

5 Jesus

**Death and
Resurrection**
Fact, Fiction
or Fantasy?

“I say unequivocally that the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt.”

Sir Lionel Luckhoo (1914-1997)—Trial Lawyer (won a world-record 245 murder acquittals in a row, making him the most successful lawyer in the world, according to The Guinness book of World Records) 1998
"God's Outrageous Claims" by Lee Strobel

According to many history scholars, Jesus did in fact live—and based on this fact we can also presume that He died. I think you'll agree that someone living and dying isn't very controversial. But what is controversial about Jesus, are the claims He made while He was alive and the claims that His disciples made after His death.

What did He claim? Well, He claimed to be the Son of God and that He would save us all if we chose to follow Him. Pretty big words for any man! His disciples then claimed, once He had died, that they saw Him again and that He had risen from the dead! And it's these claims that have since incited many great discussions and debates, still raging two thousand years after he lived.

Questions

What do I think about these claims?

What relevance does Jesus' resurrection have to my life? How can it help me with the gaps in my life?

Let's start at the beginning. The New Testament books of the Bible record Jesus stating not only that He would die, but that He would die at the hands of men and then rise again.

He said to them, The Son of Man is going to be betrayed. He will be killed, but three days later He will rise from the dead. Mark 9:31

Then Jesus began to tell them that He, the Son of Man, would suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the leaders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, and three days later He would rise again. Mark 8:31

For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give My life as a ransom for many. Matthew 20:28

So, according to the Bible, Jesus' death wasn't an unforeseen event; on the contrary, Jesus himself not only knew it was coming, but stressed more than once that it had to happen and that He had to die. He was also recorded as saying:

Gathering the twelve disciples around him, Jesus told them, As you know, we are going to Jerusalem. And when we get there, all the predictions of the ancient prophets concerning the Son of Man will come true. He will be handed over to the Romans to be mocked, treated shamefully, and spit upon.

Luke 18:31, 32

Now my soul is deeply troubled. Should I pray, Father, save Me from what lies ahead? But that is the very reason why I came!

John 12:27

And the Old Testament, which as a Jew Jesus would have been taught, includes statements foretelling the death of the Son of God. After his death and resurrection Jesus was recorded as saying:

Then He said, When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about Me by Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must all come true. Luke 24:44

I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me—that Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said.

1 Corinthians 15:3

But God was fulfilling what all the prophets had declared about the Messiah beforehand—that He must suffer all these things.

Acts 3:18

It was understood by the Bible writers, all through the New Testament, that Jesus' death was something that was foretold, even pre-ordained, in the Old Testament.

What prophets and what prophecies is Jesus referring to here? Well, thick volumes have been written on this topic, much more than we could cover now. But by most estimates, there are close to fifty Old Testament prophecies, all of them written many hundreds of years before just one man, Jesus of Nazareth, fulfilled them. It has been estimated that the odds of anyone fulfilling even 8 or so of the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus (as opposed to almost 50) would be extremely high.

He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief. We turned our backs on Him and looked the other way when He went by. He was despised, and we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses He carried; it was our sorrows that weighed Him down. And we thought His troubles were a punishment from God for His own sins! But He was wounded and crushed for our sins. He was beaten that we might have peace. He was whipped, and we were healed! All of us have strayed away like sheep. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on Him the guilt and sins of us all. He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet He never said a word. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, He did not open his mouth. From prison and trial they led Him away to his death. But who among the people realised that He was dying for their sins—that He was suffering their punishment? He had done no wrong, and He never deceived anyone. But He was buried like a criminal; He was put in a rich man's grave. But it was the LORD's good plan to crush Him and fill Him with grief. Yet when His life is made an offering for sin, He will have a multitude of children, many heirs. He will enjoy a long life, and the LORD's plan will prosper in His hands.

Isaiah 53: 3-10

“When you look at the reasons why Christ came, why he was crucified—he died for all mankind, he suffered for all mankind. So that, really, anybody that transgresses needs to look at their own part or their own culpability. It's time to get back to a basic message, the message that was given He forgave as he was tortured and killed.”

