

# Explanations for the Resurrection Series

## Jesus Never Died (Ac. 17:32)

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By  
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### At A Glance:

- I. Introduction
- II. The Natural Human Response
- III. Alternative Explanations
- IV. Problems with These Explanations
- V. Conclusion

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*These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.*

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# Jesus Never Died

## I. Introduction

### A. Illustration: Tabloid Headlines

1. Growing up, I would go with my mom when she went grocery shopping. My mom used a lot of coupons to save money. My dad told me that in the early days, when money was tight, the grocery bill was cut in half because of all the time my mom spent collecting, cutting out, and using coupons.
2. The use of all these coupons meant we spent extra time checking out at the register in the grocery store. I spent time looking at the items in the checkout aisle. I remember regularly looking at the magazines for something to do while my mom presented all of the collected coupons. Frequently, I saw crazy and mind-stretching headlines on the cover of tabloid magazines. Tabloid magazines are known for sensationalist headlines.
3. I saw plenty of headlines on the cover of the National Enquirer or the National Examiner that made me laugh. In my mind, I wondered how any magazine could make money off of the ridiculous headlines. Who would take these magazines seriously enough to spend their money on them? What could the articles actually say about these crazy headlines?
4. Perhaps you've seen the first Men in Black movie when the government agent goes to the magazine rack and buys all the tabloid magazines because they were the best place to get tips on alien activity.

B. Throughout our lives we encounter a lot of information. The modern world, with the access we have gained through technology, is on information overload. We are exposed to more information than we have time to process. We all make decisions as to whether we will dismiss and ignore certain information, or whether the information coming before our eyes is worth our time to consider and think about. We make these decisions every day. We click or we don't click.

C. Many people treat Christianity and the Bible as irrelevant, "keep scrolling" information. Christianity, especially the resurrection of Jesus, seems like a ridiculous tabloid headline that isn't worthy of the time it would require to take that claim seriously. A lot of people simply "read the headline" and move on with their day. The resurrection of Jesus is immediately dismissed and not taken seriously in a world where people know better. Acts 17:32 demonstrates that this quick dismissal of Jesus and the claim that He has been resurrected from the dead is the natural human response to the message of Christianity.

## II. The Natural Human Response

A. As the various historical writings related to Jesus and the resurrection communicate the events according to the way the events happened, these writers accurately describe how people respond to the Christian message about Jesus as well. As the authors of the Biblical writings communicate the resurrection of Jesus, we can observe the responses of those who heard this message and notice those in the first century respond to the resurrection of Jesus in the same manner as people are responding to it today. The recorded responses found in the Bible are the

same as how people are still responding to the same message about Jesus. The responses are true to life. This ought to add credibility to the Biblical writings. The Biblical authors didn't distort or sugarcoat the events they recorded. They truthfully and accurately documented the events of Jesus' life and the response of people to Jesus.

- B. Here is how some people responded to the claim that Jesus was resurrected from the dead:
- <sup>32</sup> Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to scoff, but others said, "We shall hear from you again concerning this." (Ac. 17:32)
- C. Notice what the natural human reaction to hearing about the resurrection of Jesus is: people couldn't take it seriously, and they dismissed it ("when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to scoff", v. 32). While others were willing to hear more about Jesus, some dismissed the idea of Jesus being resurrected from the dead immediately. To scoff is to laugh at with contempt and derision.<sup>1</sup> The immediate reaction of some people was to mock and make fun of the idea that a person could come back from the dead after having died. The claim that Jesus, or anyone else, was raised from the dead will be immediately rejected and dismissed, not because of any evidence related to the event of Jesus' resurrection, but because there is an ideological barrier that prevents people from taking this claim seriously.
- D. While there are many different obstacles to accepting the resurrection of Jesus as a fact, one of the most significant challenges is ideological. The event of the resurrection of Jesus goes against how people understand the nature of the world—their personal worldview. As human beings, we will generally immediately reject and dismiss anything that is contrary to the established way we view reality. The resurrection of Jesus confronts some people at the core of how they operate in life. It calls into question the assumptions and foundational perspectives from which they operate.
- E. Why does this happen? One reason could be because the resurrection of Jesus can't happen because miracles are impossible. The main reason miracles are impossible is because we live in a naturalistic universe in which God and any supernatural event is assumed to be non-existent. If God does not exist, and if the only elements that are real are those that are physical, then miracles can't happen. The resurrection of Jesus is a miraculous claim. Therefore, the resurrection of Jesus is impossible by definition, so it obviously didn't happen.
- F. Another reason could be because we know how the world works, and this doesn't happen. Dead people stay dead. In addition, they themselves have never experienced such an event; therefore, they think it is impossible. At a time when people promote "lived experience" (personal experience) as the primary means of acquiring knowledge, we are quick to dismiss the claims of others that do not align with our own personal experience. We will give greater authority and credibility to our own experience above the experience of others. We refuse to accept that another person has experienced something that we have not. If another person says anything that is not consistent with our own personal experience, we immediately dismiss it as untrue. This approach to determining truth is unwise and full of problems.

