

Neighborly Apologetics

*The Claims of Jesus and the Resurrection- Part 4:
Christ's Death*



The Royal Law
Love your neighbor

God has entrusted the primary work
of the Kingdom to the common
Christian family

Three Great Questions

“Does God exist?”

“Is the Bible reliable?”

“Who is Jesus?”



Three Great Questions

“Does God exist?”

“Is the Bible reliable?”

“Who is Jesus?”

Who is Jesus?

The Question Pursued...

- + the promise and the prophecy
- + His life and words
- + His death and resurrection
- + the claim of deity
- + is Jesus the only way?
- + how to handle the questions

Who is Jesus?

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- + the promise and the prophecy
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- + the claim of deity
- + is Jesus the only way?
- + how to handle the questions

Who is Jesus?

Christ's death and resurrection





the death

Did Jesus really die?

the “swoon” theory

the “substitution” theory

the death

Did Jesus really die?

1. What do we know from the historical documents?
2. Historical understanding of Roman crucifixion
3. Evidence of death
4. Common sense issues
5. Ethical issues

the death

Did Jesus really die?

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Did Jesus really die? or even exist?

a recent survey in Britain: 22% believe Jesus wasn't real;
it's all fake, some kind of myth or made-up deception

it's increasingly possible your neighbor believes
the same. How do we deal with this?

Did Jesus really die? or even exist?

there are significant historical references to Jesus:

Tacitus: Jesus “suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius”... “at the hands of... Pontius Pilate.” Annals 15:44

Josephus about James “the brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ.” Antiquities 20:9

other references to Jesus: Suetonius, Thallus (via Julius Africanus), Pliny the Younger

Celsus thought Jesus was a villain, but never questioned His existence

the Jewish Talmud speaks of Jesus “hanged (on a tree) on the eve of the Passover”
Sanhedrin 43a

Lucian writes of Christians worshipping their “crucified sage”

Did Jesus really die? or even exist?

there are significant historical references to Jesus:

Mara-Bar-Serapion, late first century, writes this in a letter to his son:

“What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise king? It was after that their kingdom was abolish... Nor did the wise King die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given.”

Justin Martyr, mid-second century, refers to ‘The Acts of Pontius Pilate’ in which the miraculous acts of Jesus and His resurrection are attested

Phlegon (via Origen and Julius Africanus) wrote of Jesus’ death and resurrection and the earthquake and darkness at the crucifixion.

Did Jesus really die? or even exist?

there are significant historical references to Jesus:

Nothing, however, is as compelling as the eye-witness accounts that chronicle the life and death and resurrection of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; and add then to this the extensive writings of Paul, plus James, Jude and Peter

Some would try to discount these writings because they were written by followers of Jesus, but this is a very weak charge. If we were to toss all histories because the author was not perfectly neutral toward his subject, we would be left with virtually no history

Paul was initially hostile toward Jesus and those who were following Him. He, however, became a believer and then spent time with eye-witnesses like Peter and James. His writings are filled with testimony regarding the existence of Jesus of Nazareth, especially His death and resurrection

Did Jesus really die? or even exist?

there are significant historical references to Jesus:

All four Gospels attest to His death:

“He gave up His spirit” (Matthew and John)

“... breathed His last” (Mark & Luke)

as well as the rest of the New Testament in too many places to list.

The reality is that, by the best of historical literary standards, Jesus was tried by Pontius Pilate and sentenced to death by crucifixion

Did Jesus really die? or even exist?

The key point is that there is more than sufficient evidence to support the existence of Jesus.

So why the push-back?

So why the push-back?

It might be of value to ask the question:
Why do people spend time trying to prove Him non-existent?

Societies of “mythicists” — sole purpose: prove Jesus is merely a myth and legend.

The Jesus Project was founded for the purpose of debunking the historical Jesus.

Many books written whose object is to deny the historicity of Jesus.

Every Easter, Time and Newsweek seem to be obsessed with debunking Him.

Why dedicate so much effort to this?

Why build a campus club for this purpose?

Why are there not societies formed to debunk the existence of Plato or Aristotle or King Arthur (whose existence is certainly questionable)?

Some deny the historicity of the holocaust. They do not deny it because the evidence points them to that conclusion. They deny it because they have an *a priori desire*, a motive, to do so.

So why the push-back?

There is a “need” to deny the existence of Jesus.

This is not driven by fact, but by desire.

In the debates, the rebuttal to the evidence is extremely weak and contrived.

In reality, the vast majority of honest historians, whether or not they believe the claims of Jesus, are convinced the evidence of His existence is overwhelming.

Lawrence Mykytiuk, associate professor of library science, Purdue University, writes:
“Jewish rabbis who did not like Jesus or his followers accused him of being a magician and leading people astray, but they never said he didn’t exist.”

When you begin to build a deep relationship with your neighbor and they happen to be a historical denier of Jesus, keep in mind that it isn’t so much an intellectual issue as it is a heart issue.

The contrary theories about the death of Jesus

Mythicists and skeptics attempt to debunk Jesus in a number of ways, from the veracity of the Scriptures to the most dubious conspiracy theories.

In here are the theories regarding the death and burial of Jesus.

If one desired to undercut the **resurrection**, then he might argue that Jesus never existed or that He never died at all and therefore wasn't buried, or may have been laid in a tomb, but was still alive.

Ergo, the “swoon” theory or the “substitution” theory.

The “swoon” theory is the argument that Jesus didn't really die on the cross, but went into some kind of deep subconscious state or coma and later revived.

The historical record...

Birth



Death



1000s of years
Prophecies
Promises
The Seed Line

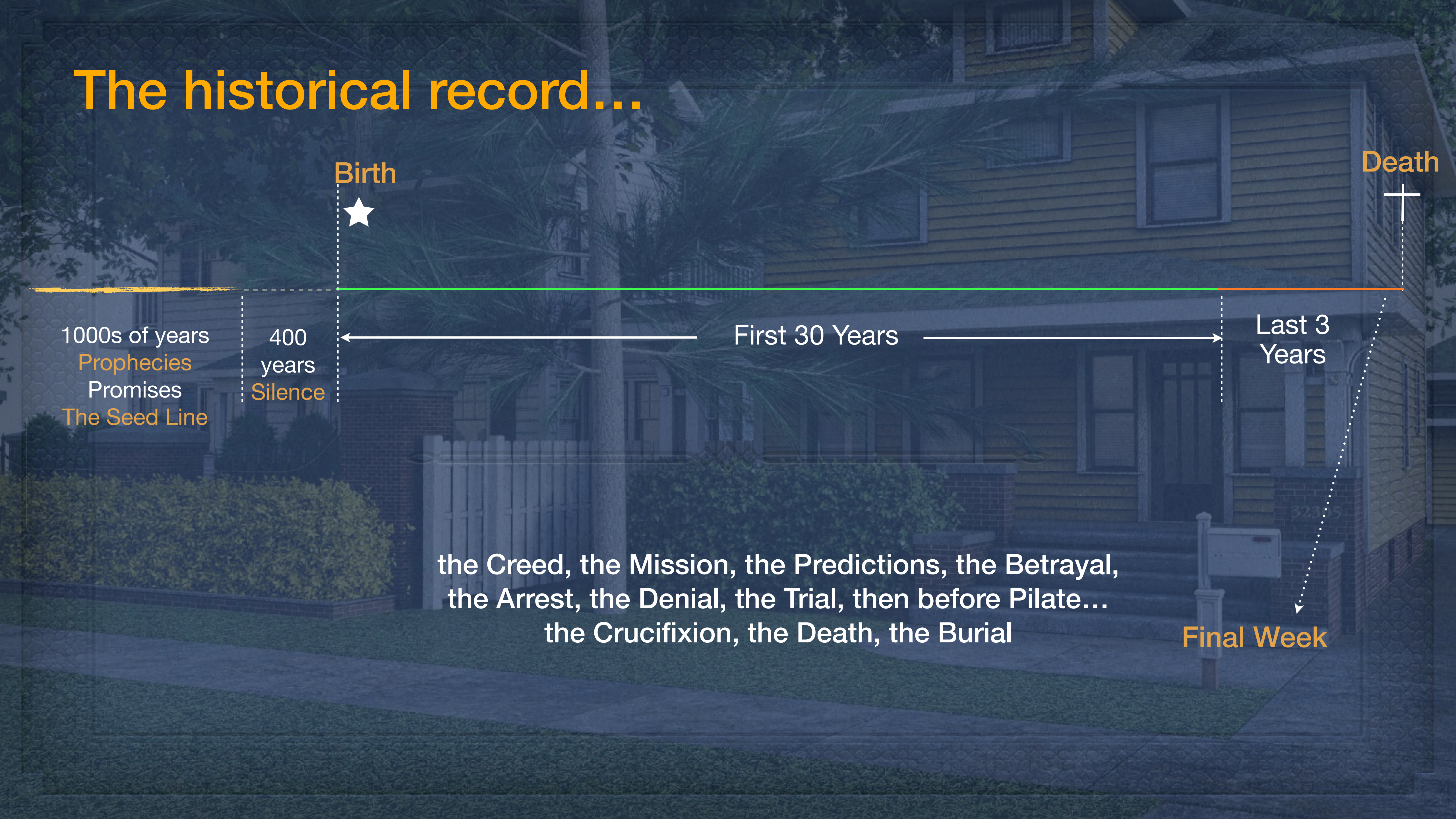
400
years
Silence

First 30 Years

Last 3
Years

the Creed, the Mission, the Predictions, the Betrayal,
the Arrest, the Denial, the Trial, then before Pilate...
the Crucifixion, the Death, the Burial

Final Week



The early Creed

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ **died** for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was **buried**, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

The Mission...

“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman...that He might **redeem those who were under the Law...**” (Galatians 4:4-5)

“...the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to **give His life as a ransom** for many.” (Matthew 20:28)

The Music

“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman...” (Galatians 4:4)

If the birth of Jesus was the “kairos” moment, this is now the “supreme kairos” moment.

Everything has led up to this point in history...

Everything so far has been spectacular, filled with increasing excitement and anticipation.

Healings of all kinds: paralysis, bleeding, fever, blindness, withered limbs, demoniacs...

Breathtaking miracles: multiplying fish and bread, raising the dead, calming storms...

Astonishing words: words of eternal life, stunning words, silencing words...

The disciples are anxious for Jesus to “reveal” Himself as “Messiah,” to take over, clean house, throw off the chains of oppression, and restore the glory of Israel. Hallelujah!!!

The music is moving ever upward, more and more thrilling...

The crescendo is going to be spectacular... Grand...!

And then the Music Changes...

It becomes foreboding, ominous, scary...

But... it didn't come from the enemies of Jesus or the religious leaders...

It came from Jesus Himself...

