

- What do Christians believe happened after Jesus' death?
- Does it make any sense to believe in the resurrection of Jesus?

## The burial of Jesus

The bodies of crucified people were usually left on the cross to rot, with the remains eventually buried in a communal grave, but Joseph from Arimathea, a member of the Jewish leadership who was a secret follower of Jesus, asked Pilate for permission to remove Jesus' body from the cross (Matthew 27:57-60). Pilate agreed after checking with his soldiers that Jesus was definitely dead (Mark 15:44-45). This investigation proves that Jesus really was dead, but so does the account in John 19:31-37. Crucifixion could take a very long time and to speed up death, the Roman soldiers would often break the victim's legs, making it much harder for them to breathe. In Jesus' case they did not need to do this because He was already dead. To be certain, however, they pierced Jesus' side with a spear. The resulting mixture of blood and clear fluid flowing from His side indicates that the heart and the pericardial sac surrounding it had been pierced, confirming death.

Joseph, helped by Nicodemus, who had visited Jesus by night and became a secret disciple, buried the body in his own tomb which was cut out of a rock (John 19:38-42). This fulfilled a prophecy that the Suffering Servant would be buried with the rich (Isaiah 53:9). The tomb was secured in three ways:

1. **A large stone over the doorway** (Matthew 27:60) – this would need several men to roll it open;
2. **A seal on the stone** (Matthew 27:66) – breaking this would have carried a punishment;
3. **A guard** (Matthew 27:62-66) – soldiers positioned to prevent a theft of the body would have been punished severely if they failed in their mission.

## The resurrection of Jesus

### *The events*

Not only did Jesus predict His death; He also told His disciples at least five times that He would rise to life again on the third day (Matthew 16:21; 17:9; 17:22-23; 20:18-19; 26:32). The disciples did not understand at the time, and when He died they hid away, afraid they might be next. Events on the Sunday changed everything. To understand what happened, we must compare the four Gospel accounts:

- **The women go to the tomb** [Matthew 28:1-15; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-11; John 20:1-9]  
Very early on the Sunday morning (around dawn) at least six female followers of Jesus went to the tomb, hoping to put spices on His body. When they reached the tomb they found the stone already rolled away and they went inside where they saw an angel who told them that Jesus had risen from the dead. An angel had rolled the stone open and sat down on it, causing the guards to faint. The women felt fear mixed with joy and ran to tell the disciples without telling anyone else on the way. As they were going, Jesus suddenly appeared to them. They recognised Him and worshipped Him. The guards, meanwhile, went to the Jewish leaders, who bribed them and told them to spread a rumour that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body.
- **Peter and John ran to the tomb, Jesus appeared to Mary** [Luke 24:12; John 20:3-18]  
When they received the news from the women, Peter and John ran to the tomb. John arrived first, but hesitated while Peter went inside. He saw the strips of linen Jesus had been buried in and went off alone. Sometime shortly after this, Jesus appeared personally to Peter. Mary Magdalene, one of the women who was especially devoted to Jesus, returned to the tomb following Peter and John and stayed after they left. She saw a man in the garden and at not recognise that it was Jesus until He spoke her name.
- **Two disciples meet Jesus on the Road to Emmaus** [Luke 24:13-35]  
Two disciples left Jerusalem on the Sunday to travel to the village of Emmaus. While they were walking on the road, they met a stranger who appeared not to have heard about what had happened in Jerusalem. Not recognising that it was Jesus, they spoke to Him about Jesus' death and in response He explained how the Old Testament pointed to the fact that the Messiah had to suffer. They recognised Jesus when He broke bread to give to them and ran back to the city to tell the eleven, who had heard already from the women and Peter.

- **The Apostles meet Jesus** [Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19-31]

Jesus appeared to ten of the eleven together on the Sunday evening, but Thomas was not there. When the other disciples told him they had seen Jesus he did not believe. One week later, Jesus again appeared to them, this time with Thomas present. Thomas now believed and made an amazing statement, calling Jesus "My Lord and my God". Jesus commended Him for realising this, accepting His worship. Jesus appeared to the apostles many times over a forty-day period before He ascended to heaven (Acts 1:3).

### ***The evidence***

The resurrection of Jesus is an amazing claim, but it has excellent evidence that stands up under investigation:

- **The empty tomb** – the resurrection could easily have been disproved if Jesus' enemies produced His body, but they could not because it was missing. The terrified disciples could not have stolen it from the guarded tomb. There really was an empty tomb.
- **Claimed from the start** – the resurrection was believed and proclaimed by Christians from the very beginning forming the central proof for them that Jesus was Lord (e.g., Acts 2:24; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8).
- **Many witnesses** – Jesus appeared to over 500 people at one time, many of them still alive at the time when the apostle Paul wrote (1 Corinthians 15:6). The apostles and others saw Him eating and were able to touch Him, proving it was no hallucination and His body was real. The first witnesses were women – an unlikely choice if the story was invented as women were not trusted as witnesses in courts at that time.
- **Transformed people** – the disciples, who hid fearfully when Jesus died, became bold witnesses after they claimed to have seen Him alive. Within around 30 years many of them were arrested and even executed for their claims, showing how strongly they believed that Jesus really was alive (who would die for a lie?) Sceptics and opponents of the gospel were also transformed by it, most notably Paul (Part 19). The gospel spread rapidly and continues to spread today as people testify to having encountered the risen Jesus.

### ***The significance***

The resurrection is central to Christian faith and has massive implications:

- **PAST** – it proves that everything Jesus taught was true. He is the Son of God, and we must listen to Him. It proves that He paid the full price for sins and that the power of death is defeated.
- **PRESENT** – it means Jesus is alive today, so we can have a personal living relationship with God through Him. Christians do not have a dead leader, but One who is alive forever.
- **FUTURE** – it assures us that all Christians who die will be raised to life in the future. We have hope for eternal life because Jesus is the "resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

If Jesus is alive, the Kingdom of God really is here now, and we must turn from our sin and trust in Him!

## **Jesus commissions His apostles and leaves earth**

Some time after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to the apostles on a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20). He commissioned them to make disciples for Him from every nation on earth by baptising them and teaching them to obey His teachings. He also made three special claims about Himself:

- **All authority has been given to Him** (v18);
- **His name is included with the Father and the Spirit in baptism**, indicating His divine identity (v19);
- **He will always be with His disciples**, referring to the promised Holy Spirit (v20)

Only Luke tells us about the final occasion when Jesus met the apostles near Jerusalem 40 days after He had died (Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:3-11). Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come and empower them to witness for Him. Then He was lifted up into the sky and disappeared from sight. Angels told the disciples He would return one day just as He had left. The New Testament teaches that Jesus ascended to Heaven and took His proper position at God's right hand (the place of greatest honour and power) where He prays for His people and awaits the future day when He will return in glory.

### **SUMMARY: Jesus was buried and rose again from the dead on the third day to live forever**

- The resurrection of Jesus has always been preached by Christians and has an excellent evidential basis.
- The risen Jesus prays for and will return for His people, but for now He sends them on a mission of hope.