

The Aftermath

Part 1 of 3: Leader Preparation Guide

■ Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group examines what happened next: proclamation in the checkable city within weeks, devout Jews moving their holy day, eyewitnesses accepting death rather than retraction, and Rome's own records of a movement that an execution failed to stop. The full external dossier is read at the table.

Catholic Touchstone. CCC 156: the Church's growth, holiness, and stability are among the motives of credibility; and CCC 2174: the Church worships on Sunday because Christ rose "on the first day of the week."

■ What You Need to Know

Tonight moves from the event to its wake, and the wake is evidence of a peculiar kind: public, datable, and conceded by enemies. First, geography and timing. The proclamation did not begin a safe distance away or a safe generation later; it began in Jerusalem, within weeks, at a pilgrimage festival, minutes' walk from the tomb (Acts 2). Peter's recorded argument even cites the checkable local landmark: David "both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day" (Acts 2:29), the pointed contrast being a second tomb nearby about which no such thing could be said. Preaching a bodily resurrection beside a occupied tomb is a strategy with a half-life of one afternoon. The movement's survival of its own falsifiability conditions, in the one city where they could be enforced, demands explanation.

Second, the sabbath. The witnesses were observant Jews for whom the seventh day was covenant identity, guarded for centuries at the cost of martyrdoms. Within the earliest documentary layer we find them gathering "on the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2), and within two generations the practice is simply assumed: St. Ignatius describes believers of Jewish formation "no longer keeping the sabbath but living in accordance with the Lord's day, on which also our life arose," and Pliny's interrogations extract that Christians met "on a fixed day before dawn." Religious bodies do not casually relocate their axis of worship. Something anchored to a specific day of the week stands at the origin, and every early source names the same anchor: the resurrection (CCC 2174).

Third, the price. Handle the martyrdom argument with the precision Session 5 established: many die sincerely for false beliefs received secondhand; these men died for claims they were in a position to verify personally. The argument is not that martyrdom proves the resurrection; it is that martyrdom proves the witnesses' sincerity, and sincere witnesses this early, in these numbers, with this variety, eliminate conspiracy outright and leave only the theories already tested. Tonight's dossier adds Rome's perspective: Tacitus, unwillingly, records that the "superstition" was "checked for the moment" by the execution and then "again broke out"; Pliny, a governor begging the emperor for guidance, records ordinary people singing "to Christ as to a god" and refusing to curse him under threat of execution; and the Testimonium of Josephus, read critically in its minimal reconstruction, still attests the condemnation under Pilate and a tribe of Christians "not extinct at this day." Finally Gamaliel's principle from inside the Sanhedrin itself (Acts 5:38-39) and Augustine's dilemma from Session 1, now cashable: either the miracles happened, or the world was converted without them, which would be the greater miracle.

A fidelity note: keep CCC 597 at hand again tonight wherever the Jerusalem authorities appear, and keep the tone of the whole night wonder, not scorekeeping. The aftermath is not a gotcha; it is a fact the size of a civilization, sitting quietly behind every date your friend has ever written.

▪ Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight's hunt starts from Peter's defense before the council: the builders' rejected stone become the head of the corner (Acts 4:11). The group hunts the source and finds Psalm 118:22, then reads two verses further: "This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps 118:24). The psalm the apostles reached for to explain the reversal sits two lines from the verse the Church has sung on Easter morning ever since, and the group will find the adjacency themselves. Thread 3 grows a Sunday branch.

▪ Voices of the Church

St. Ignatius of Antioch • *Letter to the Magnesians 9, c. AD 107*

"...no longer observing the sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death." (Ante-Nicene Fathers translation, lightly abridged.) A bishop formed within living memory of the apostles describes the change of day as an accomplished fact needing no defense, and names its cause in passing: the day our life sprang up.

St. Justin Martyr • *First Apology 67, c. AD 155*

Justin, explaining Christian worship to the emperor, writes that on "the day called Sunday" all who live in city or country gather in one place for the memoirs of the apostles, the prophets, the prayers, and the bread and wine, "because it is the first day, on which God... made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead." (Ante-Nicene Fathers translation, abridged.) The reason attached to the day, in the earliest description of the Sunday assembly we possess, is the resurrection.

St. Polycarp of Smyrna • *The Martyrdom of Polycarp 9, c. AD 155*

Ordered to revile Christ and save his life, the aged bishop, a disciple of St. John the Apostle himself, answered: "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?" (Ante-Nicene Fathers translation.) One handshake from the eyewitnesses, the price was still being paid, and still being judged worth it.

▪ Catechism Connection

- **CCC 156:** the Church's growth, holiness, fruitfulness, and stability among "the most certain signs" of credibility, adapted to every mind.
- **CCC 2174:** "Jesus rose from the dead 'on the first day of the week'"; Sunday, the "Lord's Day," commemorates it as the new creation's first morning.
- **CCC 597:** repeated tonight wherever the events touch the Jerusalem leadership: no collective responsibility then, none now.

▪ Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH • leader only

Ledger. Four candidate lines tonight, the study's largest harvest. After signing, tell the group plainly: the evidence phase is complete. Next week, the verdict.

Thread 3. Psalm 118:22-24 via Acts 4:11: the rejected stone and the day the LORD has made.

Housekeeping for Session 7. Confirm all three will attend; the verdict night does not work with two. Bring the sealed envelopes next week. Do not open them tonight, and say so with a smile if asked.

▪ **Leading This Study Well**

LEADING THIS STUDY WELL • leader only

The dossier belongs to him. Let your friend read the source cards aloud tonight; hostile and neutral voices land differently in a skeptic's own voice. Pause after each card and ask him first, before anyone else speaks, what it establishes and what it does not.

Concede the limits of each source cheerfully. Tacitus confirms execution and explosion, not resurrection. Pliny confirms worship, not warrant. The Testimonium is partly interpolated and the card says so. The dossier's power is convergence, and convergence only persuades a mind that has watched each strand weighed honestly.

Watch the temperature. This is the last evidence night, and the temptation to press for a conclusion is at its peak. Resist it completely. Next week has a structure for conclusions; tonight only gathers.

▪ **Session Goals**

1. The group weighs the Jerusalem factor: proclamation beside the tomb, within weeks.
2. The group discovers Psalm 118:22-24 behind Acts 4:11 and the Sunday shift behind Acts 20:7.
3. The full external dossier is read aloud: Tacitus, the Testimonium critically presented, Pliny, with Suetonius noted.
4. The martyrdom argument is stated with precision: sincerity, not truth, is what dying proves, and sincerity is what the case needs.
5. Ledger lines proposed; evidence phase closed.

▪ **Time Note**

75 to 90 minutes, and tonight runs long if unmanaged; the dossier is rich. If you must cut: the Suetonius note and Win question 2. Never cut Pliny or the Psalm 118 hunt.

The Aftermath

Part 2 of 3: Discussion Guide

▪ Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord, tonight we read what friends and enemies wrote after that morning. Let every voice be heard fairly, including the ones that despised you. Amen.

▪ Win

1. Can you think of a movement in history that grew *because* it was persecuted? What does suppression usually do to a false claim with living witnesses against it?
2. What is the oldest weekly habit in your own life? What would it take to move it permanently to a different day?

▪ Build

Read aloud: Acts 2:22-24, 29-33, then 2:36.

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

Acts 2:32 (RSV2CE)

1. Locate this speech in space and time: what city, how long after the crucifixion, before what audience? Peter even points at a tomb in verse 29. Why does the geography matter as much as the content?

ANSWER • share after the discussion

Jerusalem, at Pentecost, roughly seven weeks after the execution, before festival crowds including residents who had witnessed it. Peter's own argument leans on a checkable tomb: David's "is with us to this day," the unstated contrast being the nearby tomb of which that could not be said. Every listener could walk to the site before supper. A movement that begins its public life beside its own falsification point, and survives, has either verified itself or benefited from an enemy blunder no ancient enemy ever explains. The counter-story we read in Session 3 conceded the tomb was empty; tonight shows why they needed a counter-story at all.