- + He changed the mood.
- + He changed the music.

In an instant...

“I'm going to be killed.”

The Predictions

✚ Peter: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!”

✚ “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!” My Father has revealed this to you!
I will build my church...you get the keys!
Whatever you bind is bound; whatever you loose is loosed.

*start the
music
again!*

✚ “I’m going to Jerusalem”

“I’m going to suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes”

“I’m going to be killed”

✚ Peter: rebukes Jesus, “No way! This will never happen to you!”

✚ “Get behind me, Satan!

You are a hinderance to me.

You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

The Predictions

- ✚ As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.” And they were greatly distressed.
(Matthew 17:22-23)
- ✚ And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”
(Matthew 20:17-19)
- ✚ When Jesus had finished all these sayings, He said to His disciples, “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.” (Matthew 26:1-2)

The Betrayal

- + Jesus had been predicting this as well...
Jesus: “One of you will betray Me”
Judas: “Is it I, Rabbi?”
Jesus: “You have said so.” (Matthew 26:25)
- + At Bethany, a woman anoints Jesus with expensive oil...
Judas: “This could have been sold and given to the poor!”
Jesus: “She has prepared Me for burial” (Matthew 26:8-12)
- + Then one of the Twelve, whose name was **Judas Iscariot**, went to the chief priests and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him. (Matthew 26:14-16)

The Arrest

- + The opportunity for arresting Jesus came in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- + **Judas** leads an armed detachment of soldiers and officials from the Pharisees.
- + **Judas** betrays Jesus with a kiss.
- + Peter resists, cutting off the ear of the high priest's servant, Malchus.
- + Jesus doesn't resist, and tells Peter to put away his sword.
- + Jesus heals Malchus's ear.

+ **Jesus:** "Whom do you seek?"

Officials: "Jesus of Nazareth."

Jesus: "I am."

The soldiers and officials fall to the ground. (John 18:4-6)

The Denial

✚ Jesus also predicted that His disciples would all fall away this night...

Peter: “I will never fall away!”

Jesus: “You will deny me three times tonight.”

Peter: “Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you!”

And the other disciples said the same thing. (Matthew 26:31-35)

✚ And in the garden, they “all left Him and fled.” (Matthew 26:56)

✚ **Peter:** “I don’t know him...” “I don’t know the man...” Cursing, “I don’t know him!” (Matthew 26:69-74)

The Trial

- + Jesus goes before Annas, the informal high priest.
Then He goes before Caiaphas, the official high priest.
Then He is tried by the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of the Jews (72 members).
- + Many contradictory accusations are made, with no evidence of value.
Jesus remains silent...
- + Frustrated, Caiaphas finally asks: “Are you the Messiah?!”
Jesus responds: “I am.”
- + Caiaphas tears his robes and asks for a sentence from the Sanhedrin.
Jesus is condemned to death.

Before Pilate

- ✚ Pilate probably knew that Jesus had been delivered to him out of jealousy
Pilate's wife had a dream about Jesus and warned Pilate not to do anything with Him.
- ✚ Pilate offered to release Jesus...
Pilate: "Jesus or Barabbas?"
- ✚ The chief priests and elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas...
The crowd: "Barabbas!"
- ✚ Pilate: "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Messiah?"
The crowd: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

Before Pilate

- ✚ **Pilate:** “Why? What evil has He done?”
The crowd shouted all the more for Jesus to be crucified and became riotous.
- ✚ Pilate washed his hands before them...
Pilate: “I am innocent of this man’s blood.”
- ✚ **The crowd:** “His blood be on us and on our children!”

the death

Did Jesus really die?

1. What do we know from the historical documents?
- 2. Historical understanding of Roman crucifixion**
3. Evidence of death
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2. Historical understanding of Roman crucifixion

The Roman method of execution was by crucifixion.

The Persians invented it in 300BC and the Romans perfected it.

They executed thousands this way, some say in the hundreds of thousands.

It was cruel. It was horrific. It was meant to dissuade anyone from disobeying Roman authority.

Our word excruciating comes from the Latin, excruciare, “out of the cross”.

