

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

Below is a theory of how the idea of Jesus' resurrection evolved over time.

*Timeline of the growth of the legend*

Time	30 AD	55 AD	70 AD	80 AD	85 AD	90 AD
Event	Jesus died	Paul writes I Corinthians	Gospel of Mark written	Gospel of Matthew written	Gospel of Luke written	Gospel of John written
Resurrection: psychological or physical?	<b>Psychological</b> (Jesus is alive in the minds of the disciples)	<b>Psychological</b>	<b>Physical</b> (Jesus is alive bodily)	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Physical</b>
Extraordinary Events	None	Empty tomb, Jesus sightings	Empty tomb, one man, implied Jesus sighting	Empty tomb, one angel, earthquake, resuscitations, Jesus sighting	Empty tomb, two men, Jesus sighting, Jesus sighting	Empty tomb, two angels, Jesus sighting, Jesus sighting, fishing miracle
What context or audience?	Jewish	Gentile	Mixed, but mostly Gentile	Mixed, but mostly Jewish	Mixed, but mostly Gentile	Mixed, but mostly Gentile

The theory says that Jesus' followers initially felt that Jesus was alive **in their own minds**, and only later began claiming that he was physically alive **in his own body**. This was accompanied by more and more extraordinary events, which in this theory are embellishments and exaggerations, showing the marks of a legend in development.

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*The four Gospels: In what order were they written?*



*Timeline of the growth of the legend*

Time	30 AD	55 AD	70 AD	80 AD	85 AD	90 AD
Event	<i>Jesus died</i>	<i>Paul writes I Corinthians</i>	<i>Gospel of Mark written</i>	<i>Gospel of Matthew written</i>	<i>Gospel of Luke written</i>	<i>Gospel of John written</i>

Why do some scholars believe this order? Mostly because they project a **theory of evolution** (simple to complex) onto the Gospels. They said, 'Mark is simpler and shorter, so he *must* be first.' This theory of Mark's priority began in the mid 1800's. **But their conclusion simply restates their assumptions.** Many scholars differ, or are undecided, about the order.

Why Mark was probably not first:

- **Functional necessity:** The early Christians needed to disseminate teaching. *Matthew, Luke, and John* prioritize Jesus' teaching, while *Mark* does not. The needs of the community would have produced a *Matthew, Luke, or John* first.
- **Historical context:** Given the start of Christianity in a Jewish context, *Matthew* would have been first. This is called the 'Griesbach Hypothesis.'
- **Evidence from early Christian historians and documents:** They say or indicate that *Matthew* was written first.
- **Shorter can often mean later:** In language, literature, story-telling, and movie-making, shorter and simpler often mean *later*.
  - Language: Many languages were more complex earlier and became simpler over time.
  - Literature: Consider the Hebrew Bible: *Chronicles* was written after *Kings* (post-Babylonian Exile vs. pre-), and narrates more elapsed time, but is *shorter*.
  - Story-telling: Going from book to movie shortens the story; going from pre-production movie to final theatrical version yields deleted scenes on a DVD.
- **Literary analysis:** The presentation of the disciples in *Mark* suggests streamlining from *Matthew* and/or *Luke*.

**Markan priority is far from established, and has no scholarly consensus.**

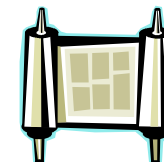
**Uncertainty about the order of the Gospels significantly undermines the 'growth of legend' theory.**

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

*Do the differences between the four Gospels matter? We have three options.*

## OPTION #1: Apply Literary Analysis to Resolve Questions

Given Hebrew literary conventions<sup>1</sup>, the four Gospels contain literary differences, but not historical discrepancies. Examples below.



*Were there men (Mk, Lk) or angels (Mt, Jn) at the tomb?* Angels. The **Old Testament literary precedent** was to describe the appearances of angels and even God as 'men' (e.g. Gen.18:2; Dan.10:5). At the same time, one suspects that Luke's description, 'two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing,' should probably not be taken to mean two *ordinary* human beings. On Mark, see below.

*Were there one (Mt, Mk) or two (Lk, Jn)?* Two. Hebrew biblical narrative and common sense allow a narrator to leave out information, but not to make up anything (Meir Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*). Matthew desires literary symmetry between beginning and end. In Mt.1 and Mt.28, we find the same elements: one angel's announcement, the fulfillment of a prediction, Gentile inclusion through Jesus, Jesus' Davidic authority, and the theme of Immanuel – 'God with us.' Matthew narrates *one angel* at the tomb to match the appearance of *one angel* to Joseph in Mt.1. Mark also desires literary symmetry between beginning and end. In Mk.1, one man, John the Baptist, directed people to Jesus. In Mk.16, *one man* directed people to the resurrected Jesus. This **principle of economy in storytelling** also explains why the lists of women vary. Each Gospel writer is probably pointing out women familiar to the Gospel writer's original audience, and not claiming to be exhaustive. Notice that John's account highlights Mary Magdalene yet, though her, refers to the other women ('we' in Jn.20:2).

*Why don't the women tell anyone about the empty tomb in Mark?* Mark uses a well-known Hebrew literary device: **the unfinished story**, where the reader supplies a response that then boomerangs back on the reader. The unfinished story occurs in Nathan's parable to David, where David responds with a judgment that boomerangs back on him (2 Sam.12:1 – 14) the Book of Jonah, the Book of Chronicles, Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (Lk.15:11 – 32), and Acts. For Mark, the desired reader response is, 'Why don't they tell anyone? What are they afraid of?' That response then challenges readers with those same questions: 'Why don't I tell anyone? What am I afraid of?'

*Did Jesus first appear to the disciples in Galilee (Mt, Mk) or Jerusalem (Lk, Jn)?* Jerusalem. Jesus also wanted to meet them later in Galilee for symbolic reasons: Galilee was where Jesus enacted ministry to Jews and Gentiles; Matthew and Mark make use of this fact to signal the start of global evangelism. Matthew and Mark knew about the Jerusalem appearances, but were simply using the principle of economy in storytelling.

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<sup>1</sup> The four Gospels employ literary techniques found in Old Testament biblical narrative. Jewish scholars of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament include: Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, *The World of Biblical Literature*; Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, James Kugel, *The Bible as It Was*; Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*. Christian scholars include: J.P. Folkemann, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*; Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was*; John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, *Old Testament Theology*. Scholars of the Gospels as literature include: Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, *The Literary Guide to the Bible*; Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* and *Through Peasant's Eyes*; Robert Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*; N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*.

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

*Do the differences between the four Gospels matter? We have three options.*

## **OPTION #2: Treat Them as Complementary Witnesses**

'The character of their narratives is like that of all other true witnesses, containing... substantial truth, under circumstantial variety. There is enough discrepancy to show that there could have been no previous concert among them; and at the same time such substantial agreement as to show that they all were independent narrators of the same great transaction, as the events actually occurred.'

- Simon Greenleaf, Harvard Law professor and attorney, *The Testimony of the Evangelists Examined by the Rules of Evidence Administrated in Courts of Justice*, 1874.



## **OPTION #3: Separate the History from the Inerrancy Question**

'Are such interventions to be excluded a priori? Put simply, this is the question: *Can one believe in miracles?*...The world contains mystery. It seems to me that, even before one gets to an act of religious faith, it is important that one is open to the mystery.'

- Peter Berger, *Questions of Faith: A Skeptical Affirmation of Christianity*, 2003, p.98, 102. One of the foremost sociologists of religion, Berger is open to Jesus' bodily resurrection, and believes adamantly in the ultimate bodily resurrection of humanity, but not strictly in the 'inerrancy of Scripture.' He shows that the resurrection has significant historical and sociological support, even separate from the biblical inerrancy question. After all, people believed in the resurrection of Jesus before the New Testament.

**Thus, focusing on the differences between the four Gospels is a dodge.  
Even if the four Gospels have differences,  
the bodily resurrection of Jesus has not been disproven at all.**

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

Adjusting the 'growth of legend' theory for more uncertainty about the Gospels' order, and for more clarity about the Gospels' content, we get this:

Timeline of the growth of the legend

Time	30 AD	55 AD	Between 40 – 90 AD
Event	Jesus died	Paul writes I Corinthians	Gospels finalized; order and dates uncertain; some could have come before Paul
Resurrection: psychological or physical?	Psychological (Jesus is alive in the minds of the disciples)	Psychological	Physical (Jesus is alive bodily)
Extraordinary Events	None	Empty tomb, Jesus sightings	Empty tomb, Jesus sightings, various
What context or audience?	Jewish	Gentile	Mixed, Jewish and Gentile

So did Paul believe in a purely spiritual, psychological 'resurrection' of Jesus?  
Or did Paul believe in a physical, bodily resurrection?

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

Below is a closer examination of the letters of Paul.

Timeline of Paul's letters & the purported development of his thought

Time	47 AD	52 AD	55 AD	57 AD	62 AD	64 – 67 AD
Event	Paul begins missionary journeys	Paul writes I Thessalonians	Paul writes I Corinthians	Paul writes Romans	Paul writes Philippians	Paul executed in Rome
Resurrection: psychological or physical?		Physical: <i>anastasis</i> (I Th.4:14)	Psychological: <i>egegetai</i> (I Cor.15:4)	Physical: <i>anastasis</i> (Rom.1:4)	Physical: <i>anastasis</i> (Ph.3:11)	

How do skeptics argue this? They say:

- (1) the word 'was raised' (*egegetai*) in I Cor.15:4 referred to Jesus being metaphorically 'alive' in the minds of the disciples, as a psychological experience.
- (2) the word 'resurrection' (*anastasis*) referred to Jesus being alive in physical, bodily form.

But this raises strange problems for understanding Paul as a person. Before and after writing *I Corinthians*, he believed that Jesus was raised bodily.

**Did Paul suddenly change his mind when writing I Corinthians? Not likely.**

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

Below is a closer examination of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

Time	47 AD	52 AD	55 AD	57 AD	62 AD	64 – 67 AD
Event	Paul begins missionary journeys	Paul writes <i>I Thessalonians</i>	<b>Paul writes <i>I Corinthians</i></b>	Paul writes <i>Romans</i>	Paul writes <i>Philippians</i>	Paul executed in Rome
Resurrection: psychological or physical?		Physical: <i>anastasis</i> ( <i>I Th.4:14</i> )	<b>Physical: <i>egeertai</i> (<i>I Cor.15:4</i>) <i>anastasis</i> (<i>I Cor.15:12ff</i>)</b>	Physical: <i>anastasis</i> ( <i>Rom.1:4</i> )	Physical: <i>anastasis</i> ( <i>Ph.3:11</i> )	

Paul's teachings in *I Corinthians* require Jesus' bodily resurrection:

## 1. Resurrection of Jesus = limited number of apostles.

There will be no more apostles, because the physical appearances of the resurrected Jesus to his followers have ended (15:1 – 11). By contrast, if anyone can 'psychologically experience Jesus', then anyone can be an apostle.

## 2. Resurrection of Jesus = future resurrection of humanity.

'Now if Christ is preached, that he was *raised* (*egeertai*) from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no *resurrection* (*anastasis*) of the dead?' (15:12) We will ultimately have a new type of physical human body, like Jesus'. We will not be disembodied souls (15:12 – 59).

## 3. Resurrection of Jesus = the classical Jewish hope for bodily resurrection is right.

Greeks expected disembodied souls. Jews expected resurrected bodies. The Jews were right (15:20 – 28).

## 4. Resurrection of Jesus = ethics of the body.

Christian teaching on sexuality is built on God placing eternal value on the human body and His design for relationships (6:12 – 20), diametrically opposed to the low Greco-Roman view of the body.

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

Do you think Paul (or someone) invented the idea of bodily resurrection **in Greco-Roman culture**?

If you had to pick a belief system, which would you pick?

DIFFICULTY:	<b><u>EASIEST</u></b>	<b><u>EASY</u></b>	<b><u>HARD</u></b>	<b><u>HARDEST</u></b>
<b>BELIEF SYSTEM:</b>	<b>CLASSICAL GREEK BELIEFS</b>	<b>JESUS RAISED 'IN SPIRIT'</b>	<b>CLASSICAL JUDAISM</b>	<b>JESUS RAISED BODILY</b>
<b>US:</b> What are we?	<b>SOUL</b> We are good, immortal souls trapped in a bad, mortal body	<b>SOUL</b>	<b>BODY &amp; SOUL</b>	<b>BODY &amp; SOUL</b> We are both; both were created good
<b>DEATH</b> is...?	<b>LIBERATION</b> of the soul	<b>?</b>	<b>THE ENEMY</b>	<b>THE ENEMY</b> God will overthrow it in a fresh new creation
<b>HOPE:</b> What is there to hope for?	<b>DISEMBODIMENT</b> the separation of soul from body	<b>?</b>	<b>RESURRECTION</b>	<b>RESURRECTION</b> God's renewal of the world, and us, affirmed by Jesus' bodily resurrection
<b>GIVE WEALTH</b> up for the poor, the weak...?	<b>NO</b> since other people's bodies are not important	<b>?</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>ABSOLUTELY YES</b> 'We share all things but our spouses.'
<b>SEX &amp; MARRIAGE</b> are...?	From <b>NEUTRAL</b> (Epicureans said have sex with anyone), to <b>BAD</b> (Stoics, Gandhi, etc. said don't have sex)	<b>?</b>	<b>UNITED &amp; GOOD</b>	<b>UNITED &amp; GOOD</b> Marriage and sex are inseparable because God designed it that way.
<b>POLITICAL POWER</b>	<b>CASTE SYSTEMS</b> tend to emerge; Greece was the first civilization to use mass slavery.	<b>?</b>	<b>WAIT FOR MESSIAH</b> Jews were legally protected by Rome	<b>JESUS IS LORD, CAESAR IS NOT</b> Die before you worship the Emperor; hence Rome killed many Christians.

Why would Paul make Christianity the **HARDEST OPTION** in a Greco-Roman context? Why would anyone believe it? Classical Judaism was similar but less difficult: It was politically protected within the Roman Empire. The idea that Jesus was only raised 'in spirit' already fit nicely with Classical Greek Beliefs. **A better explanation is that Paul inherited belief in Jesus' bodily resurrection and was able to rationally argue for it.**



# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

Adjusting the 'growth of legend' theory for Paul's belief in Jesus' bodily resurrection, we get this:

Timeline of the growth of the legend

Time	30 AD	Between 40 – 90 AD
Event	Jesus died	Gospels finalized; order and dates uncertain; some could have come before Paul
		Between 47 – 67 AD
		Paul traveling and writing
Resurrection: psychological or physical?	Psychological (Jesus is alive in the minds of the disciples)	Physical
Extraordinary Events	None	Empty tomb, Jesus sightings, Various
What context or audience?	Jewish	Mixed Jewish and Gentile

Note: Paul inherited an early Christian creed in *1 Corinthians* 15:1 – 11. It's reasonable to think that Paul embraced it at his conversion in ~36 AD, and at the latest at the start of his missionary journeys in 47 AD.

**This means that belief in Jesus' bodily resurrection predates Paul, coming as early as 30 AD (the death of Jesus) but probably well before 47 AD. It comes from the Jewish framework of belief.**

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

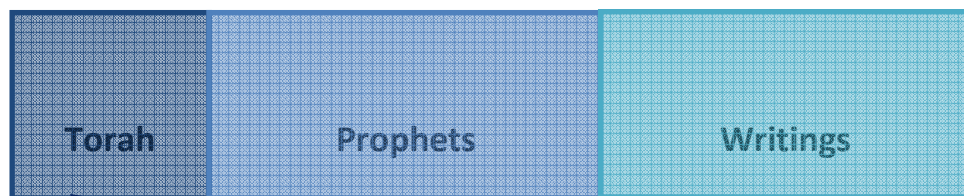
*In the first century, this is what most Jews believed about resurrection, contrasted with Greco-Roman beliefs.*

DIFFICULTY:	<u>EASY</u>	<u>HARD</u>
BELIEF SYSTEM:	CLASSICAL GREEK BELIEFS	CLASSICAL JEWISH BELIEFS
US: What are we?	<b>SOUL</b> We are good, immortal souls trapped in a bad, mortal body	<b>BODY &amp; SOUL</b> We are both; both were created good
DEATH is...?	<b>LIBERATION</b> of the soul	<b>THE ENEMY</b> God will overthrow it in a fresh new creation
HOPE: What is there to hope for?	<b>DISEMBODIMENT</b> the separation of soul from body	<b>RESURRECTION</b> God's renewal of <b>Israel</b> and the physical world
GIVE WEALTH up for the poor, the weak...?	<b>NO</b> since other people's bodies are not important	<b>YES</b> Because the body and soul were important, Jewish biblical ethics had a strong concern for the poor
SEX & MARRIAGE are...?	From <b>NEUTRAL</b> (Epicureans said have sex with anyone), to <b>BAD</b> (Stoics, Gandhi, etc. said don't have sex)	<b>UNITED &amp; GOOD</b> Marriage and sex are inseparable because God designed it that way.
POLITICAL POWER	<b>CASTE SYSTEMS</b> tend to emerge; Greece was the first civilization to use mass slavery.	<b>WAIT FOR MESSIAH; NO KING BUT GOD</b> Rome had killed many Jews until legally exempting Jews from bowing down before representations of Caesar.

*Although the sell-out Sadducee minority renounced the idea of resurrection because they were collaborators with Rome and profited from Roman occupation, the rest of the Jews hoped for **the bodily resurrection of Israelites**. In fact, it was **a fighting doctrine**, since resurrection was a future reward for standing up against the Gentiles for God, Israel, and Torah. Where did this belief come from?*

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

*Where did the Jewish belief about bodily resurrection come from?*



*Genesis 1 – 4:* God created the **physical world good**. Sin and death were problems, but God was still committed to the **goodness of the creation**.

*Isaiah:* <sup>25:6</sup> The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, And refined, aged wine. <sup>7</sup> And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, even the veil which is stretched over all nations. <sup>8</sup> **He will swallow up death for all time**, and the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth...<sup>26:13</sup> **Your dead will live; their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, for your dew is as the dew of the dawn, and the earth will give birth to the departed spirits.**

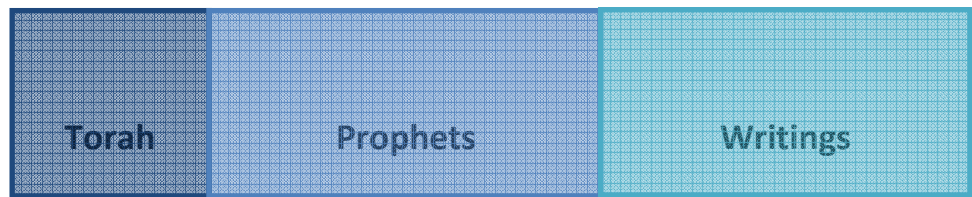
*Ezekiel:* <sup>37:1</sup> The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones... <sup>5</sup> Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. <sup>6</sup> I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.' <sup>7</sup> So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. <sup>8</sup> And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them...<sup>10</sup> and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. <sup>11</sup> Then He said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.' <sup>12</sup> Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup> Then you will know that I am the LORD, **when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves**, My people. <sup>14</sup> **I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life**, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it,' declares the LORD."

*Hosea:* <sup>6:1</sup> Come, let us return to the LORD. For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. <sup>2</sup> **He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day, that we may live before Him.**

**The bodily resurrection of Israel is both a literal hope and a metaphor/metonym for Israel's restoration from exile.**

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

*Where did the Jewish belief about bodily resurrection come from?*



*Psalms:* <sup>16:8</sup> I have set the LORD continually before me;  
Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.  
<sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices;  
**My flesh also will dwell securely.**  
<sup>10</sup> For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol;  
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.  
<sup>11</sup> You will make known to me the path of life;  
In Your presence is fullness of joy;  
In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

*Psalms:* <sup>49:14</sup> As sheep they are appointed for Sheol;  
Death shall be their shepherd;  
And the upright shall rule over them in the morning,  
And their form shall be for Sheol to consume  
So that they have no habitation.  
<sup>15</sup> **But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol,  
For He will receive me.**

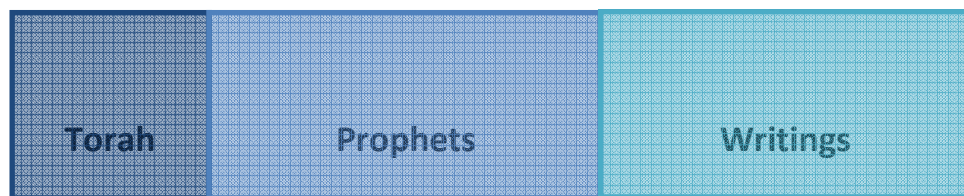
*Job:* <sup>19:25</sup> As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. <sup>26</sup> Even after my skin is destroyed, yet **from my flesh I shall see God,** <sup>27</sup> whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes will see and not another. My heart faints within me!

*Daniel:* <sup>12:2</sup> Many of **those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.** <sup>3</sup> Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

**The bodily resurrection of Israel is both a literal hope and a metaphor/metonym for Israel's restoration from exile.**

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

*Where did the Jewish belief about resurrection come from?*



**Intertestamental Writings (historical value)**

*2 Maccabees*: <sup>7:5</sup>When he was utterly helpless, the king ordered them to take him to the fire, still breathing, and to fry him in a pan. The smoke from the pan spread widely, but the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, saying, <sup>6</sup>'The Lord God is watching over us and in truth has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song that bore witness against the people to their faces, when he said, 'And he will have compassion on his servants.' <sup>7</sup>After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport. They tore off the skin of his head with the hair, and asked him, 'Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?' <sup>8</sup>He replied in the language of his ancestors and said to them, 'No.' Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done. <sup>9</sup>And when he was at his last breath, he said, 'You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but **the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws.**' <sup>10</sup>After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, <sup>11</sup>and said nobly, 'I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and **from him I hope to get them back again.**' <sup>12</sup>As a result the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man's spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing. <sup>13</sup>After he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. <sup>14</sup>When he was near death, he said, 'One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish **the hope God gives of being raised again by him.** But **for you there will be no resurrection to life!**' <sup>15</sup>Next they brought forward the fifth and maltreated him. <sup>16</sup>But he looked at the king, and said, 'Because you have authority among mortals, though you also are mortal, you do what you please. But do not think that God has forsaken our people. <sup>17</sup>Keep on, and see how his mighty power will torture you and your descendants!' <sup>18</sup>After him they brought forward the sixth. And when he was about to die, he said, 'Do not deceive yourself in vain. For we are suffering these things on our own account, because of our sins against our own God. Therefore astounding things have happened. <sup>19</sup>But do not think that you will go unpunished for having tried to fight against God!' <sup>20</sup>The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honorable memory. Although she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord. <sup>21</sup>She encouraged each of them in the language of their ancestors. Filled with a noble spirit, she reinforced her woman's reasoning with a man's courage, and said to them, <sup>22</sup>'I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. <sup>23</sup>Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, **will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again,** since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws.' (written ~125 BCE)

**The bodily resurrection of Israel is both a literal hope and a metaphor/metonym for Israel's restoration from exile.**

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

*Did the Jewish disciples invent the idea of Jesus' bodily resurrection in Jewish culture?*

*The period 163 BCE – 135 CE was filled with military, revolutionary movements as Jews struggled against Greek, then Roman oppression. For 300 years, the uniform view was: the Jewish Messiah would be military, oust the Romans, recapture Jerusalem, and rebuild the Temple.*

*Below is a greatly shortened list of such movements:*

## Timeline of Jewish Independence Movements 163 BCE to 130 CE

<b>163 BCE</b> <b>Judas Maccabeus</b> recaptures Jerusalem, cleanses the Temple, and sets a pattern	<b>40 BCE</b> <b>Hezekiah</b> leads skirmishes, revolts	<b>3 BCE</b> <b>Judas</b> leads a revolt	<b>6 CE</b> <b>Judas the Galilean</b> leads a Jewish independence movement	<b>28 CE</b> <b>Pilate</b> puts down a revolt in Jerusalem	<b>40's CE</b> <b>Jacob and Simon</b> , sons of Judas, lead a rebellion	<b>66 CE</b> <b>Menahem</b> , son or grandson of Judas, seized the Temple and burned the records	<b>67-70 CE</b> <b>John of Gischala</b> leads revolts in the Jewish-Roman War	<b>130 CE</b> <b>Bar-Kochba</b> leads the Jewish rebellion
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*In fact, when one 'Messianic hero' failed, expectations were transferred to his relative, because descent from King David was non-negotiable. Messianic hope was attached to family, at least in the case of:*

Hezekiah  
40 BCE

Judas ben Hezekiah  
(the Galilean)  
3 BCE – 6 CE

Jacob & Simon,  
sons of Judas  
40's CE

Menahem,  
son or grandson of Judas  
66 CE

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

Among Jews, belief in Jesus' resurrection was accompanied by this shift in worldview:

	FROM	TO
The Messiah	Will be a Jewish military leader	Is Jesus
The Romans are	The oppressive enemy	Loved by God, welcomed into the community
We want freedom from	Bondage to Rome	Bondage to our own evil & self-centeredness
Do we want the land?	Yes	No
Jewish law and custom are	Inviolable for everyone	Relativized for the sake of non-Jews
The Temple is	The physical building in Jerusalem	A new human community: Jesus followers
The Temple is cleansed by	Recapturing Jerusalem & purifying it	Jesus purifying humanity
The Scriptures point to	Israel's liberation from others	Israel's liberation from evil
The Messiah's death means	Defeat; you look for another Messiah, hopefully in the same family	God's loving rescue of humanity
The signs of the Messiah's victory are	Triumph over Rome & his renewal of national freedom	Jesus' triumph over death, & his renewal of humanity
Bodily resurrection?	We expect it for Israel as a whole	Jesus first, those who believe in him later

Now you evaluate. In an age filled with Jewish ethnocentric, nationalistic fervor and military revolution:

- The 'Swoon Theory':** Jesus somehow survived crucifixion and escaped the tomb, failed to deliver on any national hopes, **but persuaded many Jews to shift their entire worldview anyway.**
- The 'Stolen Body' Theory:** The earliest Jewish followers of Jesus stole Jesus' dead body, failed to deliver on any national hopes, **but persuaded many Jews to shift their entire worldview anyway.**
- The 'Mass Hallucination' Theory:** The earliest Jewish followers of Jesus all had the same delusion, failed to deliver on any national hopes, **but persuaded many Jews to shift their entire worldview anyway.**
- The 'Growth of Legend' Theory:** The earliest Jewish followers of Jesus developed the idea of resurrection over time, failed to deliver on any national hopes, **but persuaded many Jews to shift their entire worldview anyway.**
- The Christian Theory:** Jesus' resurrection **forced** his earliest Jewish followers and others, **against their own prejudices and preconceptions**, to shift their entire worldview and see the Scriptures truly.

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

*So why did belief in Jesus' resurrection start among Jews?*

Why didn't the disciples of Jesus:

## 1. GO BACK TO FISHING:

'They could simply have gone back to their fishing, glad to have escaped Jerusalem with their lives. They could have switched to a different tack, given up on messianism (as did the post-135 rabbis), and gone in for some form of private religion instead, whether of intensified Torah-observance, private gnosis, or something else. They clearly did not do that. Anything less like a private religion than going around the pagan world saying that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel would be hard to imagine.'



## 2. FIND A NEW MESSIAH:

'Equally, and perhaps even more interestingly, they could have found themselves a new messiah from among Jesus' blood relatives. This is not, I think, normally considered. It deserves to be. We know from various sources that Jesus' relatives were important and well-known within the early church. One of the closest, his brother James, though not part of the movement during Jesus' lifetime, actually appears to have become the anchorman in Jerusalem while Peter and Paul went off around the world (Acts 12:17; 15:13, 21:18; Gal. 1:19, 2:9). James was widely regarded in the early church as the person at the center, geographically and theologically. Yet—and this is the vital clue, like Sherlock Holmes's dog that did not bark in the night—*nobody in early Christianity ever dreamed of saying that James was the Messiah*. Nothing would have been more natural, especially on the analogy of the family of Judas the Galilean. Yet James was simply known as 'the Lord's brother' (Gal. 1:19; cf. Mark 6:3).'



'Their answer...was that **Jesus, following his execution on a charge of being a would-be Messiah, had been raised from the dead.**'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> N.T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Resurrection of Jesus: The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical Problem* (Originally published in *Sewanee Theological Review* 41.2, 1998. Reproduced at [http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Historical\\_Problem.htm](http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Historical_Problem.htm) by permission of the author.) Outline form and emphasis mine.



# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

Adjusting the 'growth of legend' theory for the first Jewish disciples' belief in Jesus' bodily resurrection, **we no longer have the development of a legend.**

Instead, we have **belief in Jesus' bodily resurrection** being consistently proclaimed everywhere.

Time	30 AD	Between 40 – 90 AD
Event	Jesus died	Gospels finalized; order and dates uncertain; some could have come before Paul
		Between 47 – 67 AD
		Paul traveling and writing
Resurrection: psychological or physical?	<b>Physical</b> (Jesus is alive bodily)	<b>Physical</b>
Extraordinary Events	Empty tomb, Jesus sightings, Various	Empty tomb, Jesus sightings, Various
What context or audience?	Jewish	Mixed Jewish and Gentile

Belief in Jesus' bodily resurrection was a modification of what first century Jews commonly hoped for Israel as a whole. The Jewish followers of Jesus argued that Jesus' resurrection and role was predicted in the Hebrew Bible.

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

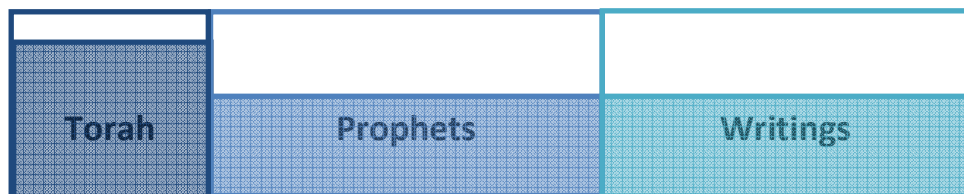
*So why did belief in Jesus' resurrection spread among Jews?  
By discussing the Hebrew Bible, **not** primarily the New Testament.*

**Persuasion by the Hebrew Scriptures: What best fits our story? What fulfills our hopes?**

- Torah: stresses Jewish ethnic identity markers and points to national hope in Messiah
- Prophets: stresses Israel's self-criticism and national hope in Messiah
- Writings: stresses Israel's national hope in Messiah



**Jesus is Messiah**



**Military Messiah**



**Rabbinical Judaism**

**'All things which are written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled' (Luke 24:44)**

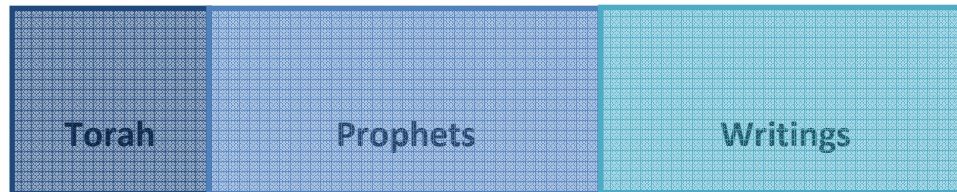
Of the three main descendants of first century Israel, **only Jesus (option #1) fulfilled all of the Hebrew Scriptures.**

The Military Messiah option (#2) claimed many passages but collapsed after Rome crushed Jewish resistance in 135 AD.

