



# 7

# Resurrection Theories

## Key Theme

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- God's Word is the standard we use to judge every thought.

## Key Passage

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- 1 Corinthians 15:3–28

## Objectives

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Students will be able to:

- Describe several of the common theories skeptics use to discredit the Resurrection.
- Provide biblical refutations to the false theories of the Resurrection.



## Lesson Overview



### Come On In

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Write on the board, "Can we really believe that Jesus rose from the dead?"



### Studying God's Word

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Students will watch a video describing some of the false theories that have been invented to discredit the Resurrection.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Study the Prepare to Share section. | <input type="checkbox"/> Pencils  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Go Before the Throne.               | <input type="checkbox"/> TV and DVD player or computer                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student Guides                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Resurrection Theories video clip from the Resource DVD-ROM |



# Prepare to Share

## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above with this background.

There can be no doubt in our minds that the Resurrection is one of the core doctrines of the Christian faith. Jesus Himself talked about the necessity of His Resurrection to the disciples. Luke records Jesus saying, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46–48). Notice that in saying, “Thus it is written” Jesus was referring to what was written before. And what was that? The Old Testament—the only Scriptures available at the time. God had planned from the beginning of time that Jesus would die for sinners and be raised to life on the third day. The Resurrection of Christ was just as necessary in the mind and decrees of God as the death of Christ was (1 Corinthians 15:3–4).

So, where do we see the Resurrection alluded to in the Old Testament? First, it is important to recall that all of the Old Testament was pointing forward to the coming of the Messiah. The thread of redemption is seen there as early as Genesis 3:15, where Christ’s ultimate victory over Satan is prophesied.

Peter recited Psalm 16:10 as he preached on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:31). He was confirming that the writer of Psalm 16 was referring not only to David, but to Jesus Christ, the Son of David, and His Resurrection from the dead.

It appears that even the historical account of Jonah who was swallowed by a fish and left there for three days and three nights was a foreshadowing of the death, burial, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself referred to this account as He explained to the Pharisees that just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so would the Son of Man [Jesus] be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:39–40).

The Resurrection showed clearly that Jesus Christ had the power to destroy death—the last enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26). This realization made the enemies of God shudder at the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus. But what could they do now that Jesus was alive again? The only thing they could do was seek to discredit the Resurrection. And that they quickly did. The Bible tells us that the chief priests and elders agreed to give a large

sum of money to the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb. This was to fund the lie that Jesus’s disciples had come at night and stolen the body of Jesus while the guards slept (Matthew 28:11–15). From that first week after His death even to this day, those who refuse to submit to the Lordship of Christ have invented many arguments to try and explain away the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

## HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

While the Bible speaks of Jesus showing Himself by many infallible proofs (Acts 1:3), we must acknowledge that we do not have tangible access to those proofs today. We cannot place our hands in the wounds of the resurrected Savior (John 20:27). We cannot sit beside the resurrected Jesus and join Him for breakfast (John 21:11–14). We know none of the eyewitnesses who saw and spoke with the resurrected Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:5). But we have a more reliable account to depend on. What we have is the record of all these things and more in the inspired, inerrant Word of God. We can trust all of God’s Word, including the accounts of the Resurrection.

Some, it seems, cannot be convinced or persuaded to believe the truth of the gospel. And Jesus Himself mentioned in the account of the rich man and Lazarus, that unbelievers will not be “persuaded” even though one would rise from the dead (Luke 16:31). Belief in Jesus Christ comes through the witness of Scripture and the illumination of the Holy Spirit and not from convincing arguments. To believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He bore God’s wrath for sin on the Cross, and that He rose victorious over death so that all who place their trust in Him will also be resurrected to eternal life requires more than a convincing argument or intellectual agreement to historical facts. No, belief in Jesus Christ and the Word of God comes through a heart changed by faith through grace (Ephesians 2:8). The Apostle Paul knew this and witnessed it frequently as he traveled and shared the good news of Jesus Christ—His life, death, and Resurrection. He spoke to many, and was only too aware that the message of the Cross was foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved, that message is the power of God for salvation (1 Corinthians 1:18).

This does not mean that answering legitimate questions from those who are skeptical of the Resurrection is improper. Dan Barker, president of the Freedom from

Religion Foundation and a skeptic, wrote the following about the Resurrection:

There have been many reasons for doubting the claim, but the consensus among critical scholars today appears to be that the story is a “legend.” During the 60–70 years it took for the Gospels to be composed, the original story went through a growth period that began with the unadorned idea that Jesus, like Grandma, had “died and gone to heaven” and ended with a fantastic narrative produced by a later generation of believers that included earthquakes, angels, an eclipse, a resuscitated corpse, and a spectacular bodily ascension into the clouds. The earliest Christians believed in the “spiritual” resurrection of Jesus. The story evolved over time into a “bodily” resurrection. (Dan Barker, “Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?” <https://ffrf.org/legacy/about/bybarker/rise.php>)

This is one objection to the biblical account of the Resurrection. And there are others. For example, it has been said that the person on the Cross was not Jesus. Muslims often claim that Judas took Jesus’s place on the Cross and was taken to heaven based on Surah 4:157–158 in the Quran. Consequently, according to the Muslims, if Jesus never died, He was surely never resurrected. But even the text of the Quran is self-refuting since it claims that the Jews were boasting that they killed the Messiah. And though the Jews were responsible for Jesus’s death, they never believed He was the Messiah—for no Jew would have killed anyone he considered to be Messiah.

In another source, the *Gospel of Barnabas*, it is claimed that Judas appeared and the disciples thought it was Jesus. However, this work is considered a false gospel (pseudepigrapha), and the earliest manuscripts are from the 1500s. While some did not recognize Jesus after the Resurrection, the Bible makes it clear that He appeared to many.

Another common rejection is to either deny that Jesus ever existed or to say the teachings on the Resurrection were developed later as mythical components of the spreading of the Christian teachings. But this explanation is problematic because there is no serious scholar who rejects that Jesus actually existed (though they reject He is God), and the manuscript evidence does not support such a claim, with the Resurrection being described in the earliest of writings from the church fathers. Another

claim by skeptics is that Jesus just appeared to die on the Cross, so there really wasn’t a resurrection, just a reviving of a wounded man. Well, let’s think about that. Jesus was scourged, hung on a cross for six hours, had a spear thrust into His chest, was buried in a tomb behind a giant rock, and then walked out of the tomb a few days later, not looking any worse for the wear, and convinced His disciples that He was the resurrected Lord of glory. Ideas like this just show the desperation of those who want to reject Jesus as Lord and Savior, attempting to disprove His Resurrection to do so.

Other ideas such as a mass hallucination, a séance, an apparition, or spirit, appearing to the disciples, and even alien visitations are all attempts to suppress the truth of the Resurrection and the lordship of Christ.

These dismissals of God’s Word should be addressed. And often, the objections are not even difficult to answer if we are prepared and familiar with the different opinions we may be confronted with. However, we must keep in mind that in many of these cases, the skeptics will accept a few scraps of evidence for a pagan god, and will not accept the truthfulness of the Bible.

As believers, we should rejoice that God has revealed the truth to those of us who are being saved (1 Corinthians 1:18). And with that divine revelation of the truth comes the privilege and responsibility to open our Bibles and proclaim that “truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:30–31).

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



## BEFORE THE THRONE

Praise you, Father, because of your perfect plan to send Jesus as the propitiation for sinners. Thank you, Jesus, that you were obedient to the point of death, and that you came back from the dead and now sit at your Father’s right hand. Please use this lesson to confirm in the hearts and minds of my students the truth of your Word and the truth of the Resurrection. May they be equipped to defend the truth of your Word.

## Review

Over the past two weeks we have looked at the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead and his forty days of ministry on earth before He ascended to the right hand of the throne of God. The doctrine of the Resurrection is an exceedingly important doctrine.

### ? What are the key points about the Resurrection that we must acknowledge?

*Jesus was dead on the Cross; He rose from the dead early Sunday; He rose in bodily form, leaving an empty tomb; He appeared to hundreds of disciples; His Resurrection is the hope of our own resurrection; the Father accepted the payment for sin as evidenced by the Resurrection.*

Having risen from the dead, Jesus Christ is now in a glorified body and will return just as He left. And since Jesus has been raised from the dead, then He is surely Lord over all—a fact that many of His creatures reject.

Today we are going to continue looking at the Resurrection, but from a slightly

different angle. Since Jesus is Lord, then He has authority over everyone and calls them to obedience. But we know that there are many who rebel against His lordship. In that rebellion, they seek to discredit Him. They say He never existed. They say He could not have been born of a virgin, nor could He have lived a perfect life. And they say that He could not have risen from the dead.

To this end, many people have invented different theories to discredit the perfect, sacrificial life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today, we are going to focus specifically on the attempts to discredit the Resurrection. The goal is to equip you to refute some of these common objections using the authority of Scripture. We will be exploring these ideas by watching a video that explains some of them.



## Studying God's Word

► Write on the board, “Can we really believe that Jesus rose from the dead?”

### INSTRUCTIONS

*Prepare the students for watching the video with this quote.*

Listen to this quote from the president of the Freedom from Religion Foundation regarding the Resurrection of Jesus:

There have been many reasons for doubting the claim, but the consensus among critical scholars today appears to be that the story is a ‘legend.’ During the 60–70 years it took for the Gospels to be composed, the original story went through a growth period that began with the unadorned idea that Jesus, like Grandma, had ‘died and gone to heaven’ and ended with a fantastic narrative produced by a later generation of believers that included

earthquakes, angels, an eclipse, a resuscitated corpse, and a spectacular bodily ascension into the clouds. The earliest Christians believed in the ‘spiritual’ resurrection of Jesus. The story evolved over time into a ‘bodily’ resurrection.

Claims like this are not uncommon, and there have been “documentaries” produced to discredit the Resurrection. In your Student Guides you will find a place to take some notes on this Resurrection Theories Video. *Show the video.*

## CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

I hope you can see that there are a lot of different ways people have attempted to discredit the Resurrection, but none even began to challenge the veracity of God’s revelation to us. Jesus is risen!



## Applying God’s Word

### WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

We can have assurance that Jesus is risen and has conquered death because God has revealed it to us in His Word. We have no reason to doubt that truth, and the skeptics have no real reason to reject it either. Sure, it is a miracle. Sure, we must receive it by faith. And it is not a blind faith, but a faith that is firmly rooted in God’s character and His revelation to us.

Let’s close this lesson by reading from 1 Corinthians 15:3–28 and then seek to apply some of these things. *Read 1 Corinthians 15:3–28 aloud, or have a student do so.*

1 Corinthians 15:3–28

### GOD’S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? If you have ever had some of the doubts about the Resurrection that were expressed in the video today, what was it that helped relieve those doubts? *You can also ask this question in the present tense, encouraging the students to face those doubts and trust in the Bible’s explanation to overcome them. Discuss various answers, making sure to point back to the authority of Scripture.*
- ? As we consider all of the other religious leaders (Buddha, Muhammad, Joseph Smith, etc.), how does the Resurrection distinguish Christianity from those false systems? *Only Christianity has a leader (as Savior) who predicted His death and Resurrection and then demonstrated His power over death by actually rising from the dead. All of the rest are dead, demonstrating their impotence to offer salvation.*

- ? **Some of these theories seem pretty extreme. What is the ultimate reason for these objections?** *Discuss various answers, focusing on the fact that people are rebellious toward God and don't want to submit to His lordship.*
- ? **Why is it important that we never set aside the Bible when we are discussing the truthfulness of the Resurrection with skeptics?** *The Bible is the only source that we have to understand what happened at the Resurrection and the doctrinal implications of that event. If we agree to argue by setting the Bible aside, we are acknowledging to the skeptic that the Bible is not important in answering these questions. The Bible is of supreme importance, and we should never argue apart from its truths.*
- ? **If we get caught up in the details of arguing about the Resurrection, how could we miss the importance of communicating the gospel?** *We must never forget that the goal of any apologetic argument is to point to the hope that we have in Christ. Talking about the Resurrection should be an easy place to call people to repent of their sins and trust in the Son of God for forgiveness, knowing that God has raised Him from the dead to give assurance of salvation.*



### MEMORY VERSE

**Matthew 28:18–20** And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.



### GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for raising Jesus from the dead.
- Praise God for His power over death.
- Ask God for boldness in proclaiming the gospel of a risen Savior.