for a guard of Roman soldiers, but simply a move on their part to get Pilate's approval of their own Jewish soldiers to guard Jesus' tomb. Following the resurrection of Jesus, could this explain why the soldiers came to the Jewish leaders for help rather than to their Roman military superiors to whom, if they had been Roman soldiers, they would have been directly accountable for deserting their post at Jesus' tomb? It also may well explain how the Jewish leaders had no hesitancy to act toward and speak to some of the guard as described in the previous scripture quotation.

Of the soldiers the record states that some of the guard "assembled with the elders"—strange conduct for Jews who would not associate with uncircumcised Gentiles—who, no doubt, regular

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Roman soldiers were. In the following record by the apostle John notice the unwillingness of the Jewish leaders to have a close association with the Romans, including Pilate, during the time of Pilate's interrogation of Jesus.

Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; **and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled;** but that they might eat the passover. Pilate then **went out unto them...Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again ... he went out again unto the Jews,** and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all. But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. (John 8:28-40—emphasis mine, DPB).

Later, in learning the difference in what the gospel permitted and what the Law of Moses prohibited, at Cornelius, the Roman Centurion's house, Peter said: "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (Acts 10:28). Peter's comment to Cornelius regarding the common practice of the Jews in refusing to associate with uncircumcised Gentiles and Luke's record of the response of the Jewish Christians' to the news of Peter's association with Cornelius at the time of he and his household's conversion to Christ (Acts 11:2, 3), is consistent with the actions of Caiaphas and the other Jews with him in their refusal to associate with Gentiles in a matter that only the uncircumcised Gentile governor Pilate could authorize them to do—put Jesus to death.

To emphasize that fact notice Matthew's record once again.

[B]ehold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day (Mat. 28: 11-15).

Furthermore, the chief priests told those of the guard that

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came to them, “And if this come to the governor’s ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.” If Pilate, the Roman Governor, had authorized Roman soldiers to be the official guards at Jesus’ tomb, a Roman guard would have ultimately, through the chain of Roman military authority, been accountable to Pilate. The military superiors of those guards would have understood the importance of their own accountability to the Roman governor. They would have made sure that the guard received the standard discipline meted out to soldiers who were on night guard duty and forsook their post. Anyone with a cursory understanding of the discipline under which Roman soldiers operated would readily know that forsaking a night watch was usually punishable by death. So, unlike many apologists who conclude that Pilate authorized Roman soldiers to guard Jesus’ tomb, the lack of evidence proving that point prohibits one from dogmatically affirming that the guard at Jesus’ tomb was composed of Roman soldiers. Furthermore, for the reasons previously declared, a Jewish guard posted at Jesus’ tomb fits the record more accurately than Roman soldiers occupying the same position.

Thus, at this point in the study the following question is appropriate. On what legitimate grounds could one successfully deny the historical accuracy of the burial account of Jesus found in the four gospel records? The answer coming across two thousand years to the present is that there is no credible evidence to prove the gospel records of Jesus’ burial unreliable. Therefore, the four books comprising the gospel record of Jesus’ empty tomb continue to stand as historically credible.

As this study progresses the following should be emphasized: without an empty tomb there could be no preaching of a resurrected Christ. But, from the beginning the apostles preached the resurrection of Jesus Christ and, thus, an empty tomb. Peter standing up with the other apostles on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ declared in no uncertain terms to his audience of devout Jews:

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being

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delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses (Acts 2:23-32).

To preach the resurrection of Christ was and is to preach an empty tomb. To preach Jesus' empty tomb was and is to preach that, not only the disciples, but others of that day knew the location of Jesus' tomb. As surely as the location of King David's tomb was known and occupied by the remains of the king, so the location of Jesus' tomb was known, but, unlike David's tomb, Jesus' tomb was empty. In his sermon Peter had no problem citing both tombs to be available for investigation by anyone who desired to inspect them. Concerning the empty tomb J. N. D. Anderson wrote:

The empty tomb stands, a veritable rock, as an essential element in the evidence for the resurrection. To suggest that it was not in fact empty at all, as some have done, seems to me ridiculous. It is a matter of history that the apostles from the very beginning made many converts in Jerusalem, hostile as it was, by proclaiming the glad news that Christ had risen from the grave - and they did it within a short walk from the sepulcher. Any one of their hearers could have visited the tomb and come back again between lunch and whatever may have been the equivalent of afternoon tea. Is it conceivable, then, that the apostles would have had this success if the body of the one they proclaimed as risen Lord was all the time decomposing in Joseph's tomb? Would a great company of the priests and many hard-headed Pharisees have been impressed with the proclamation of a resurrection which was in fact no resurrection at all, but a mere message of spiritual survival couched in the misleading terms of a literal rising from the grave (Christianity 95-96)?

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The tremendous change in the apostles from the time of Christ's arrest, trial and crucifixion to the time of the events recorded in Acts chapters 2, 3, 4 are nothing less than amazing, and must not be overlooked. Christ's disciples were terrified and forsook Him (Mat. 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:55-62; John 18:15-27). Peter was so fearful of being identified with the Christ that he lied and swore with an oath that he did not know Jesus (John 18:15-27; Mat. 26:72). But fifty days later in Jerusalem he boldly stood up with the eleven and publicly declared that the Jews had murdered Jesus, but that he had been raised from the dead (Acts 2:14). Peter and the other apostles not only proclaimed his resurrection from the dead, but that Jesus was then ruling at the right hand of God.

Later, Peter, accompanied by John, boldly testified to the leaders of the Jews the facts about the resurrection of Christ. In doing so he publicly charged them with the crucifixion of Jesus. Luke records Peter's comments at the time:

Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4: 9-13).

How could the apostles, disciples or anyone else believe in the resurrection of Christ if the tomb remained occupied with Jesus' body? The people of that day knew that in order to have a resurrection of the dead, the body must be raised from the tomb. Notice the thinking of Martha concerning the final and general resurrection at the end of time when she knew Lazarus would be raised in the general resurrection of all men. "Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. (John 11:23, 24).

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When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the dead body in its burial attire became alive at the beck and call of Jesus. Now alive, Lazarus in his body, still shrouded in his grave clothes, came forth from the tomb (John 11:44). To declare Lazarus to be resurrected from the dead, but for his body to remain in his tomb, would be absurd on the face of it and the Jews fully knew that to be the case. The same is no less true concerning the resurrection of Jesus.

If Jesus' body had remained in the tomb the Jewish leaders would have had no problem refuting the core of and foundation for the gospel system—the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to die no more. They would have simply shown everyone the tomb occupied by Jesus' body and that would have ended the whole matter. There could not and cannot be Christianity without Jesus' empty tomb.

An examination of the various efforts to deny the death and resurrection of Christ must be undertaken before this brief study is concluded. *The first one examined alleges that the Jewish leaders stole Jesus' dead body from its tomb.* However, the evidence speaks to the contrary. As previously discussed it was to the advantage of the Jews for Jesus' body to remain in the tomb and they did all they knew to do to keep it there (Mat. 27:62-66). If the Jews did steal the body it would have been a simple matter for them to produce it, exhibit it throughout Jerusalem and thereby destroy Christianity before it could get started.

Others allege that the apostles stole the body. If that were the case, why did Peter and John, who no doubt would had a hand in stealing it, run to Jesus' tomb to see if the report of his resurrection were true? Furthermore, as already noted, the apostles were in no frame of mind to plan and carry out such a theft (John 20:19). Besides that, if the guards were asleep and the disciples had attempted such a thing, the strenuous efforts involved and the sounds of their work in moving the great stone would have surely aroused them. Also, and again, if Jesus' dead body remained in the tomb, why would the apostles have undergone so much suffering and privation—even the death of all but one of the 11 remaining original apostles—knowing all along their message was a lie? Moreover, why would the thieves

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take the necessary time and effort to remove the grave cloths from Jesus' body and put them back into their original form in the tomb? Under the circumstances (remember those sleeping guards), how could the extremely frightened apostles accomplish these things? Also, it should be noted that there is no record of any disciple of Christ being arrested for the crime.

