

Seven Signs Jesus Christ did indeed rose from the dead

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## Seven Signs Jesus Christ did indeed rose from the dead

As we journey through the account of the Resurrection as found in the Gospels, we'll identify seven crucial signs demonstrating that Jesus Christ did indeed rise from the dead.

### The Signs

What they found that day has forever changed the nature of our world. The story begins in Matthew 27 (27:57). The crucifixion of Christ has taken place. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two very wealthy men, have claimed the body of Jesus and have buried His body in a tomb in which no corpse had ever lain before. On the third day after His death, some visitors came to the tomb—and what they found that day has forever changed the nature of our world.

### The Soldiers

Imagine that we were privileged to be the first ones to visit the tomb, and that we, along with the visitors who did go there, were able to approach the garden where Jesus had been buried.

Upon our arrival at the tomb, the first sign we would have noticed is that there were no soldiers. This is peculiar because soldiers had been stationed to guard the tomb for at least the first three days following Jesus' crucifixion. Why? Jesus had claimed that He would come back from the dead, and the Jewish authorities wanted to make sure that if His body went missing, no one could say He had risen from the grave. In Matthew 27:62-66 we read these words:

*The chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first" Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how" So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.*

*(NLT) The next day, on the Sabbath, the leading priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate. They told him, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver once said while he was still alive: 'After three days I will rise from the dead.' So we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent his disciples from coming and stealing his body and then telling everyone he was raised from the dead! If that happens, we'll be worse off than we were at first." Pilate replied, "Take guards and secure it the best you can." So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it.*

A Roman guard unit consisted of sixteen soldiers. Usually, four of them would stand side by side in front of the object they were guarding and the other twelve would gather in a semi-circle behind them facing inward. While the four were guarding, oftentimes the other twelve were sleeping. And every four hours, the soldiers who were standing in front of that which they guarded would take their place in the circle and four fresh soldiers would stand guard.

It was a very formidable thought that sixteen Roman soldiers were guarding the tomb. But when the women arrived that morning, there were no soldiers. Something happened to explain their absence. Matthew 28:11 says, *"Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened."* What had happened? The tomb was empty. Jesus was gone.

*When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure" So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day. (Matthew 28:12-15)*

*(NLT) A meeting with the elders was called, and they decided to give the soldiers a large bribe. They told the soldiers, "You must say, 'Jesus' disciples came during the night while we were sleeping, and they stole his body.' If the governor hears about it, we'll stand up for you so you won't get in trouble." So the guards accepted the bribe and said what they were told to say. Their story spread widely among the Jews, and they still tell it today.*

Although the idea that the disciples stole the body of Jesus explains the missing body, the idea is illogical for at least two reasons: First, it is impossible that the soldiers would have all slept through the disciples moving the stone away from the mouth of the tomb and stealing the body of Jesus. In fact, twelve of them could have been sleeping, but four of them were supposed to be awake. And the real conundrum is this: If the soldiers were all asleep, how did they know who stole the body?

## The Seal

As we get closer to the tomb itself, we notice that the stone is missing, but along with the missing stone is the missing seal.

The Bible tells us that they *"made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard"* (Matthew 27:66). After the stone was rolled in place, a rope was stretched across the stone and affixed with wax to each side of the sepulcher, the tomb. Then the Roman guard would put his signet ring in the wax, signaling that the sepulcher was officially sealed and contained what was purported to be inside. But when the women came to the tomb on that first Sunday, the stone had been rolled away, so the seal had been broken.

*Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard. Matthew 27:65-66*

## The Stone

But surely the most startling sign the visitors noticed when they stood outside Jesus' tomb must have been that the stone that had covered the entrance of the tomb was missing.

When they would seal a sepulcher, a tomb, in the days of Jesus, the body of the deceased was placed inside a hewn-out stone (the sepulcher) and then a piece of granite, usually in a round form, was rolled in front of the mouth of the tomb to keep animals from desecrating the corpse and to protect the dignity of the buried person. In front of the tomb they would create a groove, an incline, and they would roll the stone up the incline and put a shim under it. After the burial, they would roll the stone in front of the grave and seal it to officially close the sepulcher.

But when the women came to the garden that day, there was no stone in front of the tomb. In fact, the Scripture is very explicit about what had happened: *"Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it"* (Matthew 28:1-2).

And as we read the other Gospel accounts, we gain an even clearer picture of what happened that day. Mark tells us this stone was extremely large—actually, **a stone which twenty men could not move**. And John's gospel tells us that when John ran to the tomb, he had to bend over to look inside.

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*The stone would have weighed in at one-and-a-half to two tons.*

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Scholars believe that the tomb in which Jesus was buried had an opening about four and a half feet to five feet high. In fact, several studies have been conducted to determine how large the stone would have been in order to cover such an opening, and the conservative estimates indicate that the stone would have weighed in at one and a half to two tons.

