

# 7 THREE SPECIFIC FACTS

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## KEY POINTS

1. *If Jesus Christ DID NOT rise from the dead, He was just an ordinary man and there is no reason for anyone to believe in Him.*
2. *If Jesus Christ died for our sins and if He DID rise from the dead, His resurrected life can fill the spiritual emptiness in every human being.*

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## IN THIS LESSON YOU WILL STUDY THESE QUESTIONS:

- What are the facts related to Jesus' death?
  - What is the natural option?
  - What is the supernatural option?
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There are three specific facts upon which both Christians and non-Christians agree. These three evidences are:

FIRST, Jesus Christ was crucified.

SECOND, there was an empty tomb.

THIRD, there was an Easter proclamation: He is risen!

## WHAT ARE THE FACTS RELATED TO JESUS' DEATH?

Jesus was crucified on the cross around A.D. 29. He was taken down from the cross and was laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Historical

documents state that a large stone weighing between one and two tons was placed at the front of the tomb. On that stone was placed the Roman seal, which had a psychological effect, much as if the Secret Service put its seal on a door. It says, “you break that seal, and we will break you.” A Roman guard was then placed in front of the tomb to make sure nothing happened to the body. Alexander Metherell states, “The Romans weren’t about to risk their own death by allowing him to walk away alive.”<sup>57</sup> That Roman guard consisted of between four and sixteen well-trained military men. Yet the tomb was empty three days later.

Some skeptics, attempting to explain the empty tomb, present theories that actually require more faith to believe than the Resurrection itself.

One theory set forth by Venturini, is called the **swoon theory**. It suggests that Jesus did not really die on the cross, He was only unconscious. He was taken down off the cross, and when He was put in the tomb, the dampness of the tomb revived His body. He moved the large stone, tiptoed around the guards, appeared to His disciples as a triumphant God, and then went off and died somewhere. Even most skeptics do not embrace this, but some use it to try to reinforce their positions that Christ did not rise from the dead. Alexander Metherell, M.D., Ph.D. is quoted as saying, “He (Jesus) couldn’t possibly have faked his death, because you can’t fake the inability to breathe for long. Besides, the spear thrust into his heart would have settled the issue once and for all.”<sup>58</sup>

Another theory says the women who discovered the empty tomb went to the **wrong tomb**. If the women went to the wrong tomb, that means the Roman guards also went to the wrong tomb. That means the Jewish leaders went to the wrong tomb. Otherwise, Jesus’ body would have been found in the right tomb.

The alternative to these and similar theories is that the **tomb was actually empty** and the disciples proclaimed, “He is risen! Jesus Christ is alive! He forgives sins and gives eternal life to those who believe.” If this was a lie, the Jewish officials had only to go to the tomb, get the body, and display it in the middle of Jerusalem, saying, “There is your risen Savior,” and the Christian movement and resurrection proclamation would have been over. But they were unable to produce the body. The tomb was empty!

**John Warwick Montgomery**, Christian apologist and former dean of Simon Greenleaf School of Law, writes, “It passes the bounds of

credibility that the early Christians could have manufactured such a tale and then preached it among those who might easily have refuted it simply by producing the body of Jesus.”<sup>59</sup>

**Paul Althaus** of the University of Erlangen in Germany adds, “The resurrection could not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact for all concerned.”<sup>60</sup>

The empty tomb can be explained as either natural or supernatural. If God truly raised Christ supernaturally from the dead, I can rightly and truthfully call you to repent of your sins and trust Christ as your personal Savior and Lord, for that is the logical response.

## WHAT IS THE NATURAL OPTION?

If someone removed the body, the natural option, then who? The Roman soldiers? No, the Roman soldiers were placed there to keep the body in the tomb. The Jewish officials? No, they would have just brought it out and declared, “There’s your risen Savior,” to refute the disciples’ claims. In fact, for the Jewish leaders to have stolen the body of Jesus would have been against their own best interests.<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps the disciples removed the body and spread the lie that Jesus was God and rose from the dead. However, evidence found by those who investigated suggests the opposite. First, the disciples did not expect Jesus to rise from the dead. Jesus had told them over and over that He would die and three days later rise from the grave, but they did not understand Him. Once Jesus died, the disciples were fearful people, hiding, running for their lives. Their leader was dead, and their dreams were shattered. They did not seem to remember what He had told them about His resurrection.<sup>62</sup>

Yet, within several days after the resurrection this same group became bold, courageous, and visionary. What caused such a great change? It was not because they had seen an empty tomb—it was because they had seen Christ alive, risen from the dead.

