

# DEFENDABLE FAITH - ANSWERING TOUGH QUESTIONS ABOUT CHRISTIANITY

## Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?

Introduction: Among the many questions we are examining as we prepare to give a reasoned explanation of the hope we have in Christ, several rise to the top as the most critical. In my opinion, the top three are “Does God exist?” “Is the Bible reliable?” and “Did Jesus rise from the dead?” The Holy Spirit points out the pivotal nature of this third question as He speaks through the apostle Paul in

**1 Corinthians 15:17-19** “And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.”

In short, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, our Christian faith is worthless. The good news is dependent on the resurrection. No resurrection, no gospel!

To examine this monumental question, let us break the inquiry into smaller questions?

### DID JESUS REALLY DIE?

- **Across the ages, unbelievers have proposed that Jesus did not really die on the cross.**
  - They all basically take a form of the argument that Jesus did not die on the cross but either swooned, took a drug, or otherwise faked His death.
  - His disciples were complicit in the hoax and faked a burial.
  - Then Jesus revived and appeared to people, thus faking a resurrection from the dead.
- **The heresy that Jesus did not die is an oft recurring one.**
  - The holy book of Islam, the Qur’an (Koran), was written in the seventh century A.D., more than 600 years \_\_\_\_\_ the resurrection.
  - The Qur’an teaches that Allah took Jesus to heaven before Jesus died on the cross and that Allah substituted a look alike for Jesus who was crucified and died but did not rise from the dead.
  - Even today a shrine exists that supposedly marks the real burial place of Jesus in Srinagar, Kashmir.
  - In the early 1900’s Karl Bahrdt, Karl Venturini, and other early liberal scholars proposed that Jesus did not really die on the cross.

- In 1929 D.H. Lawrence placed this theme in a short story that said Jesus fled to Egypt after the crucifixion.
- In 1965, Hugh Schonfield's The Passover Plot became a best seller.
- In 1972, Donovan Joyce used the swoon theory, more fancifully than ever before, in The Jesus Scroll.
- In 1982, Holy Blood, Holy Grail proposed that Pilate was bribed to allow Jesus to be removed from the cross before He was dead.
- In 1992, Barbara Thiering wrote Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which reintroduced the swoon theory to audiences that had missed it before.
- **In contrast to the fanciful hypotheses above, none of which offers any supporting evidence in favor of their theory, the evidence of Jesus' death by crucifixion is overwhelming.**
  - Not only do the demonstrably reliable gospels offer us historical detail of the crucifixion of Jesus, but the \_\_\_\_\_ Roman historian Tacitus also recorded Jesus' death by crucifixion.
  - One cannot take these historical accounts seriously at all and still conclude that Jesus did not die on the cross.
    - The flogging Jesus received at the hands of the Romans would have in itself put Jesus on the verge of death. The Roman flogging would have included at least 39 blows, but often consisted of many more. The whip was made of braided leather with iron balls and pieces of bone imbedded within. The iron balls bruised and broke the flesh, while the bone penetrated like fish hooks to rip flesh away as the whip was withdrawn for another stripe. Victims of Roman flogging were often left looking like shredded meat. Sometimes even portions of the spine was exposed in the deep cuts produced. The depiction of flogging in the movie The Passion are not exaggerated.
    - One medical authority, Alexander Metherell, M.D., PH.D., a world recognized medical expert, professor, and author said that the evidence shows that Jesus was in hypovolemic shock as a result of His flogging. Hypo means low; vol means volume; emic means blood. Jesus was suffering from low blood volume due to the loss of blood He experienced while being beaten. The lack of blood causes weakness and fainting (Jesus fell under the weight of the cross) and extreme thirst (Jesus, "I thirst"). Metherell concludes that Jesus was already in serious to critical condition before the nails were driven into His hands and feet.

- But the destruction of Jesus' body had just begun. When He was laid upon the cross, spikes, five to seven inches in length were driven into His wrists. (This was the practice of Roman crucifixion. The Greek word for "hands" includes that portion of the body we call the "wrists.") This would have caused the crushing of the median nerve. Remember the extreme pain experienced when we bump our "funny bone." Imagine that nerve being squeezed with a pair of pliers. Metherell said that the effect of driving the spikes into the wrists would be similar to that. We would describe such agony as excruciating. The word excruciating means "out of the cross." That intense pain would be repeated as the spikes were driven into Jesus' feet. Even if Jesus had come off the cross alive, He could not have stood up or held anything in His hands.
- When Jesus was raised up to hang upon the cross, each of His arms would have been stretched by about six inches in length and both shoulders would have become dislocated. This was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 22 which declared, "My bones are out of joint."
- Death came to victims on a cross by slow and agonizing asphyxiation. As Jesus hung on the cross, the weight of His body being supported by the nails in His wrists, His chest and diaphragm would have been in the inhaled position. In order to exhale, Jesus would have to push the bones of His pierced feet against the spike, sliding his raw back against the wood of the cross to lift Himself to expel the air in His lungs. He would then sink back down with His weight on His wrists and draw a fresh breath. Each breath He took required this excruciating sequence of events. Eventually, exhaustion won out.
- As a crucified man proved no longer able to lift himself to exhale, carbon dioxide built up in the blood. This caused fluid to build up around both the lungs and the heart. Combined with hypovolemic shock, the heart rate would increase, and ultimately cardiac failure would bring certain death. When the soldier pierced Jesus' side, blood and water came out, evidence that this is what happened with Jesus. The presence of the water like fluid was a certain testimony that Jesus was already dead.
- Finally, the Centurion that supervised the crucifixion was a specialist in death. He was no doctor to make people well, but he knew with a certainty when they were dead. His own life was subject to forfeit if he erred at this point.
- Other medical experts have agreed with Metherell. In 1986, Dr. William D. Edwards wrote an article in the Journal of the American Medical Association in which he said, "Clearly, the weight of the historical and \_\_\_\_\_ evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to His side was inflicted.... Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge."