

JESUS' RESURRECTION -- FACT OR FALLACY
A LEGAL PERSPECTIVE

A **INTRODUCTION**

1. Why is it necessary to ask the question whether or not Jesus was in fact raised from the dead? Firstly, the reason why the answer to this question is important is because the entire Christian faith depends upon that answer. If Jesus did not rise from the tomb, then the entire Christian faith is a hoax. In I Cor 15:14 Paul writes to the Corinthians as follows:

“14. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”
“17. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile ...”

2. Secondly, Christianity is the only religion on earth which believes its leader and originator to have died and yet risen from the dead. It is therefore important to establish the truth or otherwise of something so miraculous that occurred some 2000 years ago. So how does one go about this process?

B **THE LAW OF EVIDENCE**

3. The legal systems of most countries contain two standards of proof whereby facts are determined in any court of law:

- 3.1 Proof of facts on a preponderance of probabilities – this standard of proof is utilised in civil cases and it's called “the civil standard of proof”. In simplified terms, it denotes the process of reasoning whereby all evidence such as documentary or oral or eyewitness evidence, is examined and evaluated, including conducting the process of inferential reasoning concerning the value of circumstantial facts, and there after concluding that the fact has been proven because the weight of the probabilities is in its favour.

- 3.2 Proof of facts beyond a reasonable doubt – this standard of proof is used in criminal cases and is called the “criminal standard of proof”. In the present instance the criminal standard of proof is not relevant and nothing more will be said in this regard. It is acknowledged that the criminal standard of proof requires a higher threshold of certainty than the civil standard of proof.

4. In South African law, by way of example, the death of a person can be proved by documentary evidence (such as a death certificate) or oral evidence of an eyewitness. In the absence of such direct evidence, death can be proved by circumstantial evidence. This has been the law of South Africa for the last hundred years or so.¹ In all such instances, death will have to be proved on a balance or preponderance of probabilities. If that is the case for proving death, it follows that the resurrection of Jesus Christ will also have to be proved according to the same standard of proof, namely on a balance of probabilities. If the available evidence is analysed and weighed and the conclusion is that the death and subsequent resurrection of Jesus Christ are more probable than not, then the legal standard of proof will have been satisfied.²

C EVIDENCE FROM EXTRA BIBLICAL SOURCES

5. Let us then examine the evidence concerning the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as documented in extra Biblical sources:

5.1 **Tacitus:** He was a Roman historian who lived in the period 55 to 117 AD. He was an ardent anti-Christian. He wrote:

“Jesus Christ was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judaea in the reign of Tiberius; but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judaea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also.”

What does this statement prove?

1. According to Tacitus, Jesus Christ actually lived (a historical individual) and actually died. He was not in a mere coma and then taken away by the disciples, as some critics would have it.
2. The time of his death was during the reign of Tiberius, who was born in 42 BC and reigned from 14 to 37 AD. This statement is therefore consistent with the time during which Jesus Christ allegedly walked this earth.

¹ See Schmidt “The Law of Evidence”, pages 3-3 and 3-7.

² See Charles Forster “The Jesus Inquest” published in 2006 at page 13. Forster is a barrister practising in London, UK.

3. The name of Jesus Christ's executioner is proven to be Pontius Pilate, who reigned as procurator in Judaea from 26 – 36 AD. This statement confirms the biblical allegations that Jesus started his ministry at round about the age of 30, lasting for approximately three years, somewhere between 26 to 36 AD.
4. It also confirms that witnesses spread the belief in Jesus Christ from Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria and even Rome – as Jesus prophesied:

“ You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”³

Evidence from an anti-Christian source such as the above statement confirming the 4 facts referred to above as contained in the Gospels, provides strong proof that the Gospels are in fact correct in those respects.

- 5.2 **Mara Bar-Seraphion:** He was a Syrian philosopher writing from prison to his son, sometime after AD 70. He wrote:

What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? (evidently referring to Jesus) ... But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on in the teaching of Plato. Pythagoras did not die for good; he lived on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise King die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given.”

What does this statement prove?

1. During the first century Jesus Christ was known as the “King of the Jews” as recorded in the Gospels. Even Pontius Pilate had those words written and placed on the cross upon which Jesus was crucified.⁴
2. It is further common cause that the teachings of Jesus Christ as contained in the Gospels and Acts have lived on long after He died.
3. The Jews in fact gained no advantage by executing Jesus Christ, nor by persecuting his followers because, contrary to the other revolts at that time which subsided after their leaders were put to death, this one did not subside.⁵

³ See Acts 1:8.

⁴ See Matthew 27:37; and Luke 23:38.

⁵ In Acts 5:33 – 40 the advice given by the Pharisee named Gamaliel is recorded. He reminded the Sanhedrin of previous leaders such as Theudas and Judas the Galilean whose followers scattered and were dispersed after they were put to death. His advice was: “Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of

4. The statement also proves that Jesus was executed and in fact died.

This extra biblical statement confirms the view that something extraordinary happened which enabled the teachings of Jesus to be carried forward by his followers against all odds and despite His death.

5.3 **The Babylonian Talmud:** This document is a commentary on old Jewish laws compiled between 500 and 600 AD which admits the historicity of Jesus and his death. This Jewish document is known as the “Gamara” and it confirms that Jesus Christ was hanged⁶ and therefore died. Despite His death, His followers did not immediately scatter but remained on in Jerusalem and boldly testified against all odds and persecution.

5.4 **Julius Africanus:** He was a Christian writer who wrote in AD 221. In his writings he refers to Thallus, a Roman writer of 52 AD from Samaria who recorded that darkness befell Jerusalem during the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Thallus, in his third book, “History”, explains that it was due to an eclipse of the sun but Julius Africanus, however, disputes the correctness of this conclusion, based on the fact that the solar eclipse could not have taken place at full moon when the crucifixion took place. Julius Africanus also refers to the writer Phlegon who recorded in his writings that an eclipse of the sun occurred strangely enough at full moon during the time of Tiberius. Unfortunately, the writings of both Thallus and Phlegon have gone missing and one has to rely exclusively on the recordal thereof as contained in the writings of Julius Africanus.

So what does this prove?

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. The darkness testified to in the Gospels⁷ during the crucifixion is confirmed extra Biblically.

human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

⁶ In Acts 5:30 Peter says that the Jews killed Jesus by “**hanging** him on a tree”.

⁷ Matthew 27:43; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44.

3. The darkness could not have been an eclipse of the sun – something miraculous must have occurred by divine intervention.

5.5 **Flavius Josephus:** He was a Jewish historian who lived from 37 to 100 AD. He held no brief for the Christians. In fact, he was very pro-Roman. In his book “The Antiquities of the Jews”, Book XVIII, Chapter III, Paragraph 3, the following astonishing extract appears:

“3. Now, there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, -- a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.”

What does this prove?

1. Some doubt is expressed as to the divinity of Jesus Christ as being a man or God.
2. It does however confirm his life and death.
3. It further confirms that he performed miracles as testified to in the Gospels.
4. He was a teacher of the truth.
5. He was the Messiah, the Christ.
6. He won over many Jews and Gentiles (Greeks) as stated in the Gospels.
7. He was accused by the principal Jews (Sanhedrin).
8. Pontius Pilate condemned him to die on a cross.
9. Those who loved Him did not cease proclaiming His name and hence the spread of the gospel as described in the Gospels and Acts.
10. He appeared to his disciples restored to life within three days as testified to in the Gospels.
11. Many things including his life, death and resurrection were prophesied by the Jewish prophets of old.
12. Christians did not disappear despite His death as in other cases of revolt leaders and even after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD the Christians were still in existence.

There are many more extra biblical sources which confirm his life, death and resurrection, but for present purposes, those referred to above will suffice. So what have we discovered so far from the extra biblical sources? Without even having opened the Bible, we can conclude at this stage, at the very least, that – (i) Jesus was a historical figure who (ii) lived in (iii) Palestine during the (iv) reign of Tiberius, (v) performing many wonderful works (vi) between 26 – 36 AD, (vii) tried and condemned by Pontius Pilate (viii) at the request of the principal Jews and then (ix) arose from the dead on the (x) third day after (xi) dying on the cross as (xii) prophesied by the Jewish writers of old and (xiii) appeared alive to His followers called (xiv) Christians after His name.

D THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

6. Let us now examine the evidence obtainable from Biblical sources. First of all, a misconception must be eradicated regarding the reason why the Gospels were written containing such evidence. There are basically three considerations of importance in this regard:
 1. The Gospels were written for **historical accuracy**. It is generally accepted that the first Gospel was written by Mark at approximately 50 AD. It was therefore written approximately 20 years after the Ministry of Jesus on earth. It was written because the original eyewitnesses to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were all mortal. By 50 AD some had already died and some had reached old-age. It was therefore important to take statements from the remaining eyewitnesses while they were still clear and capable of rendering an accurate account. That is also why Luke strove to provide an accurate and orderly account, “*just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word*”.⁸
 2. The second reason was to **counter the first heretic doctrine** which reared its head during the first century AD namely that of the Gnostics. Gnosticism proclaimed that Jesus Christ was not human and only “seemed” to be so. They

⁸ See Luke 1:1 and 2.

cast doubt as to His humanity as suggested in the writing of Josephus quoted earlier. It was therefore important to obtain the testimony of the men and women who walked the dusty roads of Galilee with Jesus; those who ate the bread and fish with him prior to his death and thereafter; those who saw the marks of the crucifixion on his body. This testimony was to show how obviously human He was while on earth and how obviously dead He was after the crucifixion and how obviously human again, while still on earth after the resurrection when he appeared to his followers. It must however be remembered that this was not a subsequent fabrication by his followers to try and convince the Romans or the Jews or the Gentiles of his death and resurrection but to answer the heretic doctrine that arose within the Christian community. What they merely did was to document that which they always had held to be the truth. The Gnostics only succeeded in making the Gospel writers more vocal and more explicit in their defence against the heretic views from amongst their own numbers.

3. The Gospels were not written as **evangelistic tracts** in order to convert people to Christianity. The evidence proves that no one was ever converted to Christianity through the Gospels during the first 20 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus and prior to Mark having written his gospel in 50 AD. Yet the evidence proves that it is during this period of 20 years that the growth of Christianity was widespread and significant. Christianity grew by word of mouth and not as a result of the Gospels during this period and due to the signs and wonders that followed upon the preaching and the new lifestyles of the early Christians. During this period of growth nobody could have expounded or preached a sermon from the Gospels because they simply did not exist. The only reasonable inference to be drawn from these facts is that Christianity grew because of the historical truths which flowed from the testimonies of eyewitnesses to Jesus's life, death and resurrection.

But the question remains, can we believe the account of his death and resurrection as contained in the Gospels?

E THE CREDIBILITY OF THE GOSPELS

7. Is the testimony contained in the Gospels credible? The first doubt cast upon the Gospels is the suggestion or theory that Jesus never died in which case there could have been no resurrection. However, this criticism is hardly credible in the face of the evidence to the contrary, namely:

7.1 The testimony of the eyewitnesses that Jesus actually died after the crucifixion is in fact confirmed by extra biblical sources which tends to confirm the correctness of the Gospels in this regard.

7.2 Pontius Pilate would not have allowed the disciples to remove Jesus from the cross if he was not yet dead. It should be remembered that Pontius Pilate buckled under the pressure of the Jewish populace to crucify Jesus Christ. They threatened him with the accusation that should he let Jesus go, he would not be regarded as a friend of Caesar, because “anyone who claims to be a king, opposes Caesar”.⁹ Pontius Pilate would have had no desire to allow Jesus to escape death and so re-incur the wrath of the populace who had threatened him. Therefore he allowed a guard to make sure that Jesus was dead and hence the spear was thrust in His body to prove such death to him.¹⁰ Alternatively, it was common practice for those crucified to have their bones broken to enhance death. They did not break the bones of Jesus because he was already dead.