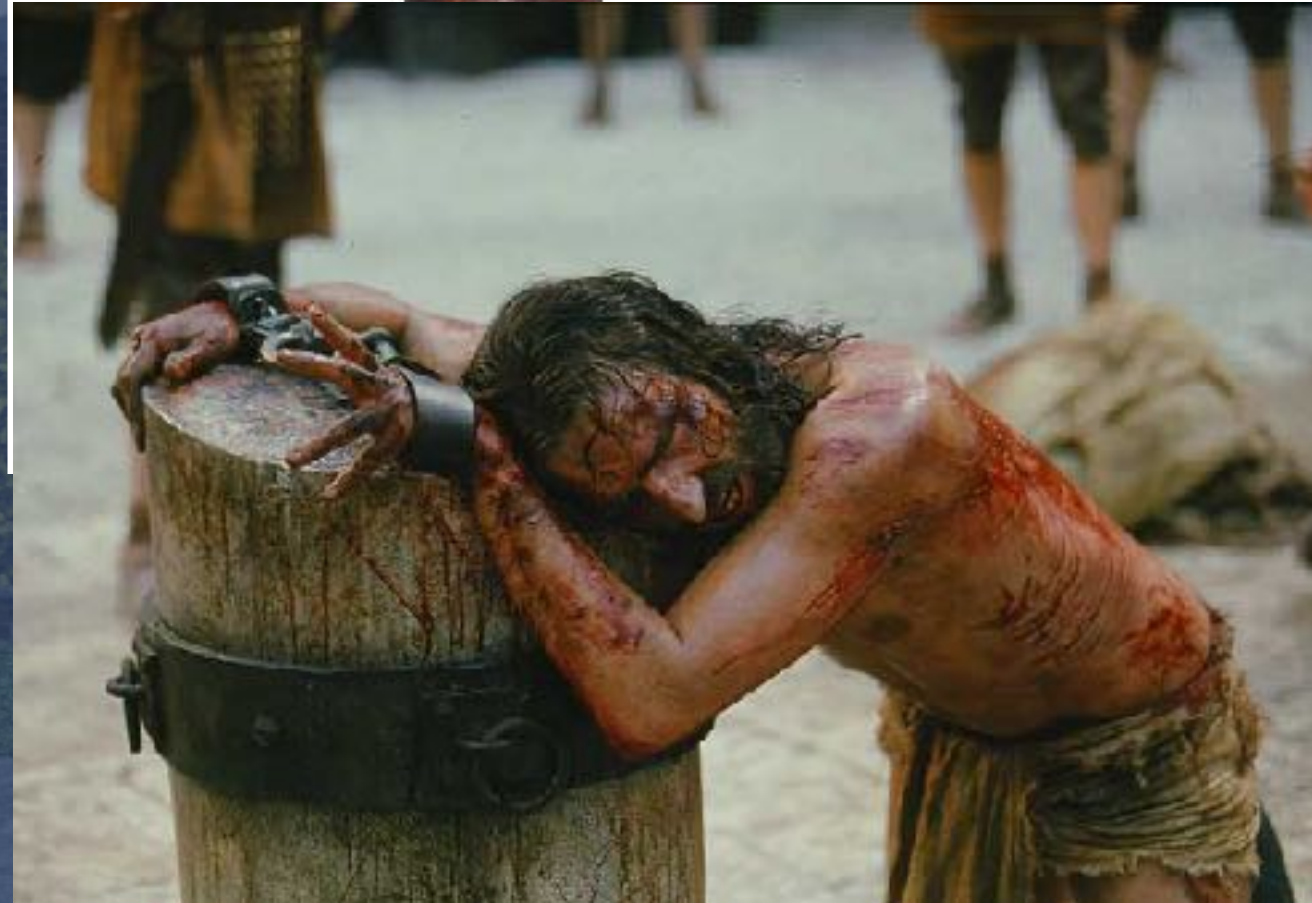
If you have never read a medical and physiological description of scourging and crucifixion, you should probably do so, with the caution that it will make you sick.



The Scourging

“The Romans employed scourging as torture or punishment to extract information or testimony.”

(Livy)

