

[The Validity of the Resurrection: Proclaimed](#)



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There is simply no way to overemphasize the importance of the resurrection to the Christian faith, for the resurrection of Jesus is the Christian faith. Christianity stands or falls on the validity, the historical reality of the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is either the greatest event in the history of mankind, or it is the cruelest hoax that has ever been perpetrated. Which is it, truth or fantasy?

The Empty Tomb Proclaims It

Let's look to Jerusalem and review the Garden Tomb site that many believe may well have been the tomb of Jesus. The tomb is ancient history's greatest fact — the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

In the lovely garden outside Jerusalem's City walls, the very heart of the Christian message is proclaimed. Jerusalem is home to the three great monotheistic faiths and is the City where the Creator of the Universe executed His plan to redeem fallen man.

The Holy Sepulcher is traditionally the chief site of Christian pilgrimage, but many, after visiting, wander away without being made aware that Christ came into the world to save sinners. Scripture says Christ suffered outside the gate and that history's greatest sacrificial death took place at Golgotha, the place of the skull. There, as the people passed by, Jesus bore the wrath of God to take away the punishment that must be paid for our sin.

The Gospels record that a rich religious leader — Joseph of Arimathea — took the Lord's body down from the cross, laying it in his own tomb, and that this tomb was in a garden nearby. The Bible says that, *"In the place where Christ was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, where no one was ever laid before."*

In this acre of land, we find two pre-Christian artifacts that attest to a working garden from the first Century. Jerusalem's third largest water system cut out of solid rock, and a very large winepress, evidence of wealth. And just yards away, a tomb that matches the Bible's description in every way, hewn from the rock with a great stone to seal the doorway. Inside

is a large weeping chamber, and the place where a body was laid is visible from outside, just as the Bible describes.

We cannot be absolute and say that this is the tomb where Jesus was laid. Joseph never left his mark on it, but others did. Christians have been present here perhaps from the very dawn of the faith. But, it's more about who is not here. The raising of Jesus from the dead is the greatest miracle in all history, for it is His resurrection from the dead, as [Romans 1:4](#) declares, that is the proof that Jesus was who He said He was, the Son of God. That's the core of our proclamation — Jesus is alive! No resurrection; no Christianity.

I love the Garden Tomb. I love to go there on tours and just meditate on the Lord. It is a place of serenity that is enriching to the soul.

In considering the evidence of the resurrection, we must always start with the fact of the empty tomb.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus was buried in the tomb of a wealthy man, Joseph of Arimathea. Three days later that tomb was empty. It was empty despite the fact that it had been sealed by a huge stone weighing close to two tons, and despite the fact that it had been guarded continuously by a special contingent of Roman soldiers.

Jesus' Detractors Failed to Hide It

When the soldiers reported their startling discovery of an empty tomb to the Chief Priest of the Jews, they were given a bribe to tell the people that quote, *"His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep."*

Now I want you to note something very important about the response of the Jewish leaders. The significant thing about their reaction is that they did not challenge the fact that the tomb was empty. That's because the tomb was empty. They simply couldn't argue with that reality, and so they made up a story to explain why the tomb was empty.

And men have been concocting stories ever since that time. Let's consider some of those explanations, and as we do so, I think you will begin to sense that the shallowness of their arguments speaks louder in many respects than the counter arguments of Christians.

1) "Confusion Theory" — One of the arguments against the resurrection is based on the idea that everybody got confused, and in the midst of all this confusion, the Disciples simply went to the wrong tomb. Yeah, some supposedly learned men have proposed this theory over the years. Yet the Gospel accounts tell us that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus both accompanied Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to the tomb and watched them prepare the body for burial. Are we to suppose that when the women returned they couldn't find their way?

And even if they did get lost and looked in the wrong tomb, did Peter and John do the same thing? Did the Roman soldiers forget which tomb they were guarding? Did Joseph of Arimathea suddenly have a memory lapse as to where his tomb was located? And why didn't the Jewish leaders simply go to the right tomb and produce the body? The answer is simple folks, the tomb was empty.

2) "The Disciples Stole the Body Theory" — The oldest explanation of the empty tomb is one that the Jews made up and bribed the soldiers to tell. Namely, that the body of Jesus was stolen by His disciples. Yes this explanation would have us to believe that Peter, Andrew, James and John were body snatchers.

Now, I want you to stop and think about this argument for a moment. To believe this theory of body snatching, we would have to believe that a small ragtag band of followers who were scared witless at the arrest of Jesus, and who fled into the night to save their own skins, suddenly found the courage three days later to take on a guard of Roman soldiers.