7.3 If Jesus did not die, why lay Him in a tomb? It is highly unlikely that a person not yet dead would have been laid in a tomb. Furthermore, he was laid in a tomb, the whereabouts of which was known to his enemies. If He was not dead after his removal from the cross, it is highly unlikely that the disciples would have laid Him in the tomb where his enemies could have finished Him off. It is common cause that the tomb was known to his enemies. Because of such knowledge it was possible for the Jews to secure a guard from Pontius Pilate to seal and to guard the tomb.¹¹

⁹ See John 18:37 and 19:12; Luke 23:2 and 3; Acts 17:7

¹⁰ See Mark 15:43 – 45; John 19:34 – 37.

¹¹ See Matthew 27:65 – 67.

7.4 John was an eyewitness to His death and His burial in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.¹² There is no reason to doubt his testimony in this regard in the light of the corroboration emanating from the extra biblical sources.

7.5 In all probability, even if He was not completely dead by the time He was placed in the tomb, He would probably have died due to the cold climate in Jerusalem during March/ April of the pass-over. After the sufferings due to His flagellation and the excruciating pain of the crucifixion, He would not have survived such a cold night in a tomb. Frank Morison¹³ states:

“Driven by the immense strength and cogency of the case for the empty tomb, the German rationalist Venturini put forward the suggestion that Christ did not actually die upon the cross, but fainted, and that in the cool temperature of the grave He recovered and subsequently appeared to the disciples.

This suggestion, while attempting to produce a strictly rational explanation of the post-crucifixion phenomena, is surely the least rational of all. It ignores the deadly character of the wounds inflicted upon Jesus, the frightful laceration of the hands and feet, the loss of strength through the ebbing away of blood, the hopelessness of human aid during the critical moments when it would be most needed, the tight-drawn bandages of the grave(clothes), the heavy stone.”

8. The conclusion, weighing up all the probabilities based on the evidence aforesaid, is, in my view, that He must have been dead. To believe otherwise, defies common sense and presents a dramatic ignorance of the known sources of evidence regarding His death.¹⁴

9. Once it is accepted that He died, the next question is: what happened to His body? There are a number of theories in existence in this regard.

9.1 The first is that His body was stolen by His disciples.¹⁵ This is extremely unlikely for the following reasons:

¹² See John 19:38 – 42.

¹³ See Frank Morison, “Who Moved the Stone?” first published in 1930 at page 96.

¹⁴ See “The Jesus Inquest” supra at page 75.

¹⁵ See Matthew 28:11 – 15.

9.1.1. The disciples never believed He would rise from the dead. Why would they steal the body and concoct a story that He rose again from the dead, if they believed He never intended to do so. Peter's disbelief in this regard was chastised by Jesus Christ when He told them about his future passion and resurrection.¹⁶ The disciples would only have had a reason to steal His body and concoct a story that He rose from the dead, if they actually understood the prophecy by Jesus that He was to rise from the dead within three days.

9.1.2. The theory that the disciples stole His body is based on the premise that they did so while the guards were asleep. However, if the guards were asleep, how did they know who stole the body? This theory is self-defeating as it carries within itself its own refutation. But even if they were asleep, it seems highly improbable that they would not have been woken by the rumbling noise of the stone being moved away from the entrance to the tomb. Furthermore, it is hardly likely that the guards would have been asleep while on guard duty. In the Digest of Roman Law as codified by Justinian,¹⁷ it is recorded that the punishment for a Roman soldier sleeping while on guard duty, is one of death. The only reasonable inference to be drawn from this absurd story is that the inexplicable occurrences could only be thought away by advancing an equally absurd story.

9.1.3. The disciples were ordinary fishermen. They would never have dared to be so bold as to defy the Roman powers by breaking the Roman seal and/or attack the Roman guard in order to steal the body. To have done so would have provoked the full might of the Roman Empire upon their dear souls. One would never have expected such a bold revolt by a bunch of unbelieving fishermen who had fled the mere presence of a temple guard¹⁸ on the previous Friday night, let alone a Roman guard. Nor is it likely that the leader, Peter, who had denounced Jesus 3 times out of fear of being recognised by a servant girl¹⁹ would have exhorted them to such a bold act.

¹⁶ See Matthew 16:21 – 23; Mark 8:31 – 33.

¹⁷ See Digesta 49.16.3.6

¹⁸ See Matthew 26:47 – 56.

¹⁹ See Luke 22:56.

9.1.4. The first of His disciples to arrive at the tomb just before dawn on the Sunday morning, were His women followers. When they arrived, the tomb was already empty. It is also unlikely that they would have attempted to steal the body and so defy the Roman guard's presence, nor would they have been able to remove the heavy tombstone without assistance. It is therefore highly unlikely that they would have stolen the body.

9.1.5. If there was any truth in the charge that the disciples stole His body, then the legal question arises why no criminal charge of grave desecration or grave robbery was ever brought against the disciples? Grave desecration was a crime well known in Roman law and it was a crime frequently committed. It is noted in the "Edict of Caesar"²⁰ as follows:

*"It is my decision(concerning) graves and tombs ... Whoever has made them for the religious observances of parents, or children, or household members, that these remain undisturbed forever. But if anyone legally charges that another person has destroyed, or has in any manner extracted those who have been buried, or has moved with wicked intent those who have been buried to other places, committing a crime against them, or has moved sepulchre-sealed stones, against such a person I order that a judicial tribunal be created. Just as (is done) concerning the gods in human religious' observances, even more so will it be obligatory to treat with honour those who have been entombed. **You are absolutely not to allow anyone to move (those who have been entombed). But if (someone does), I wish the violator to suffer capital punishment under the title of tomb-breaker.**" (Emphasis added)*

This Edict proves the existence and prevalence of the crime of grave desecration which required measures to combat it. It also proves that certain graves were sealed with stones as recorded in the Gospels. The absence of any criminal charge against the disciples of having contravened this Edict, constitutes proof that the Jews themselves knew that the tomb was empty for an undisclosed reason for which the disciples could not be blamed. If the Jews believed otherwise, it would have been an easy matter for them to arrest the disciples,

²⁰ This Edict was written on a marble tablet found by a French archaeologist in Nazareth. It purports to be an Edict from an unknown Caesar. It has been dated as emanating from the first half of the first century AD.

who were preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem under their very noses, and then charge them with the crime of grave desecration.

9.2 If the disciples did not steal the body, the question arises whether the guards stole the body. This possibility can be ruled out completely. There would have been no incentive for the guards to steal the body as they were supposed to prevent it from being stolen. In any event, no one has ever suggested that they would have done so. However, some critics have suggested that there was no guard at all. In this regard Charles Foster states:

Why shouldn't there have been a guard of some sort? It might have been a Roman guard; it might have been a Jewish guard. The text is ambiguous. But it doesn't matter. The Jewish Temple guard was disciplined and effective. Either a Roman guard or a Jewish guard could expect serious punishment for dereliction of duty. That punishment may have been particularly severe if the dereliction involved the breach of a seal."²¹

9.3 It is inconceivable that the Jews would have attempted to steal the body. The Jewish leadership seems to have been the only ones that understood the import of Jesus' prophecy that He would be resurrected within three days after His death. It is precisely because they understood the true meaning of His words, that they attempted to prevent any further "deception" by the disciples by asking Pontius Pilate for a guard to be placed at the tomb.²²

9.4 The only remaining possibility is that the body was stolen by family members, grave robbers, necromancers or magicians or the gardener. The family members can be ruled out because they did not believe in the fact that Jesus was the Messiah. In fact, they thought he was out of his mind.²³ The earthly brothers of Jesus scorned Him by suggesting that he should go from Galilee to Judaea where the feast of Tabernacles was being celebrated as they suspected he may be arrested by the Jews.²⁴ Grave robbers would only have been

²¹ See "The Jesus Inquest" supra at page 131.

²² See Matthew 27:62 – 64 where it is stated: "The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 'Sir,' they said, 'we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again'. So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.'"