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<sup>1</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Acts 17:32 "scoff"

- G. Perhaps the most common reaction to hearing about the resurrection of Jesus is to perceive it as foolish:
- <sup>18</sup> For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the understanding of those who have understanding, I will confound.” <sup>20</sup> Where is the wise person? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has God not made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. (1 Cor. 1:18-21)
- H. The message of the resurrection of Jesus and the outcomes of what Jesus did on the cross is viewed as stupidity by many (“For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing”, v. 18). Viewing the resurrection and message of Jesus as foolishness is to think of it as a wildly mistaken or unfounded opinion or idea.<sup>2</sup>
- I. Interestingly, this is the response of people who were unfamiliar with the events and facts about what happened to Jesus. Those who were in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus’ resurrection had a very different response when Peter preached the message of Jesus to them:
- <sup>22</sup> “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a Man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—<sup>23</sup> this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. <sup>24</sup> But God raised Him *from the dead*, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power...<sup>32</sup> *It is* this Jesus *whom* God raised up, *a fact* to which we are all witnesses. (Ac. 2:22-24. 32)
- J. Here is how they responded when the facts about Jesus were known:
- <sup>37</sup> Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what are we to do?” (Ac. 2:37)
- K. There is a massive difference between reacting to the claim of Jesus’ resurrection based on previously established assumptions and reacting based on a knowledge of the fact regarding the case of Jesus. This distinction, being informed or being uninformed, makes a significant difference in how we respond to the resurrection of Jesus.
- L. How is a person supposed to respond to the facts about the death and resurrection of Jesus? Peter tells us exactly how God wants people to respond to the message of Jesus: believe, repent, and be baptized (Ac. 2:36, 38). Those who recognize the truth about Jesus’ death and resurrection accept Jesus as the person He is, the Master of our life (the person who can tell us how we should be living) and the Messiah (God’s special ruler predicted in the Old Testament), they repent (turn their life away from what God says is morally wrong) and they take the step of getting baptized. Believing in Jesus, repenting, and being baptized is the desired response to Jesus intended by God, which is repeated throughout the New Testament.

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<sup>2</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 1 Corinthians 1:18 “foolishness”

