Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

Apologetics · https://thebiblicalroots.org/answers/did-jesus-really-rise-from-the-dead/

Yes. The resurrection of Jesus is presented in the New Testament as a real, historical event: His tomb was empty, He physically appeared to many witnesses, and His followers were transformed by what they saw. Christianity stands or falls on this claim—if Jesus did not rise, the faith collapses (1 Cor 15:14–17).

The earliest Christian writings treat the resurrection not as metaphor or spiritual experience, but as bodily, historical reality. In 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, the apostle Paul preserves what is widely recognized as an early creedal tradition, likely originating within a few years of the crucifixion. He reports that Jesus "was raised on the third day" and appeared to individuals and groups, including more than five hundred people at one time—many of whom were still alive when Paul wrote, inviting verification (1 Cor 15:6). The Greek term used for resurrection, *anastasis*, consistently refers to bodily rising, not merely spiritual survival.

The Gospel accounts reinforce this claim with converging testimony. The tomb is found empty by women (Matt 28:1–10; Luke 24:1–12), whose witness carried little legal weight in that culture—an unlikely detail if the story were fabricated. Jesus then appears physically to His disciples: He speaks with them, eats with them (Luke 24:41–43), and invites them to touch Him (John 20:27). These are not descriptions of visions or hallucinations but embodied encounters. At the same time, His resurrection body is transformed—recognizable yet glorified (Luke 24:31; John 20:19)—which aligns with Paul's description of a "spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:44), meaning a body animated and perfected by the Spirit, not immaterial.

Historically, several facts are widely acknowledged even among critical scholars: Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate, His tomb was found empty (or at least claimed to be), His disciples genuinely believed they saw Him alive, and the early Christian movement rapidly emerged in Jerusalem, the very place where He was executed. The question is not whether something happened, but what best explains these facts. The resurrection provides the most coherent explanation: it accounts for the empty tomb, the multiple appearances, and the radical transformation of fearful disciples into bold witnesses willing to suffer and die for their testimony.

Alternative explanations fall short. The “stolen body” theory fails to explain the disciples’ willingness to suffer for what they would have known was a lie. The “hallucination” theory cannot account for group appearances or the empty tomb. The “swoon” theory (that Jesus did not actually die) is medically and historically implausible given Roman crucifixion practices (John 19:33–34). Each alternative explains one aspect of the data while failing to account for the whole.

Theologically, the resurrection is God’s public vindication of Jesus’ identity and mission. It confirms that His death was not a defeat but an atoning sacrifice accepted by God (Rom 4:25). It also inaugurates the new creation—Jesus is “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20), meaning His resurrection is the beginning of the general resurrection promised to all believers. Different Christian traditions agree on the bodily resurrection of Christ as a non-negotiable doctrine, though they may differ in how they articulate the nature of the resurrection body or its implications for eschatology.

Key Scriptures to Study

Core teaching passages

- **1 Corinthians 15:3–8** — Early eyewitness testimony to the resurrection appearances
- **Luke 24:36–43** — Jesus appears bodily and eats with His disciples
- **John 20:24–29** — Thomas encounters the risen Christ physically
- **Matthew 28:5–10** — The empty tomb and angelic announcement

Supporting theological framework

- **Romans 4:25** — Jesus was raised for our justification
- **1 Corinthians 15:20–23** — Christ as the “firstfruits” of resurrection
- **Acts 2:32** — Apostolic proclamation: “This Jesus God raised up”

Clarifying or balancing passages

- **1 Corinthians 15:42–44** — Nature of the resurrection body (glorified, not merely physical as before)
- **John 20:19** — The risen Jesus appears in a transformed state

Objections & Misconceptions

Common Objection: “The resurrection was just a spiritual experience, not a physical event.”
Response: The New Testament explicitly contradicts this. Jesus invites physical examination (John

20:27), eats food (Luke 24:42–43), and distinguishes Himself from a spirit: “a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39). The resurrection is bodily, though glorified.

Common Objection: “The disciples hallucinated the resurrection appearances.”
Response: Hallucinations are individual, not group phenomena, yet Jesus appeared to multiple groups, including over five hundred people at once (1 Cor 15:6). Hallucinations also do not explain the empty tomb.

Common Objection: “The story developed over time as legend.”
Response: The resurrection proclamation appears immediately in the earliest Christian sources. The creed in 1 Corinthians 15 is dated by many scholars to within a few years of the crucifixion, far too early for legend to replace history.

Why This Matters

The resurrection is not an optional doctrine—it is the foundation of Christian faith. If Jesus did not rise, there is no victory over sin or death (1 Cor 15:17). But because He did rise, believers have assurance of forgiveness, justification before God, and future resurrection life (Rom 6:5).

Practically, this means Christianity is rooted in history, not mere philosophy. The resurrection anchors hope in something objective: death is not the end, Christ reigns as Lord, and those united to Him will share in His life (John 11:25–26).

Recommended Resources

- *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* – Gary Habermas and Michael Licona
- *More Than a Carpenter* – Josh McDowell
- *The Case for Christ* - Lee Strobel
- *Raised on the Third Day* – W. David Beck
- *The Resurrection of the Son of God* – N. T. Wright