



# The Resurrection of Christ

By Willie A. Alvarenga

# **THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST**

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It was almost literally 2000 years ago when a historical event known as the Resurrection of Christ took place in Jerusalem. According to Christianity, the Resurrection of Christ took place in fulfillment of great Old Testament prophecies found in the pages of the Holy Bible. Jesus Christ Himself also predicted His own resurrection while He proclaimed the Word of God in His earthly ministry. Evidence of these arguments will be later shown in this work. Sadly to say, not many people in this world believe the Resurrection of Jesus Christ to be a true historical event. There are literary hundreds and hundreds of books that have been written all over the world concerning the providing of proof to show that the Resurrection of Christ did indeed happen. At the same time, there are those who have written books and articles to demonstrate that this resurrection did not take place. Most scholars who have spent several hours researching the subject of the resurrection of Christ have presented a logical case in favor of this fundamental subject of the Christian faith. Some of their evidence will be included in this brief study. A proper treatment of this important subject will include the explaining of some arguments against the Resurrection of Christ; arguments in favor of this historical event; and, finally, I would like to impress upon the mind of our readers the need and importance to have a deep conviction upon the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is a matter related to our eternal salvation.

As we consider the work of several scholars, we realize that many arguments have been put forth against the historical event of the Resurrection of Christ. One of these arguments deals with the naturalistic theory which argues that the disciples of Christ were suffering hallucinations and thus, their testimony of a resurrected Christ cannot be taken into consideration. Dr. Habermas has produced sixth arguments which

completely refute this naturalistic erroneous view. Notice with me the arguments that he presented for our careful examination,

One popular theory of the nineteenth century postulated that the disciples and other early believers experienced hallucinations and thereby believed that Jesus had risen. However, with the advent of twentieth-century psychology and psychiatry, and by using the historical facts cited above, many substantial criticisms of this theory arise. First, hallucinations are subjective experiences in an individual's mind and therefore are not collective or contagious. Since these experiences cannot be shared or induced, the disciples could not all have had the same hallucination. Second, the psychological condition of the mind needed for hallucinations, characterized by belief and expectation, was lacking. The disciples were not expecting the resurrection but were in a state of despair. Third, the variety of times, places, and personalities involved in these experiences also militates against any hallucination theory. Fourth, care was taken to show that these experiences were not hallucinations. For instance, the New Testament clearly separates the resurrection appearances from subjective visions, thereby relating that Jesus' appearances from mental illness or from physiological sources such as deprivation of sleep and lack of food or drink. These conditions were not applicable to the disciples, however. Sixth, how do we explain the conversions of two non-believers, Paul and James? It is extremely doubtful that they would have desired to see Jesus enough to hallucinate.<sup>1</sup>

The arguments refuting the hallucination theory presented by Dr. Habermas proves to be effective, especially when you reason correctly about the evidence thus shown. The sixth argument presented in the quote above, presents, in my personal view, one of the strongest arguments, since the Bible clearly shows that Saul of Tarsus and James, the Brother of Jesus, who did not believe in Him prior to His resurrection end up believing in the resurrection of Christ (cf. John 7:5; Acts 1:14). Saul of Tarsus, who later became the great apostle Paul and a faithful supporter of the Christian faith, was a strong persecutor of those who believed Jesus had risen from the dead. Clear examples of his

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<sup>1</sup> Gary R. Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House), 26-27

opposition to Christianity can be seen in the following Scriptures (Acts 8:1-4; 9:1-2; 22:4-5; 26:9-11). A man who strongly opposed Christianity, which is founded upon the Resurrection of Christ, cannot change his beliefs based on a hallucination. This just cannot be the case with this man. And so, anyone who carefully considers the logical evidence thus presented cannot refuse to deny the great impact Christ's Resurrection had on Saul of Tarsus, James, and thousands of disciples from the early century to this day.

