

Your Verdict on the Empty Tomb

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Compiled by Hannah Abcede for personal study and ministry resource purposes. For questions or concerns, please contact me via the email on Cru's Outreach website (*Magnify*).

First, let's get to know Christ's timeline,

- The Birth of Christ (4-6 BC, approx.)
- Wise Men Visit and Jesus Escapes to Egypt (4 BC, approx.)
- Jesus' Childhood – Left Behind in Jerusalem (8 AD, approx.)
- Jesus Baptised and Tempted by the Devil (28 AD, approx.)
- Jesus Recruits Disciples and Performs First Miracle (28 AD, approx.)
- Jesus Begins Teaching and Miraculous Healings (28-30 AD, approx.)
- Christ's Arrest, Crucifixion, and Resurrection (30 AD)

The Historical Facts

- Jewish writers
 - Josephus (37 AD): Josephus was born in Jerusalem in a Jewish family and became a pharisee. He visits Rome and becomes friendly with the Emperor's family (64 AD). Returning to Jerusalem, war against Jerusalem and Rome arises, and Josephus serves as commander of the Jewish forces. Jerusalem was defeated by Roman General Vespasian, keeping Josephus as a prisoner. Josephus prophesied that Vespasian would become the emperor of Rome. When his prediction came true and was released (69 AD). He then joined the Roman general Titus in his siege of Jerusalem and was there when it fell in the summer of 70 AD.
 - Tied to Jesus' Prophecy about the fall of Jerusalem in Luke 21:5-6 (also in Matthew 24:1-2 and Mark 13:1-2): **"Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, 'As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.'"**
 - He spent the rest of his life writing numerous books on the history of the Jews of which one was a twenty-volume history of the Jewish nation covering the period from its earliest origins down to his own day and the revolt against Rome (Grieve 20). The book mentions figures from the New Testament—Pilate, Annas, the Herods, John the Baptist and Jesus Christ—even stating that Jesus was the Messiah. His writing on this specific text is debated whether Christians have tampered with the original work.
- Pagan writers

- **Cornelius Tacitus** (AD55-120), a Roman Historian known for one of his works, *Annals*, which covers the history of Rome from the death of Augustus in AD14 to Nero in AD68. Key information included:
 - Christians were named after their founder, Christ
 - Christ was put to death by Pontius Pilate
 - This was during the reign of the emperor Tiberius (AD14-37)
 - His death ended the 'superstition' for a short time, but it soon broke out again
 - It was especially popular in Judea where it began
 - It then spread to Rome
 - When the great fire of Rome destroyed a large part of the city, Nero blamed the Christians
 - They were arrested and persecuted for their faith, which many romans considered unjust
- **Pliny the Younger** (AD112), gives a full account of Christianity in a letter written to the Emperor Trajan. Key information:
 - The early Christians met regularly
 - They sang hymns
 - They worshipped Christ as God
 - They pledged themselves not to do anything wicked
 - They lived exemplary moral lives
 - There is a probable reference to the Lord's Supper in the remark about their re-assembling to eat food of an ordinary kind
- The New Testament
 - The Gospel was written in clear written memory. Jesus was crucified in the early 30s and the earliest Gospel was around the 60s, making the time gap around 25 years
 - John's Gospel dated around AD130; the time between this fragment and the original is about 40 years (in contrast, the time between the original of Caesar's Gallic War and the earliest copy is 900 years). We also have the Bodmer Papyrus containing most of John's Gospel with a time span of about 70 years and the Chester Beatty Papyri containing most of the New Testament giving a time span of about 110 years
 - There is over 13,000 ancient Greek manuscript of the New Testament in whole or in part and the text is the same in over 98% (in contrast, we only have 9 different copies of Caesar's *Gallic War*)

The Empty Tomb – The Four Possible Explanations: Fraud, Swoon, Hallucination, and Miracle

1. Fraud

- Theory: the guard fell asleep and the disciples came by night and stole the body of Jesus and invented the story that he had risen from the dead.
- Why this can't be:

- The early disciples weren't charged of stealing the body which is a serious offense to both Roman and Jewish authorities
- Romans have strict military discipline. If one fails to adhere to expectations, soldiers would be executed along with the criminals
- Apostles were depressed of the news; they wouldn't have been brave enough to steal the body
- The apostles died for their faith. Even Peter previously denied Christ, but now has full confidence which can only be explained by the resurrection—"People may die for what they sincerely believe is true, but it is another thing to die for what you know is a deliberate lie"
- Linen clothes of Christ were left behind in the tomb; it would have been easier to have taken the body, and they wouldn't have had the time to uncover him without the Roman guards noticing
- Christians are known for their upright moral values, supported by Tacitus and Pliny