2. Read Acts 4:13-20. The council can flog and threaten; what is the one thing the record never shows them doing? And what do Peter and John say they cannot do?

ANSWER • share after the discussion

The council never produces a body or disputes the emptiness of the tomb; they work entirely on suppression: "speak no more to any one in this name." The apostles' answer is testimony language: "we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (4:20). Not what we hope, what we deduced, or what we were told: what we have seen. That claim, in that city, before that bench, is either true or suicidal.

3. Discovery hunt: in Acts 4:11 Peter calls Jesus "the stone which was rejected by you builders." Hunt the psalm he is quoting, then read two verses past it. What do you find sitting next door?

ANSWER • share after the discussion

Psalm 118:22, then, two lines on: "This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (118:24). The psalm the apostles used to interpret the great reversal carries, in its very next breath, the

verse the Church has sung on Easter morning ever since. The group has just walked the same two verses the first believers walked. Thread 3 grows a branch: the scriptures did not only predict a vindication; they supplied its morning song.

4. Read Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2. What day are the believers, most of them observant Jews, now gathering and collecting on? Rank how strange that is.

ANSWER • share after the discussion

“The first day of the week.” For men whose people had died rather than break the sabbath, relocating the axis of the week is close to relocating their identity, and the sources treat it as already routine, needing no argument. Institutions do not drift off their founding day; they are knocked off by events. Every early explanation on record, from Ignatius to Justin (Voices tonight), names the same event, and the Church still names it (CCC 2174). Sunday is the resurrection’s footprint in the calendar, visible on your friend’s phone this minute.

The External Dossier

Your friend reads each card aloud. After each: what does this establish, and what does it not?

SOURCE CARD • read aloud at the table

Tacitus, Annals 15.44 (fuller excerpt)

Roman senator and historian, c. AD 116, explaining whom Nero blamed for the fire of Rome. Translation: Church and Brodribb (1876), public domain.

“Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome...”

Establishes, from a contemptuous pen: the execution under Pilate; a movement “checked” by it that inexplicably “again broke out” in Judea first; Christians in Rome in numbers worth scapegoating within about thirty years. Does not establish: anything about a resurrection. Tacitus records the effect and shrugs at the cause.

SOURCE CARD • read aloud at the table

Flavius Josephus, Antiquities 18.63-64 (the Testimonium Flavianum), read critically

Jewish historian, c. AD 93. Translation: William Whiston (1737), public domain. Printed with its problem stated.

“Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man... a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure... And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him... And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.”

The received text also contains overtly Christian phrases (“if it be lawful to call him a man,” “He was the Christ,” a resurrection report) that most scholars judge later Christian interpolation into an authentic core; we have omitted them above in line with widely used critical reconstructions such as John P. Meier’s. Even the pruned core establishes: Jesus, the condemnation under Pilate at the instance of some leaders (remember CCC 597), continuing devoted followers, and Christians persisting sixty years on. It does not establish the resurrection, and honest use of this source never claims it does.

SOURCE CARD • read aloud at the table

Pliny the Younger, Letters 10.96, to the Emperor Trajan

Roman governor of Bithynia, c. AD 112, asking how to handle Christians in his courts. Standard public domain translation, abridged.

Pliny reports that those denounced as Christians were given three chances to recant, offering incense to Caesar's image and cursing Christ, "none of which things, it is said, those who are really Christians can be forced into performing." The genuine ones affirmed that their whole fault was meeting "on a fixed day before dawn" to "sing responsively a hymn to Christ, as to a god," and to bind themselves by oath against theft, adultery, and fraud. He notes the "contagion" had spread through cities, villages, and farms, emptying the temples, and that he executed those who would not recant. A close summary with brief quotation.