Another argument that has been raised against the Resurrection of Christ deals with the questioning of Jesus being a real historical person. Some argue that Jesus did not exist in the past, but that he was a fictional character made up in the minds of Christians. Nevertheless, this argument can be easily refuted by providing evidence for the historicity of Jesus Christ. Several scholars have written extensively defending the argument that Jesus was a real historical person who walked through the streets of Palestine. Personally, I would like to include one piece of evidence that proves that Jesus was a real person who lived several years ago. Please consider carefully and logically what the roman historian, Cornelius Tacitus, wrote about Jesus,

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much for the crime of firing the city as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or

were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as nightly illumination, when daylight had expired" (Annals 15:44).<sup>2</sup>

As we can see, there is record of valuable information which proves that Jesus Christ was a real historical person. To deny the evidence is to be guilty of willingly rejecting what history has recorded for our learning. In this quote by Tacitus, not much good is being said about the disciples and Christ; nevertheless, this Roman historian reveals information which proves the existence of the historical Jesus Christ. Let me remind you that the proof of the historicity of Jesus can be substantiated by dozens of quotes from historians who either spoke in favor, or against Christ. The book entitled, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* by Dr. Josh McDowell is recommended to those who are interested in examining additional quotes from historians who provided valuable evidence in favor for the historicity of Christ; and many other fundamental subjects of biblical theism.

Now let us turn our attention to the evidence that proves, in my opinion, the case for the Resurrection of Christ. The refutation to the arguments thus far examined concerning the case against the Resurrection of Christ can be used as evidence that the resurrection is indeed a true fact that cannot be denied; Nevertheless, let us further consider more evidence that can help any honest person believe that Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, resurrected from the dead.

My first additional evidence in favor of the Resurrection of Christ deals with the attitude and actions of the Pharisees and chief priests concerning the Resurrection of Christ. Please notice carefully what the gospel according to Mathew has to say about this:

On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will

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<sup>2</sup> J. L. McKinley, *Jesus and the Resurrection, The Catalyst of Historical Christianity* (Xulon Press, 2005), 32-33

rise.' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first. Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard (Matt 27:62-66, NKJV).

If you notice, the chief priests and the Pharisees were well-informed of the predictions that Jesus Christ did concerning His own resurrection. Based on this, these people wanted to make sure that the body of Jesus was not stolen from the tomb. Pilate agreed to their petition of making the tomb secure so that nobody could steal the body. It is interesting to note that this passage of Scripture mentions the word "sealing," which, according to Roman law, if anyone broke or destroyed this seal, this person would be in danger of being prosecuted. Notice what Dr. Josh McDowell commented on this part, "Considering in like manner the securing of Jesus' tomb, the Roman seal affixed thereon was meant to prevent any attempted vandalizing of the sepulcher. Anyone trying to move the stone from the tomb's entrance would have broken the seal and thus incurred the wrath of Roman law."<sup>3</sup>

Based on this evidence, there was no way that anyone could attempt to break the seal, much less in the presence of the guards that were put there to make sure no one stole the body of Jesus; otherwise, they, themselves, would get into much trouble. Now, the biblical record reveals that Jesus was raised from the dead, and so the body came out of the tomb, leaving an empty tomb for the years to come. Please notice with me what the biblical text reveals about how Jesus was able to come out of the tomb, even when the guards were present:

Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there

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<sup>3</sup> Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands Verdict, Volume I: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith*. Rev. ed. San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1979), 217

was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, **and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.** His countenance was like lightning and his clothing as white as snow. **And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.** But the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. “He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. “And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.” So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word (Matt 28:1-8, NKJV, emp. added).

From this portion of Scripture, we can clearly see who broke the seal, and removed the stone of the tomb where Jesus was buried. The Bible tells us that an angel from heaven did this, even when the Roman guards were present. How do we know that this was a true event? All we have to do is examine the evidence found in the words the guards reported to the chief priests. Please notice with me the following verses:

Now while they were going, behold, **some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened.** When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, “Tell them, ‘His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.’ “And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and make you secure.” So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day (Matt 28:11-15, emp. added)

According to this report, the guards did indeed saw what they saw. The chief priests did not deny what had happened, but instead, made arrangements to cover with a lie what had really happened. There is no way on earth that you can dismiss this kind of evidence in favor for the Resurrection of Christ. The evidence is clear and without any fabrication to explain it away! Therefore, as we can see, this narrative we have examined is part of the evidence that can be utilized to establish the case for the