2. Swoon

- Theory: Jesus did not die on the cross but fainted or swooned from exhaustion. He was taken down from the cross and placed in the tomb, where he then revived. After this, he emerged from the tomb, and the disciples wrongly jumped to the wrong conclusion that had risen from the dead
- Why this can't be:
 - Roman soldiers' duty is strict and if they make a mistake, they are risking their own lives. If they didn't have Christ dead as what was commanded by the governor, Pontius Pilate, to condemn him to death, they would be faced with execution themselves
 - His legs weren't broken because they were certain he was already dead
 - Pilate gave permission to bury the body of Christ to John. Otherwise, this would not be allowed
 - Jesus being pierced on the side with water and blood coming out to confirm that he was dead
 - He wouldn't have had the strength to escape in such conditions if he was revived three days later. This also would've been difficult to do, as the Roman guards with their strict guidelines would be watching as their lives depended on it

3. Hallucination

- Theory: Since the disciples were confident and believe that Jesus would rise from the dead, they eventually believed it had happened
- Why this can't be:
 - A hallucination means seeing something else and mistaking it for what you are looking for. But in the New Testament, Mary saw Jesus but thought that he was the gardener. The two people on the road to Emmaus saw Jesus, but they thought he was a stranger. The apostles saw Jesus, but they thought he was a ghost

- Hallucinations only affect certain people that are highly imaginative, be in this situation, it affects many—it wasn't only his disciples, but to 500 men who saw him after his resurrection
 - Hallucinations are generally restricted to certain times and places, but Jesus appears in various locations
 - Hallucinations increase in intensity as time goes on, but the disciples stopped seeing him after 40 days and did not occur again. The next person who encounters Him is Saul, who becomes Apostle Paul.
4. Miracle
- The Gospel message is true and Jesus Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4)

Direct Evidence

- Mary Magdalene (John 20): The first person to see Jesus Christ
- Mary mother of James, Salome and Joanna (Matthew 28:9): Other women who volunteered to tell the other disciples of the resurrection upon being revealed to Mary
- Peter: The Lord reassures Him, since he was the one who denied Him
- Two Disciples on the Road to Emmaus: Cleopas and the other (maybe his wife) disciple were in Christ's presence and He revealed himself to them after two hours
- To the disciples, Thomas being absent: The two disciples from Emmaus informs the other disciples and Jesus appears to them (Luke 24:36-39)
- To the disciples, Thomas being present: It was finally revealed to Thomas, who doubted the news, that Jesus did resurrect from the dead by touching his hand and side
- To seven disciples in Galilee: The disciples encountered Jesus as they were fishing. The Lord granted them a great catch and ate breakfast with Him.
- To eleven disciples: On a hill to Galilee, Jesus commands and sets the great commission (Matthew 28:19)
- To five hundred men: The witness of 500 men where Jesus appeared to them at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6)
- To James: James, the younger brother of Jesus, along with his other brothers saw Christ after his death and became believers
- To eleven disciples on the Mount of Olives: The last recorded appearance was on the mount of Olives, where Jesus ascends to heaven (Acts 1:9)
- To Paul: Jesus appears to Paul on the way to Damascus and He becomes an apostle

The Witnesses Examined

Some witnesses saw Jesus on more occasions than one; Peter saw him six times, John, James, and Nathaniel five times, and Thomas and the other apostles four times. These witnesses either wrote as eyewitnesses of the resurrection or recorded eyewitness accounts of it. The evidence is empirical; it is based on observation and experience and not on theory

Paul's encounter with Christ is a powerful testimony, transitioning from devout Jewish person who persecuted and killed Christians, to being a follower of Christ.

Circumstantial Evidence

- The life of Jesus: The life of Christ is ever present and still makes its appearance in daily life, like in news outlets, or through those from various backgrounds, such as figures like Albert Einstein
- The change in the disciples: Peter was imprisoned and rose to prominence as head of the church of Jerusalem and died for his faith. Paul became a Christian from a Jewish background who persecuted Christians. James and his brothers believe in Jesus. Thomas no longer doubted and was probably the first missionary to India
- Its origin: Disciples preached in the same region that killed the Lord Jesus and many came to believe in Him
- Its members: There is neither Jew nor Gentile. No division in race or culture, but we are all united and one in Christ (Galatians 3:28)
- Its worship: Christians kept the Sunday as the sabbath due to Christ's resurrection on the eighth day
- Its growth: If the resurrection was not true, the early church would have lost its initial momentum and fizzled out
- The experience of Christians: Christ is still alive and active, transforming many from the old to the modern day with many encountering Christ and His love

So what?

- It shows that Jesus is God
- It means that Jesus is the judge
- It means forgiveness is available
- It gives meaning to life
- It gives hope in the face of death

Citation

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