

5. Over 500 of the brethren: In 1 Corinthians 15:6 we are told of the largest simultaneous number of eyewitnesses to the Resurrection: *“Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.”*

6. Even after the Ascension, Jesus showed Himself as the Risen One several times. When Stephen is stoned to death for his faith in Jesus, he is allowed to look into Heaven from where he stands, and to see Jesus: “[Stephen] ... *gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’*”

Eminent historians have regarded the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as the most certain historical statement of antiquity! For example, the renowned scholar Prof. *Thomas Arnold* (1795–1842), author of the three-volume work ‘History of Rome’ and chair of Modern History at Oxford, wrote: “I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.” Even the skeptic and songwriter *Wolf Biermann* described the Resurrection as “the hardest currency on the market of hopes.”

What significance does the Resurrection of Jesus have for us?

1. God’s Word proves to be truth: with the Resurrection of Jesus, all statements from the prophetic word of the Old Testament relating to His Resurrection have been abruptly fulfilled. Thus, the prophet Isaiah (in chapter 53:8–10) points to the death of Jesus, to His tomb and His Resurrection: *“By oppression and judgment he was taken away ... who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no*

violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days”

As can be shown elsewhere,¹ the Bible is the only book in world history that bears the divine seal of truth.

2. Through the Resurrection of Jesus, God has acknowledged the sacrifice of His Son at Calvary: Nothing else—neither one’s own works nor any religion—is capable of erasing our sins. Only the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross of Calvary, is the sole effective cleanser (1 Peter 1:19).

3. The Resurrection of Jesus as the basis for our own: The Resurrection of Jesus is the basis for our resurrection, and the guarantee that through Him we, too, will attain eternal life, because this is what He promised: *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die”* (John 11:25–26).

4. The Resurrection is the cornerstone of our saving faith: Without the fact of the Resurrection, any procla-

¹ On the basis of the 3268 fulfilled prophecies of the Bible, its truth can be proven mathematically. See: W. Gitt: *Information—the key to life*, CLV-Verlag, 6th edition 2018, pp. 294–314.

mation of Christianity would be in vain: *“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”* (1 Corinthians 15:17). After a long discussion with a Muslim, he asked me the specific question: “If someone could prove to you that Jesus was not resurrected after all, would your faith then be gone?” I answered him clearly and unequivocally: “Yes!” If Jesus was not resurrected, then millions of people would have gone astray; then all church services and prayers would have been in vain. All service for the kingdom of God would have been meaningless. All the martyrs for Jesus’ sake would then have died in vain. Then death really would be the end of everything. Then the atheists and evolutionary theorists would have been right. **But Jesus is risen!** And that is why every sermon is worthwhile, and all ministry in the name of Jesus is worthwhile. Faith in Jesus saves with certainty!

5. Death is defeated: Whoever believes in Jesus has finally solved the problem of death. Paul describes Jesus’ victory over death in 1 Corinthians 15:54–55, 57: *“Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ ... But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

6. With the events of the Resurrection, God has shown us a reality that goes far beyond our world of experience of time and space: Our three-dimensional world is not the whole of reality. Jesus has testified to us of the reality of eternity.

What does the Resurrection of Jesus mean to you, dear reader?

Anyone who turns to Jesus in prayer, commits their sins to Him, and entrusts their life to Him, will be freed from all the burden of guilt, and will receive from Him the gift of eternal life. He has firmly promised not to turn away anyone who comes to Him: *“Whoever comes to me I will never cast out”* (John 6:37b). There is no other way to the Kingdom of Heaven than through Jesus (Acts 4:12). Seize the eternal life to which you, too, are called (1 Timothy 6:12)!

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Title of the original German edition: Wahn oder Wirklichkeit? Die f Jesu Christi
Author’s website: wernergitt.com
Translation from the German: Laisa Oushana
Editing: Dr Carl Wieland

Publisher: Bruderhand-Medien
Am Hofe 2, D-29342 Wienhausen, Germany
E-Mail: info@bruderhand.de
Homepage: bruderhand.de

Nr. 137-3 – Englisch/English – 1st edition 2022

DELUSION OR REALITY?

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST



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Delusion or reality?

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

What was the greatest event in the history of the world?

Was it the invention of the computer by *Konrad Zuse* (1910–1995)? Was it the discovery of the Americas in 1492 by Christopher *Columbus* (1451–1506)? Or was it the first landing of a man on the moon on July 21, 1969, by *Neil Armstrong* (1930–2012)? He was the first inhabitant of the earth to set foot on the lunar surface, where he uttered the famous words: *“That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.”*

All these events were very significant, but they don’t come close to the event that we want to reflect on today. It is **the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!** This event has a connection to every person on this earth. Echoing Neil Armstrong’s words, we could say: *The Resurrection was the greatest step ever taken for mankind.* But it is also the one that is most doubted.

Critical objections to the Resurrection

Throughout history, people have repeatedly spoken out against believing in a resurrection of the dead. We will mention five critical voices.