A second story has been told in an attempt to account for Christ's resurrection. *It alleges that the disciples were in such a deranged frame of mind due to the death of Christ that they experienced hallucinations of a living Christ.* The Latin root word for "hallucination" means "to wander in thought" or "to utter nonsense." Today, "hallucinations" are defined as "subjective experiences that are consequences of mental processes, sometimes fulfilling a purpose in the individual's mental life" (W. Keup, v).

Concerning the nature of hallucinations J.P. Moreland wrote:

First, hallucinations happen to persons who are high-strung, highly imaginative, and nervous. Second, they are linked in an individual's subconscious to his past beliefs and experiences. Third, it is extremely unlikely that two or more people would have the same hallucination at the same time. Fourth, they usually occur at particular places (places of nostalgia which create a reminiscing mood) and they recur over a long period of time (177).

Jesus' resurrection appearances were not to individuals only. As noted earlier the New Testament record states that Jesus was seen at the same time by the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), ten apostles at the same time (John 20:19-25 and he appeared to over 500 people at once (1 Cor. 15:6). C. S. Lewis indicates: "And any theory of hallucination breaks down on the fact (and if it is invention it is the oddest invention that ever entered the mind of man) that on three separate occasions this hallucination was not immediately recognized as Jesus (Luke 24:13-31; John 20:15; 21:4) (433). Furthermore, the view that the hallucination theory does not and cannot answer is the question, "What about the empty tomb?" If Jesus was only a hallucination of the disciples, the body of Jesus would have remained in his tomb. Thus, again, the Jews could

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have shown the disciples or anyone else the dead body of Jesus, thereby proving the disciples only had a hallucination of Jesus.

It is important to understand that those who believe in “group hallucinations” state that the mind of those having them must be conditioned to have them. At least the following three conditions of the mind must exist for such hallucinations to happen: (1) “expectation plays the coordinating role in collective hallucinations”, (2) “emotional excitement is a prerequisite” and (3) “must be informed beforehand, at least concerning the broad outlines of the phenomenon that will constitute the collective hallucination” (Zuzne and Jones 133, 135-136).

Upon an examination of the groups of people who saw Jesus following his burial, none of the prerequisite conditions for “group hallucinations” are found. Since “expectation plays the coordinating role in collective hallucinations”, what evidence is there that the apostles expected the resurrection of Jesus? The facts bearing on the case are to the contrary. Although, they looked into the empty tomb they still did not believe in Jesus’ resurrection (John 20:9). Matthew records that Peter even rebuked Jesus after he had attempted to explain to the disciples that he was to die in Jerusalem and be raised from the dead (Mat. 16:21ff). Following Jesus’ transfiguration as he and the disciples came down the mountain; Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone what they had seen until Christ had risen from the dead. They did as they were told, but discussed among themselves the meaning of “rising from the dead” (Mark 9:9, 10). Then we read: “For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him” (Mark 9:31, 32). Concerning the disciples’ failure to understand the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, Luke wrote:

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

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saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken (Luke 18:31-34).

It is declared that “emotional excitement is a prerequisite” to hallucinating. Where in the gospel record is it found that the disciples were “excited”? The fact of the matter is the very opposite existed in the apostles. They were grieving (Luke 22:62), in despair and disillusionment (Luke 24:19ff), depressed (Luke 24:17), skeptical (John 20:25; Mat. 28:17; Luke 24:37-43 and full of fear (Mat. 25:56; John 20:19).

The historical record does not reveal that the disciples were “Informed beforehand” of the “phenomenon that will constitute the collective hallucination.” The record clearly establishes that the disciples did not understand or anticipate the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Moreover, when the stark reality of the resurrection was upon them they misunderstood what their eyes beheld (Luke 24:4; Mat. 28:10; Luke 28:10; Mat. 28:17; John 21:4; Luke 24:16, 37). The disciples were confused, afraid, unbelieving at first, doubting, some did not recognize him on two occasions and some actually thought Jesus was a “ghost”. And, this brief discussion does not cover all the witnesses to Christ’s resurrection presented by the New Testament. Thus, the fundamental requisites that those who believe in collective hallucinations declare must be present before a group can have a “collective hallucination”, were not present in those who witnessed the risen Christ.

*The “Swoon Theory” has also been offered in an attempt to explain away the resurrection of Christ.* It represents Christ as fainting on the cross, the soldiers thought he was dead, he was taken down from the cross, placed in the cool tomb, revived, arose and left his tomb. The facts do not substantiate the story. When the soldiers found Jesus dead, they made sure of his death by piercing his side with a spear, the consequence of which was a flow of blood and water from the wound (John 19:32-34). This is a strong indication that Jesus was dead when the soldier got to him. Of this event,

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Michael Green comments:

We are told on eyewitness authority that ‘blood and water’ came out of the pierced side of Jesus (Jn. 19:34,35). The eyewitness clearly attached great importance to this. Had Jesus been alive when the spear pierced His side, strong spouts of blood would have emerged with every heart beat. Instead, the observer noticed semi-solid dark red clots seeping out, distinct and separate from the accompanying watery serum. This is evidence of massive clotting of the blood in the main arteries, and is exceptionally strong medical proof of death. It is all the more impressive because the evangelist could not possibly have realized its significance to a pathologist. The ‘blood and water’ from the spear-thrust is proof positive that Jesus was already dead (33).

Since it is the case that that the Roman centurion, who was no stranger to such executions, was in charge of Jesus’ execution, he would have made very sure that Jesus was dead before he was removed from the cross. Such men as the Roman centurion knew when a man was dead and when he was not. But if the centurion and the execution party had erred in the matter, those who buried Jesus would have caught the presence of life in his body (Mat. 27:54, 57-60). Moreover, for one who was in as terrible physical condition as was Jesus, whose brain while on the cross had seized due to the strain under which his body had been put, placing him into a coma, is not revived by wrapping him in between 70 to 100 pounds of spices, sealing him in a tomb without water or food, where for almost a full three days he breaths the strong odor of the spices, but no fresh air. If Jesus was alive when he was laid in the tomb, how could a person in such a physical state, under his own power, get up, roll back the stone and leave the tomb? The so-called “Swoon Theory” is false on the very face of it.

*The last theory examined is called “the wrong tomb theory”.* Simply stated it alleges that everyone went to the wrong tomb on the Sunday morning following the death of Christ. If they had not made such a mistake and gone to the correct tomb they would have found the body of Jesus still in the tomb.

Notice that the record states that the women observed where Jesus’ body was laid (Mark 15:47). The time lapse between his burial and the following Sunday morning was only about 72 hours. Also,

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the angel stated that the tomb to which they came on the Sunday morning following his burial was the place where Jesus' body was laid (Mark 16:6). John and Peter thought that the Lord's body was in the same tomb to which the women had gone, for they both ran to it (John 20:3-8). Obviously, those who advocate the "wrong tomb" story would have their hearers believe that the women, John, Peter and the angel were all sorely confused. The facts in evidence simply do not support the "wrong tomb" idea.

After examining all of these theories, the evidence testifies to the fact that the tomb was empty for one reason and one reason only—*Jesus Christ rose from the dead to die no more*. The solution to the empty tomb is a supernatural one. But truth seekers must go where the facts in a case, logically dealt with, lead them.

The following comments are from noted men who did not believe in the resurrection of Christ. Nevertheless, notice their significant admissions concerning the subject. Michael Grant, the imminent Oxford Classical historian wrote, "These accounts do prove that certain people were utterly convinced that (Jesus was resurrected)" (176). No less a person than Rudolf Bultmann admitted the fact that the disciple's certainly believed in the resurrection of Jesus (42). The rank skeptic John Shelby Spong confessed: "The change [in the disciples] was measurable and objective even if the cause of this change is debated. [It] was part of that first-century explosion of power that cannot be denied by any student of history" (26).

In the face of such overwhelming evidence for the resurrection of Christ, the only real reason that skeptical scholars continue to reject the resurrection is this—*they do not desire to believe it*. What counter-explanations do such persons have to explain the facts in the case of Jesus' resurrection appearances? The truth of the matter is this—*they have absolutely no credible counter explanation*.

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall

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receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:36-39).

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