

# Walking the Via Dolorosa – Bonus Session – The Resurrection

## Eyewitness Testimony

Even a quick reading of the last few chapters of each of the Gospels will reveal that the Resurrection stories are not the same – that in fact, they differ on many points.

However, this is considerable proof of the truth of the stories – they were uncompromised by collusion. The writers of the Gospels, confident of the eye-witness sources of their material, reported the Resurrection stories precisely as they were transmitted to them by the witnesses themselves. No effort whatsoever was made to make the stories agree.

### A Comparison of the Resurrection in the Four Gospels

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
The Guard on the Tomb is placed by Pilate at the request of the Chief Priests and Scribes 27:62-66			
Mary Magdalene + other Mary come to the tomb towards dawn. 28:1	Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James & Salome come early, when the sun had risen. 16:1-3	'They' come to the tomb at early dawn 24:1	Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb when it is still dark. 20:1a
An earthquake happens. The stone at the entrance of the tomb is rolled away by an angel who sits on it. The angel is glittering. The guards pass out with fear. vs 2-4	The women are wondering about moving the stone, when they see that it has been rolled away. vs 3-4	They find the stone rolled away vs 2	Seeing the stone has been rolled away, Mary runs and tells Simon Peter and John that Jesus' body has gone. They run back with her, and Peter enters the tomb, confirming the loss. We are told that the other disciple 'saw and believed'. The men go home.
The angel reassures the women by explaining that Jesus has risen from the dead. He invites them to look into the tomb. vs 5-6	They go into the tomb and find a young man, who reassures them that Jesus is risen from the dead. vs 5-6	They enter the tomb and meet two men in dazzling clothes, who remind them of Jesus; words when He was in Galilee, that he would be crucified and would be raised on the third day.	Mary stands outside the tomb crying, and decides to go and look in. She sees two angels in white, who ask her why she is crying.
The angel tells them to inform the disciples of the resurrection, and instruct them to proceed to Galilee, where Jesus will meet them. vs 7	The women are told to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus has gone before them to Galilee, where they will see Him. vs 7		
The women run to tell the disciples. vs 8	The women run off, frightened, and tell no one. V 8	They return and tell the eleven and 'all the rest'. The women are named as Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and others.	Mary Magdalene meets Jesus, whom she does not immediately recognize, who tells her to return and tell the disciples

## Putting It All Together

Even with the variances of perspective of each of the stories, the accounts can be combined to form a single non-contradictory narrative:

- On the first day of the week, very early in the morning there was an earthquake, for an angel of the Lord had come down to the tomb, and rolled the stone away. The guards who had been posted there shook and were paralysed with fear.
- Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, Salome and some others of the women went to the tomb as the sun was rising, to see the tomb and, if possible, anoint the body of Jesus. As they walked, they wondered who might roll the stone away for them.
- As they arrived, the sun not quite up, Mary Magdalene saw the tomb first, and discovered the stone had been removed, and the body gone. While the others remained behind, she ran and told the disciples, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him!"
- While she was gone, the other women went into the tomb to see for themselves. There was an angel, who looked like a young man, dressed in clothes of dazzling white, standing inside the tomb on the right hand side. They were terrified! But the angel said, "Don't be alarmed! You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" The angel was joined by another, who added, "Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered Jesus saying just that, and they ran away from the tomb, terrified by all that had happened, so frightened that they told no-one what had happened or where they were going.
- Suddenly Jesus met the women. "Greetings," he said. They fell at his feet and worshiped him. And Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." Now, with amazement and joy, they ran back to tell the others.
- While all this was happening, back at the house, Peter and John were listening to Mary. Peter jumped up and ran out of the house, with John close behind. John got to the tomb first, and bent down to look inside. He saw Jesus' burial shroud, as well as the cloth in which his head had been wrapped, rolled up all by itself. Peter, however, barged right in. He just couldn't understand what had happened, and John, entering the tomb himself, finally believed the body wasn't there. They went back to the house, but Mary Magdalene, who had followed them to the tomb, remained, weeping outside the tomb.
- All alone now, still weeping, Mary bent over to look in the tomb. There were the two angels, now back, sitting right where Jesus had lain. They asked her why she was crying. She replied, "They have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where." Turning around, she saw Jesus standing there, but she did not recognise him. He too said, "Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?" Thinking him to be the gardener, she replied, Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where, and I will take him away." The Jesus said to her, "Mary!" and she finally realized who it was. "Rabbi!" she said, and throws her arms around him. Jesus then told Mary to not hold on to him, because he has not yet ascended to the Father. But she is to go to his brothers and tell them that, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Then Mary went and told the disciples all that Jesus had said.

**How do we know that Jesus' resurrection was not just a rumour spread by some of the disciples to validate their own decision to follow Jesus? Could it be that either Jesus was not dead, or his body was stolen or mislocated, or his appearances were hallucinations, or a pre-arranged plot, or a later rumour?**

- (1) Jesus really was dead. Every source we have indicates that Jesus was publicly executed before large crowds. He was certified as dead by both a centurion in charge of the execution—a professional whose job it was to determine that death had taken place—and by the regional governor, Pilate, who sent to have the matter checked. This is an important point because some skeptics claim that Jesus was not really dead, that He was only near death but revived in the cool of the tomb. Non-biblical sources (Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny) all describe Jesus as “put to death.”
- (2) The tomb was found empty. Jesus was buried in a new tomb, one that had never before been used (John 19:41). That means it was in perfect condition and would have been easy to locate. But when Jesus' friends arrived on the second morning after His death, His body was gone. All the accounts agree on this. Cover stories were invented to account for this fact (Matthew 28:11-15).
- (3) Jesus appeared after His death to many witnesses. In a garden, on a road, in an upstairs room, by the lake—each of the Gospels recounts Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to His fearful, doubting followers over a period of forty days, including to over 500 witnesses at one time. Were these hallucinations? That seems implausible, since they happened to too many people, among them hardheaded fishermen, steadfast women, civil servants, and the ultimate skeptic, Thomas. The disciples base their testimony on the wide-spread nature of the Resurrection appearances.
- (4) Women witnesses. The first, primary witnesses to the resurrection were women. If not true, this is a deeply flawed way to present a case. Women were not regarded as reliable witnesses in the ancient world; their testimony was not regarded as valid in a court of law. Not even the disciples believed the women. Why should anyone else? Why make them the primary witnesses? Even Paul excludes them from his account of the Resurrection.
- (5) Faith changed after the physical proof of the resurrection, not upon the discovery of the empty tomb. Time and again, the immediate Resurrection of Jesus – rather than as part of a general resurrection at the end of time - is presented as unanticipated. The disciples are continually presented as not understanding what Jesus meant when he talked about it, and completely missing the point on the discovery of the empty tomb. Not until Jesus actually appeared did the disciples believe – and then only reluctantly (see Matthew 28:17).
- (6) Jesus is not immediately recognized by the witnesses to the Resurrection. Somehow, in gaining his Resurrection body, his appearance had been altered. Not until he speaks do people realize who he is – and not even necessarily then. Again, it would be ludicrous to concoct a story where the main event is somehow obscured or misunderstood by the primary witnesses.
- (7) Paul and James were convinced of the truth of the Resurrection, despite initially being opposed to the ministry of Jesus. It is one thing to presume collusion and deceit on behalf of the followers of Jesus; it is another thing altogether to presume so on behalf of those opposed to Jesus' ministry.
  - a) The Apostle Paul is faithfully trying to eradicate Christianity as a blasphemous sect of his own beloved Judaism, when an encounter with the risen Jesus utterly changes his life. There is absolutely nothing for him to gain in this; he is now rejected by the Jewish community, and by the Christian community who distrust him. It is years before he is accepted by the Christian community. His resultant life is a story of astonishing hardship and self-sacrifice. He never backs down from his claim to have personally witnessed the resurrected Jesus.

- b) Jesus' brother James was opposed to Jesus' ministry and mission. Jesus' family did not seem to follow his teaching. Even Mary seems to misunderstand what is happening (Mark 3:21). Jesus' brothers are described as not believing in him (John 7:5 – "Even his own brothers did not believe in him."). John records Jesus as putting Mary into the care of John, as the rest of the family has abandoned him. However, after the Resurrection, Jesus appears to his brother James (1 Corinthians 15) while in Jerusalem, and then quite possibly to the other brothers in Galilee. The family – who did not follow Jesus during his time of celebrity and fame – now sided with the disciples and the believing community (Acts 1:14 – "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers."). James eventually became the leader of the Christian community in Jerusalem, until killed by Herod Agrippa in 61 AD.
- (8) From the outset of their claim that Jesus had been resurrected, the disciples and followers of Jesus did not lead a privileged life, but a life of considerable self-sacrifice and hardship, and were often persecuted to the point of death. There was no material or societal advantage to claiming the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Further, rather than claiming Jesus to be a wonderful teacher and miracle worker who was misunderstood, or even the perfect sacrifice who took away the sins of the world, it is the resurrection – the most unlikely and antagonistic aspect of Jesus' life – upon which the disciples base their faith, and the faith which was to follow.