²³ See Mark 3:21.

²⁴ See John 7:1 – 5.

interested in the commercial value of the spices contained in the grave clothes. We know from John 19:39 that Nicodemus brought a 34 kg mixture of myrrh and aloes. However, this theory is also untenable for two reasons: First they would only have removed the grave clothes containing the spices leaving the body behind in the tomb. However, the opposite occurred, as His body was missing but the grave clothes were left behind. Secondly, robbers would have been wary of removing the entire body in the presence of guards. However, assuming they succeeded in doing so, then, of course, there was no point in stealing the body and leaving the grave clothes behind in the tomb. The existence of the grave clothes without the body completely belies the veracity of any thesis based upon the theft of the body of Jesus Christ. Necromancers or magicians would only have been interested in parts of the body. They would not have been interested in removing the entire body.

9.5 Finally, no one has ever suggested that the tomb was **NOT** empty!! This much is common cause. All, even the critics and enemies of Christianity, are agreed that the tomb was indeed empty. So why were the critics and the Jews suggesting that the body was stolen? The answer is simple – because the body had indeed gone missing while the grave clothes remained.

10. On a circumspection of all this evidence, the conclusion must inevitably be that the only reasonable inference to be drawn is that the body was not stolen or unlawfully removed from the tomb. And yet the tomb was empty!! In my view, this conclusion is proven by an overwhelming preponderance of probabilities in the light of the aforesaid analysis of the evidence and inferences to be drawn therefrom. Having rejected all these theories as to what may have happened to the body, the only other possible conclusion is that He indeed rose from the dead as he prophesied and that He appeared to his disciples thereafter as testified to in extra biblical sources and intra-biblical sources such as the Gospels and Acts.

11. But some critics still disparage the testimony of these appearances as purely psychological phenomena.

12. The Post Resurrection Appearances

12.1 Mary Magdalene was the first to see Jesus after He rose from the grave. Her testimony as to the emptiness of the tomb cannot be disputed. She eventually recognised Him by calling Him “*Rabbouni*”.²⁵ If her testimony stood alone as a single witness, it might have been criticised as a hallucination she suffered and one may then very well doubt her version that she actually saw Jesus. But she is not a single witness. Also, no criticism arising from her alleged former immoral character defects, can be utilised to discredit her evidence. This conclusion is based on a well known legal principle that the law of evidence excludes the saying: “*once a liar, always a liar,*”²⁶ because even a liar can tell a truth.

12.2 Jesus also appeared to the Emmaus travellers and explained the scriptures to them as they were walking together. He made them understand that the Scriptures referred to his life, death and resurrection. They only recognised him as being Jesus when He left them. However, their testimony constitutes eyewitness testimony of the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus Christ. It would be difficult to explain a continuous so-called psychological phenomena affecting their testimony of having seen Him alive, walking and talking over such an extended period of time during the day.

12.3 Paul heard him speak on the way to Damascus. If this experience had been a mere psychological moment of exhilaration, then it is difficult to explain why he was struck with blindness, a few days later healed and subsequently became the biggest exponent of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, he writes that 500 people, some of whom were still alive at the time of his writing, witnessed Jesus simultaneously after his resurrection. It is hardly likely that Paul would have written this statement if it were not true. If it were false, there could have been many witnesses who could have contradicted Paul in this regard. It is also highly improbable that 500 people would simultaneously

²⁵ See John 20:16

²⁶ “*Semel mentitus semper mentitur*” or “*falsum in uno falsum in omnibus*” have been expressly rejected by the Appeal Court in South Africa. See *S v Mokonto* 1971 (2) SA 319 (A) at 323A.

experience some kind of psychological hallucination that Jesus appeared live before them. It would be similar to somebody saying today, 60 years after the death of General Jan Smuts, that he was resurrected from the dead. It would be a simple matter for anyone to point to the grave where he was buried and to his descendants who are still alive who would confirm that he died and was buried and never arose from the dead.