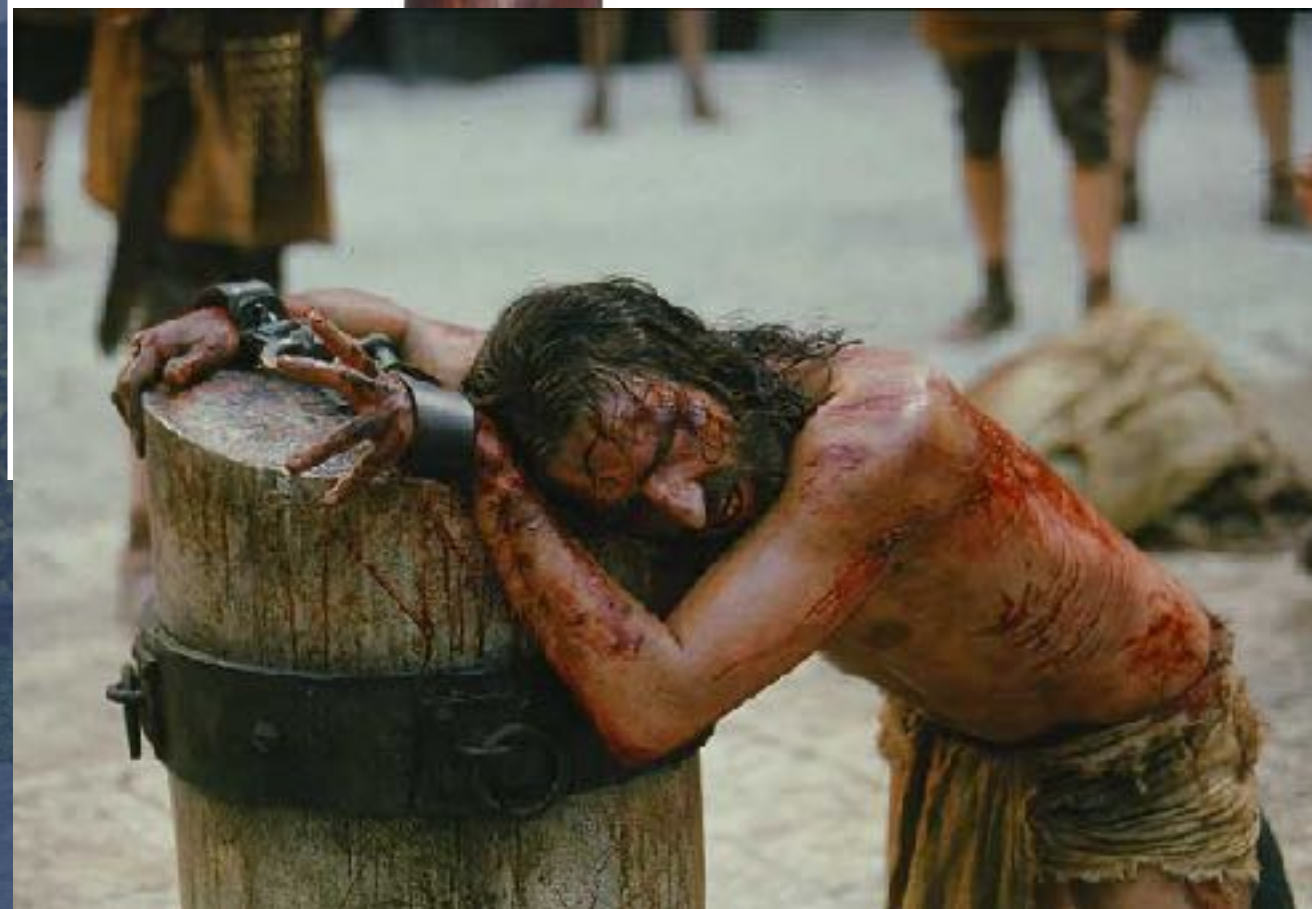


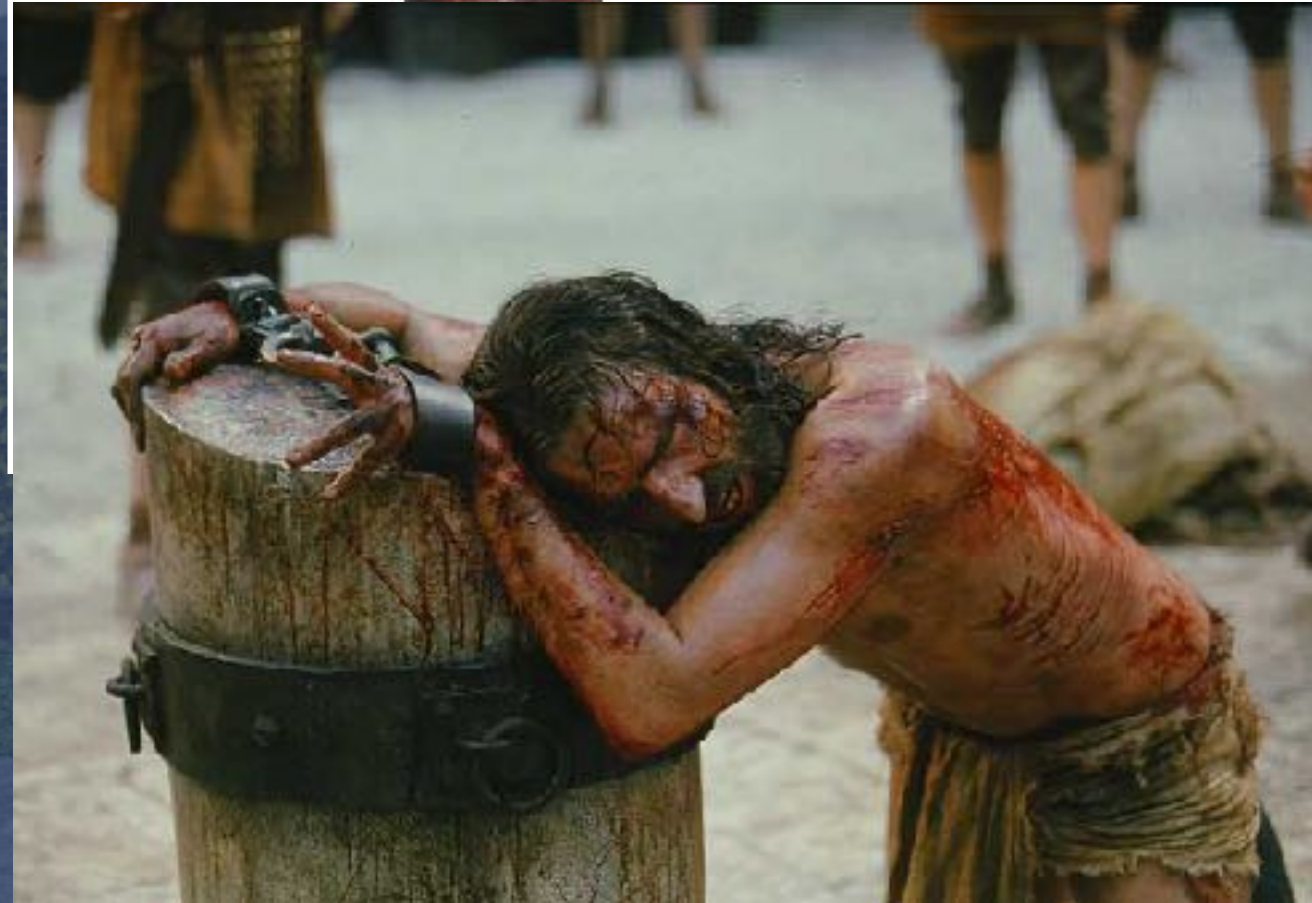


The Scourging

“Romans inflicted scourging on recalcitrant slaves or prisoners for withholding information and on criminals condemned to death by crucifixion.”