1. The Sadducees: A group of pious men approached Jesus to oppose a resurrection of the dead. They challenged Him with a trick question (Matthew 22:23–33): If seven brothers marry the same woman one after the other and she eventually dies herself, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? Jesus refuted their objection by saying that marriage no longer exists beyond the veil of death, and added a brain teaser by quoting Exodus 3:6: *“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”*. But since Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, they must have subsequently risen from the dead, because *“God is not the God of the dead, but of the living”* (Matthew 22:32b).

2. Martin Heidegger: The well-known German philosopher *Martin Heidegger* (1889–1976) did not base his arguments concerning the Resurrection on faith, and yet he made an important statement: *“If Jesus of Nazareth has risen from the dead, then all scientific knowledge is only provisional.”* He consistently concluded: If it is really true that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead, then we have imposed an unjustifiable limit on ourselves with our scientific thinking.

3. Rudolf Augstein: *Rudolf Augstein* (1923–2003), the editor of the largest German news magazine ‘Der Spiegel’ (The Mirror), was asked the question shortly before his death: *“Do you believe in God?”* To which he replied: *“No ... I don’t believe in the resurrection of any dead person, and so I don’t have to deal with it any further. When I’m gone, I’m gone!”* What a fatal mistake!

4. Pastor in a preaching emergency: It was just before Easter, when I got into conversation with a pastor. He explained to me that whenever it came to Easter, he would find himself in what he called a ‘preaching emergency’. As a pastor, he did not believe in the Resurrection of Jesus.

5. ‘Die Zeit’: Some time ago, the German weekly newspaper ‘Die Zeit’ (The Time) ran the following headline in its Easter edition (No. 16, April 8, 2009): *“The most incredible story in the world” – Nothing sounds more improbable than the resurrection of Jesus!”*



Eyewitnesses of the Resurrection

God could have had a prophet proclaim to us: *“The Resurrection of Jesus happened. I brought Him back from the dead.”* That would have brought even more doubters to the fore than is already the case. But that’s not what God did. Jesus doesn’t let His Resurrection be proclaimed through words, but He proves it Himself, by showing Himself directly, several times in different places and on different occasions.

In the New Testament, we are told 15 times by eyewitnesses that they experienced Jesus as the Risen and Living One:

1. **Mary Magdalene** (John 20:11–18)
2. **Two women at the tomb** (Matthew 28:9)
3. **Two disciples** on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35)
4. **Peter** (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5)
5. **The 10 disciples** without Thomas on Easter Sunday (John 20:19)
6. **The 11 disciples** including Thomas (John 20:26)
7. **The 7 disciples** at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1–22)
8. **The 11 disciples** on a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16–20)
9. **The 12 disciples** including Matthew (1 Corinthians 15:5)
10. **500 of the brethren** (1 Corinthians 15:6)

11. **James**, the brother of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:7)
12. **All Apostles** (1 Corinthians 15:7; Mark 16:19–20; Luke 24:50–53; Acts 1:3–12:26)
13. **Stephen**, after the Ascension (Acts 7:55–56)
14. **The Apostle Paul**, after the Ascension (at his conversion before reaching Damascus: Acts 9:3–5; in the temple: Acts 22:17–21; in prison at Caesarea: Acts 23:11)
15. **The Apostle John**, after the Ascension (Revelation 1:12–20).

Some of these eyewitness accounts are commented on here:

1. Mary Magdalene (John 20:1–18): Very early on Easter Sunday, she sets out for the tomb of Jesus. Arriving in the garden where Jesus’ tomb is, she is so frightened that she bursts into tears. Who has rolled away the heavy stone in front of the tomb opening? The tomb is empty. She is overcome with great fear, and she runs to the inn where Peter and John are staying. They immediately set off for the tomb. John arrives first, completely out of breath, followed by Peter. Mary Magdalene is far behind Peter. John approaches the tomb, and without entering it, he looks inside and sees that there are only burial cloths in the empty tomb. When Mary Magdalene reaches the tomb, Peter and John are already gone. She enters the tomb and is horrified to find it empty. Suddenly she sees two persons dressed in bright white where Jesus had been lying: one at the head, the other at the feet. She does not realise they are angels. They ask, *“Why are you weeping?”* She answers in tears, *“They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him”* (John 20:13).

She turns her head and suddenly sees a man standing in front of her. She thinks that He might be the gardener when He asks, *“Why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”* (John 20:15). At first, she fails to recognise His voice, too. She says to him: *“If you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him”*. He then addresses her

by name: *“Mary!”* This pierces her heart; no one had ever spoken her name quite like this. Never before had anyone addressed her with such sensitivity. Now it is quite clear who is standing in front of her. It is Jesus who has risen from the dead. She thus becomes the very **first witness** of Jesus’ Resurrection.

2. Two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–31): Jesus meets two disciples on the way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. From the Bible, He explains to them the meaning of His suffering, and eats with them. They recognise Him by the way He breaks the bread.

3. The 11 disciples (John 20:26–28): Eight days after Easter, Jesus appears again to the 11 disciples. This time Thomas is also there. Jesus allows Himself to be touched by Thomas in order to overcome his unbelief: *“Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe. Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”* (John 20:27–28). Thomas recognises Jesus as his God.

4. The 7 disciples (John 21:1–22): Jesus appears to seven of the first-called disciples at the Sea of Galilee when they return from an unsuccessful fishing trip (Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples). At His word, they catch 153 fish and Jesus eats with them.

