

How do you know that Jesus resurrected from the dead?

By Doug Hamilton

The Greek word for resurrection, *anastasis*, means “*making to stand or rise up, raising up the dead*”. This word is mentioned 41 times in the Bible, being a major theme of the Scriptures. Here are some people from the Bible who experienced resurrection.

- The Widow of Zarephath’s son (1 Kings 17:17-24)
- The Shunammite Woman’s Son (2 Kings 4:18-37)
- An Anonymous Man Thrown into Elisha’s Grave (2 Kings 13:20-21)
- The Widow of Nain’s Son (Luke 7:11-17)
- Jairus’ Daughter (Luke 8:49-56)
- Lazarus of Bethany (John 11)
- Tabitha (Acts 9:36-43)
- Eutychus (Acts 20:7-12)
- Many Saints from the Grave following Jesus’ death (Matthew 27:50-53)

I mention this in reflection that this is the time of the year which much of the world celebrates the resurrection of the Jesus Christ from the dead. It is called Easter on the secular calendar, but in reality, it is a holiday celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. *Luke 24:6-7*, “*He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.*” Easter is a secular attempt to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Everything Hinges on Resurrection of Jesus!

1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures”

The message of the resurrection of Jesus is what was preached, the message which was received, embraced, and resulted in salvation for the entire Christian movement. The entire movement hinges on the resurrection of Jesus! Paul would go on to say in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 that without the resurrection of Jesus, then there is no hope of eternal life for us in the future and our faith is essentially worthless. It is through the resurrection of Jesus that faith is invested, hope is seeded, and lives are changed.

The resurrection of Jesus is so key to the hearts of many in our nation, that it can be witnessed throughout the cemeteries in the United States. In early in America, being predominately of Christian origin, believed in the second coming of Christ and that He will come from the east, coming from *Matthew 24:27*, “*For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be*” (*New American Standard Bible, 1995*). Their belief was that Jesus would resurrect the bodies, the dead would sit up, and immediately see the Christ. That is why even today, nearly all cemeteries in America carry out this practice of burial facing east. Everything Hinges on the resurrection of Jesus!

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Knowing this, is it possible to prove Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead? An even more relevant question would be, what does it mean to my own faith and life to do so? Since we do not have time machines to go back and confirm the event of the resurrection of Jesus, we must have a way to logically examine the historicity of his life. This can only be done through the ancient writers and historians who were closer to the actual events.

Take, for example, the ancient writer Luke from the Bible. He was a first-century historian who wrote in detail about the events and people of his day. He mentions in Luke 3:1-2 a man from history named Tiberius Caesar, the second Emperor of Rome.

Luke 3:1-2, “Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, ² in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.”

Luke lived in that time and location, having easily confirmed the existence of not only Tiberius Caesar, but also other leaders of that day. His perspective, a time/place authentication, contributes to the historicity of Tiberius. Tiberius was the ruler of the entire Roman Empire, the ruler of the conquered world. Scholars are only aware of ten sources that mention Emperor Tiberius within 150 years of his life, including the gospel writer Luke. Only ten sources! Those ten ancient sources capture a time/place glimpse which authenticates the historicity of Tiberius.

Using the same technique, we can do the same for the historicity of Jesus and the events of his life. However, we are not limited to ten sources, but many dozens of ancient writers, including secular, Jewish, and Christian accounts.

The Historicity of Jesus and His Resurrection

The Historian Luke wrote about the miracles of Jesus.

Luke 4:17-19, And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.”

Ancient Jewish Historian, Flavius Josephus (37-100 AD), also mentioned Jesus’ Powers

“Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.”

Porphyry of Tyre / Born about 233 AD

He studied philosophy in Greece, and lived in Sicily where he wrote fifteen books against the Christian faith. In one of his books, “Life of Pythagoras”, he contended that magicians of the

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pagan world exhibited greater powers than Christ. His argument was an inadvertent concession of Jesus' existence, and power.

The Historian Luke made many claims of historicity.

- That Jesus was arrested and charged (Luke 22:54-23:1-2).
- That He was investigated by Pilate (Luke 23:3).
- That He was interrogated by King Herod (Luke 23:8).
- That he was sentenced to a crucifixion (Luke 23:23-25).

These are all historical events recorded down by the ancient writer Luke. The fact that this is part of the historicity of Jesus allows us to authenticate the life and events of Jesus. Just like we must process the other anti-Christian ancient writers from the secular history.

