THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST - HOAX OR HISTORY?

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Since New Testament times, there has been scepticism towards the resurrection of Christ which has increased during the past century or so, and the purpose of this booklet is to examine the evidence, for and against.

One thing is certain which no reasonable person should deny, and that is that Jesus Christ was a real historical person who has had a tremendous impact on history.

One of the most fundamental laws of natural science is that for every effect there is a cause. For example: Mohammedism was caused by Mohammed; it was the effect of his teaching and influence. The same applies to Buddha and Buddhism, Confucius and Confucianism, Carl Marx and Marxism etc.

Christianity is just as much an historical reality as Mohammedism and Buddhism etc and something or someone must have caused it to happen. Who or what was the cause? There can only be one answer: Jesus Christ. Most sceptics and critics of the resurrection of Christ accept this.

It is impossible to account for the origin of Christianity without recognizing Jesus as an historical character. It is unreasonable and illogical to deny it.

It is equally as sure and certain that Jesus died, and those who are sceptical towards his resurrection, generally have no serious objection about him dying by crucifiction. All recognize that it is an historical fact that the Romans occupied Palestine at the time of Christ and that they reserved the prerogative to inflict the death penalty themselves, and crucifixion was a common method employed by them to do this.

So then, most accept that Jesus was a true historical character who died by crucifixion and was buried in a sepulchre or tomb. Most also have no problem accepting the New Testament record which says a stone was rolled up against the mouth of the tomb and was sealed and guarded by Roman soldiers.

Most are also prepared to concede that after three days the tomb was empty - that the stone was rolled away and the body was gone, causing a stir that ultimately turned the world upside down, the reverberations of which still affect the world today.

So far so good! The next question is where the controversy starts. Who moved the stone? What happened to the body? Several possibilities or propositions have been postulated by those who do not believe Jesus rose from the dead.

1. Joseph of Arimathea stole the body and removed it from his own tomb to another tomb.

2. The Romans stole the body.

3. The Jews stole the body.

4. The disciples of Jesus stole the body.

5. The hallucination theory: This theory argues that all the supposed appearances of Jesus after his death were hallucinations i.e. subjective experiences which only occurred in the mind, and not real objective phenomena.

6. The wrong tomb theory: This theory contends that the women who went to the tomb went to the wrong one. Due to going early in the morning they mistook the tomb in the uncertain light, and went to another one that was empty.

7. The body stole itself: This theory subdivides into two propositions:

A. The swoon theory: which maintains that Jesus didn't really die, but fainted, regained consciousness and got out of the tomb himself.

B. He really did die and was supernaturally revived and raised by divine power.

These seven propositions include every serious argument put forward to explain what happened to the body. The belief in the resurrection of Jesus must therefore fall into one of the following three categories: delusion, fiction or fact.

This subject is going to be approached in the Sherlock Holmes style. He was a great detective of fiction who told his colleague to consider all the possibilities of every case and eliminate all the ones that won't fit the case, and whatever proposition he was left with, no matter how seemingly absurd or impossible it seems, to accept it as the answer.

This process of elimination is commonly applied in court trials and fields of research in order to arrive at a correct solution.

Jesus of Nazareth and his claims have been on trial for centuries, but many have come to believe in him and his resurrection by this process of elimination.

For example: Frank Morrison, author of "Who Moved the Stone" was sceptical towards the resurrection of Christ. But as a result of impartial analysis of the Gospel narratives, he came to believe that Jesus must have risen from the dead. In his book he says: "It is easy to say that you will believe nothing that will not fit into the mould of a rationalist conception of the universe. But suppose the facts won't fit into that mould? The utmost an honest man can do is to undertake to examine the facts patiently and impartially, and to see where they lead him."

After doing his homework, Morrison declared: "Having studied the evidence, I now believe what I formerly denied: Jesus really did rise from the dead."

Two upper-class Englishmen of the eighteenth century were Lord Lyttleton and his friend Gilbert West. They were both trained lawyers.

They knew how to weigh evidence and how to argue a case. As young men they were both unbelievers. In their early days they had hopes of publishing propaganda against the truth of Christianity. They both set their agnostic minds to work studying the evidence for and against Christ's resurrection.

The outcome was the same for both of them. Despite their early antagonism to the Bible; despite their deepest prejudices the sheer weight of evidence made them change their minds. They published the results of their separate studies in a joint book. They argued that Christ really did rise from the dead, and that Paul was converted as a consequence.

Other intellectuals in more recent times such as Malcolm Muggeridge and C.S. Lewis etc have had the same experience as a result of open, honest and impartial research.

These men and many others discovered that faith in the resurrection of Christ is not a mindless thing that can only be believed by naive, gullible simpletons or emotional egg-heads. It is based on reliable historical data and can stand the test of logical, critical analysis and scrutiny.

We will now look at the seven possibilities, and demonstrate that the evidence, when carefully and logically sifted, demands the verdict that Christ did indeed rise from the dead.

FIRST PROPOSITION:
JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA TOOK THE BODY

Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man, a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews. He was a "counsellor" - a member of the high Jewish court known as the Sanhedrin. He "waited for the kingdom of God" and was "a good and just man" who, "consented not" to the decision of the council to instigate Jesus' death. It was Joseph who went boldly to Pilate and requested the body of Jesus after he died on the cross. He and Nicodemus took the body, wrapped it up in strips of linen cloth with spices, and lay it in Joseph's own new tomb in which no man had ever been laid before, which he had hewn in a rock garden. They rolled a great stone up against the opening to the sepulchre and departed due to the Sabbath approaching. It was obviously late afternoon, probably around 5pm. Certain women followed Joseph and Nicodemus and saw the sepulchre in which the body of Jesus was placed, but because of the approaching Sabbath, they returned home to prepare spices and ointments and to rest (Matt. 27:57-. Lk. 23:50. Jn. 19:38-).

We are told in Matt. 27:62 that: "The next day (still the Sabbath!) the chief priests and Pharisees came to Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was still alive, After three days I will rise

again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be secured until the third day, lest his disciples come and steal him away, and say to the people, he is risen from the dead: resulting in the last error being worse than the first. Pilate said to them: You may have a guard; go your way and make it as secure as you can. So they went and made the sepulchre secure, sealing the stone and setting a guard."

So then, during the first night after the crucifixion and burial, and part of the next morning, the body of Jesus lay in the tomb with no guards guarding it.

Some therefore argue that, for private reasons, Joseph could have removed the body to another place before the guards arrived. But the question is: what private reasons? One answer given is that he had purchased and prepared the tomb for himself and only used it as a temporary resting place for Jesus, because no one else offered or made provision. In the meantime another permanent tomb became available so the stone was rolled away and the body removed, leaving an empty tomb, causing the disciples to conclude that Jesus had risen.

There are a number of flaws in this theory.

First flaw: If it was true, it would mean that when the guards arrived, the stone would have been rolled away and the tomb would be empty. You could hardly imagine them rolling the stone back without firstly looking inside to end up guarding an empty tomb! Because it was due to fear of the body being stolen that they were sent to guard the tomb, the first thing they would do if they arrived and found the stone was rolled away, would be to see if the body was still in there.

Even if Joseph took the body and rolled the stone back against the opening of the sepulchre, the guards would roll it away to make sure the body was still there. Roman soldiers were well trained, disciplined and very efficient. They would not want to be blamed for an empty tomb or be ridiculed for guarding an empty tomb!

Second flaw: The reason given in the historical record for Joseph promptly placing the body in his tomb was that the Sabbath was approaching. It was contrary to the Sabbath law to bury a body or do any other form of work. All work ceased. If Joseph removed the body before the guards arrived and buried it elsewhere, he must have done it on the Sabbath day for it was still in progress. This would involve a serious discrepancy. If he promptly placed the body in the tomb before the Sabbath commenced, in order to avoid breaking the Sabbath law, it would be out of character for him to go back a few hours later when the Sabbath was in full force, and break it by removing the body. If a more permanent burial place became available, he would wait until the Sabbath was over to shift the body. Why would he rush? The body was embalmed and well preserved and nobody wanted it. Neither did he know that a guard was

going to be posted at the tomb.

Lk. 23:50 says Joseph was a "counsellor, a good and just man." He was of the same calibre as Zecharias, referred to in Lk. 1:6 as being "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless." This speaks of a very devout man, strictly honest and law abiding. Being a "counsellor," Joseph was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin which was a body of very strict (fanatical) adherents to the Jewish law. They rigidly complied with the letter of the law, to the point of objecting to a man being healed on the Sabbath day. They wouldn't even eat an egg if it was laid on the Sabbath day! Such strict adherents to the Sabbath law would not, under any circumstances, shift a dead body from one tomb to another on the Sabbath day, especially if it was not necessary and could wait for another day.

Third flaw: If Joseph simply transferred the body to a more permanent resting place, why would he remove the grave clothes and leave them in the empty tomb and take the body away naked? This is not the kind of indignity to which one would subject the body of someone he respected. According to "the custom of the Jews" he would have to wrap the body up again later anyway. So why unwrap it? What possible reason could he have for doing this?

At this point some argue that Joseph deliberately did this to give the appearance that Jesus had risen from the dead i.e. he set up a resurrection scene. But there are several problems with this view. Firstly, it would make Joseph a liar and deceiver which would be totally inconsistent with his historical character references. Secondly, like all the other disciples, Joseph did not believe that Jesus would rise on the third day. This is well documented and more will be said about it later.

If Joseph had believed that Jesus would rise in three days before corruption commenced, why would he go to the trouble of wrapping him up and embalming him, using 100lbs of expensive myrrh and aloes? Joseph clearly was not expecting Jesus to rise on the third day. He therefore had no reason or motive to shift the body to try and give the impression he had risen.

Anyway, if Joseph understood and really believed Jesus' teaching about rising from the dead on the third day, he would surely have left the body alone and leave it to God to raise him. Or, if he felt God wasn't going to do it, he would at least have waited until the third day before removing it and not get the operation out of its time sequence. If he wanted to give the impression that Jesus' prediction of rising from the dead on the third day was fulfilled, he would hardly be foolish enough to remove it on the first day and make a liar out of Jesus.

Here is another point: If Joseph simply removed the body to a more permanent resting place, would he not, being a disciple himself, tell the

other disciples? Why conceal it, especially in view of the fact that none of them believed or expected an immediate resurrection, and therefore would not be planning to create a situation that looked like it?

And, if Joseph removed the body and forgot to tell the others, he would surely have done so if the empty tomb caused them to start preaching Christ's resurrection. When all of Jerusalem was seething with controversy, can you imagine Joseph, who was a good, honest, righteous man, allowing such a lie and deception to spread, knowing he was responsible for it, and not tell the truth and put an end to all false rumours?! Can you imagine him sitting idly by, allowing his friends to continue on a vain mission making a fool of themselves and being persecuted and killed for proclaiming a lie?

SECOND PROPOSITION: THE ROMANS STOLE THE BODY

This theory maintains that the Romans stole the body to prevent the tomb from becoming a shrine, causing continual pilgrimages, congestion, disorder and riots.

Well, if they did it for that reason, they created a far worse problem, because removing the body gave the impression that Jesus had risen, resulting in large numbers of people making him their Lord and king - titles to which the Roman ruler Caesar claimed to have exclusive rights. This is why the Romans put Jesus to death in the first place, because by claiming to be king, they believed he usurped Caesar's title and authority. Therefore, if the Romans stole the body (for any reason at all), they would have quickly produced it, or admitted to shifting it, the moment Christians started turning the world upside down by claiming Jesus had risen and was Lord and king.

The fact of the matter is that the Romans had no reason to steal the body. They hated and despised Jesus, and mocked and belittled him. They simply regarded him as a fanatical Jew who was under some hallucination about being a son of God and king. They saw him as another insurrectionist and false Messiah like others before him who all ended up in the same place - nailed to a cross.The Romans never stole their bodies and it was not in their interest to steal the body of Jesus. Pilate's main interest was to keep things peaceful and not cause unwanted agitation and speculation among the people by moving or stealing the body.

Once Jesus was dead, the Romans couldn't have cared less what happened to his body. Pilate let Joseph take it away for burial and did not ask or show any interest in the location of the tomb. The only reason why Pilate sent soldiers to guard the tomb was because the Jewish priests and Pharisees pressed for it. Pilate obliged to calm their fears, not his own! The soldiers' only concern was to guard the tomb for the priests and

Pharisees.They had no personal interest in the body themselves and no reason to take it.

Matt. 27:66 says: “And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guards they set a seal on the stone.” The sealing was performed by stretching a cord across the stone at the mouth of the tomb and fastening it to the rock face at either end by means of sealing-clay. The stone could not be rolled away without breaking the seal, and it was a serious crime to break the seal of Roman authority. The soldiers themselves were the least likely to do this.

There can hardly be any doubt about it that the Roman soldiers knew the body was inside. They hadn’t shifted it and weren’t going to let anyone else remove it.

So then, both the Romans and the Jews did their best to prevent theft of the body and resurrection, and in so doing they overreached themselves. In posting a guard and sealing the tomb, they provided additional witnesses to the fact of resurrection, because they made it impossible for any human agency to steal the body! There was only one way in which the dead body could get out and that was through resurrection by the power of God. The Jewish priests, in asking for a guard, unwittingly laid a basis on which the resurrection of Christ became an incontestable fact!

THIRD PROPOSITION:
THE JEWS STOLE THE BODY

This is a most unlikely proposition, because the Jewish leaders were the ones who asked Pilate to arrange for the tomb to be guarded so that the body could not be stolen. If they didn’t want it stolen for fear of giving the impression that it rose from the dead, why steal it themselves? It would be nonsense to argue that the Jewish leaders, who went to considerable trouble to keep the body in the tomb, went and stole it themselves. Such an action would defeat their purpose. If they removed it they would create an empty tomb and put a noose around their own neck. At all costs they did not want an empty tomb.

The whole case for the body being removed by the Jews breaks down when we consider what the sequel to this would have been. If they stole it, they would know where they put it. There would therefore be no need to circulate the obviously untrue and unsatisfactory report that Christ’s disciples stole it. The Jews would have a much more convincing argument than that if they stole it. They could publicly announce that they had removed the body themselves and could produce it to prove it, and blow the apostles’ claim apart.