(New Catholic Encyclopedia)

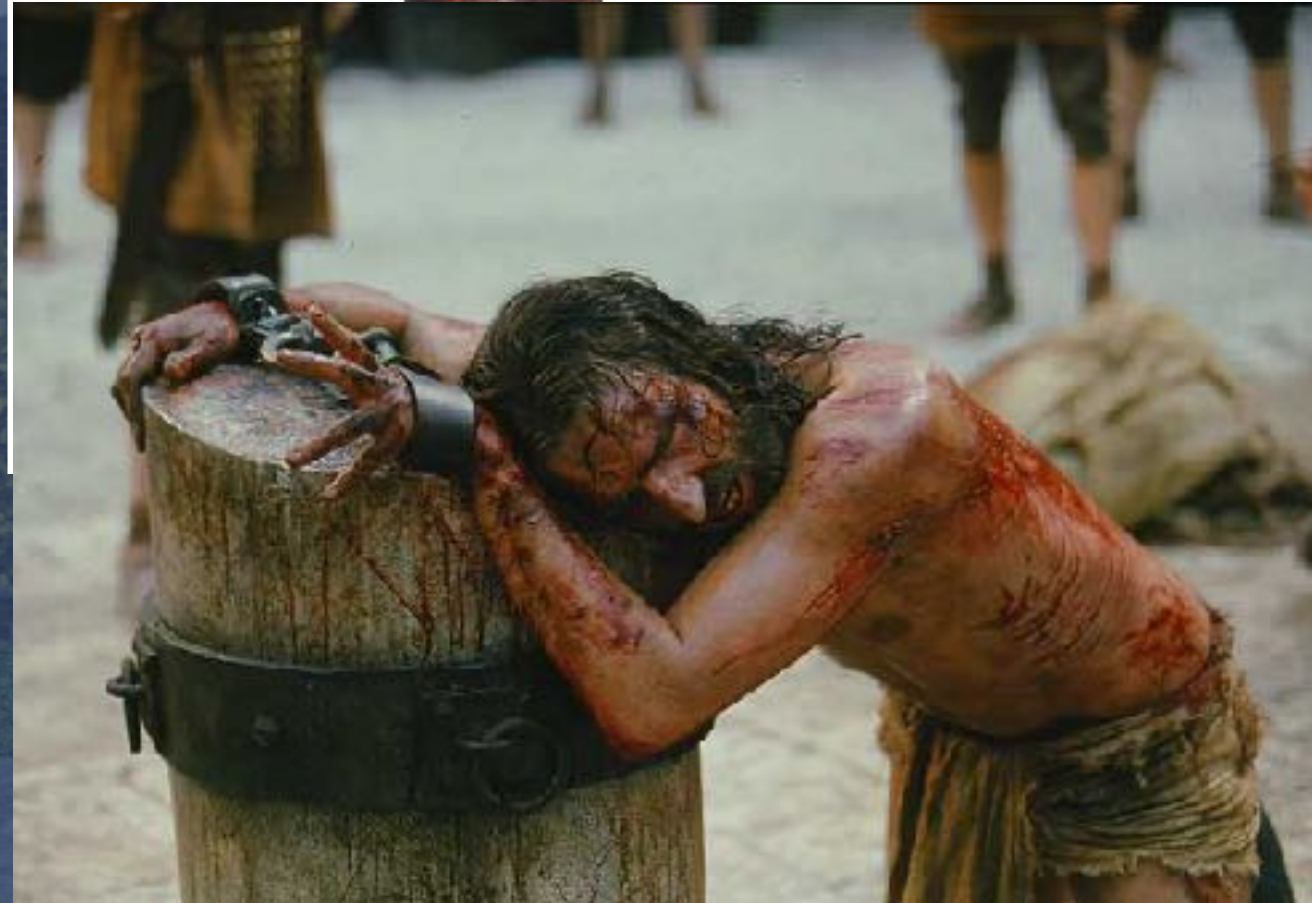




The Scourging

“...their bodies were frightfully lacerated. Christian martyrs in Smyrna were so torn by the scourges that their veins were laid bare, and the inner muscles, sinews, even entrails, were exposed.”

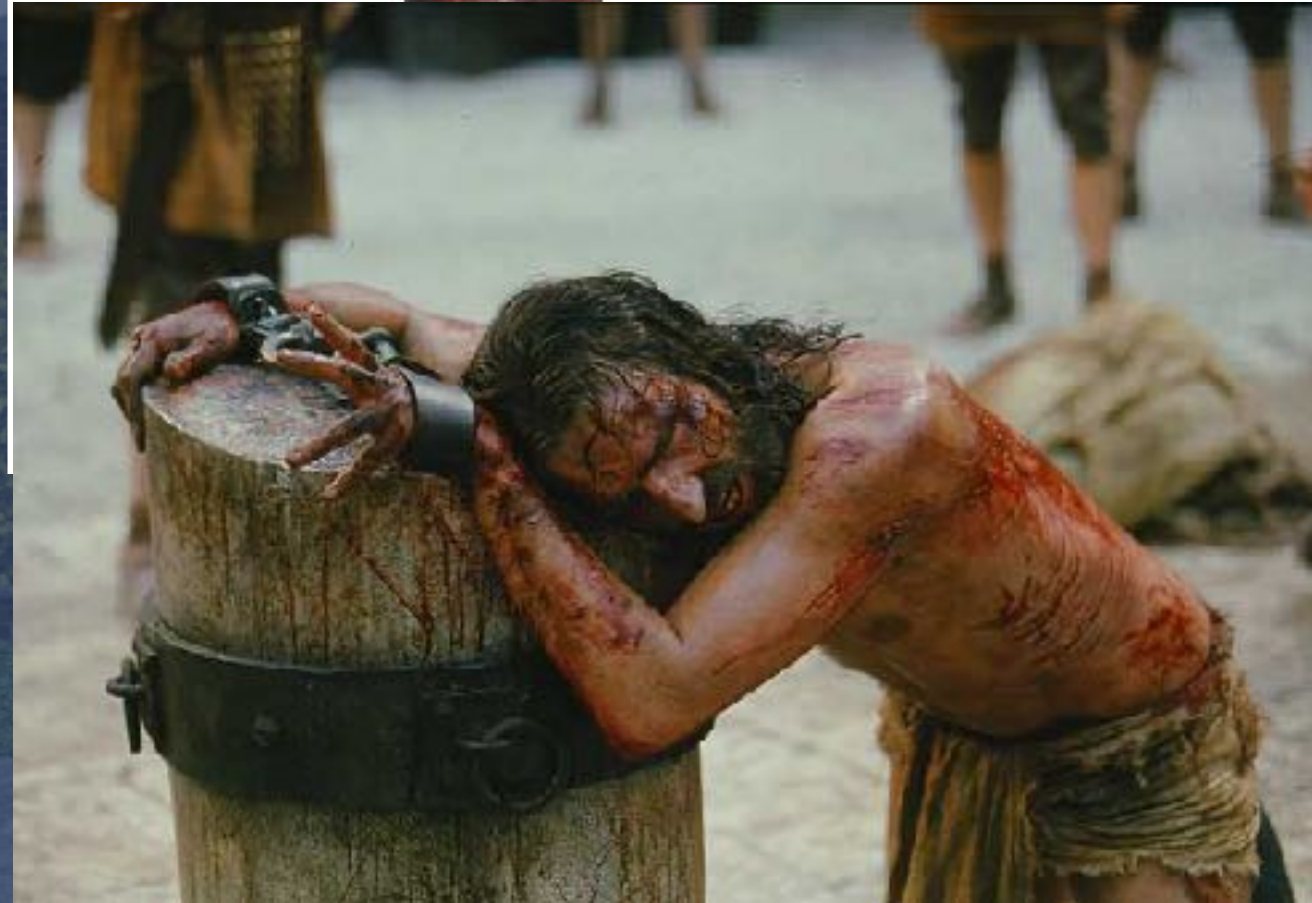
(Eusebius of Caesarea)



The Scourging

“I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting.”

(Isaiah 50:6)



The Scourging

“...there were many who were appalled at him—
his appearance was so disfigured beyond that
of any human being and his form marred
beyond human likeness...”

(Isaiah 52:14)



The Crucifixion

In this lacerated state, Jesus was forced to carry His crucifixion cross to “The Skull” where He was to be crucified.

Stripped, laid on a rough wooden beam, arms stretched out, nails driven through wrists and feet, raised and dropped into a hole...

Exposed, bloody and naked before the public, exposed before the sun and the cold of the night, exposed before birds and insects.



The Crucifixion

Cicero called crucifixion the “extreme and ultimate punishment of slaves” and the “cruellest and most disgusting penalty.”



The Crucifixion

Josephus called it “the most pitiable of deaths.”



The Crucifixion

“Crucifixion was widely believed to be the worst form of execution, due to the excruciating pain and public shame. Hanging suspended by one’s arms eventually caused great difficulty in breathing, which could be alleviated only by pushing up with one’s feet to take the weight off the arms. ... Eventually, the victim would succumb to suffocation, if he had not already died as a result of the cumulative effect of the physical trauma inflicted on him.”

(ESV Study Bible)



The Crucifixion

The Roman soldiers were under orders to execute criminals and they were professional at doing so. This was their capital punishment.

To insist that someone could go through this and still be alive would be like someone arguing that “Ted Bundy” survived the electric chair and is still alive, or “Timothy McVeigh”, who was executed by injection, survived and is still running around.

This borders on the incredulous.



The Crucifixion

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

(Luke 23:34)

the death

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3. Evidence of death

The Death

- + The soldiers came to break the legs of the three crucified men. They didn't break Jesus's legs, because He was already dead. To make sure, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus's heart with a spear. Blood and water flowed out of Jesus's side. The professional executioner was satisfied.
- + Jesus was dead.

The Death



Louis Lapidès

The Death

+ Jesus was dead.

Matthew: “Jesus cried out in a loud voice and gave up His spirit.”

Mark: “With a loud cry, Jesus breathed His last.”

Luke: “Jesus called out in a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ And having said this he breathed his last.”

John: “...he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

+ Jesus really died.

The Death



Gary Habermas

the death

Did Jesus really die?

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4. Common sense issues

To think that someone could survive a Roman execution is grasping at straws.

If you think one could survive crucifixion and then be wrapped in layers and layers of linen cloth mixed with 75 pounds of aloe and myrrh and not suffocate, you are now grasping at more than straws.

When you add in that Jesus was first scourged (leaving most people near death and disgusting to even describe) and then crucified and then pierced with a sword (most likely into the heart) and after all this then wrapped in a shroud like a mummy and then laid in a cold tomb with a heavy stone over the entrance that was both sealed and guarded by professional Roman soldiers...well, if after all of this one still glibly maintains that Jesus was not only NOT dead, but then somehow able to get up and escape, one has simply entered into some logic twilight zone.

4. Common sense issues

When Joseph of Arimathea came to ask Pilate for the body of Jesus to bury, Pilate first summoned the centurion to make sure He was dead, which the centurion confirmed. It is without any reason at all to believe, first, that the centurion would get it wrong or, second, that he would put his own life on the line by confirming that of which he wasn't sure.

Nor would it make sense that Joseph and Nicodemus could spend a few hours with the body, carrying it and wrapping it, when rigor mortis is setting in, and somehow be fooled that the body wasn't dead.

And, maybe more so, it wouldn't make sense at all that the post-resurrection, radical changes we see in the women and the disciples would have occurred if the death of Jesus was faked.

The Burial

- ✚ Joseph of Arimathea (Sanhedrin and secret believer in Jesus) asked Pilate for the body. Pilate, surprised that Jesus was already dead, sent for the centurion. The centurion confirmed that Jesus was dead. Pilate granted Joseph permission to take Jesus's body.
- ✚ Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped Jesus's body with 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes. The preparation of the body was in accordance with Jewish custom. They laid His entombed body in Joseph's new tomb, cut out of the rock. A large stone was rolled in front of the entrance to seal the tomb.
- ✚ Mary Magdalene, sitting opposite the tomb, watched them seal the tomb.

It appeared to all be over.

Creation's Response

+ At noon, everything turned dark...

Luke: "The sun stopped shining."

+ At 3 pm, Jesus died and a tremendous earthquake shook the earth...

Matthew: "The rocks split..." "The tombs broke open."

+ The heavy and thick curtain that separated and guarded the entrance to the "Holy of Holies" in the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom...

Matthew: 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 27:54)

the death

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5. Ethical issues

The swoon theory requires that Jesus was a most despicable liar and deceiver.

He would have been lying to Magdalene, to the other women, to Peter, to Cleopas and His companion, to the disciples, to James and to the 500+ gathered on the mountain.

This requires us to take a horrific leap from everything we have seen and heard from the life of Jesus to then say that He lied about His resurrection and that all of His appearances were nothing but a wholesale scam.

We would also have to either discount the record of the angels or say that they were also lying (that is hard to imagine) or that the women were lying and never saw them at all.

This would mean that both the women and the disciples were all part of a truly evil plot to deceive the world. And if so, many of them would have to have defended this lie up to and through their own executions.

5. Ethical issues

There is another argument.

It is the “substitution” theory.

This position is mainly derived by some from the Koran which teaches that Jesus was real, a prophet, but it wasn't Jesus that was crucified.

Some then say that it was someone else on the cross, not Jesus—a substitute. This, in itself, would be quite extraordinary that someone would be willing to go through the horrible scourging and despicable death by crucifixion in order to propagate a lie.

How can Jesus be tried and sentenced in front of the High Priest, chief priests and everyone else and no one just happens to notice that it is not Jesus?

5. Ethical issues

How in the world did someone make a switch with Jesus under the command of the Roman soldiers?

Can anyone in their wildest dreams imagine that Jesus' mother, at the cross, didn't know that they were nailing someone else up there? Is she not able to discern the voice of her own son?

These, again, are desperate notions that expose the fact that we are not dealing with evidential problems here. Instead, we are dealing with heart problems.

When you are in conversation with your neighbor and they offer some of these theories, recognize the real cause and deal with it appropriately and wisely, with grace.

The Death



Lee Strobel

The Criticality of the Death of Jesus

The death of Jesus is much more about what happened that was unseen...

An angel said, “You shall name Him Jesus for He will save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21)

Jesus said, “I have come to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10)

Jesus told Nicodemus that God had sent Him into the world to save it. (John 3:17)

Jesus told the Pharisees that He was the Gate and anyone who enters through Him would be saved. (John 10:9)

Jesus told the disciples that He didn't come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28)

The Criticality of the Death of Jesus

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

(Hebrews 9:15)

- + The penalty for sin is separation from God.
- + This was the consequence that fell upon humanity at the beginning in the garden.

Revisiting the Death of Jesus

“ My God, my God,
why have you forsaken me? ”

— Jesus

Mark 15:34

Revisiting the Death of Jesus

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
(Mark 15:34)

If Jesus was going to pay for our sins, He needed to pay the full penalty...

- + This means being separated from the Father, a unity that had existed from all eternity past.

Without the death of Jesus...

- + There is no forgiveness of sin.
- + There is no reconciliation with God.
- + There is no salvation.

Revisiting the Death of Jesus

But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.
All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him.

— Isaiah, the prophet

Isaiah 53:5-6

Revisiting the Death of Jesus

“It is finished”

— Jesus

John 19:30

Revisiting the Death of Jesus

*What Does this
Mean for Me?*

“Paid in full”

ΤΕΤΕΛΕΣΤΑΙ

— Jesus

John 19:30

The Disciples' Response

At this point, even the disciples were confused about what just happened.

The One they thought was the Messiah...

The One who would set them free from political bondage...

The One who would restore Israel to its glory days...

had been betrayed and arrested like some common criminal,
taken through a farce of a trial,
declared guilty by the high priest and the Sanhedrin,
taken to Pilate for a sentence of death,
beaten and scourged beyond recognition,
and nailed to a Roman cross.

The Disciples' Response

- + Jesus had died like every other frail human executed by the Romans.
- + He was now dead and buried in a tomb, sealed by a stone.

Jesus was Dead...

✚ It was all over...

✚ Now What?

Put yourself in the place of His followers...



What Happened Next?

Neighborly Apologetics

*The Claims of Jesus and the Resurrection- Part 4:
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Next: the resurrection of Jesus