And even more significant, what would have been the motivation of the disciples to steal the body? We are told over and over again in the Scriptures that they did not understand that Jesus was to be resurrected. Their behavior after the crucifixion testified to this as they sat around in despair mourning the loss of their leader.

And yet, this very group suddenly came alive with hope and went forth boldly, proclaiming the resurrection at the risk of their lives. Now are we really to believe that a group of frightened disciples could be transformed into a courageous band of fearless proclaimers by snatching the body, hiding it, and then committing their lives to a lie? That's more difficult to believe than the resurrection itself!

3) "Hallucinations Theory" — Well, that brings us to a third theory, one that has become very popular in recent times, and that's the theory that the disciples experienced a series of hallucinations. As one advocate of this novel concept has put it, "they experienced a disruption of the physiochemical structures of the brain in such a way as to be able to see what they desperately wanted to see."

Now, I will grant that Mary Magdalene might have had a hallucination. After all, she was a frightened and frustrated young woman wandering around in a cemetery at daybreak. And as a matter of fact, the reaction of the disciples to the news of the empty tomb and her encounter with angels who had informed her of the resurrection indicates that they thought she might have been, you know, seeing things. But what about the appearance of Jesus to all the apostles on three different occasions? Or, His appearance to five hundred believers on a Galilean mountain? Or His ascension into Heaven before a host of disciples?

Hallucination is a highly subjective experience and a very personal one. Like beauty, it's in the eye of the beholder. To believe that five hundred people could have the same hallucination simultaneously takes more faith than a belief in the resurrection. And furthermore, the hallucination theory does not explain the empty tomb.

4) "Mass Hypnosis Theory" — Another modern theory is that the disciples experienced mass hypnosis. The advocates of this idea argue that the disciples so desperately wanted Jesus to rise from the dead that they created an aura of auto suggestion, or mental hypnosis, and thus whenever the name of Jesus was mentioned His disciples believed that they could see Him.

Mass hypnosis is a probability with even as many as five hundred people, given precisely the right type of controlled environment and the proper mass medium like radio or television or film, but mass hypnosis without some form of mass media, and without a professional hypnotist, and without ideal conditions is utterly outside the realm of sound reasoning. And so I ask you, how could five hundred people in the open air of a countryside, before the invention of mass media, and before the discovery of hypnosis, be subject to mass hypnosis? And how does this explain the fact of the empty tomb? I think it's obvious that the skeptics are grasping for straws.

5) "Swoon Theory" — This leaves us with centuries old theory that has been recently popularized by an apostate Christian named Hugh Schonfield, it's called the "Swoon

Theory." This is the idea that Jesus really didn't die on the Cross. Instead, He just passed out, and then woke up three days later. Schonfield has revived this idea in his book called, *The Passover Plot*.

Now think about that for a moment. Mr. Schonfield would ask us to believe that after Jesus was scourged, and crucified, and after He had laid in a cold, damp tomb for three days without food or water. He suddenly revived, removed His burial wrapping, rolled back the stone and ran around the countryside for forty days without the benefit of even a dose of penicillin or a tetanus shot. Only a fool could believe such utter nonsense.

6) "Nostalgia Theory" — There is one other theory that's become very popular among modern day liberal theologians. It's what I call the "Nostalgia Theory." It's the idea that the resurrection occurred only in the hearts of the disciples.

Several years ago I ran across a startling example of this concept in the *Dallas Morning News*. The newspaper reported that this crazy idea had been proposed to the students of a local Dallas University by a person bearing the title of Professor of New Testament Theology. He stated in his incredible Easter sermon to the students that Jesus had not really risen from the dead in any literal way. What happened instead, he explained, is that Jesus simply came alive in the hearts of His disciples as they sat around and discussed His life and teachings. Just as had been the case with the followers of Martin Luther King after his assassination.

Such a ridiculous concept is a natural outgrowth of liberal apostasy because it leaves them with the kind of Jesus that they really want, one who is only human. Their messiah turns out to be a man who meant well, but who in reality was a deluded fool who thought He was God in the flesh. And this nostalgia theory, like all the other theories, fails to explain the well documented post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, and it fails completely to explain the fact of the empty tomb.

The tomb of Jesus was empty. It was empty, not because it was the wrong tomb, nor was it empty because the body had been stolen. The fact of the empty tomb was not based on hallucinations or hypnosis. It certainly was not based on daydreaming or wishful thinking. The tomb was empty. That is a historical fact.