12.4 The Gospels record 15 appearances after his death. It is hardly likely that on 15 occasions the same psychological phenomena or hallucination would have occurred to different people at different places. As stated earlier, His resurrection was preached by the disciples openly in Jerusalem and other places and the only reaction from the Jews was an attempt to scare them down by ordering them to remain silent. They never denied that the tomb was empty and that the apostles were preaching falsities in this regard. There is no documented treatise of any kind from the first century by any writer who was able to point to His grave to dispute their contentions that He had risen from the grave.

12.5 However, the **most compelling evidence** of His resurrection is not His post resurrection appearances, but the complete metamorphosis which occurred in the lives of the people who were eyewitnesses to His resurrection, something which cannot be explained away by some sort of psychological phenomena. Let us look at the facts underscoring this conclusion:

12.5.1. Peter, who was an uneducated fisherman and who had betrayed Jesus three times, suddenly turned into a bold preacher who defied the authorities and under who's preaching no less than 3000 were converted in one single day. This could only have happened if indeed he was an eyewitness do the supernatural resurrection of Jesus Christ.

12.5.2. The doubting Thomas changed suddenly in one moment from a doubter to a worshipper of Jesus Christ as his "*Lord and King*" when he saw the marks on the flesh of the risen Jesus Christ.

- 12.5.3. **Fearful** disciples who ran away on the night in Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested turned into **fearless** preachers of the good news throughout Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria and further afield.
- 12.5.4. Saul, the ardent persecutor of the early Christian Church, who stood by when Stephen was stoned by the Jews, overnight changed into a propagandist of Christianity and a world traveller who founded churches in Asia and Greece while performing many signs and wonders validating the truth of his message. He could only have done so if indeed he really met up with the risen Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus.
- 12.5.5. All of these disciples except John died martyr's deaths. Why would one die as a martyr if you know you are being persecuted for a massive hoax? One may be prepared to die if you believe it to be the truth but not if you know your proposition is false. **Madiba's** famous declaration at the end of his trial that "*if need be, I am prepared to die for my beliefs*" proves the point. History has proven his beliefs in true democratic principles to have been correct and not misguided, and he was therefore prepared to be a martyr for his beliefs.

F **CONCLUSION**

13. Now, all of the above evidence demands a verdict. To sum up, in the case of Jesus' death we have the testimony of eyewitnesses as recorded in the Gospels and Acts as well as the extra biblical sources referred to earlier. As to his resurrection, we have the testimony of eyewitnesses and their credibility being confirmed by the remarkable change in their lives as well as their martyr deaths, facts which are consistent only with them having accepted that they indeed saw and believed in a risen Christ. In my view, judgement should be entered that the case for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ had been proved by overwhelming probabilities. Personally, I no longer **believe** that Jesus had risen from death, I **know** it. Paul writing to Timothy is of like mind when he says, ... *because I **know** whom I*

believed, ...”²⁷ Also, Jesus commanded us to love God “... *with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your **mind***”²⁸ ...”. The resurrection from death of Jesus is not only a matter of faith, because the evidence exists to convince our minds of the truth thereof as well. I find some further support for my conclusion from my colleague, the barrister Charles Foster, who concludes at page 13 of his book “The Jesus Inquest”:

“The historical resurrection is easily the most probable explanation for all the data that we have. You do have to believe some remarkable things if you don’t believe the Resurrection. And I don’t have the faith to believe those things.”

14. The **aforsaid conclusion leads to another**. If Jesus can be believed concerning His oft repeated prophecy that he will suffer, die and arise from the dead after three days, it is a simple matter of logic that he can be believed in regard to everything else He said including the fact that He clearly identified himself as the “Son of Man”, a reference to being the Messiah; that He was the Son of God; sent by God; that there is life after death for an eternity; and that He will return to gather his people for His kingdom on a new earth and in a new heaven.

15. Hence, I greet you as the **first Christians** greeted one another on Easter Sunday:

“The Lord has truly risen!”

Judge Neels Claassen

30 September 2018.

²⁷ See 2 Timothy 1:12.

²⁸ See Matthew 22: 37.