Resurrection of Christ. The internal evidence from the record of the Scriptures can help us realize this to be the case. Concerning the empty tomb seen on this biblical narrative, notice what Dr. Bert Thompson commented about it,

Thousands of people go annually to the graves of the founders of the Buddhist and Muslim religions to pay homage. Yet Christians do not pay homage at the grave of Christ—for the simple fact that **the tomb is empty**. A dead Savior is no good! For those who accept, and act upon, the evidence for Christ's deity provided by the resurrection, life is meaningful, rich, and full (see Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 15). For those who reject the resurrection, the vacant tomb will stand forever as eternity's greatest mystery, and one day will serve as their silent judge.<sup>4</sup>

As we can see in this quote, the tomb is empty, and it has been empty for centuries; which, if reasoned correctly, this would make a very strong case in favor of Christianity. Let us now turn to our second piece of evidence which will establish the case for the Resurrection of Jesus. This evidence is clearly seen by the many witnesses that established and proclaimed having seen the Lord Jesus after His death. Again, there may be some who may argue that these people were experiencing hallucinations in their lives; nevertheless, as we have shown already, this just cannot be the case. The biblical record reveals that several people had the opportunity to see Jesus alive after the resurrection. For this evidence, we turn to the writings of one of the persons whose life changed for the better right after the resurrection of Jesus; this person is the apostle Paul. We recall earlier that this Christian used to persecute Christianity in the early century, but then he had an encounter with Jesus himself, which changed his life completely. Now, this man offers evidence which helps us to understand that the resurrection of Christ is proved by the hundreds of witnesses who saw the living Savior

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<sup>4</sup> Bert Thompson, Rock-Solid Faith How To Build it (Montgomery, Alabama: Apologetics Press, 2000), 257

right after His resurrection. Let me encourage you to please consider what the inspired text says concerning these witnesses:

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, **and that he arose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.** After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time (1 Cor 15:1-8, NKJV, emp. added).

According to this passage of Scripture we see how Paul establishes the fact that Jesus arose again from the dead on the third day, which is exactly what the Lord said would happen. He then showed how He appeared to as many disciples who actually saw Him alive. Dr. McDowell provides a list of Bible references that shows how many people actually saw Jesus Christ after His resurrection:

1. Mary Magdalene (John 20:14; Mk 16:9), 2. Women returning from the tomb (Matt 28:9, 10), 3. Peter later in the day (Lk 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5), 4. Disciples at Emmaus (Lk 24:13-33), the apostles, Thomas being absent (Lk 24:36-43; John 20:19-24), 5. The apostles, Thomas being present (John 20:26-29), 6. The seven by the Lake of Tiberias (John 21:1-23), 7. A multitude of 500 plus believers on a Galilean mountain (1 Cor 15:6), 8. To James (1 Cor 15:7), 9. To the eleven (Matt 28:16-20; Mk 16:14-20; Lk 24:33-52; Acts 1:3-12), 10. To the disciples at the ascension (Acts 1:3-12), 11. To Paul (Acts 9:3-6; 1 Cor 15:8), 12. To Stephen (Acts 7:55), 13. To Paul in the temple (Acts 22:17-21; 23:11) and finally, to John at Patmos (Revelation 1:10-19).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands Verdict, Volume I: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith*. Rev. ed. San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1979), 233-234

Friend, the evidence is very compelling to the point that it cannot be denied. This evidence is so strong that based on this truth, Christianity began to be spread all over the world back then as it is still the case today. Professor C. S. Lewis commented the following concerning this piece of evidence, "The first fact in the history of Christendom is a number of people who say they have seen the Resurrection. If they had died without making anyone else believe this "gospel" no gospels would ever have been written."<sup>6</sup> Also, John R. W. Stott said, "Perhaps the transformation of the disciples of Jesus is the greatest evidence of all for the resurrection...."<sup>7</sup> There is no way that millions and millions of people throughout the centuries will base their faith on something which does not rest upon logical and sufficient evidence or something that is false.