### III. Alternative Explanations<sup>3</sup>

- A. There are different types of alternate explanations for the resurrection of Jesus that do not require a supernatural event taking place. We will be focusing on the types of explanations that explain the resurrection of Jesus from the viewpoint that holds Jesus didn't die. One category of views that explains the resurrection of Jesus by thinking the reason Jesus reappeared after His crucifixion is because Jesus never reached the point of death. These theories that claim Jesus didn't die are called the Swoon Theory or the Apparent Death Hypothesis. Under this category of views, different particular explanations are offered to explain how Jesus never died.
- B. One of the most well-known explanations for the resurrection of Jesus that holds to the view that Jesus didn't really die on the cross is found in the Quran:
- <sup>157</sup> and for their saying, 'Surely we killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of God'—yet they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but it (only) seemed like (that) to them. Surely those who differ about him are indeed in doubt about him. They have no knowledge about him, only the following of conjecture. Certainly they did not kill him. <sup>158</sup> No! God raised him to Himself. God is mighty, wise. (Sura 4:157-158)<sup>4</sup>
- C. According to Islam, Jesus did not die on the cross. He only appeared to die, but God took Jesus into his presence, not allowing Jesus as one of God's prophets to be killed. Islam claims that anyone who says Jesus was killed on the cross doesn't have knowledge of Jesus. Some Muslim commentators understand the Quran to be saying that Allah caused someone to have the appearance of Jesus and die in the place of Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Strictly speaking, the Quran doesn't say how it appeared that Jesus died, only that it appeared as though Jesus died and those who believe Jesus died are incorrect.
- D. Another version of the theory that Jesus only appeared to die on the cross comes from Henrich Paulus, a liberal German Bible scholar who presented the most scholarly version of this perspective. He says:
- The apparent death of Jesus was a natural occurrence. The coolness of the sepulchre, the aromatic spices, and the devotion of his followers restored him to life.<sup>6</sup>
- E. Jesus only appeared to die, but was later revived. While there are different explanations of how Jesus was revived and how he appeared to be dead, all these apparent death theories all agree that Jesus did not really die, and his "resurrection" has a natural explanation.

<sup>3</sup> For more detailed information with documentation on the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus and the problems with non-death theories see Sean and Josh McDowell [\*Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Life-Changing Truth for a Skeptical World\*](#) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017), chapter 10; J. Warner Wallace, [\*Alive: A Cold-Case Approach to the Resurrection\*](#) (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2014); Michael Licona [\*The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach\*](#) (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011); Gary R. Habermas, [\*The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ\*](#) (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Gordon D. Nickel, [\*The Quran with Christian Commentary: A Guide to Understanding the Scripture of Islam\*](#), trans. A. J. Droge (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2013), 126–127.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon D. Nickel, [\*The Quran with Christian Commentary: A Guide to Understanding the Scripture of Islam\*](#), ed. J. Dudley Woodberry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 314–315.

<sup>6</sup> Heinrich Paulus [\*The Life of Jesus\*](#), <https://thequran.love/2025/04/01/thirteen-authors-works-and-quotes-on-the-swoon-hypothesis-of-jesus/>. See also Sura 3:55 and 19:33.

- F. Is it possible for a person to think Jesus never died on the cross as a reasonable and credible viewpoint? The only way to determine this is to become more familiar with the facts of what happened to Jesus. One explanation of how Jesus didn't truly die must be consistent with all the facts related to the death and resurrection details related to Jesus. Each person will have to make this determination for themselves.

#### IV. Problems with These Explanations<sup>7</sup>

- A. Why hasn't any apparent death explanation of the resurrection of Jesus gained much support by scholars in the past hundred plus years? Because the evidence disproving this explanation is overwhelming. There are two main categories of evidence leveled against any explanation that claims Jesus didn't die. There is strong medical support for the fact that Jesus died, and the historical accounts of the fact of Jesus death is also very solid. The death of Jesus is the most established fact about Jesus and His life.

- B. Here are a few of the most significant reasons to reject the idea that Jesus only appeared to die on the cross. There is only one ancient account of anyone surviving the crucifixion process, and this person didn't experience a full crucifixion and received the best medical attention available at the time. There isn't a single example from the ancient world of anyone surviving the whole crucifixion process. The one person to survive a partial crucifixion is discussed by Josephus:

(420) and when I was sent by Titus Caesar with Cerealius, and a thousand horsemen, to a certain village called Thecoa, in order to know whether it were a place fit for a camp, as I came back, I saw many captives crucified; and remembered three of them as my former acquaintance. I was very sorry at this in my mind, and went with tears in my eyes to Titus, and told him of them; (421) so he immediately commanded them to be taken down, and to have the greatest care taken of them, in order to their recovery; yet two of them died under the physician's hands, while the third recovered. (75:420-421)<sup>8</sup>

- C. Another reason any theory that claims Jesus did not die on the cross fails is because Jesus and the two criminals killed with Him received a death blow to ensure death:

<sup>31</sup> Now then, since it was the day of preparation, to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews requested of Pilate that their legs be broken, and *the bodies* be taken away. <sup>32</sup> So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man, and of the other who was crucified with Him; <sup>33</sup> but after they came to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. <sup>34</sup> Yet one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. <sup>35</sup> And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. <sup>36</sup> For these things took place so that the Scripture would be fulfilled: "Not a bone of Him shall be broken."  
<sup>37</sup> And again another Scripture says, "They will look at Him whom they pierced."  
(Jn. 19:31-37)

- D. Jesus was speared in the chest to ensure a death blow ("one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear", v. 34). Why did they do this? Because they thought He was already dead ("when

<sup>7</sup> Gary R. Habermas, [Refutations](#), vol. 2, On the Resurrection (Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2024), 478

<sup>8</sup> Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, [The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 25.

they saw that He was already dead”, v. 33). The soldiers saw that Jesus was dead, but just to make sure, they stabbed His chest. This action punctured Jesus’ lung, or possibly His heart, as evidenced by the “blood and water” (v. 34). A person in Jesus’ weakened state with such significant blood loss would not survive a punctured lung or heart. If only Jesus’ lung was punctured and He was still alive, an obviously observable sound would be heard as He continued to breathe. If His heart was pierced, He would clearly be killed.

- E. Pilate, the one who ordered Jesus to be killed, was convinced Jesus was dead:
- <sup>44</sup> Now Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. <sup>45</sup> And after learning this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. (Mk. 15:44-45)
- F. Now that we’ve looked at a little of the medical evidence, what about the historical evidence supporting the fact that Jesus died? A well-known and vocal critic of Christianity, New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman, accepts the death of Jesus as a reliable historical fact about Jesus. In his book *Did Jesus Exist?*, Ehrman lists fifteen ancient early and independent sources that confirm the fact of the death of Jesus (prior to 130 CE). These sources include:
1. The Gospel of Mark
  2. The source material of Matthew
  3. Luke’s source
  4. John
  5. The speeches in Acts
  6. Writings of Paul
  7. 1 Timothy
  8. Hebrews
  9. 1 Peter
  10. Revelation
  11. 1 Clement
  12. Ignatius
  13. The Gospel of Peter
  14. Josephus
  15. Tacitus
- G. If someone wants to claim that Jesus never died, they must present historical reasons demonstrating each of these sources are historically unreliable. This is going to be an extremely difficult task. The historical evidence and the strength of that evidence is such that every early source claiming Jesus died will have to be simply ignored because all of it can’t be reasonably refuted. This is why the fact of the death of Jesus is virtually unanimous by critical scholarship in being accepted as a historical fact. The evidence in support of the death of Jesus forces a person to accept it. Anyone claiming that Jesus only appeared to die has a significant burden of proof to support their view in a way that is consistent with the historical evidence of Jesus’ case.
- H. If a person wants to hold to a view that claims Jesus never truly died on the cross, they must do so in a way that is inconsistent with the known facts about Jesus. The evidence we currently

have available to us regarding the events of the life of Jesus is a major obstacle that prevents us from taking the idea that Jesus never died seriously as a reasonable view. The facts about Jesus will have to be ignored or changed to maintain any view that claims Jesus did not die on the cross during His crucifixion.

- I. Winfried Corduan makes this significant observation:

Non-miraculous explanations of what happened at the empty tomb have to face a cruel choice: either they have to rewrite the evidence in order to suit themselves or they have to accept the fact that they are not consistent with present evidence. The only hypothesis that fits the evidence is that Jesus was really resurrected.<sup>9</sup>

## V. Conclusion

- A. When hearing about the resurrection of Jesus, some people respond with the natural human reaction: laugh with contempt at the thought of a person rising from the dead. Many people throughout human history have done so. However, this response seems to occur most often with those who are unfamiliar with the facts about Jesus. When the facts are known, the death of Jesus becomes apparent.
- B. If Jesus was truly raised from the dead as a real event of history, would you be willing to accept Christianity as the true message of God? The main claim in support of Christianity is that Jesus truly rose from the dead and that the Gospels are accurate eyewitness accounts of this event.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Sean and Josh McDowell [\*Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Life-Changing Truth for a Skeptical World\*](#) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017), 275.

<sup>10</sup> J. Warner Wallace, [\*Alive: A Cold-Case Approach to the Resurrection\*](#) (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2014).