This is the obvious fundamental weakness in this theory. If the Jews

stole the body, why did they accuse the disciples of Christ of stealing it, and why didn't they produce it to prove it was still dead? If they had possession of the body they would have produced it. The fact that they couldn't produce it, proved they didn't possess it.

It is the complete failure of anyone to produce the corpse (or point to another tomb in which it was supposed to have been transferred), which ultimately destroys every argument based upon the human removal of the body. There are two more observations to be made:

1. On the various occasions that the apostles were arraigned before the Jewish leaders for preaching the resurrection of Christ, they were not once accused of stealing the body. Not even a whisper escaped the lips of the Sanhedrin on the subject. Why? Because they knew it was a deliberate lie on their part and couldn't bring themselves to repeat it in front of those they had falsely accused of doing it. They seem to have abandoned the story as absurd and untenable.
2. In the words of Frank Morrison from the book "Who Moved the Stone?" on page 94: "Finally, and this to my mind carried conclusive weight, we cannot find in the contemporary records any trace of a tomb or shrine becoming the centre of veneration or worship on the ground that it contained the relics of Jesus. This is inconceivable if it was ever seriously stated at the time that Jesus was really buried elsewhere than in the vacant tomb. Rumour would have asserted a hundred supposed places where the remains really lay, and pilgrimages innumerable would have been made to them. Strange though it may appear, the only way in which we can account for the absence of this phenomenon is the explanation offered in the Gospels i.e. that the tomb was known, was investigated after the burial, and that the body had disappeared."

The assumption that the tomb was empty, and that the body was not removed to another, seems to have been universal.

FOURTH PROPOSITION:
THE DISCIPLES STOLE THE BODY

This theory teems with difficulties. The first thing to notice is where the report or accusation came from and why. The story is narrated in Matt. 28. This chapter refers to a great earthquake occurring as an angel whose countenance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow, descended from heaven and rolled back the stone from the entrance to the tomb. The guards were petrified with fear and trembled. They heard the angel declare to some women who had come to the tomb that Jesus had risen from the dead. Some of the guards went to report what they had seen and heard to the Jewish authorities, who decided to bribe them with a large amount of money to give a false report. They asked them to say that

the disciples of Jesus came during the night while they were asleep and stole the body. “So they took the money and did as they were asked, and this report is commonly reported among the Jews until this day” v15.

It is interesting to note that the Jewish leaders did not question or challenge the report of the Roman guards. They did not accuse them of drinking on the job! They knew that the guards had no reason to lie, not about a matter such as this. After all, hardened worldly men like Roman soldiers don’t leave their post to tell stories about encountering a man whose countenance was like lightning and whose clothes were glistening white, or of seeing large rocks moving and rolling by themselves, unless they really saw it and were freaked out by it. Such stories invite ridicule and scorn, much in the same way as stories of ghosts.

It is also significant that the Roman guards reported to the Jewish authorities not to the Roman governor Pilate. This in fact, was very unusual. They were under Pilate’s employment and authority, not the Jews. Most Roman soldiers despised the Jews and treated them with contempt. Why then? Because the Jews, being religious and believers in extra-terrestrial beings and supernatural forces such as angels, were more likely to believe and accept their testimony. Pilate was more likely to accuse them of being drunk, or hallucinating on drugs or being asleep.

So then, the report of Jesus’ resurrection was delivered to the Jewish leaders by their own witnesses - the very men they requested Pilate to put on guard to prevent this from happening. These soldiers, who had no vested interest at all in an empty tomb, were the most unimpeachable witnesses possible, being rational, level-headed, highly disciplined, hard-hearted soldiers.

So there it is: the story about Jesus’ disciples stealing the body while the soldiers slept, was concocted by the Jews themselves to explain away the empty tomb. And they had to bribe the soldiers with a large sum of money to uphold this lie and not tell the truth. This concocted story was a lame excuse put forward for lack of anything better! The Jews denied the undeniable. Their unbelief, hardness of heart and prejudice was incredible.

EVERY ANGLE IS FULL OF DIFFICULTIES

Because the concocted report of the Jewish leaders has always been the main argument against the resurrection of Jesus, having been argued for centuries, further consideration should be given concerning it. Every angle from which it is logically viewed is full of difficulties. There are ten points in particular which demonstrate this:

First point: The lie for which the Jewish leaders paid so much money was self-destroying. If the guards were asleep, how could they know who took the body? Sleeping sentinels could not know what happened! They would

be oblivious to what was going on. What judge would listen to someone who said that while he was asleep his neighbour came into his house and stole his TV? Such a testimony would be laughed out of court. It is so silly that the Gospel record of Matthew doesn't attempt to refute it.

Anyway, it was most unlikely that one Roman soldier would go to sleep on duty, let alone two or more. Roman soldiers were subjected to tremendous discipline. Death was the punishment for falling asleep on duty. No wonder it was an almost unheard of thing. Some say that the whole guard could have consisted initially of ten to thirty soldiers - enough to resist Jesus' disciples who were many, in the event of them attempting to steal the body. Maybe one guard might fall asleep but not all, especially when there was so much anxiety on the part of the authorities to keep the tomb undisturbed. The proposition of all the soldiers going to sleep is not credible. The odds are well and truly stacked against such a proposal.

Here is another thought: If the Jewish authorities did believe, or wanted to give the impression they believed that the followers of Jesus stole the body, why didn't they arrest and interrogate them? Such an act would be a serious offence against the authorities because breaking a Roman seal was a serious violation of Roman law. So why didn't the Romans arrest them? Why weren't the disciples of Jesus ever approached and compelled to give up the body? Why was no effort made to substantiate the charge that the disciples stole the body and no attempt made to locate the thieves and the body? The answer is: because the Jewish leaders knew the disciples had not stolen the body. They knew it was a blatant lie fabricated by themselves.

Second point: Even if all the guards went to sleep on duty, it would be impossible to move the stone away from the mouth of the tomb without waking them. All the Gospel writers indicate that the stone was large and consequently heavy. It is referred to as a "great stone" in Matt. 27:60. Mk. 16:4. Some modern translations say it was "extremely large." This is confirmed by the anxiety of three women as to how they could move it. If the combined strength of three women (Mk. 16:1-3) could not move it, it must have been quite heavy. The stone had to be lifted or rolled out of a slot before it could be rolled away from the entrance. There were no ball bearings to push it on, or grease to make a slippery and silent track. It was a noisy operation. It would therefore be quite ridiculous to argue that such an operation could take place without waking up at least one guard.

Third point: The grave clothes give a silent testimony against the body being snatched by disciples. We read in Jn. 20:5-8 that Peter and John went to the tomb after the stone was removed, and they saw the linen wrappings that had been wrapped around Jesus' body lying there inside the tomb, and the napkin which had been wrapped around his head was

rolled or folded up in a place by itself. The napkin was not left unrolled or strewn about as if removed in a hurry by human hands or thieves.

Now, if the guards did go to sleep and some disciples managed to roll the stone away without waking them, they were not likely to tarry in the tomb taking off all the linen bandages and carefully wrap or roll any of them up. It is inconceivable that they or anyone else stealing the body would tarry like this. They would snatch the body with its wrappings and make a fast exit. Fear of detection makes thieves act as hastily as possible. The wrappings in the tomb, not to mention some being wrapped or rolled up, is therefore a silent witness that the body was not stolen by the disciples or anyone else. The orderliness of the head bandages is rather a witness to Divine intervention.

Fourth point: The disciples had no motive for stealing the body. They certainly had no material advantage to gain from it. Quite the opposite. As a result of publicly proclaiming that Jesus had risen from the dead, they incurred persecution, suffering involving flogging, imprisonment, and death. They were not likely to subject themselves to such treatment for a corpse!

Fifth point: This is the most important point: The Jewish leaders spread the false rumour that the disciples stole the body of Jesus so that they could claim he had risen from the dead, but the fact of the matter is that the disciples did not believe he would be raised. Even though Jesus told them on a number of different occasions that he was going to be put to death and rise on the third day, they did not understand or believe it. Ironically enough the Jewish leaders themselves did catch on to what he said about rising on the third day (Matt. 27:63). They did not believe it but assumed that the disciples of Christ believed it and would try to fulfil it, but they didn't.

Proof that the disciples did not comprehend, can be found in Lk. 18:31-34: Jesus said to his disciples that he "shall be delivered to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated and spat upon: and they shall scourge me and put me to death: and the third day I shall rise again. But they did not understand any of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things that were spoken."

Contemporary Jewish hopes did not allow for, or anticipate a Messiah who would suffer crucifixion at the hands of the Romans and die. The Gospel record is psychologically sound and consistent with Jewish convictions in this respect. So the disciples were unprepared for Jesus' death and overwhelmed by it. All hopes were shattered when he was arrested and crucified, and they became dejected and depressed. They shut themselves away in a house behind locked doors for fear of the Jews, mourning and weeping (Jn. 20:19. Mk. 16:10, 13).

The disciples lost all hope of seeing Jesus again. They did not expect

him to rise on the third day. They were so convinced that they would never see him again, that even after some women told them that they had seen him risen from the dead, they would not believe them (Lk. 24). It should be evident therefore that such men who did not believe in the resurrection of Christ would not attempt to make it appear to have taken place by stealing the body! How could they proclaim a belief they did not believe in?

It is quite clear that the disciples had no reason or motive to steal the dead body of Jesus. It had been honourably buried by Joseph and there was nothing that could be done or needed to be done as far as they were concerned.

Sixth point: The disciples of Christ were honest men - men of integrity who loved righteousness and hated dishonesty and iniquity. They were not the kind of men who would lie, steal and indulge in blatant deception. To say otherwise would be to present them out of character with their writings. There is an unmistakable lofty moral tone in the writings of the apostles. They preached righteousness and turned many from wickedness. Cheats do not normally write in such a way extolling virtues of truth, honesty, humility and justice.

If they stole the body for the purpose of claiming resurrection, this would make them liars and deceivers. But they clearly did not fit into that category. It runs contrary to all we know about them. Even opponents of the resurrection of Christ agree and refuse to use this argument. One wrote this: “The view is morally impossible. All historians must acknowledge that the disciples were too honourable to perform a piece of deception like this. They firmly believed that Jesus was risen.”

Seventh point: The apostles preached the resurrection of Jesus with great boldness (Act. 4:13, 29-31). Was it a stolen corpse that gave them such boldness? Was it a stolen dead body that made them willing to face arrest, imprisonment, beatings and horrible deaths? Not one of them denied the Lord after his resurrection. In spite of intense persecution, not one recanted of his belief that Jesus had risen. Could a rotting corpse provide a psychological basis for this kind of endurance and enthusiasm? As one writer puts it: “Men will die for what they believe to be true, though it may actually be false. Very few, however, die for what they know is a lie.”

We are therefore faced with a psychological and ethical impossibility if we insist that the disciples stole the body and then proclaimed a lie. They had no reason to take it and both stealing and lying were foreign to their character.

Eighth point: It is inconceivable that, even if a few disciples had conspired and pulled off this theft, that they would never mention it to the others, or that it never leaked out to the others. In view of the tremendous pressure and pain of persecution the early Christian community had to

suffer, it is most unlikely that not one of them "cracked" and "spilled the beans" i.e. let the secret out.

But it all comes back to the point made before: If they did steal the body and lie, what was the reason and motive? They had nothing to gain from it - no money, fame, reputation, honour or glory. Quite the opposite: poverty, shame, dishonour, contempt.

Ninth point: Considerable courage would be required to steal a body from a tomb guarded by Roman soldiers. It would be a very daring mission to sneak past armed Roman guards whose duty was to see that the tomb was "made sure until the third day" i.e. to make sure men like the disciples could not get the body.

However, according to the historical record, the men in question were not in the right mental or emotional state to attempt such a risky and daring mission. They fled in panic when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, and shut themselves in fear behind locked doors (Mk. 14:27, 50-52. Jn. 20:19). They remained indoors, afraid of being seen and seized by the Jews. At that stage, the last thing they would want to do would be to publicly identify themselves with Jesus by visiting his tomb.

In the historical record, nothing is heard of the disciples until the startling news is brought to them by Mary Magdalene on the morning of the third day. As a result of visiting the tomb, she learned that Jesus had risen, and went and told the disciples. At that stage only two of them (Peter and John) had the courage to venture forth beyond the locked doors to go to the tomb to check out Mary's report.

It is clear that the seizing and crucifying of Jesus demoralized and unnerved the disciples, reducing them to fearful characters who wouldn't dare resist the authority of the Jewish Sanhedrin let alone the power of the Romans. They clearly lacked the moral fortitude and physical power to run the risk of having an encounter with Roman soldiers guarding the tomb.

So the question that must be asked is: What could have happened in those few hours after the crucifixion that could have changed fearful and cowardly men into such brave and daring men who were prepared to face armed soldiers in order to steal a corpse? Much more than a corpse would be required to account for that kind of change! A corpse would not provide sufficient psychological impetus to undergo such a hazardous and life-threatening mission. As one writer aptly put it: "The disciples had no spirit left for such a daring action. Sorrow and remorse lay like a weight of lead on their hearts, and made them almost as inanimate as the corpse they are supposed to have stolen."

Tenth point: This concerns the transformed lives of the disciples after Christ's resurrection. This is the greatest evidence of all! It is also a challenge to all Christians, namely: If you really believe that Jesus rose

from the dead and is alive today, it should transform your life. One who truly believes cannot stay the same.

Prior to the resurrection, the disciples were, as we have seen, depressed, dispirited and demoralized. Their confidence was shattered and their hopes dashed, making them puzzled and uncohesive. They were lying low and keeping out of sight for fear of the Jews. Without Christ visibly at their head, they were a disorganized bunch of weaklings.

But what a dramatic change occurred after Christ's resurrection! Sadness turned to gladness. They became full of joy, courage and enthusiasm. They went out publicly into the streets bold as a lion, unashamedly identifying themselves with Christ, proclaiming his name and preaching his resurrection.

How do we account for such a sudden dramatic change? All the laws of psychology and common-sense are against believing it was caused by stealing a corpse, hiding it and then lying about it. If such were the case, their joy and boldness would be superficial and artificial - psyched up and put-on, with no real or solid foundation. It would therefore not last. Human nature, being what it is, cannot sustain or maintain that kind of joy and boldness, especially when it brings persecution, suffering and death.

The only satisfactory explanation for the amazing transformation of the disciples is the one given in the Bible, namely: they saw the risen Christ!

Consider the changed life of James, the blood brother of Jesus. Before the resurrection, he despised what his brother was doing and probably felt his claims brought disrepute upon the family name (Jn. 7:1-5. Ps. 69:7-8). But after the resurrection, James is found with the disciples of Jesus preaching the Gospel. In his epistle he refers to the new relationship that he had with Christ. He describes himself as "a bond servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Jam. 1:1). The only explanation for this change in his life is that which is given in 1 Cor. 15:7: "He (Jesus) appeared to James ..."

Thomas believed that the death of Jesus would be the death of his kingdom, for when he thought Jesus would be killed by the Jews if he went to Judea, he said: "Let us go, that we may die with him." Thomas would not have proposed to die with Christ if he expected him to rise in three days time. He clearly had no hope in his resurrection. His unbelief and scepticism was so deep that he refused to believe that Christ had risen from the dead even when all the other apostles told him that they had seen their risen Lord. Thomas said he refused to believe unless he could see Jesus himself and the scars of the nails in his hands and feet and touch them. He did eventually see him and touch him and made an about-face. "Jesus said to him, Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed: Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe" (Jn. 20:24

-29).

The conversion of the apostle Paul is also a strong testimony to the resurrection of Christ. Paul was an intellectual - a well educated Pharisee who excelled in learning above all his fellows. He did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah and certainly didn't believe in his resurrection. He was so opposed that he got authority from the Jewish leaders to arrest and imprison all Jews who became Christians. It was while he was on his way to Damascus to arrest all in the synagogues who were followers of Jesus, that Jesus appeared to him and spoke to him, resulting in his conversion.

A remarkable transformation took place which can only be explained by the resurrection of Jesus. Paul went from one extreme to another in less than an hour. From that time forward he lived and died for Christ. He went from being an extreme persecutor of Christ's church to an extreme promoter, because he saw the risen Christ! No explanation for his conversion is adequate or convincing other than the resurrection of Jesus.

The established psychological fact of changed lives, is a very credible reason for believing in the resurrection. It is subjective evidence bearing witness to the objective fact that Christ rose from the dead. Had Christ not risen, he would have ultimately been forgotten along with his ministry, and Christianity would never have been born.

The apostle's answer to the question: "Why do you proclaim the resurrection of Jesus?" is: "We cannot help speaking about the things we have seen and heard" (Act. 4:20). This simple confession of faith is the simple and satisfying answer to all that happened on the third day after Christ's death.

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CHAPTER TWO

We have seen that Joseph of Arimathea could not have stolen the body of Jesus, and all the facts are stacked against it being stolen by the Romans, Jews or the disciples of Jesus. These propositions create major problems and would not hold up in a court of law when cross-examined by an astute lawyer. Each proposition has the same fundamental failure in common: they cannot provide a credible reason or motive for stealing the body.

But, supposing the body was stolen by any of these, resulting in an empty tomb causing belief in the resurrection, the fact is that the New Testament does not claim that it was the empty tomb that caused this conviction! It was the appearances of the risen Christ that gave rise to this conviction. The empty tomb merely stood as an historical fact, verifying the truth of the resurrection.

Throughout the record in the book of Acts there is enormous emphasis on the fact of the resurrection of Christ, but there is not a single appeal to the empty tomb as proof. The proof was provided in the testimonies given by witnesses who saw him risen from the dead and who performed miracles in his name by the power provided by God through him.

So then, while the empty tomb does not by itself prove the resurrection, it does present two distinct alternatives, namely: the empty tomb was either a human work or divine. Both of these choices must be objectively considered and the one with the highest probability of being

true must be accepted. This brings us to the:

FIFTH PROPOSITION

This relates to the theory that all the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus which caused the disciples to believe he had risen from the dead, were not real objective phenomena, but subjective. Some claim they were hallucinations.

"Objective phenomenon" has to do with the eyes seeing something physical, tangible and real - something external to the mind and body, which is then registered in the mind and becomes a picture or "vision" there. This involves the "seeing is believing" principle.

"Subjective" has to do with thoughts, imaginations and convictions in the mind producing and projecting a picture or vision to the eye. "Believing is seeing" is the principle involved. This subjective principle is good if what is believed is true. But unfortunately visions, dreams and convictions can be inspired or generated by the wishful thinking of the gullible human spirit. All false prophets were deceived by this. They prophesied what they desperately wanted to believe, claiming to have seen it in dreams and visions. God, through the prophet Ezekiel, condemned such so-called prophets, saying: "Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing" (Ezk. 13:3).

The hallucination theory therefore maintains that the appearances of Jesus after his death were not objective reality, i.e. they were not real physical external phenomenon, but merely profound inner conviction and mental conditioning. It is argued that the disciples had so much faith, conviction and anticipation in their mind that they would see Jesus after his death, that they started to hallucinate and imagine it.

Because women are generally more emotional than men and therefore more susceptible to deception or hallucination, really plays into the hands of the sceptics, for it was women who first claimed to see Jesus risen from the dead and reported it to the men.

After the women made their report, Jesus appeared to all the apostles who were gathered together in a room. But the sceptics argue that they had, as a result of the women's report, gathered for a meeting at which they whipped up their emotions and got into a religious frenzy and started imagining that the Lord had appeared. In other words, it was not the appearances of the risen Christ that created faith, but faith in his resurrection that created appearances in their mind.

But this theory breaks down in the most fundamental way possible. As already pointed out, the disciples did not believe that Jesus would rise. There was no faith, hope or expectation in their minds to create subjective visions or hallucinations. They had lost all hope of ever seeing him again.

They actually had a marked prejudice against the resurrection. This is evident from the fact that when the women reported that they had seen Jesus alive, the apostles regarded their report as "idle tales" i.e nonsense and refused to believe it (Lk. 24:1-11). Remember also what was said earlier (p16) about Thomas.

The hallucination theory is totally inconsistent with the mental state of the disciples. Something very dramatic had to happen to convince the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. Only one thing could suffice: his own personal and unmistakable appearance! And that is what happened! Faith did not create the appearances; the appearances created faith.

ANOTHER CONSIDERATION

According to Jn. 20:15, when Jesus appeared to Mary near the open tomb, she mistook him for the gardener. If Mary had been convinced that Jesus would rise from the dead, why would she conclude that someone had stolen his still dead body when she saw the open tomb, and why would she mistakenly think Jesus was the gardener when he appeared to her? If she was in an hallucinatory state of mind and her heart was full of expectation of seeing Jesus, she would have mistaken the gardener for Jesus. So why did she fail to realize that it was Jesus? The answer is: Because she was convinced she wouldn't see him alive again. Her unbelief blinded her to reality, and this completely shatters the hallucination theory. There were no subjective influences or processes at work in the mind of Mary to create visions of Christ. The only vision Mary had of Jesus was a dead body wrapped in linen.

Consider also Lk. 24:13- which refers to two of the disciples of Jesus walking along the road to Emmaus, talking about the death of Jesus. Jesus drew near to them and walked with them but they mistook him for a stranger. Why? Because they were so convinced that he was dead and that they would not see him again!

