

## **CHAPTER 11**

### **PROOF THAT THE RESURRECTION REALLY HAPPENED**

We have seen in the last two chapters that Jesus Christ died on the cross, in our place, and how important that is for our salvation. However, we must now turn to the question of His bodily resurrection. Although Jesus died, He did not remain dead. After three days He physically rose to life again. Everything in Christianity hinges upon this one central event, namely the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If He did not rise again from the dead, then Christianity would not be true and Jesus' death on the cross would mean nothing. We would remain unforgiven and lost in our sins, awaiting God's judgment. The resurrection is therefore central. The apostle Paul put it well when he said:

*<sup>12</sup>But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup>If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. <sup>14</sup>And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. <sup>15</sup>More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.*

*<sup>16</sup>For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. <sup>17</sup>And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup>Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. <sup>19</sup>If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.*

*<sup>20</sup>But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup>For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. <sup>22</sup>For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. <sup>23</sup>But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 1 Corinthians 15:12-23 (NIV)*

Given the vital importance of the resurrection, it is essential that we believe that it happened. Possibly you have never been taught about the resurrection or considered the evidence for it? Therefore, I propose in this chapter to set out some of the facts which prove conclusively that the resurrection really happened.

Some people are surprised by that. They assume that after all these years it cannot be possible to prove that the resurrection really took place. Yet we can prove it. In fact we can prove it beyond all reasonable doubt. The facts are so overwhelming that no other explanation is possible.

In the 1920s a man called Frank Morrison set out to write a book to prove that there was no resurrection. He began to carefully assemble the evidence and the facts in order to write his book, but in the process of doing so he came to some surprising conclusions. He discovered that in fact the evidence proved the exact opposite of what He had set out to prove.

He therefore did write a book, but it was to prove the resurrection rather than disprove it. It is a very famous Christian classic called 'Who Moved the Stone?' It is still in print and well worth getting. I have used some of Frank Morrison's ideas in this chapter. I have also borrowed from another book, 'Know Why You Believe' by Paul Little, to whom I am also indebted.

Before we begin to look at the arguments and the evidence, it would be a good idea to read the following lengthy passage from Luke chapter 24, followed by some other shorter passages from Matthew, Mark and John. These will give you an understanding of the main facts which we will then consider:

Extract from Luke's Gospel:

<sup>1</sup>On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. <sup>2</sup>They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup>While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. <sup>5</sup>In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup>He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: <sup>7</sup>'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' "

<sup>8</sup>Then they remembered his words. <sup>9</sup>When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. <sup>10</sup>It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup>But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. <sup>12</sup>Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened. <sup>13</sup>Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

<sup>15</sup>As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup>but they were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup>He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup>One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

<sup>19</sup>"What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. <sup>20</sup>The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup>but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. <sup>22</sup>In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup>but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. <sup>24</sup>Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

<sup>25</sup>He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup>Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" <sup>27</sup>And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. <sup>28</sup>As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. <sup>29</sup>But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. <sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup>They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

<sup>33</sup>They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together <sup>34</sup>and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." <sup>35</sup>Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. <sup>36</sup>While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>37</sup>They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. <sup>38</sup>He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? <sup>39</sup>Look at my

*hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."* <sup>40</sup>*When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.*

<sup>41</sup>*And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?"* <sup>42</sup>*They gave him a piece of broiled fish,* <sup>43</sup>*and he took it and ate it in their presence.* <sup>44</sup>*He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."* <sup>45</sup>*Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.* <sup>46</sup>*He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,* <sup>47</sup>*and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.* <sup>48</sup>*You are witnesses of these things.* *Luke 24:1-48(NIV)*

Extract from Matthew's Gospel:

<sup>8</sup>*So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.* <sup>9</sup>*Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.* <sup>10</sup>*Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."* <sup>11</sup>*While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.*

<sup>12</sup>*When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money,* <sup>13</sup>*telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'"* <sup>14</sup>*If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble."* <sup>15</sup>*So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.* *Matthew 28: 8-15 (NIV)*

Extract from Mark's Gospel

<sup>9</sup>*When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons.* <sup>10</sup>*She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping.* <sup>11</sup>*When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.* <sup>12</sup>*Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country.* <sup>13</sup>*These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.*

<sup>14</sup>*Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.* <sup>15</sup>*He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.* <sup>16</sup>*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.* *Mark 16:9-16 (NIV)*

Extract from John's Gospel

<sup>19</sup>*On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"* <sup>20</sup>*After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.* <sup>21</sup>*Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* <sup>22</sup>*And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.* <sup>23</sup>*If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

<sup>24</sup>Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.  
<sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

<sup>28</sup>Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup>Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." <sup>30</sup>Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.  
<sup>31</sup>But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.  
John 20:19-31 (NIV)

### **The arguments for and against the resurrection:**

Perhaps the simplest way to approach the resurrection is first of all to consider the alternative explanations that men have put forward over the years to try to disprove it. We can then examine whether they hold any water in comparison to what the Bible says happened. So, we shall look in turn at each of the arguments/explanations of those who *don't* believe in the resurrection:

#### **Alternative Explanation 1 – Did Jesus' disciples steal His body from the tomb and invent the whole story of the resurrection?**

This false allegation dates back to the very beginning. It is what the Jewish officials spread around as a rumour to try to explain away what had happened. Yet they themselves knew it to be a lie. We can prove it to be false in many different ways:

##### **a) How could the disciples have got past the guards?**

Jesus was a very important public figure, famous throughout all Israel. His death was extremely controversial and both the Jewish authorities and the Roman Governor feared that trouble would come from it. Therefore a large group of guards was told to watch his tomb. It was not just a couple of men. There were probably 60-100 men guarding the tomb. Therefore if the disciples were to steal Jesus' body they would have to get past that entire group. That would clearly be impossible.

Moreover, even if they had somehow got there and overpowered the guards, those guards would have seen the disciples. Even if unable to prevent them taking the body, which is hard to imagine, they would at least be able to say "*We saw the disciples coming and they overpowered us and took Jesus' body by force*". However that was not said. Instead, a very strange story was put about. The Jewish authorities told the guards to say that the disciples had come and stolen the body *while they were sleeping*. But it was unheard of for even one Roman soldier to fall asleep on duty, let alone 60-100, and all at the same time. That is impossible.

But there is another reason why that explanation is absurd. If the guards were all sleeping then how would they know who it was that had come and stolen the body? Clearly, it did not happen that way and although that rumour was put about, it obviously could not be true. It is the type of lie that a small child tells. Yet the fact that the authorities needed to make up such an obviously false explanation shows the tight corner they were in. But, why would that be so, unless Jesus *had* risen?

**b) If the resurrection was invented as a false story then it would mean that all the apostles were liars. But what about their subsequent ministries?**

If we are to believe that the disciples stole the body and made up the story of the resurrection, then that makes them deliberate liars. Yet we see that each of the 11 surviving apostles embarked upon life-long ministries of preaching the gospel about Jesus Christ. They were all proclaiming to the world that He had risen from the dead. All of them suffered persecution for saying this. In fact 10 of them were executed for insisting on it. The only one to survive and die of old age was the apostle John. But even he experienced great persecution and suffering for preaching about Jesus.

Why would any of these men be willing to suffer and die for something that they all knew to be a lie? One could imagine one person telling a lie, and even continuing to tell it, so long as it gained them something, whether financially or otherwise. But why would they all persistently tell a lie which brought them nothing but suffering, difficulty and death? Look at these passages which illustrate how much the apostles suffered for what they believed:

*<sup>27</sup>Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. <sup>28</sup>"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." <sup>29</sup>Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! <sup>30</sup>The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup>God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. <sup>32</sup>We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." <sup>33</sup>When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.*

*Acts 5:27-33(NIV)*

*<sup>40</sup>His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. <sup>41</sup>The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. <sup>42</sup>Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.*

*Acts 5:40-42 (NIV)*

Even if we can imagine that the disciples were all capable of dishonestly inventing the resurrection, we have to assume that at least one or two of them would, at some point, have broken down under torture and persecution. Some of them would have said "Alright, we made it all up – don't execute me". Yet, they never did. None of them ever denied the resurrection. All of them continued to proclaim it, even as they were executed, one by one, for doing so.

**b) What about their subsequent writings?**

One only has to read the letters that they wrote to see that the apostles were men of wisdom, love, truth, sincerity and maturity. If they were somehow willing to arrange a deceitful hoax, and to persist in it, that would mean they were men of bad character. They would have to be dishonest and devious. Yet we see the exact opposite of that shining out from every page of the New Testament as we read the things they wrote over the decades. Whatever you might say about the writers of the New Testament, it is plain that they were godly and honest men. They themselves obviously believed with all their hearts that the resurrection had truly happened.

**c) What about the subsequent physical appearances of Jesus to many different people? They would all have to be liars too.**

Jesus did not only physically appear to His apostles. He also appeared to many other people as well. For completeness I will go through all of the passages in the New Testament which refer to Jesus

physically appearing to people. These incidents took place during a 40 day period following the resurrection whilst He remained physically present on the earth and travelled to various parts of Israel. He was openly seen by people and was touched and spoken to.

There are many instances where He appeared to more than one person at a time. On some occasions He appeared and spoke to large groups. On at least one occasion, in 1 Corinthians 15:5, we are told that He appeared to more than 500 people at the same time. That is highly significant. It means that the idea of it all being a fraud or a hoax is even more impossible.

Even if one can imagine a small group of people colluding together to deceive others, it is impossible to imagine such vast numbers of people all agreeing to carry out a deception in that way. It is equally impossible to imagine them *all* being mistaken, deluded or hallucinating. One person might hallucinate, but not a group, and certainly not 500 people all at the same time and all in the same way.

### **People who saw Jesus alive:**

I will now set out all the physical appearances of Jesus after His resurrection. These are the ones that are recorded in the Bible, though there must have been many more. I will refer to each of the people who saw Him after His resurrection and then set out the Bible verses which record it:

- (i) Two women outside of Jerusalem, probably Mary Magdalene and another Mary:

*<sup>9</sup>Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."*  
*Matthew 28:9-10 (NIV)*

- (ii) Mary Magdalene:

*<sup>15</sup>"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." <sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" which means Teacher. <sup>17</sup>Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' " <sup>18</sup>Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.*  
*John 20:15-18 (NIV)*

- (iii) Two travellers on the road to Emmaus

(see the earlier passage from Luke 24 verses 13-22)

- (iv) Peter (Simon) in Jerusalem:

*and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."*  
*Luke 24:34 (NIV)*

- (v) Ten disciples in the upper room:

*<sup>19</sup>On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending*

you." <sup>22</sup>And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

<sup>24</sup>Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."  
John 20: 19-25 (NIV)

(vi) Eleven disciples in the upper room:

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." <sup>28</sup>Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

<sup>29</sup>Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." <sup>30</sup>Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.  
John 20:26-31 (NIV)

(vii) Seven disciples fishing:

<sup>1</sup>Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. <sup>3</sup>"I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. <sup>4</sup>Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup>He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered.

<sup>6</sup>He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. <sup>7</sup>Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. <sup>8</sup>The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. <sup>9</sup>When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

<sup>10</sup>Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." <sup>11</sup>Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup>Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup>Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup>This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.  
John 21: 1-14 (NIV)

(viii) Eleven disciples on the mountain in Galilee:

<sup>16</sup>Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."  
Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV)

(ix) To more than five hundred people, to James and (some years later) to the apostle Paul:

*<sup>3</sup>For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup>After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; <sup>7</sup>then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; <sup>8</sup>and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.*  
*1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (NASB)*

(NB - Note that when apostle Paul refers to Jesus appearing to him, he does not mean the incident on the road to Damascus when Jesus spoke to Paul. Paul means a separate, later occasion when Jesus visibly appeared to him.)

(x) Disciples who watched Jesus ascending into Heaven:

*<sup>44</sup>He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." <sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup>He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*  
*Luke 24:44-49 (NIV)*

*<sup>3</sup>After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup>For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." <sup>6</sup>So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup>He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*  
*Acts 1:3-8 (NIV)*

In addition to all these recorded appearances, there must have been many others which aren't referred to in the Bible. Moreover, remember that Jesus also appeared to Paul and later to John in the book of Revelation. Those appearances were equally real and physical. Both Paul and John literally met Jesus. These meetings took place years after the resurrection, long after Jesus had ascended into Heaven. I will now set out the relevant Bible verses which refer to these:

(xi) Apostle Paul's first encounter with the risen Jesus, a few years after the resurrection when Jesus spoke to him on the road to Damascus:

*<sup>1</sup>Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest <sup>2</sup>and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from Heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup>He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" <sup>5</sup>"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. <sup>6</sup>"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." <sup>7</sup>The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. <sup>8</sup>Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.*

- (xii) Apostle Paul's face to face meeting with Jesus Christ. Paul received the gospel as a direct revelation from Jesus, not through any man:

*Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?*  
1 Corinthians 9:1 (NASB)

*<sup>11</sup>For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. <sup>12</sup>For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*  
Galatians 1:11-12 (NASB)

- (xiii) Apostle Paul seeing and speaking with the Lord Jesus while in a trance in Acts 22:

*<sup>17</sup>"It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, <sup>18</sup>and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.' <sup>19</sup>"And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. <sup>20</sup>'And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.' <sup>21</sup>"And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"*  
Acts 22:17-21 (NASB)

- (xiv) Apostle Paul being caught up into Heaven where he was given a direct revelation and was told many things:

*<sup>1</sup>Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. <sup>2</sup>I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago--whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows--such a man was caught up to the third Heaven. <sup>3</sup>And I know how such a man--whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows--<sup>4</sup>was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. <sup>5</sup>On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses. <sup>6</sup>For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me. <sup>7</sup>Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me--to keep me from exalting myself! <sup>8</sup>Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. <sup>9</sup>And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.*  
2 Corinthians 12:1-9 (NASB)

- (xv) Apostle John's meeting with Jesus about 60 years after the resurrection

*<sup>12</sup>I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup>and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. <sup>14</sup>His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.*

*<sup>15</sup>His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. <sup>16</sup>In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.*

*<sup>17</sup>When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. <sup>18</sup>I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am*

*alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. <sup>19</sup>Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.* *Revelation 1:12-19 (NIV)*

It is important to read through each of these passages to fully realise how long Jesus stayed on the earth and how many people saw Him, touched Him and spoke with Him after His resurrection. We are not speaking about a small group of people who fleetingly saw Him. He stayed and taught and explained things to them for 40 days before they began their ministries in Israel and throughout the Roman Empire. Plus, as we have seen, the apostles Paul and John met Him, face to face, even years later.

If the resurrection was a fraud, then how could the early Church have grown in the spectacular way that it did in the city of Jerusalem? That was the very place where the resurrection is said to have happened? If it was a fraud then the people of Jerusalem would be very well placed to disprove it.

If nothing else, they would be able to go to the tomb and bring out the dead body of Jesus. Alternatively, virtually everybody in Jerusalem would have had a neighbour or a relative or a friend who was part of this so called hoax. If it was a fraud it would have leaked out somewhere.

We have seen from the many Bible references just how numerous the people were who had seen Jesus physically. It ran into hundreds, probably thousands, of people. These were in Jerusalem and elsewhere. Yet, there is no evidence that any of these people privately confided in their friends or relatives that it was a hoax. Neither did any of them ever say or that they had been mistaken, or that they had imagined it. On the contrary, thousands more people in Jerusalem turned to Jesus Christ and began to follow Him, precisely because of His resurrection.

They were not in the same position you or I are in. We are living many years later and in different parts of the world. Therefore, we are unable to check out the facts for ourselves in the locality. However, they were locals and were able to check all the facts for themselves. Yet, far from disproving or denying the resurrection, they knew for sure that it had happened. The church in Jerusalem became very large in a short space of time and they all continued to believe in the resurrection, despite the persecution that came to them as a result of believing in it.

### **Alternative explanation 2 – What if the Jewish and/or Roman authorities stole the body?**

Again, this makes no sense at all, as one can demonstrate:

#### **a) Why would they do that? They could only lose by doing so.**

The main reason that the Jewish authorities wanted Jesus to be crucified was because they feared and envied His growing fame and popularity. Therefore why would they seek to enhance His reputation even further by helping to falsely convince people that He had risen from the dead?

They knew that Jesus had prophesied that He would rise from the dead. That was one of the reasons why a large guard was posted at His tomb. They knew that He said it would happen. Therefore it makes no sense for them to steal His body or to cooperate with anyone else doing so.

#### **b) If either group had stolen the body, i.e. the Romans or the Jewish authorities, then the other group would have exposed it.**

It would make no sense for either the Jewish authorities or the Roman authorities to assist in building up the reputation of Jesus and His followers. Thus if either had, for some unknown reason, chosen to

take the body, then the other group would have tried to prevent them doing so. They would at least have revealed that the other group had done so. They would not cooperate in the stealing of the body, or in concealing it later.

**c) Even if they had stolen the body, they would then have displayed it later**

If, for whatever reason, the Jewish or Roman authorities had taken the body then they would have revealed it. When they began to see how many people were following Jesus and believing in His resurrection, they would have gone and got the body and displayed it publicly. They would have said *“Actually He is not risen at all – here is His body, we had it all along”*. We know that they never did that. But, we can be certain that if they had got the body, they would have displayed it. So, we know they didn't have His body and that they could not find it either.

