

The historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus

The entire Christian faith hangs on the singular claim that Jesus rose from the dead. If you can prove this event DIDN'T happen, then the entire religion crumbles like a house of cards. However, did you know that the event has more evidence to support it than most other 1st century events?

Let's dive into what is by far the most important event in human history. We are going to look into the 7 HISTORICAL FACTS that historical scholars (regardless of religious affiliation or faith background) nearly unanimously agree on (this is called the "minimal facts" argument for the resurrection):

1. Jesus was a real person

This, as stated, is nearly unanimously agreed upon by historians. Bart Ehrman, a NON-CHRISTIAN historian who is alive today, wrote a book called "Did Jesus exist?" In this book, written to counter the idea that there was never such a person as Jesus of Nazareth at all, Ehrman sets out to demonstrate the historical evidence for Jesus' existence, and he aims to state why all experts in the area agree that "whatever else you may think about Jesus, he certainly did exist."

2. Jesus died by crucifixion under Pontius Pilate

Again, this is nearly unanimously agreed upon by historical scholars.

Josephus, a first-century Jewish (non-Christian) historian had this to say about Jesus' death:

“At this time there was a wise man called Jesus, and his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. Many people among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die.”

Tacitus, a first-century Roman (again, non-Christian) historian also spoke of Christ’s death:

“Christus... suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus”

These are just two of the DOZENS of historical writings on the crucifixion of Jesus. Remember, these are NOT the Bible, these are historical writings written in the first century by non-Christians.

3. His tomb was found empty by women three days later

Skeptical (non-Christian) scholar Jacob Kremer says:

"By far most exegetes hold firmly to the reliability of the biblical statements concerning the empty tomb."

In addition, the fact that women discover the empty tomb also adds to the embarrassment of the story, which is something that historians look for:

“The criterion of embarrassment is a type of historical analysis in which a historical account is deemed likely to be true under the inference that the author would have no reason to invent a historical account which might embarrass them.” - Wikipedia

The narratives embarrassingly portray the disciples as cowardly running away for their lives when Jesus was going to be crucified, and they even doubted the reports of the women because the culture of that time was to reject any and all testimonies of women.

[4. We have dozens of independent eye-witness testimonies of people seeing, touching, and interacting with Jesus alive after His death](#)

Here, Josephus and Tacitus continue their statements:

Josephus:

“Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive. Accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have reported wonders. And the tribe of the Christians, so named after him, has not disappeared to this day”

Tacitus:

“Christus... suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.”

Both mention the “superstition” of Jesus’ resurrection and the fact that the disciples of Jesus claim to have encountered Him after His death.

Again, these statements are not in the Bible. Additionally, non-Christian historian Gerd Lüdemann had this to say on the subject:

“It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus’ death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ.”

Bart Ehrman (a previously-mentioned atheist) says “It is a historical fact that some of Jesus’ followers came to believe that he had been raised from the dead soon after his crucifixion”

5. The disciples held to this belief until the day they dies and despite the persecution.

After these interactions with the supposed risen Jesus, His disciples proclaimed He rose from the dead and held onto this belief under persecution, torture, and martyrdom and not a single one once ever recanted their belief nor did they even back down from it, proclaiming it until the day they died.

Pliny the Younger, a first-century Roman, had a lot to say about his interactions with Christians in the first century and wrote at length about it, but he concluded one of his letters with this:

“I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses.”

This, among many other pieces of evidence, show that followers of Jesus were persecuted in the first century for their belief. Those that claimed to be EYE-WITNESSES of the risen Christ never recanted their claims, even when some were beheaded, crucified, burned alive, etc. They would not endure these things if they knew what they claimed to be a lie.

6. Several first-century enemies of Jesus and Christians were radically converted to Christianity after interactions and encounters with the risen Jesus

What would it take for the doubting brother of Jesus to become one of the foremost leaders in the early church? Better yet, what would it take for someone who was actively killing first-century Christians to become the person that ends up writing nearly half of what we consider the New Testament? They encountered the risen Jesus.

James, the brother of Jesus and Paul the Apostle had radical conversions to Christianity, and the resurrection of Jesus best explains this change.

While the Bible mentions James' skepticism, Josephus confirms the prominence and martyrdom of James in the early church in Antiquities of the Jews (20.9.1).

Similarly, Paul, once a fervent persecutor of Christians, experienced a profound transformation after what he described as an encounter with the risen Jesus. This event turned him into Christianity's most influential missionary, despite enduring great suffering, persecution, and ultimately martyrdom.

Even skeptic Bart Ehrman acknowledges, "Paul really believed he saw Jesus alive after his death, just as James...did" (Did Jesus Exist?), underscoring the sincerity of their claims.

7. The EXPLOSION of Christianity in the first century within months of the resurrection

Before the first century, Christianity didn't exist. Then, within months of Jesus' reported resurrection, it rapidly grew into a widespread movement—an unprecedented historical anomaly.

Tacitus (Annals 15.44) confirms Christians were active in Rome by AD 64, calling their belief in Christ's resurrection "a most mischievous superstition.

Josephus (Antiquities 18.3.3) notes Jesus' influence, with followers proclaiming Him alive after death.

Pliny the Younger, writing to Emperor Trajan (AD 112), describes Christians as growing so rapidly they disrupted pagan worship.

This unprecedented expansion occurred despite severe persecution, lack of military or political power, and the scandal of a crucified leader. The only plausible explanation for this explosive growth is the unwavering conviction of early Christians that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead.

Ultimately, my point is this: Non-Christian historians nearly unanimously agree with the 7 points listed. What is the best explanation of this evidence? Many non-Christians have offered many explanations, but they all fall flat in one way or another. For instance, the conspiracy theory that the disciples made the whole story up doesn't make sense with evidence 3, 4, 5, or 6. The theory that the disciples hallucinated the risen Jesus doesn't make sense for 2 reasons. Firstly, it doesn't align with evidence 3 or 6, and secondly, group hallucinations simply don't happen.

The theory that accounts for all of the facts is the Christian theory: That Jesus rose from the dead and is the Son of God!

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