



# Links Players

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## The Resurrection Is Not A Legend

*And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith...And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile....(1 Corinthians 15:14-17, NIV)*

One of my favorite golf books is *The Legend of Bagger Vance* by Steven Pressfield. The fictional account tells the story of a golf match between Bobby Jones, Walter Hagen, and a local Georgia golfer---Rannulph Junah, a one-time accomplished golfer who had fallen on hard times.

A mysterious caddie, Bagger Vance, agrees to caddy for Junah and guide him through the suspense-filled match. While it is both entertaining and humorous, it is still a work of fiction about a legend named Bagger Vance.

As we approach Easter, we should keep in mind that this season is about much more than hams, easter egg hunts, and fancy new spring clothes. It is a wonderful time to share the Gospel message with family members, friends, and anyone else in our sphere of influence—that Jesus died, was buried, and rose from the dead to save us! To do so, we must be prepared to explain the reality of the Resurrection with gentleness and respect.

One of the most common objections that skeptics and non-believers raise in opposition to the accounts of the Resurrection is that they are merely legends. They claim that the story of Jesus' resurrection is not a historical event but rather a legendary embodiment of the popular hopes and beliefs of the early Christian community created by second-century writers.

Contrary to this "Legend Theory," the historical evidence and the nature of early Christian writings establish that the resurrection was not a late-developing legend but rather a core belief held by the earliest Christians based on their experiences and the historical events they witnessed.

Modern apologists like Lee Strobel and William Lane Craig rely on a well-accepted proposition established by the work of A. Sherwin-Williams, a classical historian from Oxford, who concluded that at least two full generations (and perhaps more) were required for a legend to develop and to wipe out a solid core of historical truth. If the "Legend Theory" is correct, that legend would not have developed until the second century, more than 70 years after Jesus died in 30 AD.

Among New Testament scholars, it is widely accepted that the four gospels were written between 70 and 95 AD, well before the passing of two or more generations. Insufficient time had passed for the Resurrection account in all four gospels to have become legends.

Not only do the Gospel accounts fail to fit the “Legend Theory,” but other New Testament writings do not fit the theory either. One of the earliest creeds professing Jesus’ resurrection is 1 Corinthians 15:3-7. It was written between 53 and 55 AD, less than 25-30 years after the Resurrection.

Several non-Christian biblical scholars, including Gerd Ludemann and Michael Goulder, have dated this creed to within two to three years after Jesus’ death. Another prominent New Testament scholar, James D. G. Dunn, dates the creed to within months of Jesus’ death.

The early dating of the Resurrection accounts effectively refutes any “Legend Theory” because it demonstrates that these early writings and creeds existed long before any legend could have developed in the second century.

A second equally persuasive basis for debunking the “Legend Theory” is the fact that over 516 eyewitnesses saw Jesus after he rose from the dead. In both the gospels and Paul’s letters, we read about the more than 500 people who witnessed the resurrected Christ and his numerous appearances to Mary and others at the empty tomb and later to the apostles and disciples.

When the gospel accounts were formed, most of these eyewitnesses were still alive and could attest to the truthfulness of the accounts. They were available to verify what did and did not occur and would have functioned as a check on any “legends” that might have developed in the years following the Resurrection.

While there are other persuasive arguments that refute the “Legend Theory,” these two arguments are the most persuasive and easiest to understand and communicate in a concise and cogent manner to friends, family, and others.

The Resurrection is not a legend; it is the TRUTH!

**PRAYER: Heavenly Father, as we approach this Easter Season, we give you thanks for the gift of your Son, who died for our sins and rose again from the dead. We live in the hope and truth of the Resurrection.**

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Mark Olsen

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