**Alternative explanation 3 – “The Swoon Theory”**

A few people have half-heartedly put forward the idea that Jesus did not actually die on the cross at all. They suggest that He simply fainted and appeared to be dead. They argue that perhaps He was then put in to the tomb where He later revived and came out again, causing His disciples to mistakenly imagine that He had risen from the dead. However, this theory is plainly impossible, for many reasons:

**a) We know He died - the Romans made sure of that**

The Romans knew how to execute people. They did not get it wrong. Roman soldiers were experts in killing and they knew death when they saw it. That is why they did not bother to break Jesus' legs, which is what they did if people were too slow in dying. They could clearly see He was already dead.

Plus, Jesus had many additional wounds over and above those that men normally received when crucified. He had a crown of thorns put on His head. He had also been flogged beforehand with a whip, which would have torn open His back and legs. That in itself would cause great loss of blood. Moreover, a spear had been thrust in to His chest. All that had happened in addition to a complete crucifixion on the cross, whereby His wrists and feet were nailed on to the wood and He then had to struggle in agony to lift Himself up to gain every breath that He took.

That is how men died on the cross. They reached the point where they could no longer lift themselves up to breathe. This was because their arms were outstretched. That places great pressure on the chest and makes it impossible to breathe unless they lift their chest up. Thus Jesus had to keep putting pressure on his nailed wrists and feet to lift Himself. The pain would have been terrible. Therefore, how could anyone survive all of that?

**b) Even if He did somehow survive, how could He recover?**

The swoon theory would require Jesus, despite His many horrific injuries, to regain consciousness in the tomb and then unwrap his own body. That would not be easy, because He was wrapped with cloth. Then He would have to single-handedly roll away a heavy stone in order to escape. After that He would have to overpower a large group of Roman soldiers. All of this would have to be done after great loss of blood, the agony of the crucifixion, a deep stab wound in the chest from a spear, and then three days without food, water, or any medical attention. It is plainly impossible.

**c) Even if He did somehow “revive” like this, how could He then be strong and healthy enough to convince hundreds or even thousands of people that He was resurrected and that He was the Son of God?**

Even if we can somehow believe all of these extraordinary ideas, if He was able to crawl out of the tomb then he would be a physical wreck at best. Yet we know that He was able to walk briskly for several miles on the road to Emmaus. And, whilst doing so, He was alert enough to give a long lecture on the various prophecies in the Bible that were about Himself. How could He do that on feet that had just had long Roman nails driven through the heel bones, let alone all the other wounds?

**d) Also, it would make Jesus a liar.**

The swoon theory requires Jesus Himself to be a liar and a hoaxer rather than His disciples. In effect, it means Him pretending to have risen from the dead and pretending to be the Son of God. Yet, if you read everything that He said in the gospels and look at everything else that He did, does He sound like a liar? Clearly not. Moreover, if this had somehow happened, Jesus would still have had to die later at some point. If so, He would have had to leave His body behind then. But He never did.

**Alternative explanation 4 – That the women ran to the wrong tomb**

This explanation is too silly to take seriously, but I will deal with it for completeness. The idea is that Mary Magdalene and the other women who went to the tomb of Jesus early on the morning of the resurrection somehow went to the wrong tomb. Then, when finding it empty, they just assumed that He must have risen from the dead!

If this absurd theory had been true then the mistake would have been quickly corrected. The Jewish and/or Roman authorities, on learning about the rumours of a resurrection, would have gone to the correct tomb. Then they would have displayed the body publicly to disprove all the rumours. They clearly did not and could not do so, because they did not have His body.

Moreover, even if the women had somehow been mistaken on day one, we know that from then on they saw Jesus and spoke to Him on many occasions. Therefore, even if they could somehow have been mistaken at the beginning, they would still need from that point on to have been deliberately lying about the many subsequent appearances and meetings with Jesus. The apostles would all have to be lying too.

**Alternative explanation number 5 – That it was all an hallucination**

We can imagine one person hallucinating about something, but not hundreds of people all at the same time and in the same way. Moreover, if there is an hallucination it would only happen on one occasion, not on many subsequent occasions involving the same people and/or different people.

Also, even where hallucinations do happen it is generally with emotionally disturbed and unbalanced people. Yet we know that the disciples and followers of Jesus were sane, sober and balanced. If nothing else, we know it from the writings that they later produced. Thus, this theory too must be discarded.

**Other evidence about Jesus Christ outside of the Bible**

Some people argue that perhaps Jesus never existed at all. They are not prepared to believe the Bible and assume that there is no other evidence that Jesus even existed. They wrongly imagine that the only place where Jesus is referred to is in the Bible. However, the existence of Jesus Christ is an

historical fact. There is more evidence for His existence than there is for that of Julius Caesar or any other famous person of that era.