Establishes: within eighty years, ordinary provincials of every rank worshipping Christ as divine on a fixed day, and choosing death over a pinch of incense. Does not establish: what happened in AD 30. It establishes what the people nearest to it were willing to die about, under a neutral magistrate's own seal. (A note also for completeness: Suetonius, Life of Claudius 25, mentions Rome's Jews rioting "at the instigation of Chrestus," probably a garbled reference to Christ disputes in Rome by the 40s; it is disputed, and we hang nothing on it.)

5. Read Acts 5:34-39, the counsel of Gamaliel, Paul's own teacher, from inside the council. State his test in your own words. Then recall St. Augustine's dilemma from Session 1. Two thousand years on, how does the test read?

ANSWER • share after the discussion

Gamaliel: failed messiahs' movements scatter when the man dies, as Theudas's and Judas the Galilean's did; "if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them." Every comparison movement he named is a footnote; this one outlived the council, the Temple, and the empire that crucified its founder. Augustine's fork sharpens the point: either the attested signs were real, or the world was won without them, by fishermen, against every power, which would be the stranger miracle. Neither prong is comfortable for the theories on our table. That is the whole argument of the aftermath, and the ledger will now carry only its facts, not its conclusion; the conclusion is next week's work.

DIG DEEPER

On dying for a lie: state the argument's precise shape once more, because it is often stated badly and then rightly rejected. Martyrdom never proves a belief true; Muslims, Buddhists, and atheists have all died bravely for their convictions, and modern martyrs die for what they received on testimony. What martyrdom proves is that the martyr is not lying. The apostles were not later believers dying for received testimony; they were the alleged eyewitnesses themselves, dying for what they claimed to have seen and touched, with every opportunity to save themselves by a word. Their deaths therefore eliminate exactly one theory: deliberate fraud. The sincere-error theories (swoon, wrong tomb, hallucination, legend) have already stood their trials on other evidence.

The Fact Ledger: Proposed Lines

- *Proposed:* The proclamation that Jesus had risen began in Jerusalem within weeks of the crucifixion, where its central claim could be checked.
- *Proposed:* Within living memory of the events, observant Jews were worshipping on the first day of the week, and every early explanation of the change names the resurrection.
- *Proposed:* Hostile and neutral Roman-era sources independently confirm the execution, the movement's survival and explosive spread, and believers' willingness to die rather than curse Christ.

- *Proposed:* The eyewitness generation accepted persecution and death rather than retract, and no recantation by any witness is recorded anywhere.

▪ **Send**

1. The evidence phase is now complete. Looking at the whole ledger, which single line surprises you most to have signed?
2. Before next week: is there any line you want to reopen, any evidence you feel we skipped, any card you want recheck? Name it now and we will bring it.

▪ **Live It This Week**

- Read the whole Fact Ledger once on your own (photograph it tonight). Sit with it for ten quiet minutes and write one sentence: what does this list *feel* like it adds up to? Bring the sentence unshared.
- Notice one Sunday this week, anywhere in the world, and remember what you now know about why that day.

▪ **Closing Prayer**

Leader: Lord, the evidence is gathered. Whatever verdicts we bring next week, keep the three of us honest, and keep us friends. Amen.

▪ **Scripture Memory Verse**

for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

Acts 4:20 (RSV2CE)

The Aftermath

Part 3 of 3: Leader Reference Card

▪ Every Passage Used Tonight

- Acts 2:22-24, 29-33, 36 • read aloud (Pentecost; 2:32 read from the card)
- Acts 4:11 • read aloud (the rejected stone)
- Psalm 118:22-24 • discovery hunt (the stone; the day)
- Acts 4:13-20 • read aloud (we cannot but speak)
- Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2 • read aloud (the first day)
- Acts 5:34-39 • read aloud (Gamaliel)
- Acts 4:20 • memory verse
- CCC 156, 2174, 597 • doctrine anchors

Source cards tonight: Tacitus, Annals 15.44 (fuller excerpt); Josephus, Antiquities 18.63-64 with critical note; Pliny, Letters 10.96 with Suetonius note. Remind all three: bring the sealed envelopes and the ledger next week.