

From Myth to Savior
by Doug Hamilton

Step Three: The Historical Prediction of Jesus

According to Luke's historical account, Jesus predicted that he would be killed and resurrected on the third day.

- Luke 9:22 "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day."

Special Note: It is very important to establish that this is the supreme test of all the miracles that Jesus carried out. It was and is the thing to be believed concerning the gospel (1 Cor 15:1-4 "the Death, Burial and Resurrection of Christ"). All other miracles at the hands of Jesus do not have to be believed in order to be saved. A person does not have to believe that Jesus walked on water to be saved. Neither will they be saved if they do not believe that He multiplied the fish and bread, healed people of their afflictions or even brought people back from the grave. There is but ONE supreme miracle to which a person must believe and that is in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus from the dead. That is the supreme miracle what confirms Him to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4).

This was quite a prediction for anyone to make. Whether or not a person actually believes Jesus was risen from the grave, one thing for sure, the historical account of Luke says that Jesus did make this prediction. Since it is a historical fact, then only one of the following could be true concerning this prediction:

1. Jesus was a liar concerning His prediction.
We would tend to not believe this since He spoke against lies, dishonesty and deceit. He could not stand it when people carried on in that behavior.
2. Jesus was crazy concerning His prediction.
This is difficult to believe since people who are crazy don't teach with the authority that He did. They do not stand toe to toe with the greatest minds of the day as a crazy man. He would have been dismissed as a lunatic before even entering the grave.
3. Jesus was actually believed it to be true.
If He was raised from the dead, then He was Whom He said He was, the Christ. Whether or not a person believes Jesus is the Christ, one thing for certain, Jesus believed He was the Christ and tied it to the prediction that He would be killed, buried and resurrection to prove it.

Luke records in great investigative detail of the events surrounding the arrest, trial, conviction, sentencing, execution and disposition of the body in his historical document.

- Luke 22:54 Jesus was arrested sometime after midnight and taken to the house of the High Priest, a real person of history.
- Luke 22:63 He was rough-up in interrogation during custody.
- Luke 23:1-2 He was originally charged with insurrection, tax evasion and claiming to be a king.
- Luke 23:3 He was questioned by Governor Pilate, a real person of history, to see the validity of the charges and originally declared innocent.
- Luke 23:8 He was questioned by King Herod, a real person of history, to gather information of the situation.

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- Luke 23:23-25 -Jesus was sentenced to the crucifixion, the historical means of putting a man to death under the Roman Empire of that day.
- Luke 23:33-34 Jesus was taken to a real place for crucifixion as a place called "The Skull" and executed with criminals
- Luke 23:44-46 Jesus died at 3 pm after hanging on the cross for six long hours.
- Luke 23:50 "...Joseph...went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.⁵³ And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain.
- Luke 23:55 Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid.

There are those that claim that Jesus never died, but passed out from the stress of the crucifixion, was revived in the cool of the tomb and then went on to live His life in a far away region. This is actually an argument referred to as the "Swoon Theory". A Simple Summary of the Facts: According to Luke's historical account everybody who was there believed Jesus to have died on the cross.

- The executioners who made a living putting people to death claimed he was dead.
- The soldier that pierced His side with a spear said he was dead.
- The governor who oversaw Jesus' execution believed he was dead.
- The embalmers who prepared His body for burial believed He was dead.
- The priests and Jewish leaders who begged for the tomb to be sealed and guarded believed He was dead.
- The guards who watched over the tomb believed Him to be dead.
- The apostles that fled out of fear believed He was dead.
- His own mother and other friends thought He was dead.

Everyone who actually was there according to the ancient record of Luke believed that Jesus was dead. How credible would it be today for someone who was not there nor knows of anyone who was there to say that He wasn't dead? It just does not make sense no matter how you interpret it. The "Swoon Theory" is a bad one at that.

Luke's historical account states that the tomb was empty on the first day of the week.

- Luke 24:1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb,³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.
- Whether or not a person believes that Jesus was resurrected from the dead, it does not change the historical fact that Luke records that the tomb was empty. If He did not raise from the dead, then someone moved the body, but who?
 1. One might propose that thieves stole the body. This would make them the most stupid thieves in the history of crime because they left the only things of any value, the embalming spice and grave clothes. To propose this would not make any sense.
 2. Some might propose the Jews stole the body. This does not make sense because they were the ones that wanted to hire the guards out of fear the disciples would

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come and steal the body of Jesus (Matthew 27:64). That proposition would be ridiculous at best, defying the historical evidence and logic.

3. Some propose that the disciples came and stole the body. In fact the historical records indicate it was a well known rumor circulated by the Jewish leaders to explain where the body might have gone (Matthew 28:11-15). Since the tomb was intentional sealed and the guarded by up to sixteen hand selected guards during the entire time, this appears to be ridiculous to believe. Which ones of the terrified and fleeing disciples would have the tenacity to approach armed guards, attempting to bribe them? Where could these poor individuals possibly raised enough money to pay off this many of the Jewish temple guards? Should we not take into consideration the evidence that reveals the disciples were just as perplexed as everyone else?
 - Luke 24:8-9 states that the women who came to the tomb and found it empty. They immediately went and reported it to the apostles and were dismissed as delirious.
 - Luke 24:12 says that Peter went to the tomb and confirmed it was empty, leaving him just as perplexed.

It is preposterous to believe a claim that the disciples came and stole the body away.

That leaves us with a question: "Where was the body of Jesus?"

- With all of Jerusalem's Passover population well aware of the public execution of Jesus, word spread of the empty tomb of this "self-proclaimed" Savior. Everyone wanted to know what had happened lest this movement of His followers gain strength and boldness.

