

Witnesses for the Prosecution: Introduction: Jesus, the Church, & the Bible; Prologue: The Passion; Archaeological Proof of Crucifixion; Prologue: No One Killed Christ; Prophecies of the Resurrection

Witnesses for the Prosecution

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I. Introduction:

1. In the rebuttal phase of the appeal trial of Satan the argument for the Prosecution is twofold: (1) the Incarnation of Christ, during which He utilized the prototype divine power system to execute the salvation plan of God, and (2) the dispensation of the Church in which believers are privileged to utilize the operational divine power system to execute the Christian way of life.
2. In the Incarnation, Jesus Christ is the witness for the Prosecution. His objective was to maintain status quo perfection in His true humanity. To do this He was required to utilize the prototype spiritual life.
3. His mission was to demonstrate the functionality of this system and, in effect, conduct an experiment to prove its capacity to maintain status quo spirituality in the face of continual satanic opposition.
4. If successful it would qualify Him to become the divine substitute for sinful mankind and provide every person the opportunity to believe in Him for salvation and eternal life.
5. When Jesus entered into Jerusalem mounted upon a donkey on Palm Sunday, A.D. 29, He boldly announced Himself as the Messiah of Israel and in so doing kicked-off a fifty-seven day drama that would literally change the world.
6. These fifty-seven days would result in the transition of the dispensation of the Incarnation over to that of the Church and bring forward hundreds of millions of witnesses for the Prosecution who would believe in Him and for almost two millennia testify that Jesus is the Christ.
7. The fifty-seven days are divided into four segments: (1) four days from Palm Sunday through the crucifixion on the following Wednesday, (2) three days from the time of His burial to His resurrection, (3) forty days from the time of His resurrection to His ascension, and (4) 10 days from the ascension to Pentecost.
8. The key event among many, each of which could be the subject of an independent study, is the resurrection. The significance of this event cannot be overstated as evidenced by Paul in:

1 Corinthians 15:12 - Now if Christ is preached, that He rose from the dead, and He is, how do some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

v. 13 - But, let us assume that there is no resurrection of the dead, then it is logical to conclude that Christ is not risen.

v. 14 - And, if we assume that Christ is not risen, then is our preaching in vain? And, then is not your faith also in vain?

v. 15 - Yes, and we are found liars, false witnesses of God, because we have testified concerning God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise, if we assume in fact that the dead are not raised.

v. 16 - For if we assume that the dead are not raised, then is it not a logical conclusion that Christ was not raised?

v. 17 - And, if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless and we must conclude you are yet in your sins.

v. 18 - Then those also which are fallen asleep in Christ remain under judgment.

1 Corinthians 15:19 - Let us assume that if in this life only we have placed our confidence in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

v. 20 - But now Christ has been raised from the dead in the past with results that go on forever, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

9. We have studied in the past the overwhelming archive of biblical texts that have survived over the past nineteen-hundred years and which dwarf the number of surviving manuscripts by any of the most revered writers of antiquity. Nevertheless, the multiplicity of evidence contained in the Bible is universally challenged by those who doubt its veracity:

Many facts from antiquity rest on just one ancient source, while two or three sources in agreement generally render the fact unimpeachable. In the case of the first Easter, there are at least seven ancient sources—the four Gospels, Acts, and the letter of Paul and Peter—but this has not led to universal acceptance of the resurrection as a datum of history. Why not? Because the more unlikely the episode, the stronger the evidence demanded for it. So if something supernatural were claimed, the evidence required to support it would have to be of an unimpeachable, absolute, and, indeed, direct eyewitness nature.¹

10. The resurrection of Jesus is the most important event in all of human history; it is the most revered in Christendom and the most assaulted by the cosmos, illustrated by supercilious remarks describing Him as a “great teacher,” “a prophet,” or a “man of peace,” but “not God.”

¹ Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time: A Historian Looks at Christmas, Easter, and the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1991), 197.