Again, when Jesus appeared to all his gathered disciples, they thought he was a ghost (Lk. 24:36-. Jn. 20:20-). They had to be invited to touch and handle him and put their hands into the nail wounds and eat with him to be convinced it was really him. Jesus had to bend over backwards to convince them that it was him. There is no record of them whipping up their emotions and psyching themselves up resulting in imagining his presence. Such a view is the imagination psyched up by the sceptics in order to attempt to deny the undeniable.

SIXTH PROPOSITION
THE WRONG TOMB THEORY

This theory maintains that the women mistook the tomb in the uncertain light of early morning and went to the wrong one. Being an empty tomb, they concluded that Jesus had risen from the dead. One sceptic put it like this:

"In the area where Jesus was buried were several tombs. The women, visiting the tomb early on Sunday morning, were not sure of the correct tomb and therefore came upon one that was empty. A young man stood at the entrance, and guessing their errand, tried to tell them that they had mistaken the place. "He is not here," he said, "see the place where they laid him." and probably pointed to another tomb. The women were frightened at the detection of their errand and fled, only imperfectly or not at all understanding what they had heard. Later on they came to believe that the young man was something more than they had seen, and that he was announcing Jesus' resurrection."

However, according to the historical records, the women did carefully note the tomb where Jesus' body was interred, less than seventy two hours before. Matt. 27:61 informs us that as Joseph laid the body of Jesus in the tomb, "Mary Magdalene was there and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb." Also Mk. 15:47: "And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus were looking to see where he was laid" i.e. they took specific note of the tomb to know where to return. Again we read in Lk. 23:55: "Now the women who had come with him from Galilee followed (Joseph) and saw the tomb and how his body was laid."

Two or three women are referred to in these accounts and they all took note of the site where Joseph placed the body of Jesus. It is most unlikely that all of them would so quickly forget the place where their loved one was laid to rest.

As we know, when the women reported what they experienced to the apostles, Peter and John ran to the tomb and found it empty (except for the linen wrappings). Is it to be argued that they went to the wrong tomb also? Is it conceivable that they would succumb to the same mistake? No! The grave clothes in there were a witness to the fact that a dead body had been in there.

Furthermore, an angel sitting there on a stone said: "Come and see the place where the Lord lay" (Matt. 28:6). Did the angel make a mistake too?! Did he roll the stone away from the wrong tomb?

This "wrong tomb" theory suffers from the same fatal objection as most others, namely: It was not the empty tomb that gave rise to the belief that Jesus rose from the dead. No! It was the risen body out of the empty tomb!

Also consider this: If the conviction that Jesus rose from the dead arose as a result of the women going to the wrong tomb (an empty one), the Jewish authorities could have gone to the right tomb and produced the

body if it was still dead. This would have silenced the disciples forever and put the death knell on Christianity.

Even if the angels, women, disciples, Romans and Jews all went to the wrong tomb, one thing is certain: Joseph of Arimathea, the owner of the tomb, certainly knew where it was and could lead people to it. If Jesus was still dead inside, he would have soon discovered it.

SEVENTH PROPOSITION
THE BODY STOLE ITSELF

This theory subdivides into two possibilities. The first one is the "swoon" or "recovery" theory, which advocates that Jesus didn't really die, but fainted. The spices and cool air revived him. He freed himself from the embalming clothes, removed the stone from the mouth of the tomb without the guards hearing or noticing it, crept past them unobserved, then appeared to the disciples and convinced them that he had risen from the dead and was immortal.

The second possibility relating to "the body stole itself" is that Jesus really did die and was supernaturally raised by the power of almighty God his Father.

Let's consider the first possibility - the "swoon" theory. It has many insurmountable difficulties.

First difficulty: The Romans had a reputation for being thorough and efficient when it came to putting their victims to death, especially by crucifixion. They were not amateurs. It is specifically stated in the historical record that the Roman centurion who stood by the cross, saw Jesus cry out and die (Mk. 15:39). He heard Jesus' death cry. Such men were familiar with the signs of death and he knew Jesus had died.

We read in Mk. 15:42-43 that Joseph of Arimathea went to the Roman governor Pilate to request the dead body of Jesus. Joseph saw Jesus hanging limp on the cross and knew he was dead, so he wanted to take the body away to embalm and bury it.

Mk. 15:44-45 goes on to say that "Pilate was amazed that Jesus was dead already, so he called the centurion to see if he had long been dead. And when he had ascertained from the centurion (that Jesus was dead) he gave the body to Joseph."

Pilate required certification of Christ's death before he would release the body! He personally questioned the centurion before granting permission. He took nothing for granted! The Roman centurion, being an authority on the evidences of death, was satisfied, and satisfied Pilate, that Jesus was dead.

Let us now consider Jn. 19:30-34: "When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head and

expired. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day (for that Sabbath day was an high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water."

These executioners were specialists, accustomed to dealing with death. They knew a dead man when they saw one and they knew that Jesus was dead!

Mk. 15:45-46 records how Joseph took the body of Jesus down from the cross and wrapped it in linen and laid him in the tomb. Nicodemus helped him do this. Both were convinced he was dead. They had very close contact with the body while carrying it and wrapping it in linen cloths. There was obviously no sign of life. Not a twitch or flicker of life remained; not the faintest sign. Professor Chandler is worth quoting here:

"The remarkable circumstances of wrapping up the dead body in spices, by Joseph and Nicodemus, "according to the manner of the Jews in burying," is full proof that Jesus was dead, and known to be dead. Had there indeed been any remains of life in him, when taken down from the cross, the pungent nature of the myrrh and aloes, their strong smell, their bitterness, their being wrapped round his body in linens with a roller, and over his head and face with a napkin, "as was the custom of the Jews" to bury, must have entirely extinguished them."

It is significant to note that it was the Jewish leaders who didn't want the bodies left on the cross on the Sabbath and appealed to Pilate to hasten their death by breaking their legs (Jn. 19:31). They were the ones who wanted Jesus dead and it is clear from the fact that they did not ask the soldiers to break his legs, that they were satisfied he was dead. They were so sure that he was dead that they requested the tomb to be sealed and guarded, not because they thought he might revive and walk out, but because they were afraid someone else might steal and walk out with the body! All that they were afraid of was fraud on the part of the disciples, not that Jesus himself would regain consciousness, get up and walk out.

It is also worthy of note that although the soldiers were convinced that Jesus was dead, and therefore did not break his legs, one of them thrust his spear into his side just to make doubly sure. Jesus' body did not respond. There was no sign of life.

Numerous authorities agree that reference to blood and water coming out of his side where the spear penetrated is symptomatic of rupture of the heart. It is strong medical proof of death. If Jesus had only fainted, strong spouts of blood only would have emerged with every heart beat. Instead,

blood came out, distinct and separate from the accompanying watery serum. This is evidence of massive clotting of the blood in the main arteries and is exceptionally strong medical proof of death.

There can be no doubt about it: Jesus died. He was clinically dead. The testimony of the English prayer book stands on a firm foundation: "He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried."

SECOND DIFFICULTY WITH THE "SWOON" THEORY — IMPOSSIBLE TO SURVIVE CRUCIFIXION

Even if Jesus had only fainted, the deadly nature of his wounds, along with being three days without food and water, would have made it physically impossible for him to recover, let alone get up on his feet, shift a heavy rock and walk out looking normal.

