

The Resurrection: Legend or Fact?

The Strongest Evidence for Christ's Resurrection

"3 I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. 4 He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said." 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 NLT



- Is the life, miracles, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus a fact of history or legend?

The Legend Theory

Some people who are skeptical of Christianity claim that the Gospels and teachings of the New Testament are not factual history, but legend, just like the Roman mythology of Zeus, Apollos, Ares, Hermes, and Hercules, etc. This is called the "legend theory." The idea that the miracles and resurrection of Jesus gradually evolved over decades and centuries. The legend theory was popular in the 19th century but has pretty much collapsed in the 20th century with the new discoveries of modern archaeology and New Testament scholarship.

The Apostle Peter wrote, *"For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendor with our own eyes [NIV "eyewitnesses"]."* 2 Peter 1:16 NLT.

Legends usually require long periods of time to develop. For example, a study of the legend of King Arthur took about 300 years or more. However, the historic records of the life of Jesus can be traced back to 3-5 years of Jesus' resurrection. The strongest evidence for the life of Jesus and the resurrection is found in the creeds mention in the writings of the New Testament. The creed of 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 is one of the most important.

Central Lesson

The Resurrection is not a legend but a historic fact and is **PROOF that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world.**

1. What Is a Creed? - Short **SUMMARY** statements expressing the core beliefs of the early Christians.

Creeds are short summary statements that were easy to memorize and repeat. There are several creeds mentioned in the New Testament. They are incorporated in the text of the New Testament letters. Josh and Sean McDowell wrote, "Perhaps 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 contains the most important New Testament creed for the study of the historical existence of Jesus." (*Evidence That Demand A Verdict*, p. 166)

2. Where Do We Find Creeds in the N.T.?

Some examples of creeds incorporated in the text of the New Testament are: Romans 1:3-4; Philippians 2:6-11; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; and 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

3. Why Are Creeds Important?

- The creeds were **EASY** to memorize and repeat orally in a society where few people could read and write.
- The creeds **PREDATE** the New Testament written documents - and give an earlier record of the beliefs and message of 1st century Christians.

Estimated Timeline

- Jesus' crucifixion - **AD 30**.
- Paul's conversion - approx. AD 33-35.
- Paul meets Peter & James in Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18-19) - **approx. AD 36-38**.
- Galatians & James possibly the first books of the N.T. - A.D. 49.
- Paul wrote 1 Corinthians - approx. AD 54-55.
- Mark possibly the first Gospel - A.D. 55-65.

Scholars believe that Paul may have heard **the oral creed** of Jesus's death & resurrection from Peter & James when they met in Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18-19). Paul **heard the creed 5-7 years after the crucifixion**. A very short period after the event, too short to qualify as legend or folklore. Furthermore, **the creed existed and was circulating before Paul heard it**.

Dr. Gary Habermas considered the world's greatest scholar on the Resurrection, wrote, "A Jerusalem location would date Paul's reception of the creed at about five to seven years after the crucifixion. But we can actually proceed back two stages earlier. Since the tradition would actually have been formulated before Paul first heard it, the creed itself would be dated even earlier. Additionally, the independent beliefs themselves, which later composed the formalized creed, would then date back to the actual historical events. Therefore, we are dealing with material that proceeds directly from the events in question and this creed is thus crucial in our discussion of the death and resurrection of Jesus."

Again, Habermas, explained, "The importance of the creed in 1 Corinthians 15:3 can hardly be overestimated. No longer can it be charged that there is no demonstrable early, eyewitness testimony for the resurrection or for the other most important tenants of Christianity...for this creed provides just such evidential data concerning the facts of the gospel, which are the very center of the Christian faith." (*Evidence That Demand A Verdict*, p. 167-168).

- The creeds **DEFEAT** the legend theory because they existed far before there was time for legends to develop and be widely accepted.

Central Lesson:

The Resurrection is not a legend but a historic fact and is **PROOF that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world.**

► Accept Christ as your Savior. ► As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ. ► Invite someone to next Sunday's study. ► Attend a small group. ► Read the Bible this week & journal meaningful verses. ► Pray for friends that need Jesus.