



RESURRECTION 101

Introducing Reasons for Confidence

5 ~ “He Is Not Here” — What Happened to the Body?

- A. Review: the two New Testament claims offered as evidence that Jesus rose from dead.
 - 1) Unlike David’s, *Jesus’ tomb was empty* (Acts 2.29-31).
 - 2) The disciples were *witnesses that Jesus had risen* (Acts 2.32).
- B. The New Testament never claims that anyone saw Jesus come back to life and/or exit the tomb. The records are unanimous that *the tomb was discovered to be empty after Jesus had risen*.
- C. An empty tomb does not prove resurrection, but there is no resurrection without it.
 - 1) What would have happened to Christianity if the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem had produced Jesus’ body or shown the disciples were making a claim about the wrong grave?
 - 2) See the council’s charges and apostles’ defenses in Acts 4-5 (esp. 5.28- “. . . you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching. . .”).
 - 3) Matthew 28.11-15 is evidence that efforts were made to explain why the tomb was empty.

Some Alternative Theories

- 1. *The disciples stole the body.*
 - a. Matthew 28.11-15 shows that this is one of the earliest alternative explanations (cf. Matt. 27.62-66). By including it, Matthew wrote as an apologist.
 - i. The passage points to the biggest difficulty with the suggestion and to an early attempt to answer it: how could the disciples have gotten past the guard, rolled the stone from the entrance, secured Jesus’ body, and gotten past the guard with the body as they left?
 - ii. The claim is that the core group of disciples stole the body and perpetrated the hoax.
 - a) If so, the accounts of their initial investigations of the story were fabricated (see Luke 24.1-12; John 20.1-10).
 - b) The deceived would also include converts and disciples outside the immediate group of conspirators.
 - c) The greater the number of conspirators, the harder it is to keep the secret.
 - d) The disciples’ later actions: What would they have gained? Why endure intense persecution and martyrdom for a known lie?
 - b. A variation is that *someone else stole the body*: Roman or Jewish authorities, or thieves.
 - i. What would have been the motive for any of them to do so?
 - ii. If authorities, why let the story spread and movement grow? Just produce the body.
 - iii. This does potentially explain the empty tomb, but not the other details in the record.

2. *The apparent death (swoon) theory: Jesus did not really die on the cross, revived (in the tomb), and was able to convince his followers he had risen.*
 - a. Ignatius (110 AD) referred to some who claimed Jesus “suffered in appearance only” (*To the Smyrnaeans* 2.1).
 - b. Claim: Jesus’ death was confirmed by a Roman soldier who knew nothing about medicine.
 - i. But the Romans had crucified others and knew their business.
 - a) Conservative estimates are that the Romans crucified 30,000 people.
 - b) Josephus reported that after a revolt following the death of Herod the Great (4 BC), Varus, Roman governor of Syria, crucified 2,000 Jews (*Antiquities* 17.295).
 - ii. They did not break Jesus’ legs because he had already died (John 19.31-33).
 - c. Medical experts have investigated the effects of crucifixion; death results from asphyxiation.
 - d. The apparent death theory does not account for the complete record concerning the severity and extent of Jesus’ injuries: from the nails, loss of blood, scourging, and the piercing with the spear (cf. Matt. 27.26; Luke 24.39; John 19.34; 20.25).
 - e. Unless the claim is that Jesus was never buried, this proposal also does not explain how Jesus could have freed himself from the tomb and left the scene without being noticed.
3. *The women who intended to anoint Jesus’ body went to the wrong tomb and mistakenly reported Jesus had risen.*
 - a. The same women who went to the tomb had watched the burial (Mark 15.47; 16.1).
 - b. The women were determined to anoint the body (Mark 16.1). Would they have been so easily deterred from their purpose?
 - c. What would have motivated them to begin saying he had risen? Like modern people, ancient people did not assume a missing dead body had returned to life.
 - d. Others checked their story before believing (cf. Luke 24.11-12; John 20.3-9).
 - e. Why did the Jerusalem leaders not correct the mistake? In response to the apostles’ preaching, they could have readily refuted the story by producing the body and showing the location of the right tomb.

For Additional Reading

William Lane Craig, “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?” *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins & J. P. Moreland (Zondervan, 1995), 141-176.

John A. Dennis, “Death of Jesus,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed., ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, & Nicholas Perrin (IVP Academic, 2013), 172-193.

Gary R. Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus-Workbook* (The Credo Courses, 2014), 59-80.

Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Kregel, 2004), 84-103.

Homer Hailey, *That You May Believe: Studies in the Gospel of John* (Baker, 1976), 141-154.

Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, trans. John Bowden (Fortress, 1977).

Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Zondervan, 1998), 302-330.

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Next Time: We Have Witnesses