Mel Gibson (b.1956) —

Producer/Director

'The Passion'

Jan. 14, 2003

The O'Reilly Factor

I don't know how many of you know the story of Jesus, but this is an incredible depiction of what happened to Him; His death was a fulfilment of this ancient prophecy. And, again, this was just one of many. Thus, we can see this important point: Jesus was supposed to die. This wasn't anything unexpected. In fact, it was planned, the Bible says, from even before the world was created.

So if Jesus knew He was going to die, why do it? Why go through with it? What was the point?

If we look at Jesus' ministry, we see that His passion in life was people. Ask any teacher, life coach, professor, counsellor, parent or friend about what inspires them to be who they are and do what they do, and they will probably all give a very similar answer. They don't just see the person in front of them as they are, they see more than that—they see each person's potential, and want to help them learn, achieve and lead full lives! And that's basically what Jesus' life was about—people were His passion and He wanted to teach them, help them, guide them and eventually save them from this life that wasn't designed for them. And He still does.

This is why Jesus chose to die on the cross. He lived and died here on earth so that, though we may also live and die on earth, we can know that death is not the end for us.

Imagine what it would be like to have someone give their life for you. It's something most of us can't imagine, but it does happen. In the wars that have scarred our world, true heroes have emerged.

After scouting an insecure area for signs of the enemy, a young soldier in Vietnam unintentionally triggered a mine within metres of his unit. Shouting a warning to his friends, this amazing man hurled himself upon the mine so that his friends would be safe. He literally threw his life down as an act of love for the other men fighting alongside him.

But how did this come about?

When the earth was made, God did not want to be a dictator, and our ancestors were given a choice. Unfortunately, they made the wrong one and we have all suffered the consequences for their decision and actions. Basically, we are all 'sinners'—that is we constantly choose to do things that are selfish, immoral, cruel, and that go against God's guidelines on how to live life. He could have wiped us off the earth and started again, but He loved us despite our faults and had a back-up plan all organised when we (or our ancestors) chose wrong.

God's back up plan was his son Jesus. They decided that if we chose wrong, instead of our having to die, Jesus would come down to earth and experience that death for us. After which He would return to God as a man forever, leaving us the opportunity also to live forever if we choose to take a risk and believe in Him. It takes my breath away to think that someone could be so passionate about us, love us so much that He would suffer through a life He didn't have to live and elect to die in our place. It's hard to imagine how deep this passion, this love for us must be.

God's back up
plan was his
son Jesus

“Our suffering is not worthy the name of suffering. When I consider my crosses, tribulations, and temptations, I shame myself almost to death, thinking what are they in comparison of the sufferings of my blessed Savior Christ Jesus.”

Martin Luther (1483-1546)—Reformation leader who emphasised that Christ’s goodness alone saves us

Questions

How does it make me feel to think that someone would give up his life so that I could continue living?

What would I say about someone who would do this for me?

Even if we were to accept this love and sacrifice as true, what would it mean for us? What are the implications of Jesus’ death and resurrection?

Good question. First of all, the death and resurrection of Jesus should tell each of us that our life matters; that we are important; that we aren’t just blobs of protoplasm. It says that Jesus cares about each one of us. He saw us as being so important that he became human and died for us! Just like that soldier in Vietnam, Jesus threw down his life as an act of love for each one of us. His sacrifice says that we are known and that we are loved. God loves each one of us, personally and individually, and nothing we can do can change that.

death
was
not the
final end

Second, the death and resurrection of Jesus offers us an answer to the greatest of all questions—death. The Bible teaches that just as death was not the final end for Jesus, it doesn't have to be for us either. Imagine if during our whole life we believe that this life is all there is; we just live our days out, and then whether from old age or from a wrong turn on the motorway, we are dead. Imagine going from that to believing that even if we die, death is not the end, but that one day we will live again for eternity. That knowledge, that death does not have to be the end, is, ironically, a life-changing realisation.

Now I don't know about you, but that gap that keeps popping up in my life—am I lovable, worth loving, does anyone truly love me—is definitely altered by the knowledge that someone died in my place. The thought that Jesus loved each of us enough to hurl his life down to protect us, to keep us alive, blows my mind! I can't think of what He must have gone through; the suffering, the pain, the fear!

Question

How does Jesus' dying in my place affect the gaps in my life?

But what about the resurrection? How do we know that it actually happened and that Jesus' followers didn't just get together and make up a story to support their mistaken beliefs? How do we know that He actually did die and didn't just go into a coma? How can we believe that something so outrageous really happened?

Let's look at just one account, in the book of Mark:

So they entered the tomb, and there on the right sat a young man clothed in a white robe. The women were startled, but the angel said, "Do not be so surprised. You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene, who was crucified. He isn't here! He has been raised from the dead! Look, this is where they laid His body. Now go and give this message to His disciples, including Peter: Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see Him there, just as He told you before He died!" Mark 16:5-7

Yes, I know, quoting from the Bible to prove what the Bible says is not really a good way of debating. But bear with me. I am not trying to prove something here, just to highlight that the text not only records the existence, life and stories of this historical figure Jesus, but also happens to mention that He was “raised from the dead”.

Question

What do I think about Jesus’ resurrection—His being ‘raised from the dead’?

It was early on Sunday morning when Jesus rose from the dead, and the first person who saw Him was Mary Magdalene, the woman from whom He had cast out seven demons. She went and found the disciples, who were grieving and weeping. But when she told them that Jesus was alive and she had seen Him, they didn't believe her. Afterward He appeared to two who were walking from Jerusalem into the country, but they didn't recognise Him at first because He had changed His appearance. When they realised who He was, they rushed back to tell the others, but no one believed them. Still later He appeared to the eleven disciples as they were eating together. He rebuked them for their unbelief—their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. Mark 16:9-14

“It certainly could be said that as long as Christianity was only a Palestinian sect it was not necessary to write a Gospel. But, once it became necessary to either expand to the Gentile community or to reach the Diaspora (the dispersion of the Jews) then it was necessary to write a Gospel.”

D. G. Conklin, “A Study on the Synoptic Gospels” Part 1
The Date of the Gospels

Look at how the book of Mark portrays the attitude of the disciples (and all the other gospels do the same): that of unbelief. If these were fictional stories, if the disciples were lying, why would they paint themselves in such a bad light if they were going to start some new religious movement?

Maybe they were hallucinating, deranged, crazy? Maybe. But were all four crazy and deranged in the same way?

Then there’s the question of a conspiracy, that the disciples conspired to say that Jesus rose from the dead. Well, that’s only slightly more logical than the hallucination theory, but not much. What advantage would they gain by making this up? After all, the account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus made them outcasts in their own society, enemies of the Roman state, pariahs and fugitives. What would they gain by making up a story that in the end would cause them to lose everything? And why write it all down years and years after the events happened when the writers were outcasts, enemies of the state and fugitives? There was no glory in it, no riches or fame and their lives certainly wouldn’t have been made any easier!

For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

Romans 6:4

The bottom line is that their leader was shamefully killed, they were scattered, their movement for all purposes should have been dead. After all, many of them expected Jesus to reign as king; instead, he was crucified as a common criminal. They were dispirited, dejected, fearful, even in hiding right after His death. Then, all of a sudden, they are boldly proclaiming this Jesus as the Messiah, as the promised deliverer of Israel? What suddenly changed their attitude? It was the resurrection of Jesus. They all, obviously, believed it; and, according to their own accounts, they saw Him after the resurrection, and apparently, a whole lot of others did as well. How else can one account for this phenomenal change in their attitude?

OK, so maybe the disciples had some real reasons to believe this story, but what about us, what's in the story of Jesus' death and resurrection that relates to our lives today?

I think you'll agree with me that life is hard, and often we are our own worst enemies. We have self-destructive habits; again and again we form bad and unhealthy relationships; we are slaves to things that we cannot control: fear, worry, emptiness, depression, rejection, and on and on. And what the Bible says is that these things can be part of an 'old life', we can leave these things behind. Through God and His guidance we can change our lives and start a 'new life'. Jesus died and rose again into a new life, and while we can't actually do the same thing—physically rise again after we die—we can, through our actions and choices, begin a new kind of life.

Questions

What habits, fears, worries and gaps do I have in my life that I would love to see gone?

What do I want to change about myself?

What the death and resurrection of Jesus says to us is that we matter. Jesus died in our place; He paid our debt so that when we die, our mortal death will be temporary, just like His. Our death will last only until Jesus returns, when He will resurrect us to live forever. He will bring us back to life to live with Him for eternity.

he paid
our debt

Now I know that this is a hard concept to comprehend or accept. But who could have imagined that the content of DNA could define a person, or be able to describe a person's make up digitally a hundred years ago? In fact, who would have believed that we would be able to fly at all let alone fly to the moon? Thousands of things that we have been unable to comprehend have still happened, so who is to say Jesus' taking us to live with Him in eternity is not one of them? This is a world of possibilities—and I believe that with God everything is possible.

For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and people. He is the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message that God gave to the world at the proper time.

1 Timothy 2: 5, 6

The great hope of what Jesus has done for us is not only for the future hope of eternal life; what Jesus has done for us can make a radical difference in our lives now; we can be free from the practices and habits that are destroying us. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ means that we can have freedom from those things we do in our own lives that we hate. Freedom from the things we want to change but find ourselves powerless to change. He offers us a new life in Him, not just at the end of time but now. Right now, our whole lives can start to change. He sees past our human mistakes and imperfections and sees our potential; our abilities; our smiles; our tears and what really lives inside our hearts. He sees our new lives waiting for us!

We believe that Jesus died in place of every human being, that includes each one of us personally. We believe now that He is resurrected, alive and seeking to give each of us a new life in Him.

In the end, we can't know these things only because someone tells us. We have to experience these things ourselves. We can't live on someone else's experience. We need our own. And this I believe is what God offers us. A new experience, a new life, a new beginning.

Questions

What sort of hope would Jesus' resurrection bring to my life?

What would my 'new life' be like?

a new
beginning

My Answers

What do I think about these claims?

What did Jesus claim? Well, He claimed to be the Son of God and that He would save humankind if we chose to follow Him. Pretty big words for any man! His disciples then claimed, once He had died, that they saw Him again and that He had risen from the dead! And it's these claims that have since incited many great discussions and debates, still raging two thousand years after he lived.

Your Answer

What relevance does Jesus' resurrection have to my life? How can it help me with the gaps in my life?

I suppose that believing in Jesus' resurrection gives me hope for better things in my life. The gaps in my life feel easier to bear because I believe there is someone watching over me, someone who really cares about me.

Your Answer

How does it make me feel to think that someone would give up his life so that I could continue living?

I feel shocked that someone could even think of dying in my place. I don't know if I would ever have that sort of love or courage.

Your Answer

What would I say about someone who would do this for me?

I would say that he is the most courageous person I know who truly understands what it is to love another. I would admire him until the end of my days and try to live my life in a way that would credit him.

Your Answer

How does Jesus' dying in my place affect the gaps in my life?

The gaps don't seem as big. I feel as if I have someone to lean on who knows what I am going through and who will not desert me. Even though these gaps still hurt or feel empty, they are easier to endure.

Answers
101
102

Your Answer

*What do I think about Jesus' resurrection—
His being 'raised from the dead'?*

It's something that I believe in even though at times my logic fights against it. It doesn't seem possible, yet I know that with God ALL things are possible.

Your Answer

What habits, fears, worries and gaps do I have in my life that I would love to see gone?

I have bad habits like reacting first and responding later which means I'm not that good at conflict resolution. I worry how I will cope financially, I worry about the future of my family, I fear that I'm not good enough.

Your Answer

my answers

What do I want to change about myself?

I want to be a more patient person, more gracious and understanding.

Your Answer

What sort of hope would Jesus' resurrection bring to my life?

This thought makes me hope for a better life and experience for everyone. It gives me hope that our pain will end and that eventually we will understand the things which torment us now.

Your Answer

What would my 'new life' be like?

My 'new life' has less pain in it because I am learning to deal with the things in my life in a better way. It has more hope, I feel more peaceful, I am taking more risks and am facing my fears because I believe that someone 'up there' is looking out for me!

Your Answer

my answers

Further Resources

Christ Our Saviour

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