Rabbinical Judaism (option #3) focuses on ethnicity via the Torah, and places much less stress on the Prophets and Writings.

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

*So why did belief in Jesus' resurrection spread among Jews?  
By discussing the Hebrew Bible, **not** primarily the New Testament.*



## **GOD'S GOODNESS**

God's goodness, love, and justice meant that evil would be defeated one day, namely through the Messiah.

It even meant that God would resurrect those who are faithful to Him, into eternal life.



## **HUMANITY'S SIN**

But humanity's sin and corruption posed a problem. Could Israel be cleansed and resurrected? Would any other human beings? Would the line of King David?

**Torah:** Humanity sins; Israel sins.

**Prophets:** Even the line of King David sins, like everyone else (*Samuel, Kings*).

**Writings:** Is there anyone righteous? (*Psalms 51, 130, etc.*)



## **GOD WILL TRANSFORM HUMANITY**

So God must create a new humanity, somehow involving the Messiah.

**Torah:** God must transform the human heart (*Deuteronomy 30:6*).

**Prophets:** God must give us a new heart and new spirit (*Jeremiah 31:31 – 34, Ezekiel 36:26 – 36*). The Messiah will share in Israel's suffering to share his victory (*Isaiah 53*).

**Writings:** The Messiah would be righteous and victorious (*Psalms 22, 110*).

**The Christian explanation:** Jesus, the Messiah and heir of King David, shared in the disease of our self-centeredness and evil. But Jesus fought against it all the way to his death, overcoming the disease. He perfected the antibodies in himself so he could share that with us after his resurrection. In essence, Jesus cleansed his own humanity, and created a new type of humanity, a God-soaked humanity. **How else can God, who is committed to human agency, transform humanity? Except by transforming (i.e. resurrecting bodily) the Messiah into a new type of human being, and then calling us all to join ourselves to him spiritually?**

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

*For example, who has the better interpretation of Isaiah as a whole?*

<p><b>Militant &amp; Rabbinic</b></p>		<p><b>Jesus</b></p>
<p>Jerusalem will be the capital.</p>	<p><sup>2:1</sup> The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.</p>	<p>Jerusalem will be the starting point of his reign.</p>
<p>The Messiah-King will rule over Israel and the Gentile nations by his power.</p>	<p><sup>2</sup> Now it will come about that in the last days The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it.</p>	<p>Jesus as Messiah-King will rule over Israel and the Gentile nations by their voluntary assent, i.e. faith.</p>
<p>He will instantly (more or less) cause and enforce world peace.</p>	<p><sup>3</sup> And many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths.' For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.</p>	<p>He will cause peace to unfold as his movement unfolds.</p>
	<p><sup>4</sup> And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares And their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war...</p>	

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

*For example, who has the better interpretation of Isaiah as a whole?*

Militant & Rabbinic		Jesus
<p>God, speaking to the Messiah-King says, 'You will restore Israel and the Gentiles.'</p> <p>God will extend salvation from <b>idols and lies</b>.</p> <p>This refers to <b>Israel</b>. Israel will be rejected by the world, but vindicated as a nation.</p>	<p><sup>49:5</sup> And now says the LORD,          who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,          To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him          (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD,          And My God is My strength),  <sup>6</sup> He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant          To raise up the tribes of Jacob          And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;          I will also make You a light of the nations          So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.'  <sup>7</sup> Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and its Holy One,          To the despised One, to the One abhorred by the nation,          To the Servant of rulers,          'Kings will see and arise, princes will also bow down,          Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel          who has chosen You.'</p>	<p>God, speaking to the Messiah-King says, 'You will restore Israel and the Gentiles.'</p> <p>God will extend salvation from <b>idols, lies, evil, and self-centeredness</b>.</p> <p>This refers to the <b>Messiah-King</b>. He will be rejected by Israel initially, but vindicated, as in Isaiah 53.</p>

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

*For example, who has the better interpretation of Isaiah as a whole?*

<p><b>Militant &amp; Rabbinic</b></p> <p>This refers to <b>Israel</b>. Israel will be rejected by the world, but vindicated as a nation.</p> <p><b>Israel's suffering</b> is somehow God's way of redeeming the world.</p>	<p><sup>53:4</sup> Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.</p> <p><sup>5</sup> <b>But He was pierced through for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.</b></p> <p><sup>6</sup> All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him...</p> <p><sup>11</sup> As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities.</p> <p><sup>12</sup> Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.</p>	<p><b>Jesus</b></p> <p>This refers to the <b>Messiah-King</b>, not Israel (notice the contrast between <i>him</i> and <i>us</i>).</p> <p>Jesus shared in the disease of our self-centeredness. But he fought against it all the way to his death, and perfected the antibodies in himself so he could share that with us after his resurrection. Hence, for our healing, <b>Jesus shared in our suffering</b> though he did not deserve it. <b>How else can God transform humanity, except by creating a new human being, and then connecting us to him?</b></p>
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# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

*So why did belief in Jesus' resurrection spread among Jews?  
By discussing the Hebrew Bible, **not** primarily the New Testament.*

## A Closer Look: The Suffering Servant-King Prophecy of Isaiah 52:13 – 13:12

<sup>52:13</sup> Behold, My servant will prosper,

**He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.**

<sup>14</sup> Just as many were astonished at you, My people,

So His appearance was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.

<sup>15</sup> Thus He will sprinkle many nations;

kings will shut their mouths on account of Him;

For what had not been told them they will see,

and what they had not heard they will understand.

<sup>53:1</sup> Who has believed our message?

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

<sup>2</sup> For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,

and like a root out of parched ground;

He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him,

nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

<sup>3</sup> He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;

and like one from whom men hide their face, he was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Who do you think this  
refers to?

Reign

Rejection

<sup>4</sup> Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried;  
yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> **But He was pierced through for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.**

**His Death  
for Others**

<sup>6</sup> All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way;  
but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth;  
Like a lamb that is **led to slaughter**, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,  
so He did not open His mouth.

<sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment He was taken away;  
and as for His generation, who considered that He was **cut off out of the land of the living**  
for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?

**Rejection &  
Death**

<sup>9</sup> **His grave** was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man **in His death**,  
because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

<sup>10</sup> But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief;  
if He would render Himself as a guilt offering,

**He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days,**  
and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

<sup>11</sup> As a result of the anguish of His soul, **He will see it** and be satisfied;  
by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities.

**Reign &  
Resurrection**

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,  
and He will divide the booty with the strong;

Because **He poured out Himself to death**,  
and was numbered with the transgressors;  
yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.



# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

*So why did belief in Jesus' resurrection spread among Jews?  
By discussing the Hebrew Bible, **not** primarily the New Testament.*



*The Great Isaiah Scroll from the Dead Sea Scrolls. While the traditional date attributed to Isaiah – 700 BCE – is impossible to verify, it is sufficient for our purposes to discuss the complete Isaiah scroll found in Cave 1 among the Dead Sea Scrolls (along with the partial copy in Cave 1 and the other 17 partial copies found in the other Caves). A team from the University of Arizona ‘radiocarbon-dated the famous Book of Isaiah scroll at between 335 BCE and 122 BCE. Paleographers had dated this scroll at between 150 – 125 BCE.’<sup>3</sup> The Dead Sea Scrolls show that: (1) Isaiah was heavily scrutinized during the time of Jesus in anticipation of God fulfilling the prophecy; and (2) the Suffering Servant-King prophecy unquestionably existed before Jesus.*

**This and other passages show that the Messiah was to die and rise from the dead in order to bring about God’s restoration – of Israel and the world.**

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.physics.arizona.edu/physics/public/dead-sea.html> published in 1995

# Jesus' Resurrection: A Legend That Grew Over Time?

*So why did belief in Jesus' resurrection spread among Jews?*

Jesus' Death and Resurrection According to Luke	The Suffering Servant-King According to Isaiah
Jesus quotes Isa.53:12 in Lk.22:37, 'and he was numbered with transgressors,' showing his awareness of being the Suffering Servant. This refers first to the sword-bearing disciples, who will be mistaken for revolutionaries, and later to the two criminals. It marks off the beginning of the crucifixion narrative.	And was numbered with the transgressors (Isa.53:12)
I find no guilt in this man. (23:4) ...I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against him. (23:14)...No, nor has Herod, for he sent him back to us, and behold nothing deserving of death has been done by him. (23:15)...Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in him no guilt demanding death. (23:22) Certainly this man was innocent (23:47)	He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in his mouth (Isa.53:9)
And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing him vehemently. (23:10)...The people stood by, looking on, and even the rulers were sneering at him. (23:35)...The soldiers also mocked him. (23:36)...And one of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at him. (23:39)	Yet we ourselves esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted (Isa.53:4)
And he questioned him at some length, but he answered him nothing. (24:9)	Like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so he did not open his mouth (Isa.53:7)
And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified him and the criminals. (23:33)...But Jesus was saying, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' (23:34)...Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in paradise. (23:43)...[The two Emmaus road disciples walk with Jesus and their eyes are opened – a scene that comes from Genesis and the Fall where two people walk with God and their eyes are opened, only this time it is used to describe the return to paradise.]	He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our peace fell upon him, and by his scourging we are healed (Isa.53:5, 11-12)
And two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with him. (23:32)...And behold, a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man...and he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. (24:50-53)	His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet he was with a rich man in his death (Isa.53:9)
Jesus rose from the dead (24:1 – 12)	He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied (Isa.53:10 – 11).
Jesus' death and resurrection extends forgiveness to all nations; he tells his disciples to proclaim this (24:47)	Thus he will sprinkle <i>many nations</i> , kings will shut their mouths on account of him (Isa.52:13)
'Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: 'He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearers is silent, so he does not open his mouth. In humiliation his judgment was taken away; who will relate his generation? For his life is removed from the earth.' The eunuch answered Philip and said, 'Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?' Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture <b>he preached Jesus</b> to him.' (Acts 8:32 – 35)	The eunuch was reading Isaiah 53. Philip explains it as being fulfilled by Jesus.

**Jesus' life, death, and resurrection fit the hope and story of the Hebrew Bible.**