

Resurrection of Jesus – best explanation for phenomenal growth of Christians

“Some sort of powerful, transformative experience is required to generate the sort of movement earliest Christianity was.”¹

“As an historian, I cannot explain the rise of early Christianity unless Jesus rose again, leaving an empty tomb behind him.”²

Christianity remains the world's largest religious group with about 2.5 billion people who still consider themselves Christians in 2019.³ Without doubt, Christianity has been the dominant influence in the West.⁴ However, with its once modest beginnings of around 30 followers, one of the biggest questions in world history is: Why did Christianity prevail? How did Jesus, an enthusiastic Jew, manage to captivate so many with his life and his comforting, uplifting, redeeming words up to today? The key lies in that he was executed by the Romans and rose from the dead on the third day, according to Jewish reckoning of time! Jesus promised:

“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.”⁵

The majority of all scholars and historian also agree, it is a fact that Jesus died on the cross⁶. Furthermore, they confirm:

-Very shortly after Jesus' death, the disciples (followers of Jesus) had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had risen and appeared to them.

-Within a few years after Jesus' death, Paul converted after experiencing what he interpreted as a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus.⁷

The two quotes above are from the ground-breaking book, “The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach” by Prof Michael R. Licona. In it he writes:

¹ Luke Timothy Johnson, New Testament scholar at Emory University in “The Real Jesus” (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), p. 136.

² N. T. Wright, “The New Unimproved Jesus,” Christianity Today (September 13, 1993), p. 26. ⁷ Bart Ehrman, “The Historical Jesus,” (The Teaching Company, 2000), Part II, p. 50.

³ <https://www.learnreligions.com/christianity-statistics-700533>

⁴ <https://christianityexplained.net/to/atheists/crime-millennium-year-2000-robbed-ad/>

⁵ John 11:25

⁶ <https://www.uncover.org.uk/questions/whats-the-evidence-outside-the-bible-for-jesus-life-and-teaching/> - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/14/what-is-the-historical-evidence-that-jesus-christ-lived-and-died> - <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/historical-evidence-for-the-resurrection>

⁷ Licona, Michael R. The Resurrection of Jesus. A New Historiographical Approach (p. 303). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition. 2010

“The objective of this investigation was to learn and apply the approach of historians outside of the community of biblical scholars to the question of whether Jesus rose from the dead ... and then weighing a number of hypotheses representative of what is being proposed at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the end, the resurrection hypothesis came out on top and meets the standards discussed herein for being historical.”⁸

What is clearly taught in the Bible finds confirmation from other historians and scholars⁹ who have applied the established historical methodology.¹⁰

Nobody has given a better explanation for the rapid growth of Christianity, than Christ, its death-conquering leader, for what follows: ¹¹

Informed estimates project phenomenal growth of Christians in the first 300 years from about 30 to 33 million followers. This is more than half of the entire population of the Roman Empire. Christianity then became the state religion of the empire.

A new empire

The American sociologist of religion Rodney Stark calculated, that If Christians increased by 30 to 40 per cent every ten years - more or less constantly - then their numbers grew exponentially, which was particularly evident from the year 250 onwards: a growth rate of 30 to 40 per cent is high. The Christian religion appealed particularly well to certain strategically important groups such as women, Jews in the Diaspora and in the cities. The Christian message was modern, valuing all life, egalitarian - and it transcended the rigid clan and family structure of ancient societies. Jesus called all his followers his brothers and sisters.¹²

Nowhere, therefore, did Christianity strike a chord with the people better than in the great multicultural metropolises of the empire: Alexandria, Antioch, Carthage. Above all in Rome, the melting pot where about a million people from all over the world lived - alienated from their homeland, their customs, their religions. Christ assigned them a new empire, the kingdom of God.

A new approach to disasters

Christians also made the most of the worst calamity in Roman history: In 165 an epidemic broke out, probably smallpox, one of the deadliest plagues ever. It devastated Europe for the first time: 25 to 30 percent of the empire's population died. Unlike the pagans, however, the Christians weathered the crisis

⁸ Ibid. (pp. 619-620). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWSG5okmUr8> - <https://www.publicchristianity.org/an-historian-examines-the-resurrection/>

¹⁰ <https://smartfaith.net/2020/08/29/atheist-historians-admit-evidence-for-resurrection/>
<https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/historys-biggest-hoax-how-historians-think-about-the-resurrection/>

¹¹ Sources for these various points are found in: https://www.amazon.com/Rise-Christianity-Sociologist-Reconsiders-History-ebook/dp/B08783D3C1/ref=sr_1_1?crd=1356WIFIPH3ZI&keywords=rise+of+christianity&qid=1650369172&s=digital-text&sprefix=rise+of+christianity%2Cdigital-text%2C117&sr=1-1 The book is a non-Christian sociologist's analytical perspective on the matter. (At the time of publication, Stark identified as an agnostic, but in a [2007 interview with Massimo Introvigne](https://www.foxnews.com/2007/01/20/the-rise-of-christianity-by-rodney-stark/), he said that he now identifies as an "independent Christian.") <https://thejesusquestion.org/2013/01/20/the-rise-of-christianity-by-rodney-stark/> See also: https://www.amazon.com/Triumph-Christianity-Movement-Largest-Religion-ebook/dp/B005C6IJZA/ref=tmm_kin_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=

¹² Hebrews 2:11

much better. Their faith ensured that they coped better with dying. They believed in the resurrection. They cared for each other, empowered by God who lived in them. Their religion emphasised charity. Therefore, they also helped pagans - while the latter abandoned each other.

The consequences were twofold: disproportionately more Christians survived and more pagans converted. Christianity had again proved superior. Bishop Dionysius stated: "Most of our brothers showed boundless love and loyalty, they never spared themselves and always thought of others. Regardless of all dangers, they cared for the sick and prayed with them. When death approached, they left their lives cheerful and happy. Many Christians took a personal risk to get infected themselves to save their neighbours - often dying in their place."

This is different from Islam, where only those Muslims who die in Jihad, a physical battle for Allah, are promised immediate paradise by Muhammad. He is dead and was not certain of where he was going.¹³ Christians are already granted paradise through repentance and faith by Jesus. He is alive in heaven. The central belief of Christianity is supported by historical facts. Hence, they do not have to take other people's lives to live eternally; instead, they can lay down their own lives that others may have fullness of life too.

In 260, a hundred years after smallpox, a second brutal epidemic had swept the empire. Now it was measles, and again many more pagans died than Christians. Dionysius (200-265) wrote: "The pagans behaved quite differently from the Christians. As soon as the plague broke out, they drove away the sick and ran away from their loved ones. These threw them into the street even before they were dead, and treated them like dirt."

After the pandemic, the number of Christians grew immeasurably: within a few years they increased from one million to eight million. The Roman emperors, who had plagued, tortured and killed Christians for centuries, had to change their ways. In 313, Constantine the Great initiated the turnaround and recognised the new religion. He died a Christian in 337. Whether he really believed in the resurrection, God alone knows.

To find out why Jesus died and rose from the dead please click here:

<https://christianityexplained.net/to/all/jesus-rose-from-the-dead/> (pages 3-5)

If you would like to give your life to Jesus or have questions and comments please write to: Oskar1@live.co.uk

¹³ Surah 46:9, Saheeh Bukhari, Volume 5, Book 58, Number 266. See also:

https://www.answeringislam.net/authors/shamoun/muhammad_salvation.html