



Were there any eyewitnesses to Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection?

Critics of the Bible claim there are no eyewitnesses of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. This article takes an objective look at the facts.

"[The Gospels] were written down thirty-five to sixty-five years after Jesus' death . . . not by people who were eyewitnesses, but by people living later"—Jesus, Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium, 2005, pages 44-45, by Bart Ehrman

"There is not a sentence concerning Jesus in the entire New Testament by anyone who had ever met the unwilling King of the Jews"—Jesus and Yahweh, 2005, page 19, by H. Bloom

These are common claims today by those who are considered to be scholars, and which are popularly believed by many. On the other hand, New Testament Bible writers tell a very different story.

"They were handed down to us by those who were eyewitnesses"—Luke 1:2 NIV

"The original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us"—Luke 1:2 HCSB

"We were eyewitnesses of his majesty"—2 Peter 1:16 NIV

"We have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life . . . We

proclaim to you what we have seen and heard”—1 John 1:1-3 NIV)

Much importance is given today to eyewitness reports, but what about New Testament Bible writers? These writers claim to either be eyewitnesses themselves, or to use eyewitness testimony, in much of their writings. Who, and what, should we believe about all of this?

Many non-believers, skeptics and critics, do not doubt the existence of the historical Jesus. It is the miracles, and most importantly, his death and resurrection that they deny. But the Bible contains much evidence that should be examined by any honest-hearted skeptic, especially if they are truly open-minded enough to give it a fair chance. To assist with this, let's take a look at the witnesses to Jesus' execution, burial, empty tomb, and resurrected state.

The placement of witnesses is very important in **proving** things. Police reports give much importance to eyewitness statements. Many local news programs are titled **“Eyewitness News.”** The Gospels and letters (such as 1 Corinthians) were all written independently. There were no “rules,” such as requiring strict chronological listing of all witnesses of Jesus in his resurrected state. The writers of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and 1 Corinthians made true and accurate statements in their books. There are no false statements, even though there are divergences. Divergent accounts are not tantamount to contradictions, as some critics and skeptics assert. In fact, virtually identical accounts would be highly suspect to be collusion, so the divergences actually are a testimony to Biblical accuracy.

Notice the similarities among the four Gospel accounts:

1. There are named witnesses at Jesus' execution site Friday afternoon.
2. There are named witnesses at his burial Friday near dusk.
3. There are named witnesses at his newly emptied tomb around sunrise on Sunday morning.
4. There are named witnesses of Jesus in his resurrected state (including 1 Corinthians,

but excluding Mark, because Mark ends at 16:8. Verses 9-20 are spurious additions).

5. There are unnamed, anonymous witnesses in each of the above categories.

Witnesses of Jesus – Named and Anonymous

Eyewitnesses to the death of Jesus, his burial, his empty tomb, and his resurrection are included in all four of the Gospels, and 1 Corinthians. Below is a chart listing the witnesses to each of these events for each Gospel account, followed by the witnesses described in 1 Corinthians:

Matthew (*Matthew 27:55-28:20*)

When/Where	Witnesses
Execution site	• “Many women” who had followed Jesus from Galilee • Mary Magdalene • Mary mother of James and Joseph • Mother of Zebedee’s sons • “The centurion and those with him”
Burial	• Mary Magdalene • The other Mary • Joseph of Arimathea
Empty tomb	• Mary Magdalene • The other Mary
In resurrected state	• Mary Magdalene • The other Mary • The eleven disciples

Mark (*Mark 15:40-16:8*)

When/Where	Witnesses
Execution site	· “Women” who “had followed him and cared for his needs” · “Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem” · Mary Magdalene · Mary mother of James the younger and Joseph · Salome · The centurion “who stood there in front of Jesus”
Burial	· Mary Magdalene · Mary the mother of Joseph · Joseph of Arimathea
Empty tomb	· Mary Magdalene · Mary the mother of James · Salome

Luke (*Luke 23:47-24:52*)

