



7. THE DISCIPLES WERE RADICALLY TRANSFORMED

Before the resurrection, Jesus' disciples were confused and fearful. They fled when Jesus was arrested. Three times, Peter denied knowing him. As Jesus breathed his last on the cross, only a handful of disciples stuck around.

But then something changed. The disciples were transformed from frightened followers to fearless founders of a brand new way of life. They preached with boldness, performed miracles, and defied great opposition to take the gospel across the known world. Paul's transformation was especially amazing: he went from zealously persecuting Christians to becoming Christianity's chief proponent.

Something must have happened to turn the lives of these disciples around so dramatically. That something was Jesus' resurrection.

8. WITNESSES WILLINGLY DIED FOR THEIR CLAIMS

Many people have died as martyrs throughout history, sacrificing their lives for what they believed was true. However, almost no one dies for something they fear is false or know is a lie.

Ten of Jesus' twelve disciples were martyred for their faith — the only exceptions being Judas Iscariot, who committed suicide, and the apostle John, who died of old age. What got them killed was their eyewitness testimony that Jesus rose from the dead and now reigns as Saviour.

To avoid being beheaded, crucified upside-down or sawed in half, all Jesus' closest companions had to do was retract their claims about his resurrection. If they had doubts or had knowingly lied, surely some of them would have recanted to avoid such a cruel end. Instead, they died as martyrs, providing further evidence Jesus really did conquer the grave.

9. JEWISH BELIEVERS CHANGED THEIR DAY OF WORSHIP

Before the first Easter, the Jews had been observing the Sabbath for over 1,300 years. More than just a custom, it was part of God's sacred law that they must rest and worship on Saturday, the last day of the week (Exodus 20:8-11). As faithful Jews, Jesus and his disciples also obeyed the Sabbath.

But everything changed after Jesus' resurrection. Suddenly, the Christian community began meeting on Sundays, the first day of the week. Their rationale was simple: Jesus' tomb was found empty on the first day of the week, as every gospel writer had affirmed (Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1-2, Luke 24:1, John 20:1).

By changing the day of the week on which they practised Sabbath, these Jewish believers were declaring publicly that the Messiah had arrived and was risen. Their confidence to break with centuries of tradition and fashion a new weekly calendar is further proof that Jesus really did rise again.

10. CHRISTIANITY SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE

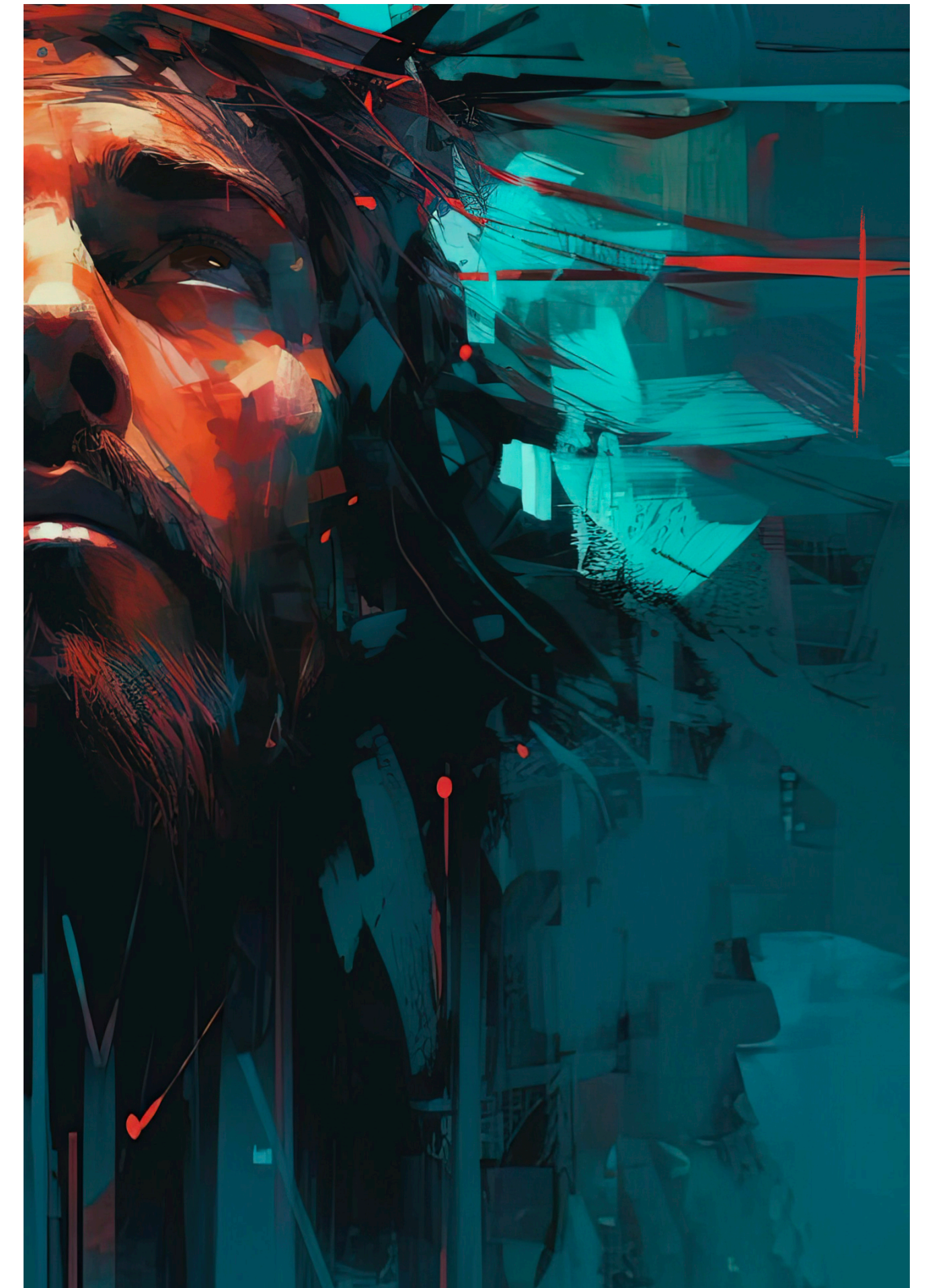
Just before he ascended, Jesus told his followers, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8). And he was right: the early church moved out in waves across the Roman Empire, their message spreading like wildfire.