What would the disciples gain by fabricating a story about Christ’s resurrection? Prestige? Wealth? Power? Position? Let me tell you what

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they gained. According to tradition all but one died martyrs' deaths. Some were decapitated. Some were crucified. Some were stoned to death or beaten to death; all because they claimed Jesus is alive and offers forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Here is a list of what the twelve apostles and early Christian leaders gained by holding on to the declaration that Christ has risen:<sup>63</sup>

## **THE APOSTLES**

- Andrew—crucified on a cross
- Bartholomew (Nathanael)—beaten, crucified, then beheaded
- James son of Alphaeus—thrown from a pinnacle of the temple and beaten to death
- James (son of Zebedee)—beheaded
- John—natural causes
- Matthias (replacement for Judas Iscariot)—stoned and beheaded
- Matthew (Levi)—run through with a spear
- Peter—crucified head down
- Simon (the Zealot)—crucified
- Thomas—thrust through with a spear
- Thaddaeus (Judas son of James)—killed by arrows
- Philip—crucified and stoned to death<sup>64</sup>

## **OTHER EARLY CHRISTIAN LEADERS**

- Barnabas—stoned to death
- James, brother of Jesus—stoned to death
- Luke—hanged on an olive tree
- Mark—dragged through the streets by his feet and then burned to death
- Paul—beheaded

If this story of the resurrection were a lie, early Christians would have known it was a lie. For them to live a lie is certainly inconsistent with what we know about their moral lives.

### THREE SPECIFIC FACTS

Historian **Harold Mattingly** emphasized the truth that the apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul sealed their witness with their blood. **Tectallin** wrote that no man would be willing to die unless he knew he had the truth.

It is true that a lot of people have died for a lie, but only when they believed it to be the truth. It is not normal for people to die for a lie that they know is a lie. If the disciples did lie, they were deliberately deceiving the whole world. This certainly is not in line with their teachings and writings in Scripture or with the moral conduct they were telling people to live by. They taught honesty, integrity, and truthfulness.

**Edward Gibbon** in his book, *The History of the Decline and the Fall of the Roman Empire*, lists five reasons for the spread of Christianity in the first century, one of which is “the pure and austere morals of the Christians.”<sup>65</sup> The whole message of Christ is to love one another, to be kind, and to speak the truth. Could they have been living a colossal lie? No, I believe they had seen the risen Christ, their lives were radically changed, and they went to the world to tell the Good News of Christ’s love for each person. They told of His death as their substitute, of His resurrection that conquered death, and that He was and is now alive. He stands ready to give life because He is the Way and the Truth for all who trust in Him.

**Paul Little** asks in his book, *Know Why You Believe*, are these men, who helped transform the moral structure of society consummate liars or deluded madmen? These alternatives are harder to believe than the fact of the resurrection, and there is no shred of evidence to support them.<sup>66</sup>

## WHAT IS THE SUPERNATURAL OPTION?

The other option to explain His resurrection is supernatural: God raised Him from the grave and He lives today. I believe this is not only the truth but rational truth.

Jesus said that He was the only way to a relationship with God and the only truth that could set people free. He is the only path up the mountain. Only through Him can humankind become whole and know the true and living God. Only through Jesus Christ does humanity gain life. Jesus said He was “the life,” conquering death on our behalf.

## PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF JOHN MAISEL

During my university years, a statement by Blaise Pascal deeply impressed me. Pascal was a brilliant seventeenth-century French mathematician. He dazzled Europe with sophisticated mathematical equations when he was only sixteen years old. By age thirty-one, Pascal had come to the conclusion that there is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person that can never be filled by any created thing. It can only be filled by God, who is made known through Jesus Christ.

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***There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person.***

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That statement by Pascal made an impact on me. I recognized that vacuum in my life. I was asking questions such as, “Who am I?” “Where am I going?” “What am I doing here?” Moreover, no matter what I accomplished in life, I had a sense of emptiness and meaninglessness. I was trying to find answers. I gave myself to athletic pursuit. However, no matter what I accomplished, my life was still void of meaning. I gave myself to intellectual pursuits, but no matter what I accomplished there at the university, I had a sense that there was something missing in my life. You see, my friend, God has made you and me in such a way that we will never have a sense of completeness, fullness, and meaning until we come to know Him in a personal way.

God has made us to simultaneously function in three ways: physically, mentally, and spiritually. He has made us physical beings. He has given us our mental capacity. He has also given us a spiritual capacity. Yet most of us go through life as only two thirds of a person. We develop ourselves physically and mentally, but not spiritually. We will never be complete until we come to know God personally, and that is through the person of Jesus Christ. That is the only way that the spiritual emptiness within us will ever be filled.

THREE SPECIFIC FACTS

**TWO QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION:**

*“If God truly raised Jesus Christ from the dead, are you willing to repent of your sins and trust Him as your personal Savior and Lord?”*

*“If you realize there is a God-shaped vacuum in your life, are you ready to ask Jesus Christ to fill it?”*