The Numerous Sightings of Jesus Following the Crucifixion.

- Luke's historical account mentions that many saw the Jesus after the resurrection.
 - Luke 24:13-15 He appeared to the two travelers to Emmaus.
 - Luke 24:34 He appeared to Simon
 - Luke 24:46 He appeared to all the apostles.
 - According to the account of Luke (Acts 1 and 2), over the next six weeks there were many eye witnesses that came forth over the sightings of a post-crucifixion Jesus. People talked with Him, ate with Him, examined the puncture marks in His hands, were instructed by Him.
 - Another historical record from one of Luke's closest sources reported that there were more than 500 eyewitnesses to these sightings and encounters with a Jesus following the crucifixion and His missing body from the grave (1 Corinthians 15:6).
- A modern day skeptic twenty centuries removed from the event might attempt to dismiss these witnesses, but under what grounds? In doing so, could we be guilty of the same logic of those that dismiss that the holocaust happened in the 1930s and 40s simply because we ignored the eyewitness testimony of those who were there? It is in the reaction to the testimony of these early witnesses that made it possible for Christianity to even get off the ground as evidenced in the next argument.

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Step Four: The Reaction of the Populace to the Resurrected Jesus.

Luke records an interesting event from Jewish history about a man named Gamaliel.

Acts 5:34-39 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time.

³⁵And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men.

³⁶“For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. ³⁷“After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. ³⁸“So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; ³⁹but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.”

- Gamaliel was comparing the movement of Jesus to two men of their recent history, Theudas and Judas of Galilee. Theudas was a self proclaimed prophet that led many astray and ended up beheaded. His movement died out rather quickly. Judas of Galilee led a tax revolt against Rome, but also ended up dying along with the movement he started.
- The point of Gamaliel was that any of the "saviors" for the Jewish people, whether from Roman Imperialism or taxation, came to nothing in the end because they were not with God. He reasoned that Christianity would meet the same end if not with God.
- The Jewish leaders would have loved nothing more than to have opened the tomb on the fourth day and throw Jesus' lifeless body in the street, causing the Christian movement to have gone the way of Theudas and Judas as Gamaliel insinuated. The basis of the Christian faith was not anchored in an earthly foundation, but upon the eye-witness testimony of those who witnessed the dead, buried and resurrected Jesus of history, of which the primary ones were the apostles (John 17:20-21).

Luke's historical account states...

- that Jesus instructed the apostles to wait in Jerusalem until the beginning of their post-resurrection message called the gospel (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8).
- that Jesus ascended into heaven (Luke 24:5).
- that only fifty days following the crucifixion, three thousand people converted in response to Peter's sermon about the resurrected Jesus (Acts 2:29-32, 41). This was done while a half million Jews were in Jerusalem and in spite of massive rejection by the same.
- that shortly thereafter the number of converts that responded to the message of a resurrected Jesus grew to be five thousand men (Acts 4:2-4).
- that there were constant converts to the resurrection of Jesus even though they would be persecuted without end (Acts 5:14).
- that all more believers in the resurrected Jesus, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to *their number* (Acts 5:18).
- that the persecutors laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail to stop them from spreading this message (Acts 5:27-30). They simply were too convicted to what they had witnessed.

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- that the first generation of Christians was even willing to be put to death for their belief in the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 7:59, 12:2). They were convinced what they had seen and known of the current events of the death, burial and resurrection to be true.

A Simple Summary of the Facts:

- The people who were in and around Jerusalem, whom saw Jesus and could remember the death, burial and an empty tomb on the third day, were willing to convert, be persecuted and killed for what they knew to be true. A person today might reason twenty centuries after the events that Jesus is not the resurrected Christ and it would be understandable, for they were not there to witness anything.
- On the other hand, the same person must at least reason that many thousands of people were in Jerusalem and witnessed the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. He must also reason that they were there in real time, hearing of the reports of the missing body of the empty tomb and wondered where the body was. They must reason the likelihood that hundreds of witnesses to the sightings of Jesus were being communicated and internalized. They must reason that in only a matter of weeks, these thousands of individuals that had the facts laid before them believed in the resurrected Jesus enough to be persecuted and later killed in defense of what they perceived as truth.
- It is easy to dismiss Jesus as being resurrected from the dead if we simply ignore the evidence of those who were there. In fact we can reason anything away if we fail to look at the eyewitness testimony of those recalling the history of the events. At best we are left with an unreasoned opinion based on ignorance, not facts.

Closing thought:

There are many things that we reasoned in this lesson.

- We know that Jesus is not a myth, but a real person of history.
- We know He was a good man of history.
- We know He claimed He was the Christ.
- We know that offered as evidence of this claim His death, burial and resurrection.
- We know for a fact that He was killed and buried.
- We also know for a fact that His tomb was empty on the third day.
- We know that there were hundreds of people that claimed they came into contact with Him in the weeks that followed.
- We know that tens of thousands of people who were there and had to struggle with the evidence before them about the things they saw and heard about Jesus and His missing body.
- We know that many thousands of them accepted the evidence that Jesus was who He said He was based on His death, burial and resurrection from the dead.
- They believed and were baptized under scrutiny and with persecution by their peers in only weeks and months after the events.

The only question left is this, "Do you believe Jesus resurrected from the dead based on the evidence?" If you don't, then you have no hope of eternal life. If you do, then will you make yourself in the likeness of His death, burial and resurrection by being baptized into Christ? One supreme act for another, leading to joy, peace and happiness. Reason carefully.