The movement had every reason to fail. Their claims sounded far-fetched. Their leaders were beset by weakness and failure. They were hunted by the state and often chased out of town. Yet Christianity kept spreading — within a few generations reaching as far as India, Spain, Persia and North Africa.

Wherever followers of Jesus went, they cared for the poor, defended the outcast, fought against injustice, and told the world of a hope beyond the grave. The message of the risen Saviour still resounds today. Jesus' resurrection changes everything.

How will you respond this Easter?

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10 REASONS TO BELIEVE EASTER REALLY HAPPENED

Jesus Christ is arguably the central figure of history. This Easter, 2.4 billion people will celebrate his resurrection. But how do we know if Jesus really did rise from the dead?

Christians believe Jesus is not merely a dead hero, but God in flesh and the living Saviour. The apostle Paul wrote, "if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

Jesus' resurrection really matters. Consider 10 reasons that Easter is not a legend or a fairy tale, but true history.

1. JESUS REALLY DIED

Some have suggested that Jesus merely fell unconscious on the cross and later revived in the tomb. But there is no way he could have survived crucifixion. The Romans invented crucifixion not just for torture but for capital punishment. The soldiers attending Jesus were trained executioners.

Crucifixion forced its victims to lift themselves up to draw breath. If they stopped doing this, they died of asphyxiation. When the guards found Jesus, he had stopped moving, making it certain that he was already dead (John 19:32-33).

It's not just the New Testament authors who affirmed Jesus' death but many non-Christian writers from the ancient world too — including Thallus, Josephus, Tacitus, Lucian of Samosata, Mara Bar-Serapion and Celsus.

2. THE GRAVE WAS SECURE

Another theory is that Jesus' disciples stole his body and lied about him rising from the dead. In fact, the Jewish leaders predicted this and asked Pilate to post guards at Jesus' tomb to prevent such a conspiracy (Matthew 27:63-64).

In doing so, ironically, they helped foolproof history for us. The Roman soldiers stationed at Jesus' tomb were highly trained and disciplined. If they fell asleep on the job, they faced the death penalty.

On seeing an angel move the stone to reveal an empty tomb, the guards were terrified and immediately reported what had happened. The Jewish leaders then bribed them to claim the disciples stole the body (Matthew 28:11-15). In other words, everyone knew the truth: Jesus' grave was secure.

3. THE BODY WAS MISSING

The best evidence for Jesus' resurrection is, of course, the empty tomb. After the guards saw that Jesus' body was missing, a group of women observed the empty grave, followed by John and Peter. When Peter stepped inside, he saw Jesus' burial clothes neatly folded (John 20:6-7). It was hardly a scene consistent with a grave robbery: who would take the time to strip the body — and even fold the linen?

Some have suggested the disciples visited the wrong tomb and mistakenly concluded that Jesus had risen. But why would Jesus' followers launch an entire movement without first verifying the one claim on which it all hinged?

Also, if Jesus' body was in a different tomb, why didn't the authorities recover it and parade his corpse in public to disprove the unruly Christian movement once and for all? The reason is simple: Jesus' body really was missing.

4. HUNDREDS SAW JESUS ALIVE

Around a dozen people bore witness to Jesus' empty grave. Far more significant is that hundreds of people saw him alive.

Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene and several other women, followed by Peter, then two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He also appeared to large groups of disciples on many occasions — including in a locked room, on the beach for breakfast, and at his ascension.

The apostle Paul writes that some 500 people saw Jesus back from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). Paul wrote these words around A.D. 53, just 20 years after Jesus' resurrection, when most of the witnesses were still alive. Paul was telling his critics: "Ask them. See for yourself that what I say is true."



5. THE KEY WITNESSES WERE WOMEN

It is striking that some of the first witnesses of the empty tomb and the risen Christ were women. In the ancient Near East, the testimony of women was considered less reliable than that of men. In fact, a woman's testimony was often not even admissible in court.

If the gospel writers were spinning tales about Jesus coming back from the dead, they almost certainly would have portrayed men as key witnesses, lest they undermine their own story's credibility.

The fact that all four gospel writers portray women as key witnesses to the resurrection (Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-11, Luke 24:1-11, John 20:1-18) strongly suggests the writers were being honest, and simply recording events that really happened.

6. THE RESURRECTION ACCOUNTS VARIED

Sceptics say the inconsistencies between Matthew, Mark, Luke and John prove the Easter story was made up. For example, the four writers disagree on who was with Mary Magdalene that morning, whether the women went before or after dawn, and if one or two angels were at the tomb.

Actually, a closer look suggests the opposite.

Four matching narratives would look suspicious, like they had colluded to fabricate their story, or all copied a single dubious source. The same is true today: criminal investigators assume witnesses with identical accounts collaborated to tell a lie or were coached by an outsider.

However, divergent but compatible accounts provide strong evidence a story is genuine. And the gospel accounts are compatible: Mary was accompanied by a large group of women, though not all writers mentioned every one. The women left for the tomb when it was dark and arrived when the sun had risen. Two angels were present, though one played a prominent speaking role.

Far from sowing doubt, the four varying accounts found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John read like true history.