The Talmudic Writings / 70 to 200 AD:

These were the writings of the Jews following the destruction of Jerusalem. They mention Jesus many times, all in negative light, for they considered him a rebel. The writings say that Jesus was a sorcerer that practiced magic, caused trouble against the wise men of the day and was moved to destroy the Law of Moses. Take for example this summary statement from the Talmud: *"It has been taught: On the Eve of the Passover, they hanged Yeshu. And an announcer went out in front of him, for forty days saying: 'he is going to be stoned because he practiced sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray.' Anyone who knows anything in his favor, let him come and plead in his behalf.' But, not having found anything in his favor, they hanged him on the Eve of the Passover."*

The Historian Luke mentions Jesus' prediction of crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

Luke 9:22, *"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day."* Whether or not you agree with the declaration of Jesus, according to Luke the historian, Jesus predicted crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

Mara Bar-Serapion / 73 AD:

He was a famous Stoic philosopher of the first-century. Writing to his son in prison, he encourages him with the fact that it is foolish to persecute wise men of history, specifically Socrates, Pythagoras and Christ. He said concerning the latter "What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their King?"... "the wise King die for good; He lived on in the teaching which He had given." The takeaway is this, that Jesus' life was depicted in historical context, just like the other real people mentioned in the statement. His movement was fueled as a result of his execution. Mara Bar-Serapion attests to the historicity of Jesus' crucifixion.

The Historian Luke mentioned the event of sun going dark during this crucifixion.

Luke 23:44-45, "It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two."

Historian Thallus (52 AD) had a discussion of darkness of sun as well.

It is of interest to note that this account is not only mentioned in the Bible, but also in secular history. There are ancient writings of Julius Africanus, discussing another writer named

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Thallus, concerning this event. It says "*On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his 'History', calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun.*" Whether or not you believe the sun went dark during the day of the crucifixion, it does not dismiss the ancient writers who were there and witnessed the sun going dark at that time.

The Historian Luke said Jesus was executed on the cross.

Luke 23:46, And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last." Wh

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The Historian Luke claimed that Jesus rose from the dead.

Luke 24:2-3, And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

The Historian Luke mentioned many witnessed the resurrected Jesus (Luke 24:13-15, 34, 46).

Luke's historical account states that the resurrected Jesus instructed the apostles to wait in Jerusalem until the beginning of their post-resurrection message (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8).

Here are some other claims of Historian Luke

- Jesus ascended into heaven (Luke 24:5).
- That only fifty days following the crucifixion that three thousand contemporaries of Jesus believed that he was resurrected enough to convert to Christianity (Acts 2:29-32, 41) .
- That shortly after, that number grew to more than five-thousand. (Acts 4:2-4).
- That there were constant converts to the resurrected Jesus (Acts 5:14).
- That they were willing to be persecuted for their convictions of this fact, even to the point of death. (Acts 7:59, 12:2).

Whether or not you believe that those closest to the events were convicted enough to convert, live for, and even die for the resurrected Jesus, does not nullify those whose were present, even the secular historians who confirm the same.

Cornelius Tacitus / (Born 52-54 AD):

Tacitus was considered one the greatest Roman ancient historians. He wrote concerning the Nerodian persecution of Christians, dating only thirty years after Jesus. "*Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its*

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

Pliny the Younger / 112 AD:

In writing to Emperor Trajan requesting advice on how to deal with the sect of Christians, which according to his words, were troubling his province. He wrote the following concerning Christians. *“They were in a habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang an anthem to Christ as God, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to commit any wicked deed...after which it was their custom to separate, and then meet again to partake of food, but a food of an ordinary and innocent kind.”*

Suetonius / 120 AD:

In his writing “The Life of Claudius” he mentions Jesus in historical context saying, “As the Jews were making constant disturbances as the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.” This was the same historical event that occurred in Acts 18:1-2.

Lucian of Samosata / 2nd century Greek philosopher:

He was a Greek philosopher. In criticizing the early Christians he wrote: “The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day -- the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account... You see, these misguided creatures started with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property.”

Celsus, a pagan philosopher of the 2nd century AD:

He produced the oldest existing literary attack against Christianity. His True Discourse (c. A.D. 178) was a bitter assault upon Christ. Celsus argued that Jesus was born in low circumstances, being the illegitimate son of a soldier named Panthera. As he grew, He announced Himself to be God, deceiving many. Celsus charged that Christ’s own people killed Him, and that His resurrection was a deception. His criticisms and hatred of Christianity unconsciously confirmed his acceptance of the personhood of Jesus.

Summary

Just like you can confirm any historical information from the past, through authentication and reason of the evidence we do have. To ignore the evidence, disenfranchises all history of every one a few generations from the events. We can only look at the historical records within that narrow scope of time to capture glimpses of what did occur in the culture.

How do you know Jesus was resurrected from the dead? Ultimately, we must trust this fact, not with blind faith, but a reasoned faith. I believe there is abundant evidence from the ancient writers that there was a man named Jesus, who claimed to be the Christ, that He died on the cross to pay for my sins, was buried, and resurrected on the third day, overcoming death and carrying a promise of eternal life for his followers. For me, this is a feeling, but rather a reasoned fact.