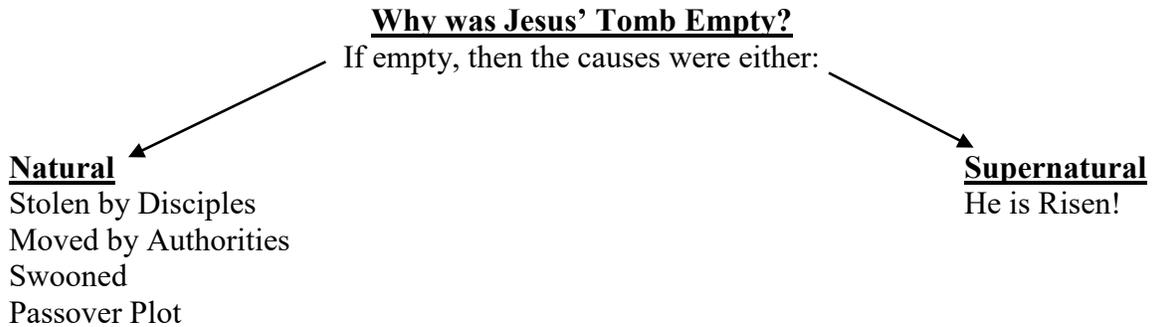
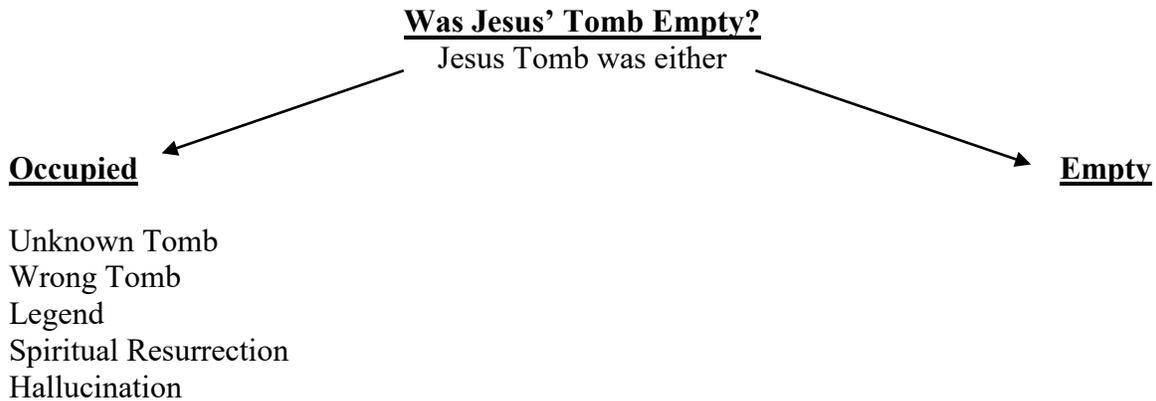


Defending the Resurrection

Steven L. Jones, PhD (sjones@kingsland.org)

“Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.” – Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of Sherlock Holmes



Occupied Tomb Theories:

Unknown Tomb Theory

The belief which goes against what the Bible says about the body of Jesus being placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea and instead postulates that the body was thrown in a pit or paupers grave. It was therefore unmarked and unknown to the disciples.

- “The truth is that we do not know, and in all probability the disciples know no better, where the body of Jesus had been thrown after it had been removed from the cross, probably by the executioners. It is more likely to have been cast into the pit for the executed than laid in a new tomb.” - Charles Alford Guignebert. Jesus (New York 1956) 500

Weaknesses:

- This argument is manufactured whole cloth. It is a modern idea, which goes against what the Bible says about the burial of Jesus. Surely had Jesus been thrown into a pit some Jewish or Roman official would have known this and quickly exposed the belief in the empty tomb as fraudulent. There was no tomb so how could it be empty. But no one ever makes this claim. This idea stems more from a personal disbelief in the resurrection than from a thorough investigation of the evidence.