No one acquainted with the facts of the deadly wounds should seriously argue that he recovered by natural means and walked out in his own strength. Such a theory is the least rational of all.

The sufferings of Christ, involving the wounding and mutilating of his body, did not start with his crucifixion. It started the night before when he was flogged, slapped, punched and had his head pierced by a cruel crown of thorns.

Regarding the flogging administered by the Romans: the victim was stripped of his clothes and then tied to a post or pillar. Although the Jews were limited by their law to inflict forty strokes, the Romans set no such limitation. The whip they used to scourge the victim was called a flagrum and it contained bone and metal that would greatly lacerate human flesh. The sufferer's veins would be laid bare, and the muscles, sinews and even the bowels of victims in extreme cases were open to exposure.

After suffering the most intense form of physical punishment, Jesus was then expected to carry his cross to the place where he was to be crucified. Due to the pain and stress to which he had been subjected, not to mention lack of food and sleep, it is not surprising that his physical strength was at such a low ebb, he could not carry the cross. So the Romans compelled another man to carry it for him (Matt. 27:32). It is even possible that the phrase in Mk. 15:22: "They (the Romans) brought him to Golgotha" could indicate that Jesus could not walk there under his own power.

When the revolting pre-cross sufferings were brought to a close, the act of crucifying began, and it would be an understatement to say that it was extremely intense and severe. Crucifixion was a long drawn-out excruciatingly painful death, in which every nerve in the body cried aloud in anguish. The unnatural position made the slightest movement painful; the lacerated veins and crushed tendons throbbed with incessant anguish;

the wounds, inflamed by exposure, gradually gangrened; the arteries - especially at the head and stomach - became swollen and oppressed with surcharged blood; and while each variety of misery went on gradually increasing, there was added to them the intolerable pang of a burning raging thirst. No wonder the prospect of death to victims of crucifixion was so desirable.

It would be difficult to imagine even the most powerful of men not succumbing to death when crucified. As we have seen, steps were taken to make sure that Jesus was dead. But suppose for argument's sake that he was not quite dead. Can we seriously believe that after the rigours and pain of flogging and crucifixion, he could survive thirty six hours in a cold stone sepulchre with neither warmth nor food and water nor medical care? Rather than revive him it would prove the inevitable end to his flickering life.

THIRD DIFFICULTY
WITH THE SWOON THEORY — THE GRAVE CLOTHES

To believe that Jesus did not really die after all that he suffered, and in a sorely-injured and near-to-death state he was able to remove himself from yards of bandages wrapped tightly around him, weighted with one hundred pounds of sticky spices, myrrh and aloes (Jn. 19:39-40), then roll away the stone boulder from the mouth of the tomb which three women were incapable of shifting, without disturbing the Roman guard, and then walk miles on wounded feet and convince his disciples that he had vanquished death - such credulity is more incredible than Thomas' unbelief! One commentator explains the grave clothes like this:

"In preparing a body for burial according to the Jewish custom, it was usually washed and straightened, and then bandaged tightly from the armpits to the ankles in strips of linen about a foot wide. Aromatic spices, often of a gummy consistency, were placed between the wrappings or folds. They served partially as a preservative and partially as a cement to glue the cloth wrappings into a solid covering. John's term "bound" in Jn. 11:44 in relation to Lazarus' hands, feet and face being bound with grave cloths, is in perfect accord with Lk. 23:53 which says Jesus' body was "wrapped ... in linen." The Greek word translated "wrapped" means to entwine, wind or roll up in.

So the question is: if Jesus revived and did not die, how did he in his terribly injured condition remove these tightly wrapped, tightly stuck and sticky bandages by himself? Others had to do it for Lazarus (Jn. 11:44). And why would Jesus tarry to fold up any of the cloths?

Professor James Hastings says: "As far back as the fourth century A.D. attention was called to the fact that the myrrh was a drug which

adheres so closely to the body that the grave cloths would not easily be removed."

FOURTH DIFFICULTY WITH THE SWOON THEORY — THE REMOVAL OF THE STONE

Even if Jesus did not die and survived the torture inflicted upon him, it would have been physically impossible to remove the stone from inside the tomb. Even a strong uninjured man could not do it, let alone a man weakened by injuries, loss of blood, lack of food, water and sleep.

The historical accounts leave us in no doubt that the stone was large and consequently heavy. This fact is asserted or implied by all the historians who refer to it. It is referred to as "a great stone" in Matt. 27:60 and "very great" in Mk. 16:4. According to Mk. 16:1-4 the combined strength of three women could not move it, indicating that it must have been of considerable weight. Most authorities agree that several fit and strong men would be required to shift it. The physical improbabilities of a near-dead, weakened and exhausted man removing it by himself from inside the tomb with nail-pierced hands, are overwhelming.

It must be appreciated that the stone was round like a huge solid wheel and its surface was flat. The flat surface covered the whole inside mouth of the tomb, so there was no edge to get the shoulder under on the inside. To make matters worse, there was a slot on the outside of the tomb into which the stone dropped, making it difficult to remove even from the outside. This is why the three women said: "Who shall roll away the stone from the door for us?"

To imagine that a man with nail-pierced hands could push the stone out of the slot and away from the mouth of the tomb, without having a handle to grip on its flat surface or an edge to get his shoulder under - and to not disturb the Roman guards in the process, and then walk on nail-pierced feet from Golgotha to Jerusalem and from Jerusalem to Emmaus and back (a distance of over thirty kilometres) requires more faith than to believe he was supernaturally raised from the dead.

FIFTH DIFFICULTY WITH THE SWOON THEORY — PROVING HE CONQUERED DEATH

It is clear that anyone who survived the ordeal that Jesus suffered, would be nearly dead, full of pain, weak (hobbling and limping), feverish and in desperate need of medical attention, food, water and a time of resting and convalescing.

So the question is: How could one in this kind of condition give his disciples the impression that he had vanquished death and become

immortal? It would be painfully obvious that he was still mortal and weak. How then could such a person in this condition have changed his disciples' sorrow into joy, despondency into enthusiasm, despair into triumph and hope, and cowardice in confidence and boldness? The appearance of a sorely injured, sick and frail leader would elicit sympathy, sorrow and concern. A man in such poor physical condition would hardly look the invincible warrior or hero that the Scriptures said the Messiah would be, and would weaken conviction that he was the true Messiah.

It is utterly incredible to imagine that an injured and weak man could make an impression on the disciples that would provide a basis for their future ministry. Such an impression would lack sufficient inspiration and motivation to account for their joy and gladness.

However, according to the historical records, all the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples were not those of an injured and weak man, but a healthy and strong man, no longer fettered by the physical limitations of mortality.

SIXTH DIFFICULTY WITH THE SWOON THEORY — IT MAKES JESUS A LIAR AND DECEIVER

If Jesus only fainted on the cross and came out of the tomb by his own physical strength, then it makes him a liar and deceiver because he told his disciples that he was dead and is now alive forevermore by the power of God. This would mean that he involved them in a lie and deception because he told them to spread the news around about his resurrection. The swoon theory therefore requires us to believe that Jesus told flagrant lies and cannot be, as he declared himself to be: "The way, the truth and the life" - "The faithful and true witness of God." Instead of being honest, true and righteous, Jesus would become a fraud with no scruples, sending his friends on a wild goose chase, resulting in them being persecuted and put to death.