11. The Christian is willing to take the description of the resurrection found in Scripture as reason enough to believe it to be true and to hang his eternal future on its veracity.
12. However, as we shall learn today, there are abundant witnesses on behalf of the Prosecution to confirm what faith concludes.

II. Prologue:

1. Resurrection cannot occur unless physical death occurs first. Throughout Church history there has been debate over who killed Christ: the Jews, the Romans, or a combination of the two?
2. But the truth is that no one killed Christ. It is true that He experienced death on the cross. In fact He did so twice: (1) spiritual death, separation from God while being identified with our certificate of debt and the judgment of the sins thereon inscribed, and (2) physical death after His substitutionary spiritual death was completed.
3. But His physical death was not a consequence of injuries inflicted upon Him. It is true that the seventy members of the Sanhedrin punched and slapped Him in the face (Matthew 26:27).
4. This assault occurred in the second of six trials the Lord would face over the course of the night of Passover culminating with being lashed with a *flagrum*, the Roman whip used for scourging. It was a cat-o'-nine-tails that had metal and bone inlaid into the ends of its cords designed to rip and tear flesh. When the Roman soldier inflicted the lashes he complied with Jewish custom to limit the blows to thirty-nine (Matthew 27:26).
5. Following the scourging, the Roman cohort dressed the Lord in a scarlet robe, formed a crude crown of a thorny plant, and placed it on His head. The soldiers mocked Him saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They then beat His head with a reed, driving the thorns into His scalp and spit in His face (Matthew 27:28-31).
6. The journey to Golgotha, a hill outside the walls of Jerusalem, followed a route called *Via Dolorosa*, translated Sorrowful Road. Along this street the Lord was forced to carry the heavy 40-pound *patibulum*, the crosspiece of the cross, which in His weakened condition caused Him to fall and require the assistance of Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21).
7. On the arrival at Golgotha, He was placed, arms outstretched, on the *patibulum*. Seven-inch nails were driven into His wrists piercing the medial nerves causing intense pain.
8. It seems that every aspect of the Lord's Passion has been placed under doubtful scrutiny by naysayers and this is not an exception. The contention by some is that no one was ever nailed to a cross since their body's weight would have torn the flesh free of the nails. Here's proof that crucifixion was indeed practiced this way:

In the summer of 1968, archaeologist V. Tzaferis excavated some stone ossuaries in northeastern Jerusalem dating from the first century A.D. These were chests in which bones of the dead were reburied after the flesh had decomposed following original burial in a cave. One of these ossuaries, inscribed with the name Yehohanan Ben-Hagakol, contained the bones of a man who had obviously been crucified, the first such victim ever discovered. A large, rusty iron spike, seven inches long, had been driven through both heel bones after first penetrating an acacia wood wedge or plague that held the ankles firmly to the cross. The nail must have encountered a knot on being driven into the cross, for the point of the spike had been bent directly backward. Slivers still clinging to it show that the cross was made of olive wood.²

Israeli pathologist Dr. Nicu Haas further examined Yehohanan's bones and announced the following conclusions: the victim was between twenty-four and twenty-eight years old, with a triangular face, curved nose, robust chin, and good teeth, but he had a cleft palate on the right side. In addition to the iron spike, evidence of crucifixion included a deep scratch on the right radius bone, showing that a nail had penetrated between the two bones of his lower forearm just above the wrist, which abraded them as the victim writhed in agony.³ (p. 165)

Even the detail of the two criminals (on crosses flanking Jesus) having their legs broken to induce death—the *crurifragium*—has an exact parallel here: Yehohanan's right tibia and the left tibia and fibula were all broken in their lowest third segment at the same level, indicating a common crushing blow, probably from a mallet or sledge. Breaking legs, then, appears to have been "standard operating procedure" for crucifixion.⁴ (pp. 167, 169)