### **Historical and archaeological proof regarding the Resurrection**

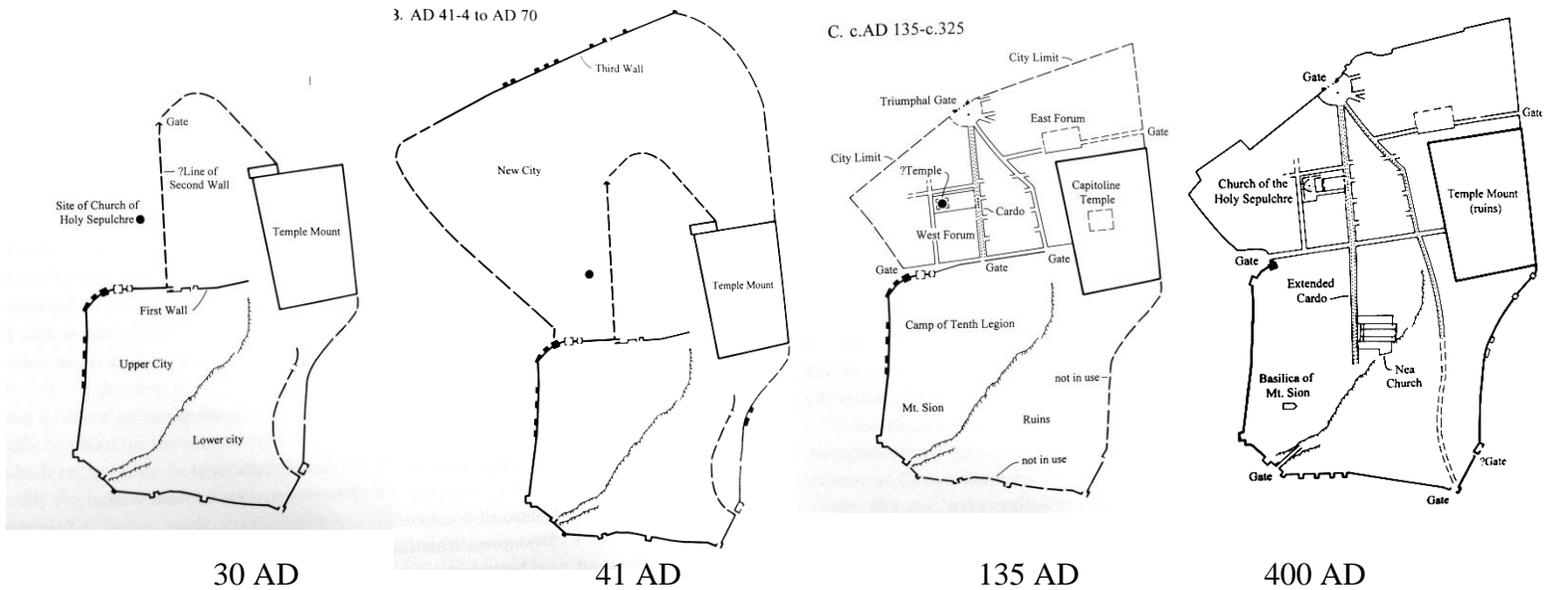
The primary historical proof is of course the establishment and continued existence of the Christian community itself, which bases its foundation on the Resurrection – not simply the life – of Jesus. The Christian Community is an unbroken line of testimony, pointing back to, and connected with, the Resurrection appearances of Jesus.

Additionally, considerable archaeological and historical proof is found in two sources: 1) the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; 2) the Church of the Apostles.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre marks the location of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus (it is also appropriately called The Church of the Resurrection, or Anastasis). The history of the building itself is strong testimony to the importance placed upon it by the early Church.

The site of the Crucifixion and Resurrection is located at Golgotha, or Calvary, a quarry fallen into disuse, converted at the time of Jesus into a burial ground with gardens. It was located just outside the city walls. A large spur of unquarried rock (soft limestone, flawed with a large crack) marked the site. The soft limestone was convenient for the excavating of tombs. Joseph of Arimathea paid for a tomb for his own use; Jesus was placed within this previously unused, new tomb. It is unknown whether this site was regularly used for crucifixions; it is known archaeologically to contain a number of burial chambers, some of which can be visited within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, just metres away from the remains of Jesus' tomb. In this case, the crucifixion is said to have happened "in the same place" as the location of the tombs.

Following the Resurrection, the tomb became a place of pilgrimage by early Christians. These people somehow distinguished the tomb of Jesus by markings (graffiti) or other manners. In 41 AD, some 11 years after the Resurrection, Herod Agrippa enlarged the walls of Jerusalem to include the area occupied by Golgotha. This was to improve the defensive capacity of the city to its vulnerable north side, resulting in the tomb now located internal to the city.



In 72 AD, the city was sacked by the Romans, and large areas were destroyed, including the Temple Mount. Prior to this time, the early Christian community dispersed, many to Pella in Jordan, and returned by the late 70s AD. They resumed venerating the location of the Resurrection. They built a church on Mount Zion – a Christian synagogue – known as the Church of the Apostles. This synagogue is oriented not towards the Temple Mount, as are ALL OTHER SYNAGOGUES, but instead is oriented TO THE SITE OF THE RESURRECTION. This is profound proof of the authenticity of the site of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, but also a profound statement as to the Early Church giving absolute importance to the Crucifixion and Resurrection as of primary importance to the faith.