It is not only the Bible that tells us about Jesus Christ. He is referred to by the secular historians of the time, not least Josephus, a Jewish historian who worked for the Romans. Josephus was not a Christian and yet he referred to Jesus, as did others. He also referred to the fact that Jesus' disciples were claiming that He had risen from the dead.

## **Conclusion**

We are therefore faced with an inescapable conclusion - that the bodily resurrection of Jesus really did happen. It takes much more faith to believe the various alternative theories than it does to believe in the resurrection. Yet, why should it be considered hard to believe in the resurrection? What is difficult about it?

If God is God and is capable of creating the world and everything in it, then why could He not raise Jesus from the dead? The main reason why people do not want to believe in the resurrection is simply because they do not want to have to believe in and follow Jesus Christ, or do what He says.

If you are troubled about the resurrection or have difficulty believing it, then read Paul Little's book "*Know Why You Believe*". Also read Frank Morison's book "*Who Moved the Stone?*" Those two books will help you greatly. For me, coming to be convinced of the truth of the resurrection was a turning point in my life. There was a moment where I came to the stark realisation that the resurrection was undeniably true. At that point I knew that I should hand my whole life over to Jesus Christ and follow Him with all my heart.

Yet, even when I came to that point of realising that the resurrection really was true, I still resisted for several more months, because I did not *want* to hand my life over to Him. Thus, believing in the resurrection is necessary, but it is not enough. We must go on from there to realise who and what Jesus is and to repent and believe in Him.

## **Jesus had repeatedly prophesied beforehand about His own resurrection**

The resurrection of Jesus took the disciples by surprise, but it shouldn't have done, because He had already told them many times that it would happen. He spoke about it publicly, such that even the unbelievers and officials knew He had said it:

*<sup>20</sup>And He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God." <sup>21</sup>But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, <sup>22</sup>saying, "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." Luke 9:20-22 (NASB)*

*<sup>31</sup>And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup>And he said this plainly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup>But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men." Mark 8:31-33 (RSV)*

*<sup>31</sup>because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." <sup>32</sup>But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it. Mark 9:31-32 (NIV)*

<sup>31</sup>Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. <sup>32</sup>"For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, <sup>33</sup>and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again." <sup>34</sup>But the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said. Luke 18:31-34 (NASB)

<sup>1</sup>Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup>And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. <sup>3</sup>And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. <sup>4</sup>Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup>While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" <sup>6</sup>When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. <sup>7</sup>And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." <sup>8</sup>And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone. <sup>9</sup>As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." Matthew 17:1-9 (NASB)

<sup>22</sup>When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. <sup>23</sup>They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life." And the disciples were filled with grief. Matthew 17:22-23 (NIV)

<sup>62</sup>The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. <sup>63</sup>"Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' <sup>64</sup>So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first." <sup>65</sup>"Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." <sup>66</sup>So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. Matthew 27:62-66 (NIV)

### The difference between "resurrection" and "resuscitation"

Jesus was physically 'resurrected'. That is a very important word. Nobody else has ever been resurrected in the way that Jesus was. Yet, one day, all of us will be. Many have been raised from the dead in the sense of being 'resuscitated'. There was Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. Plus there was the 12 year old daughter of Jairus. Also, a large number of people rose from their graves on the day of the crucifixion:

<sup>51</sup>At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. <sup>52</sup>The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. <sup>53</sup>They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. <sup>54</sup>When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" Matthew 27:51-54 (NIV)

All of these people were merely resuscitated in their ordinary mortal bodies. That means that they physically came back to life, having been dead, but they would all then age and die again later. That was not so with Jesus. His resurrection body is eternal, as ours will be. Jesus did not die again later. He stayed on the earth for 40 days after His resurrection and met with His disciples and others and

taught them. Then, when He had finished teaching them, He rose into Heaven in His resurrection body:

### **The ascension of Jesus**

*<sup>6</sup>So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup>He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." <sup>9</sup>After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. <sup>10</sup>They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup>"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into Heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into Heaven."* Acts 1:6-11 (NIV)

This event is called "*the ascension*" because Jesus ascended, or rose, into Heaven. That is where He has been ever since. He is there now, waiting for the time of His return to the earth. That is when He will "*restore the Kingdom to Israel*", as the disciples asked about above. Israel will then be the leading nation on the earth and Jesus will be their King.