9. Once the victim is nailed to the *patibulum* he is hoisted upon the top of the *stipes*, the vertical beam that is already transfixed into a grounded socket. His feet are then nailed to the stipes and the person is crucified.
10. The crucified person has the weight of his body either pulling on his wrists or, when the pain gets too intense, he pushes up with his feet which only results in shifting the pain. This alternation is done repeatedly as the person tries to gain relief from the excruciating pain.
11. For our Lord, His physical agony was intensified due to the rawness of His back caused by the scourging and the rough- hewn surface of the stipes.
12. Then, to top it all, He was asked to receive the imputation of our certificate of debt and be judged for it.

² V. Tzaferis, "Crucifixion—The Archaeological Evidence," in *Biblical Archaeology Review*, January-February 1985, 44-53.

³ Nicu Haas, "Anthropological Observations on the Skeletal Remains from Giv'at ha-Mivtar," in *Israel Exploration Journal* 20 (1970), 38-59.

⁴ Maier, *In the Fullness of Time*, 167, 169

13. None of this killed Him. When the three hours of judgment were completed He is quoted by John (John 19:30a) as saying, "It is finished," the intensive passive participle of the verb **τελέω, teleō**. The perfect tense indicates completed action; an action seen in a state of progress to the point of culmination and the existence of its finished results. The point of completion is always antecedent to the time stated which means that when the Lord exclaimed, "**Τετέλεσται**," salvation had already received its fulfillment, which is expressed by the passive voice. The indicative mood tells us this is an historical and biblical fact.
14. This means the Lord's spiritual death is what saved us. Since His mission to earth was completed His next item on the agenda was a resurrection body, necessary for two reasons: (1) so He could demonstrate to His disciples the reality of their future resurrection bodies, and (2) so He could, after another 43 days, return to the eternal state.
15. It must be emphasized that no one killed Jesus. We are given two quotes to verify this. First, John 19:30b, "He bowed His head and gave up His spirit," and Luke 23:46, "And Jesus crying out with a loud voice said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.'"

III. Prophecies of the Resurrection:

1. Our approach to interpreting Scripture is to assume a literal rendering of its content following an exegetical analysis of each Greek or Hebrew word while considering the historical context of the passage.
2. But this system is flawed if the expositor does not subscribe to the belief that the Bible is inerrant, infallible, and the only repository of the voice of God to man.
3. The veracity of any issue is confirmed by discovering what the Bible has to say about it. Today we pose the question, "Did Jesus rise from the dead in resurrection body?" We do not have the time to give an exhaustive response, but we can be confident about our findings under the principle that if biblical revelation is absolute truth, then even a cursory analysis of it commentary will be sufficient to establish certainty.
4. The first consideration is to note several of the prophecies of the Old Testament that forecast the Messiah:
 - 1) His true humanity would be from a virgin birth: Isaiah 7:14.
 - 2) He would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah: Micah 5:2.
 - 3) His lineage would be from: (1) the seed of the woman, Genesis 3:15, (2) the seed of Abraham, Genesis 22:18, (3) the seed of Judah, Genesis 49:10, and (4) the seed of David, 1 Chronicles 17:11-14.
 - 4) He would be called the Son of God: Psalm 2:7,12.
 - 5) He would proclaim His messiahship by entering Jerusalem riding a donkey: Zechariah 9:9.
 - 6) He would die a substitutionary spiritual death: Isaiah 52:13-53:12.
 - 7) He would die physically and be resurrected: Psalm 16:10.
5. These are but a handful of the prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth and the one we will amplify is the last noted: Psalm 16:10.

Psalm 16:10 - You [God the Father] will not abandon my soul in Sheol [שְׂאוֹל *she'ol*: Hebrew for the Greek ᾗδης, *Haidēs*, specifically, Paradise]; nor will you allow your Holy One [Messiah] to see corruption [שָׁחַת *shachath*: to not experience the decay of the grave but rather be resurrected].