

Resurrection “Theories”

The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ remain the two most significant historical events of the Christian faith. Since these events took place, many notable people who were not believers have studied the resurrection in antagonism to Christianity, only to find the evidence so compelling that they ended up personally accepting the lordship of Christ.

If the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is true, just as the Scriptures declare, then the Christian faith stands on a rock-solid, immovable foundation. If the resurrection stands, the other doctrines of the Bible stand with it. However, if the resurrection falls, the other doctrines of the Bible fall with it as well. Even the Scripture itself admits that this is the case (see I Corinthians 15:12-19). With that in mind, opponents of Christianity have spent much time and energy trying to discredit the resurrection with their theories.

The Swoon Theory - This theory maintains that: Jesus never really died. Medical knowledge was rather primitive then, and the apostles only thought he was dead. After all, Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so soon. He actually only swooned. Resting in the cool of the tomb revived him, aided by the invigorating effects of the spices with which he was embalmed.

Problems with the Swoon Theory - Roman soldiers were experts in killing. That was their job and they did it well. They knew when people were dead and when they weren't. Besides, they were highly motivated to make absolutely sure that their victims were indeed dead, because if a prisoner somehow got away, any soldier responsible would have had to pay with his own life. According to medical science, the spear thrust into Jesus' side, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water, was further evidence that he had already died. But if, somehow, Jesus had entered the tomb still alive he would have had to roll away, from the inside, a stone that was too large for one man to move, all of this while in a still seriously weakened condition after having been gruesomely whipped and having lost large quantities of blood. Then he would have had to slip past the Roman Soldiers without their noticing (either the re-located boulder or his escaping), leaving naked with the grave clothes neatly folded inside the tomb.

The Disciples Stole the Body Theory - This theory maintains that: the resurrection was a hoax propagated by the disciples, who actually stole Jesus' body from the tomb while the guards were sleeping.

Problems with the Disciples Stealing the Body Theory - This theory is almost as old as the resurrection itself. Matthew records in his gospel that this story was invented the same day that Jesus rose from the dead. There were at least four soldiers guarding the tomb, most likely about twice that many (see Matthew 28:11). This theory does not adequately account for: 1) the soldiers being highly motivated to do their job of guarding the tomb due to the severe punishment for failure, 2) the disciples exhibiting discouragement and fear at that time, rather than bravery, 3) the soldiers knowing who was responsible for the theft, since they were supposedly sleeping, 4) the moving of a very large boulder not waking anybody up, and 5) the grave clothes still being inside the tomb. Besides all these difficulties, the main reason for the dismissal of this theory has to do with the character of the disciples themselves. At least 11 of the original 12 died for what they so firmly believed. Granted, some people have died for a lie, but not something **they knew to be a lie**. If the disciples had stolen the body, they would have known that the resurrection was a hoax. No one would have died for that.

The Romans Stole the Body Theory - This theory maintains that: the Romans stole the body.

Problems with the Romans Stealing the Body Theory - Most scholars agree that this theory is actually more likely than the one that the disciples stole the body. However, it fails in several very important respects. First of all, there was no motive. Clearly, the Romans wanted the body of Jesus to remain in the tomb. Pilate wanted to keep the peace. If the Romans had stolen the body, there was no reason for them to unravel the grave clothes from the body and leave them inside the tomb. But more importantly, when Christianity started becoming a problem, all the Romans would have had to do was to produce the body and publicly parade it down the streets of Jerusalem. That would have put a neat end to an upstart religion they definitely wanted to squash.

The Hallucination Theory - This theory maintains that: each of Jesus' post-burial appearances didn't actually take place. The people who claimed to have seen him only hallucinated.

Problems with the Hallucination Theory - According to psychiatrists, it would have been impossible for a dozen people to have had the same hallucination at the same time, never mind the 500 people who saw Jesus on one occasion after he had been in the tomb. Besides, this theory has no explanation for things like why the soldiers reported to the chief priests that they saw an angel roll back the stone and sit on it – a report which was never questioned – and why they were then paid off to lie about it. It also presents the serious problem that if the dead body of Jesus were still in the tomb, it could have been produced. That would have ended the preaching about the resurrection. Certainly, many people were very interested in silencing that message.

The Wrong Tomb Theory - This theory maintains that: each person who saw the empty tomb had mistakenly gone to the wrong location.

Problems with the Wrong Tomb Theory - Joseph of Arimathea knew exactly where his tomb was located and he would have been very capable of setting any possible confusion straight. Besides, surely no other tomb in that area had a guard of Roman soldiers in front of it, with a seal on the stone secured so that no one could get inside. Also, those who adhere to the wrong tomb theory must admit that it is highly unlikely that those who went to the tomb each independently made the very same mistake of going to the wrong location. More fundamentally, though, the followers of Jesus were not convinced of his rising from the dead by the empty tomb. When they saw the empty tomb, the women were bewildered, Mary thought they had taken Jesus away and she didn't know where they had put him, and Cleopas and his friend acknowledged that the tomb was empty but their faces were still downcast. Finally, this theory provides no reasonable explanation for what happened to the body of Jesus. If it were still in the correct tomb, it could have been produced, bringing the message of Christianity to an abrupt halt.