There is logical and sufficient evidence to establish the case for the Resurrection of Christ, as well as anything that entails biblical theism. Hundreds of Christians have died because of what they believe to be the true claims of Christianity. They experienced a change of lives that can only be explained by their true faith in Jesus Christ and His resurrection. Dr. McDowell commented the following which serves as the best explanation for the change of life the disciples of Christ experienced, "The established psychological fact of changed lives, then, is a credible reason for believing in the resurrection. It is subjective evidence bearing witness to the objective fact that Christ arose on the third day. For only a risen Christ could have such transforming power in a person's life."<sup>8</sup> Consider also what Dr. Harrub commented on this same thought,

The profession of disciple did not offer a great life expectancy for those willing to preach and teach in His name. For instance, we know James was killed with a sword (Acts 12); Paul was beheaded; whereas Peter and "Andrew were crucified. And yet they preached Christ crucified with

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<sup>6</sup> Lewis, C. S., *Miracles, A Preliminary Study* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1947).

<sup>7</sup> Stott, John R. W., *Basic Christianity* (Downers Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971), 236

<sup>8</sup> Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands Verdict, Volume I: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith*. Rev. ed. San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1979), 237

boldness. This was not a profession for the faint of heart. The question should be asked: Why would men be willing to give up their lives in exchanged to preach the Gospel? The answers lie in a cogent understanding of what the resurrection of Christ really means for mankind<sup>9</sup>

I do not believe anybody would be willing to give his life for something that is not logical and true. Christianity is a logical religion based upon sufficient evidence. If anyone does not want to accept the true claims of Christianity, then this person is not reasoning correctly about the evidence set before them. Notice what Ramon C. Kelcy commented about this, "Modern religious teachers have not rejected the resurrection because they examined the evidence and found it to be insufficient, but because they first decided that such a miracle could not have occurred and approached the question with that preconceived opinion."<sup>10</sup>

What should be our attitude after considering this kind of evidence? Did you reason correctly about the arguments presented in favor of the Resurrection of Christ? Do you now believe that Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, arose from the dead about 2,000 years ago? Are you now convinced that the Resurrection of Christ is a true historical event? Personally, I really hope and pray that this brief document has helped you realize the truth about the historical event of the Resurrection of Christ. It is my prayer that you will acknowledge the logical evidence that has been presented to you! The implications of this historical event are critical indeed. Therefore, let me encourage you to please accept the evidence that has been presented in this material.

From a biblical stand point, the importance of believing in the Resurrection of Christ is strongly emphasized. This is due to the fact that those who do not believe in this event will not have a chance to spend eternal life in heaven. Jesus Christ stated the

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<sup>9</sup> Brad Harrub, Convicted, A Scientist Examines the Evidence for Christianity (Brentwood, TN: Focus Press, INC., 2009),170

<sup>10</sup> Ramon C. Kelcy, *Why I Believe in God and Other Sermons*, 18

following, “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). Part of believing in Jesus Christ includes believing that He was raised from the dead on the third day after his crucifixion. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is very attached to the claims Jesus made concerning His deity. If he was not resurrected from the dead, then his claims of who He was are false. But, His claims were not false, He indeed was raised from the dead; therefore, He is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. And, in order to be saved from our sins, we must obey the Gospel of Christ, which message includes His resurrection from the dead (cf. 1 Cor 15:1-4).

As I bring this study to an end let me remind you of some of the things that we have considered throughout the development of this very important and fundamental subject. We have examined some information that has been utilized to refute the true claims of Christianity in favor of the Resurrection of Christ. We have also considered carefully the evidence that presents a clear and logical case for the true claims of the Resurrection of Christ. This task was accomplished by showing the internal evidence found within the Scriptures and the external evidence of the testimony of scholars who have written extensively in favor of the Resurrection of Christ. Any person who reasons correctly about the evidence thus shown, will, indeed, accept the information as true and valid. Personally, my plans are to use the evidence we have examined to help people realize the importance of believing in the Resurrection of Christ. I want you to examine the internal and external evidence that proves this very important and fundamental subject which is so related to our eternal salvation. May you please reason correctly about the things you have examined in this brief study!

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