In the 130s AD, following a second (unsuccessful) Jewish revolt, the Roman Emperor Hadrian completely rebuilt Jerusalem as a Roman city, renaming it Aelia Capitolina. Roman temples were erected over sites of veneration; the area of Golgotha was rebuilt into a large Roman temple. A plaza or platform was constructed around the sites of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, and the area was buried under gravel and fill.

In the 320s AD, the Emperor Constantine, sympathetic to Christianity, was determined to restore the ancient Christian shrines. Christians in Jerusalem identified the Temple to Aphrodite and Jupiter as covering the site of Golgotha. This must have been considered highly unlikely: it was now located within the city walls; nothing of the original site was visible; the Pagan temple was considered a haunt of demons. And yet, the Christian community insisted on the veracity of the site. The pagan temple was destroyed; Church historian Eusebius, himself a sceptic of this location, was an eyewitness to what happened next:

*The emperor, however, was not satisfied with having proceeded thus far: once more, fired with holy ardor, he directed that the ground itself should be dug up to a considerable depth, and the soil which had been polluted by the foul impurities of demon worship transported to a far distant place. This also was accomplished without delay.*

*But as soon as the original surface of the ground, beneath the covering of earth, appeared, immediately, **and contrary to all expectation**, the venerable and hollowed monument of our Saviour's resurrection was discovered. Then indeed did this most holy cave present a faithful similitude of his*

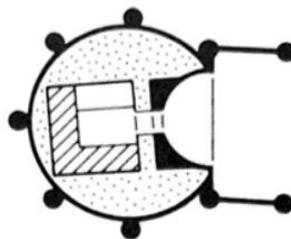
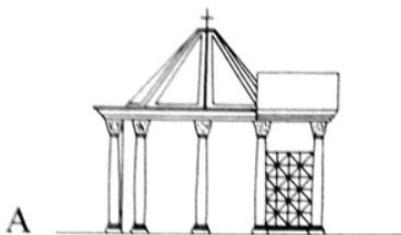
*return to life, in that, after lying buried in darkness, it again emerged to light, and afforded to all who came to witness the sight, a clear and visible proof of the wonders of which that spot had once been the scene, a testimony to the resurrection of the Saviour clearer than any voice could give.*

A large church was built on the site to commemorate the location, and, to isolate the tomb of Jesus more clearly, the rest of the raised area was carved away, and a small house (edicule) built over the now solitary tomb to protect it from the elements (and souvenir seekers).

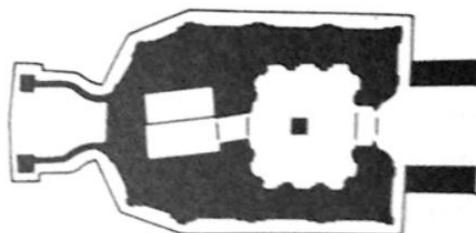
The church was partially destroyed in 614 by fire, during the Moslem conquest of Jerusalem. It was rebuilt with a restored edicule in 630. Tragically, in 1009 it was largely destroyed by the Egyptian caliph al-Hakim, who destroyed many other churches in the Holy Land. The actual Tomb was decapitated to the level of 2m or so in height. While roofless, it retained the walls and bench. Under military threat, al-Hakim rebuilt the church on a smaller scale; upon their conquest of Jerusalem in 1099, the Crusaders also rebuilt to the extent possible to them. Again, a new edicule housed the tomb. This edicule deteriorated and was rebuilt in the 1500s, and after a major fire, again in 1809. This is the edicule in place today. The interior is as it was in 1809, completely encased in marble; many of these marble slabs are now known to date back to the much earlier edicule structures.

Recent extensive restorations, documented by the National Geographic Society, have revealed that the current tomb is the tomb identified and enshrined in the early 300s. The original tomb walls (to a height of approximately five feet) and the original bench are still intact, covered in protective marble.

Also significant, the interior of the tomb is at an imperfect angle to the Edicule and to the rest of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre – even to the original Constantinian basilica. The only explanation for this difficult-to-notice but significant deviation from the rest of the building is if the Edicule in fact contains the original (obstinately mis-aligned) tomb, rather than a tomb of Constantinian invention, and still today preserves the original walls and bench. This, like the orientation of the Church of the Apostles, is eloquent testimony to the importance given to the Empty Tomb as the central physical witness of the Christian faith.



*The original Edicule (325 AD) containing the tomb of Jesus (A) with top view showing the angle of the tomb relative to the building.*



*The current, much larger Edicule (D – 1809 AD) demonstrating the same angle as found in the 325 form*