When/Where	Witnesses
Execution site	· “All those who knew him” · “The women who had followed from Galilee” · “The centurion, seeing what happened”
Burial	· “The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee” · Joseph of Arimathea

Empty tomb	• "The women" and "the others" • Mary Magdalene • Joanna • Mary the mother of James • Peter
In resurrected state	• Two disciples, one named Cleopas • The Eleven • Simon Peter

John (*John 19:25-21:24*)

When/Where	Witnesses
Execution site	• Jesus' mother • His mother's sister • Mary the wife of Clopas • Mary Magdalene • "He [John] who saw this", who is also "the disciple whom he (Jesus) loved" • "The soldiers"
Burial	• Joseph of Arimathea • Nicodemus
Empty tomb	• Mary Magdalene • Peter • "The other disciple" (John)

In resurrected state	· Mary Magdalene · The disciples (without Thomas) · The Disciples, including Thomas · At Sea of Galilee (7) - o Simon Peter - o Thomas - o Nathaniel - o The sons of Zebedee - James and John - o Two other disciples
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1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

"Christ died"

"He was buried"

"He was raised on the third day"

When/Where	Witnesses
Resurrected state	· Cephas (Peter) · "The Twelve" · "More than five hundred... at the same time" · James · All the Apostles · Paul

Approximate Order of Jesus' Resurrection Appearances

Sometimes the exact timing of events is of major importance, and sometimes it is not. With some events, the events themselves are of major importance, not the exact time of those events. This was especially true of ancient times, long before precise clocks, and instant global "breaking news."

The Bible documents Jesus' resurrection as a fact of major importance, but who saw him first is not. However, it is possible to approximately construct the order of Jesus' resurrection appearances from the Bible itself. Please see the following chart:

Appearance	Place	Time	Source(s)
Empty tomb (preliminary)	Jerusalem	Resurrection Sunday	Matthew 28:1-10 Mark 16:1-8 Luke 24:1-12 John 20:1-9
To Mary Magdalene	Jerusalem	Resurrection Sunday	John 20:11-18
To other women	Jerusalem	Resurrection Sunday	Matthew 28:9-10
To two disciples going to Emmaus	Road to Emmaus	Resurrection Sunday	Luke 24:13-32
To Peter	Jerusalem	Resurrection Sunday	Luke 24:34 1 Corinthians 15:5

To 10 disciples in upper room	Jerusalem	Resurrection Sunday	Luke 24:36-43 John 20:19-25
To 11 disciples in upper room	Jerusalem	Following Sunday	John 20:26-31 1 Corinthians 15:5
To seven disciples fishing	Sea of Galilee	Some time later	John 21:1-23
To eleven disciples on a mountain	Galilee	Some time later	1 Corinthians 15:6
To more than 500	Unknown	Some time later	1 Corinthians 15:6
To James	Unknown	Some time later	1 Corinthians 15:7
To his disciples at his ascension	Mount of Olives	40 days after resurrection	Acts 1:3-8
To Paul	Damascus Road	A couple of years later	Acts 9:1-19 Acts 22:3-16 Acts 26:9-18 1 Corinthians 15:8

We can see from the above that there were plenty of eyewitnesses to Jesus' execution, death, burial, empty tomb, and resurrected state. In fact, the evidence for Jesus' execution, death and resurrection was so strong that Jewish leaders bribed guards at Jesus' empty tomb to spread the lie that: **"His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep"** (**Matthew 28:13 NIV**). This reflects their desperate attempt to explain why Jesus' body was missing and presupposes the empty tomb. No other competing burial story even exists.

The Gospels and 1 Corinthians are not based on **"myths"** (**1 Timothy 1:3,4 NIV**), as critics and skeptics claim, but on **"accurate information"** (**Acts 23:15,20 NIV**), **"the truth"** (**Galatians 4:16**). We have examined the facts and found that there is an abundance of

evidence of eyewitnesses of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection