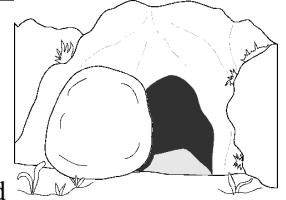


## The Resurrection of Jesus

### *The Empty Tomb (5 of 12)*



On the third day after Jesus was buried, several women came to his tomb to anoint His body with spices (Mark 16:1). Yet, upon their arrival they found the stone removed, the tomb empty and were told, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him” (Mark 16:6). These women immediately went and told Peter and John who also witnessed the empty tomb (John 20:1-8).

As Peter preached the first gospel sermon after the resurrection, the empty tomb was a primary piece of evidence. Peter contrasted King David’s occupied tomb with the empty tomb of the resurrected Jesus Christ (Acts 2:29-32). He said of David, “...he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day” (2:29). Yet, of Christ, “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses” (2:32).

There is no way to deny the fact of the empty tomb. It is established by too many witnesses and denied by none. So, how did the tomb come to be empty? The Scriptures teach the empty tomb was proof of the resurrection. Yet, skeptics, who do not want to believe in Jesus, often propose and offer alternative theories. Despite their attempts, the Bible has a response. Consider a few of the conspiracy theories and the Bible’s answer.

**The Secret Passageway Theory.** Could Jesus have been secretly escorted out of the tomb through a secret passageway? The Bible tells us Joseph of Arimathea had the “new” tomb “hewn out of the rock” (Matthew 27:59-60). This precludes any possibility of a secret back entrance to the tomb.

**Wrong Body Theory.** Many ancient tombs have been unearthed in Palestine. Often, these tombs were filled with several bodies. Could the Jews have just mistaken his body was gone or misidentified it with other bodies? Referring back to the Matthew passage, we realize this was a “new” tomb (27:59-60). Jesus was the first body to have been placed in the tomb. This theory is not a possibility.

**Stolen Body Theory.** Could it be the tomb was empty because his body was stolen by Joseph, the women or the disciples? Pontius Pilate commanded soldiers to “guard” and “secure” the tomb (Matthew 27:65). The punishment for a Roman soldier sleeping while on duty was death (Polybius). The punishment for a Jewish soldier sleeping on the job was a severe flogging. These soldiers would take their jobs seriously. Besides, it would take more than one person to move a large stone, carry out a dead body and haul it away. Some skeptics hope beyond probability these soldiers were not only negligent, but very deep sleepers! Further, the stone on the door of the tomb was so large the women were asking before they arrived, “Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?” (Mark 16:3). If merely rolling the stone away seemed too big a task, what about carrying around a body through the busy streets of Jerusalem?

**The Swoon Theory.** One theory of Jesus suggested he was merely unconscious when placed in the tomb and awoke after the tomb was closed. The text is very specific about the details surrounding the death of Jesus. As a sword is struck into a man’s heart to the

point “blood and water” flow out of the wound, he is not merely unconscious (John 19:34). He is dead. Further, if he was unconscious, what are the chances he got up on his own, moved a stone, ran past the guards and convinced others in such a state he was the Almighty Conqueror of the grave? This is not plausible.

**Disciples Lied Theory.** Some would simply “write off” the empty tomb as an untrue deception foisted upon the world. For those who would believe that, consider a few questions. First, if the empty tomb was a lie, why were the Jews trying to come up with an excuse to explain it (see Matthew 28:11-15)? Second, if it was a lie why could the Jews never come up with a body? Wouldn’t this be the easiest way to dilute a religion based upon a resurrected Jesus? If it was a lie, and the disciples knew it, then why did they die for it? Some will die for a lie they believe due to a lack of knowledge or evidence. Yet, the disciples had all the knowledge about the resurrection available to them first-hand. If the tomb of Jesus was still occupied, why do we see such a change of heart from even the most skeptical of disciples? Why waste their time preaching it was empty? Why were they dying for it? The easiest answer to these questions is explained by the empty tomb.

Everett F. Harrison wrote in *The Short Life of Christ*, “Without the certification of the empty tomb early Christian preaching would have been lame and halting. But it proceeded in the serene confidence that no one could contest this fact.”

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