A PUBLIC EXECUTION ASSURED HIS DEATH.

During the Jewish Feast of Passover, Jesus was swept away by an angry crowd into a Roman hall of justice. As He stood before Pilate, the governor of Judea, religious leaders accused Jesus of claiming to be the king of the Jews. The crowd demanded His death. Jesus was beaten, whipped, and sentenced to a public execution. On a hill outside of Jerusalem, He was crucified between two criminals. Brokenhearted friends and mocking enemies shared in His deathwatch. As the Sabbath neared, Roman soldiers were sent to finish the execution. To quicken death, they broke the legs of the two criminals. But when they came to Jesus they did not break His legs, because from experience they knew He was already dead. As a final precaution, however, they thrust a spear into His side. It would take more than resuscitation for Him to ever trouble them again.

IN SPITE OF GUARDS, THE GRAVE WAS FOUND EMPTY.

On the morning after the Sabbath, some of Jesus’ followers went to the grave to anoint His body. But when they arrived, they were surprised at what they found. The huge stone that had been rolled into place over the entrance to the tomb had been moved, and Jesus’ body was gone. As word got out, two disciples rushed to the burial site. The tomb was empty except for Jesus’ burial wrappings, which were lying neatly in place. In the meantime, some of the guards had gone into Jerusalem to tell the Jewish officials that they had fainted in the presence of a supernatural being that rolled the stone away. And when they woke up, the tomb was empty. The officials paid the guards a large sum of money to lie and say that the disciples stole the body while the soldiers slept. They assured the guards that if the report of the missing body got back to the governor, they would intercede on their behalf.

A HIGH OFFICIAL SECURED THE GRAVESITE.

The next day, religious leaders again met with Pilate. They said Jesus had predicted He would rise in 3 days. To assure that the disciples could not conspire in a resurrection hoax, Pilate ordered the official seal of Rome to be attached to the tomb to put graverobbers on notice. To enforce the order, soldiers stood guard. Any disciple who wanted to tamper with the body would have had to get by them, which wouldn’t have been easy. The Roman guards had good reason for staying alert—the penalty for falling asleep while on watch was death.

HIS APOSTLES WERE DRAMATICALLY CHANGED.

When one of Jesus’ inner circle defected and betrayed Him, the other apostles ran for their lives. Even Peter, who earlier had insisted that he was ready to die for his teacher, lost heart and denied that he even knew Jesus. But the apostles went through a dramatic change. Within a few weeks, they were standing face to face with the ones who had crucified their leader. Their spirit was like iron. They became unstoppable in their determination to sacrifice everything for the one they called Savior and Lord. Even after they were imprisoned, threatened, and forbidden to speak in the name of Jesus, the apostles said to the Jewish leaders, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). After they were beaten for disobeying the orders of the Jewish council, these once-cowardly apostles “did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42).

WITNESSES WERE WILLING TO DIE FOR THEIR CLAIMS.

History is full of martyrs. Countless men and women have died for their beliefs. For that reason, it is not that significant to point out that the first disciples were willing to suffer and die for their faith. But it is significant that while many will die for what they believe to be the truth, few if any will die for what they know to be a lie. That psychological fact is important because the disciples of Christ did not die for deeply held beliefs about which they could have been honestly mistaken. They died for their claims to have seen Jesus alive and well after His resurrection. They died for their claim that Jesus Christ had not only died for their sins but that He had risen bodily from the dead to show that He was like no other spiritual leader who had ever lived.

MANY PEOPLE CLAIMED TO HAVE SEEN HIM ALIVE.

About A.D. 55, the apostle Paul wrote that the resurrected Christ had been seen by Peter, the 12 apostles, more than 500 people (many of whom were still alive at the time of his writing), James, and himself (1 Corinthians 15:5-8). By making such a public statement, he gave critics a chance to check out his claims for themselves. In addition, the New Testament begins its history of the followers of Christ by saying that Jesus “presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by [the apostles] during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).
YOU’RE NOT ALONE if you find yourself honestly unconvinced about whether Christ rose from the dead. But keep in mind that Jesus promised God’s help to those who want to be right with God. He said, “If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether My teaching comes from God or whether I speak on My own” (John 7:17 NIV).

If you do see the reasonableness of the resurrection, keep in mind that the Bible says Christ died to pay the price for our sins, and those who believe in their heart that God has raised Him from the dead will be saved (Romans 10:9-10). The salvation Christ offers is not a reward for effort, but a gift to all who in light of the evidence put their trust in Him. To accept God’s gift of forgiveness and everlasting life, you can pray something like this: “God, I know I’m a sinner. I know I can’t save myself. I believe Jesus died on the cross for my sins. I believe He rose from the dead to live His life through all who believe in Him. I now receive Him as my Savior. I accept Your offer of forgiveness and everlasting life. Thank You, Father. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.”

If you made a decision to put your trust in Christ, let us know by letter or e-mail (rbc@rbc.org) and you will receive, without cost or obligation, devotional and Bible-study materials designed to help you grow in your new life as a child of God. Also, pray for God to lead you to a church that faithfully teaches the Bible in a spirit of love and Christlikeness.

For more information, or for a catalog of our resources (which includes other 10 Reasons To Believe brochures), write to RBC Ministries at:

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