Wrong Tomb Theory

The belief that because Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus while the disciples and women watched from a distance where Jesus was laid, the disciples and women were confused as to which tomb exactly it was. So when they went to find the tomb on Sunday, they went to the wrong one.

- “The women came in the early morning to a tomb which they thought was the one in which they had seen the Lord buried. They expected to find a closed tomb, but they found an open one; and a young man . . . [who] guesses their errand, tried to tell them that they had made a mistake in the place. ‘He is not here,’ said he, ‘see the place where they laid him,’ and probably pointed to the next tomb. But the women were frightened at their detection of their errand and fled.” Kirsopp Lake. The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ (New York 1907) 250-3

Weaknesses

- While using the Bible as evidence for the phrase “He is not here, behold the place where they laid him,” this theory leaves out the phrase, which is included in every account (Matthew 28:6, Mark 16:6, Luke 24:6) He is risen.
- The other main problem with this theory is that it, were this theory true, the body of Jesus would be easily locatable. So when Jesus’ disciples claimed he was risen, all the Sanhedrin or Roman officials need do is go to the actual tomb and get the body of Jesus, which was still lying there.

Legend Theory

This is the belief that the resurrection accounts are mere legends concocted after the fact.

Weaknesses

- Facts are able to be changed into myth only after eyewitnesses to them are no longer available to dispute the actual occurrences. In 1 Cor. 15:1-6, Paul makes specific reference to eyewitnesses (as many as 500) who are still alive and can verify the truth of what he is saying.
- If it were possible to date the Gospels to 200 or 300 years after the event, the theory might be plausible. But the Gospels were all written by the first generation of Christians, all of whom saw Jesus. They presented his life not as legend but as fact which rests on history and could be supported with evidence. In fact, the story hinges on it being fact, In 1 Cor 15:14-19 Paul says that if Christ wasn’t actually raised then Christianity is worthless.

Spiritual Resurrection Theory

This is the theory that believes that Jesus body rotted in the tomb, but that the real resurrection was a spiritual resurrection

Weaknesses

- The bible goes to great length to emphasize the physical nature of Jesus' resurrected body. The Risen Jesus says to his disciples, "See My hands and My feet, that is it I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." Luke 24:39. Jesus goes on to ask for something to eat, they give him piece of fish and he eats it. Luke 24:41-43
- This theory disregards that Christianity claims a bodily resurrection of Jesus, that his tomb was empty and that it really did matter. If Jesus had only been resurrected "spiritually", when his disciples claimed that the tomb was empty, once again the Jews or Romans could have easily produced the body to prove otherwise.

Hallucinations Theory

This theory claims that the disciples only imagined that they saw the risen Lord. All Jesus' appearances were simply imagined.

Weaknesses

- Psychologists tell us that only particular kinds of people experience hallucinations - paranoid or schizophrenic individuals.
- Hallucinations are rooted in the mind of the individual experiencing them. It is extremely unlikely that more than one or two people could experience the same hallucination. The bible claims that he appeared to groups of people
- Hallucinations require expectation. You usually have to expect what you hallucinate. Your mind cannot simply create what it doesn't have. But the last thing the disciples expected was the resurrection.
 - "Mary came to the tomb on the first Easter Sunday morning with spices in her hands. Why? To anoint the dead body of the Lord she loved. She was obviously not expecting to find him risen from the dead. In fact, when the Lord finally appeared to the disciples, they were frightened and thought they were seeing a ghost." Paul Little Know Why You Believe (Wheaton 1967) 68-9

Analysis of Occupied Tomb Theories

- "It passes the bounds of credibility that the early Christians could have manufactured such a tale and then preached it among those whom might easily refute it simply by producing the body of Jesus." –John Warwick Montgomery
- "The resurrection could not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact for all concerned." -Paul Althaus

EMPTY TOMB THEORIES

Stolen By Disciples

Probably the most prominent of the empty tomb theories is this one. In fact it was the one the Jewish Authorities are credited with starting. Simply put, as the name suggested, it speculated that the disciples or other followers of Jesus stole his body. Matthew 28:11-13 says that the guards reported this all to the chief priests who then paid them off and instructed them to say that the disciples stole the body while they were asleep.

Some Questions need to be answered about this explanation

- Where the guards Roman soldiers or temple guards?
 - The bribe proves that these were roman guards not temple guards for the priests need not have bribed their own men. Where as Roman soldiers, if the body was gone, would have gone to the priests to help them out of a dire predicament.
- How did the guards know it was the disciples?
 - If the guards were asleep, how could they have seen who took the body?
- Did they really fall asleep?
 - The idea that a Roman soldier would fall asleep during night watch is almost laughable. Through discipline and fear of punishment, they executed a faultless attention to duty, especially during night watch.
- Would the Disciples have risked it?
 - Given the already demonstrated cowardice of the disciples (they all fled Jesus when he was arrested), is it reasonable to assume that they would have attempted to steal Jesus from a tomb guards by Armed Roman Soldiers, asleep or not?
- Could the guards have slept through the stone being rolled away?
 - I must be remembered that the stone was rolled in front of the tomb and then a seal was place on it. To get to the body the disciples would have had to tiptoe past the soldiers, break the seal, role the stone away, then carry the body back past the guards, these trained Roman soldiers who slept through the whole thing.
- What did the disciples have to gain?
 - Jesus had cost them their lives. They had left everything for him. They no gain from creating and perpetuating this lie. All but one disciple, John, died a violent death for his faith. Why would people who had concocted a story all die for something which they had invented. Stealing the body doesn't explain how they disciples were transformed from "dejected and dispirited escapist into witnesses whom no opposition could muzzle (J.N.D. Anderson)."
- How does this explain the appearances of Jesus?
 - Simply, it does not.

The Authorities Stole the Body

This theory alleges that the Roman or Jewish authorities moved the body and put it in a safe place so that the disciples could not perpetuate any deception.

Problems:

- The main problem with this theory is the same as the occupied tomb theories, if the Jews or Romans had the body why did they not produce it, when the disciples started making resurrection claims.

Resuscitation Theory

A modern theory whose beginning are in the 18th century among the rationalists. This theory suggests that Jesus did not in fact die on the cross, but rather simply appeared to have died when in actually he had simply swooned or slipped into a deep coma. The Jews, not possessing our superior medical knowledge, mistook him for dead and buried him. Once inside, the coolness of the tomb revived Jesus, he then emerged from the tomb and appeared to his disciples who mistakenly assumed he had risen from the dead.

Problems:

- Even just assuming a minimal number of details, this theory has numerous problems. This theory maintains that Jesus was
 - sleep deprived since his trials (there were 6, 3 Roman and 3 Jewish) went on through the night
 - was beat with the Roman flagrum, and instrument which itself had been known to cause death in its victims
 - had nails driven through his hands and feet, and hung there for several hours
 - he was mistaken for dead by 4 Roman executioners who specialize in killing
 - he was wrapped in a tight burial shroud (through which he must have been able to breathe)
 - was placed in a tomb guarded by Roman soldiers
 - Jesus then in the coolness of the tomb (coolness which according to medicine would have aided in killing him instead of healing him), awoke, unwrapped himself, moved the stone, snuck past the guards, then appeared to the disciples who mistook his bleeding and exhausted body as the risen christ.
- The best refutation of this theory comes from David Strauss a non-Christian and bitter opponent of the resurrection who nonetheless saw through the weaknesses of this theory.
 - "It is impossible that a being who has been stolen half dead out of a sepulcher, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment; who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that he was a conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a

resuscitation could only weaken the impression which He had made upon them in life and in death, at the most could only have given it an elegiac voice, but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship." The Life of Jesus for the People

The Passover Plot

The origin of this theory is from the Hugh Schonfield book The Passover Plot. In this book, Schonfield develops a far-fetched theory which goes as follows. Jesus believed he was the messiah and therefore plotted a very timely and detailed plan to arrange what appeared to be his resurrection. Jesus in conjunction with Joseph of Arimathea and an anonymous young man, ordered his life so as to fulfill the Old Testament Messianic prophecies. Jesus arranged a feigned death on the cross by being administered a drug, when he was offered the wine vinegar. The plan was for Joseph to take Jesus' body to a tomb, then when the drug wore off Jesus would wake up and emerge as the risen messiah. The Plan went wrong when Jesus' side was pierced by the Roman spear. He regained consciousness temporarily then finally died. Before dawn, Jesus body was moved to an unknown grave so that the tomb would appear empty. Then the unknown man was mistaken for Jesus on 4 different occasions by disciples who were plagued with grief. The man nor Joseph never corrected the disciples errors. The appearances of Jesus went on to motivate the followers of Jesus to go and change the world.

Problems:

- Schonfield proceed with a pick and choose approach to the evidence. He dismisses the guards because they are only mentioned in Matthews gospel, and because they don't fit with his theory. He however accepts the spear thrust into Jesus' side because it fits with his theory, although he should by his own criteria dismiss it for it is only mentioned in John's account.
- Another huge problem is that it dismisses all the appearances except for 4. Again mention must be made of the 500 Paul says Jesus appeared to. He claims this as historic fact. If he had been lying, he would have been laughed out of every synagogue and meeting place he visited.

Circumstantial Evidence

One may assert that the early church did not claim the resurrection of the Jesus but rather it was added later, and that the only evidence which supports the resurrection comes from the gospels also of later origin. The following is a list of things which while not directly supporting the resurrection, points to the fact that the resurrection was an early and necessary Christian dogma

The Church-

- Anyone who wishes to dismiss the resurrection must then explain the church. It began in Jerusalem weeks after Jesus resurrection. This points to the fact that something transpired.

Sunday Worship

- Early disciples changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday in honor of what Jesus had accomplished. It must be remembered that Jesus' followers weren't forming a new religion but were claiming to fulfill Judaism. Being Jews they were still concerning with keeping the law and would not have done something as severe as change the day of worship unless something had convinced them of the importance of that day. i.e. the resurrection.

Baptism

- Early Christians celebrated the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus by this sacrament. Why unless they believed he had actually been resurrected

Communion

- Likewise this sacrament represents the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Changed lives

- The disciples were changed from cowardly men who ran for safety into men who were unashamed proclaimers of the gospel and willingly gave their life instead of deny their faith.

While none of this circumstantial evidence can outright prove the veracity of the gospels or the truth of the resurrection, it does help establish the point that the Christianity from the start believed that the resurrection had happened. From there, the arguments already listed above apply as to whether they were justified in their belief.

Conclusion

If one is to dispute the resurrection, one must either systemically refute the evidence to explain why he chooses certain points and discounts others or you may discredit the reliability of the texts and discount them entirely but if you do so you must give justifiable reasons why you believe the texts to be unreliable. It is circular reasoning to say that the gospels are false because they recount miraculous activity which cannot happen. A presupposition has been applied but no argument has been defended.

"That a few simple men should in one generation have invented so powerful and appealing a personality, so loft an ethic, and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the gospels."

-Will Durant

"Is there really any other theory which explains the facts?"

-J.N.D. Anderson

Resurrection of Jesus

“On the third day the friends of Christ coming at day-break to the place found the grave empty and the stone rolled away. In varying ways they realized the new wonder; but even they hardly realized that the world had died in the night. What they were looking at was the first day of a new creation, with a new heaven and a new earth; and in a semblance of the gardener God walked again in the garden, in the cool not of the evening but the dawn.”

-G.K.

Chesterton

The Everlasting Man