But when the women got there that day, the stone was not in front of the opening, and it wasn't even in the groove that had been placed there to help move the stone John says *"the stone had been taken away from the tomb"* (John 20:1). **And the words John uses to describe the displacement of the stone mean "to pick something up and carry it away." So the stone hadn't been merely rolled back up the incline where it had started; it wasn't near the opening of the grave.** Rather, the stone was over by itself, **as if someone had picked it up and moved it over.** And then, of course, there was **an angel sitting on top of it** (Matthew 28:2). Obviously, something miraculous was going on that day.

*And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. Matthew 28:2*

## The Sepulcher

Examining the tomb of Jesus, we discover the fourth sign of the Resurrection: the sepulcher itself.

When we study Luke's account, we read that not only did the women find *"the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 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? He is not here; He has risen! Remember how He told you, while He was still with you in Galilee' "* (Luke 24:2-6 NIV).

When they looked inside the tomb, there was no body. Past the soldiers, past the seal, past the stone, and in the security of the sepulcher—Jesus' body was gone.

## The Shroud

The evidence is growing, and we still haven't come to the most powerful evidence of all.

When Peter and John looked into the grave that day, the tomb was almost empty, but not quite. No, there wasn't a body, but there was a shroud—the grave clothes were still there.

*Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple [John], and were going to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. John 20:3-8*

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*This folded napkin is a **deliberate signal to the others at the table that the person will come back and finish the meal** (52:15-52:44). The burial linens found at the empty tomb mirror that practice in a striking way.*

***The entire resurrection account testifies to God's intentional plan. Nothing is haphazard, reinforcing the confident reassurance for believers that salvation and resurrection rest in the hands of a decisive God.***

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In Jesus' day, people weren't buried in robes; they were buried in layers of fabric, similar to what we would think of as a mummy, with spices wrapped between each layer of cloth. And as Peter and John peered into the grave where Jesus' body had lain, they saw something startling—there were the grave cloths that had encased Him, still in the shape of His body, slightly indented and caved in, like the empty chrysalis of a caterpillar's cocoon. That was enough evidence to make a believer out of anyone. And the Scripture says that when John peered into the tomb and saw the empty grave cloths—undisturbed in their form and position—he believed.

I don't know exactly how their conversation went, but John's explanation to Peter must have gone something like this:

*Don't you see, Peter? No one has moved the body or even disturbed the grave cloths. They're lying exactly as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea left them on the eve of the Sabbath. And the body is gone. It hasn't been stolen. It's not been moved. Clearly, His body had to have passed through the cloths, leaving them as we see them now. Jesus must be risen!*

Theologian and teacher James Montgomery Boice commented on this fact:

*This sign of Easter destroys the idea that the body was stolen. The linens would not have been there. This sign destroys the idea that Jesus resuscitated Himself and walked out of the grave. Leaving the grave clothes in the shape of His body in the tomb? A glance at these grave clothes proved the reality of the Resurrection.*

Following that experience, instead of being cowardly, as they were before the crucifixion, John and his fellow disciples became courageous evangelists for the Gospel. In fact, the Bible says that as a result of the Resurrection, these men of God turned their world upside down. And if you read the book of Acts, which is the history of the early church, and the sermons that were preached by the apostles at that time, you'll notice that the Resurrection is the theme of every one of their messages. They were changed dramatically by what they saw that day when they went into the tomb.

## The Scars

Now let's examine what happened in the days that followed. The Bible tells us that after the Resurrection, there was an occasion when Jesus' apostles were gathered in the Upper Room and Jesus appeared to them. The Bible says He did not come through the door; He just appeared. (Remember, Jesus was in His resurrection body.) But one of the disciples, Thomas, was not present. After the meeting the disciples told Thomas that they had seen the Risen Lord; but unbelieving, Thomas said, "I won't believe it until I see myself."

Eight days later, the Lord returned, but this time Thomas was among the disciples:

After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:26-28).

Thomas knew he had seen the Risen Lord because of the scars in Jesus' body.

## The Sightings

Even beyond the scars, there is yet more evidence for our Risen Savior. Did you know that after He was resurrected from the grave, Jesus didn't immediately ascend to heaven? He spent several days here on this earth. And during that time, we are told that Jesus was not only seen by the apostles on the two occasions in the upper Room, but by men and women, by adults and children, by individuals and groups, in the morning and in the evening. In every situation you can imagine, Jesus Christ was seen. In fact, if you read 1 Corinthians, Paul says that He revealed Himself on one occasion to more than five hundred people, most of whom were still alive at the time Paul wrote his letter (1 5:6)\_ Certainly they could have refuted his statement had they chosen to do so. One writer has said that if all the witnesses who saw Jesus in His resurrected body were brought to court and given six minutes to speak, it would result in more than fifty hours of testimony about the Risen Christ.

The evidence for Christs resurrection is overwhelming! We can say with absolute certainty that Jesus Christ is alive He overcame the grave. And He is living today at the right hand of the Father in heaven.