Such a person is totally out of character with the historical Jesus of the gospels, and this would be an inconsistency and discrepancy that any honest historian would have to reject. Of all the things that might be said against Jesus, it cannot be said that he was a liar. Even his enemies had to admit that he was a man of integrity who spoke the truth (Matt. 22:16).

SEVENTH DIFFICULTY WITH THE SWOON THEORY — IT MAKES THE DISCIPLES LIARS AND DECEIVERS

If Jesus came staggering out of the tomb injured and weak, the disciples would know that he had only fainted and revived, and was not immortal. Therefore, to teach and preach that he had been raised by the

power of God to immortality, would be a deliberate lie. And this would be hard to reconcile with what we know about them from their writings, which indicate that they were men of high principle and integrity. They were strictly honest and true and condemned lying and cheating.

As pointed out before: the apostles had no motive for fraud. Preaching the resurrection of Christ did not bring them wealth, fame or comfort. Quite the opposite; it brought poverty, ignominy, reproach, suffering and death. At this point they would have abandoned their mission if they knew it was a lie. Intelligent, practical men are not that stupid to carry on with a false endeavour when it tarnishes their reputation, alienates from friends and family and incurs hostility and death.

EIGHTH DIFFICULTY WITH THE SWOON THEORY — WHEN AND HOW DID CHRIST ULTIMATELY DIE?

If Christ did not die on the cross, and fully recovered from his wounds, and lived on as a mortal man, then when did he die and under what circumstances? To account for his disappearance, we would have to suppose that he withdrew himself from his friends, went into solitary retreat to live out the rest of his days (forty years?) hiding or masquerading, and finally died in seclusion. If so, we would have to eliminate from the historical record the whole ascension narrative.

This would mean that while his church was growing and his disciples were exposed to persecution, suffering and death, putting faith in the help and strength of his presence; he was in fact absent, having no contact, spending the remainder of his days in solitude. And then finally he died, but no one knows when, where or how.

Once again this would be totally out of character with the Jesus revealed in the historical records, as the good shepherd who loved his friends and enjoyed fellowship with them and promised to always be present with them. If he remained on earth, he would not leave or forsake them, but remain with them. He was loyal and faithful to his friends to the core.

In concluding this section on the swoon theory, one can honestly say that it is hard to believe that this was the favourite explanation of eighteenth century rationalism. The evidence speaks so much to the contrary of such a hypothesis, that it is now virtually obsolete.

CONCLUSION

Having dealt with the issue of the empty tomb Sherlock Holmes style, considering all the possibilities and eliminating the ones that don’t

fit, we are left with one final proposition: The body stole itself as a result of being supernaturally revived and raised from the dead, for it would require supernatural power to bring back to life a body that had been dead for three days and endow it with immortality.

Contrary as this may be to natural laws and means, and impossible for man to perform, we have no other alternative or answer. This of course is the explanation given in the historical record of the New Testament. It presents the resurrection of Christ as a definite event in history in which God acted in a real and definite way. The resurrection faith of Christians which arose in the first century and continued from that time forward to our present day, is the effect, and Christ's resurrection is the cause.

The fact of the resurrection of Christ is an historical matter, but the meaning or significance of it is a theological matter. The implication of Christ's resurrection is that if God can raise one man to immortality, He can raise others! This is the main theological significance of Christ's resurrection. The apostle Paul put it like this: "Christ has been raised from the dead and is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ" (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

The first thing to notice in this statement is that Paul says death came by one man (Adam) and resurrection from the dead comes by another man (Christ). According to the early chapters in Genesis, Adam's faith and obedience failed when put to the test. He disobeyed God's commandment, which is sin and it incurred the death penalty. Due to genetic factors, all of Adam's descendants, which is the whole human race, inherited a mortal and sinful nature. The tendency of this nature to sin is so strong, that all throughout history have sinned and therefore died. To break this deadlock required someone whose faith could pass every test and who could render one hundred percent obedience in all trials i.e. never sin. Not long after Adam sinned, God announced that He would ultimately arrange for such a person to conquer the power of sin and lay the basis for victory over death. That person was of course, His own son Jesus Christ.

When man was first created, he was given access to the tree of life, but as a result of sin, he was expelled from the garden of Eden "lest he put forth his hand and take of the tree of life and live forever" (Gen. 3:22). It is evident from this that man was not created with inherent immortality in the form of an immortal soul. It would be absurd for God to prevent access to the tree of life so that man could not live forever, if he possessed an immortal soul that would live forever anyway!

It is evident that if Adam and Eve had continued to have access to the tree of life, they would have lived forever as physical bodily beings. This is very significant, because it teaches us that God's purpose was for man

to live forever in a physical bodily state, not an immaterial disembodied state, as is taught in the universal doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

This therefore implies that if God wants those who die to live again, He will have to bring them back from the dust of death and the grave, as physical bodily beings. According to Scripture, this and this alone, is the divine purpose and solution to death, and it is called "resurrection."

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul has from time immemorial been the pagan's doctrine of life after death, by which they tried to take the sting out of death. And unfortunately, this doctrine became superimposed upon the Christian faith by an apostate church, but it is never taught in the Bible. Scripture clearly teaches that apart from resurrection, there is no other hope of life after death. For a full treatment of this subject, send for the free booklet: "Life After Death - Immortal Body Or Disembodied Immortal?"

So then, from Adam to Christ, all sinned and died and lay unconscious ("asleep") in the grave. But Jesus, the promised redeemer came and never sinned. No matter how severely his faith and obedience was tested, he remained one hundred percent obedient. "He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Plp. 2:8).

The cross with all of its terrible pain was the ultimate and climactic test of faith and obedience and Jesus passed with flying colours. "Therefore God has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every other name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Plp. 2:9-11).

Because death is the result of sin, and Jesus never sinned, he could not remain dead. Not even his flesh was allowed to see corruption. His resurrection was therefore a vindication of his righteous and sinless life. It was also a vindication of his appointment by God to judge and rule the world, as taught in Act. 17:31: "God has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man He has appointed, and He has proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead."

Because Jesus the son of God is the first and only man in history to conquer sin by living a sinless life to the glory of God, he is the first man in history to conquer death by being raised from the dead to immortality. All other leaders of world religions such as Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed etc died and are still dead, but Jesus is alive! He alone qualifies as the Saviour and ruler of the world.

We read in 1 Tim. 1:10 that Jesus "brought life and immortality to light." It is evident from this that up until Christ's resurrection, no man had experienced the immortality promised by God to man. For the first time in history, it was revealed and demonstrated, and people witnessed it

in the resurrected immortal body of Jesus. For this reason Christ is referred to as the firstfruits of those who have died. His resurrection is likened to "firstfruits" because the firstfruits of a tree are a promise of more to come and an example or specimen of what they will be like. For this reason we read in 1 Cor. 15:22-23: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterwards those who are Christ's at his coming."

We learn from this that Jesus is the first man to be raised from the dead and all true believers who belong to him will be raised and made immortal like him at his second coming. In the words of 1 Jn. 3:2: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him." Paul puts it like this: "For our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our lowly (mortal) body like unto his glorious (immortal) body ..." (Plp. 3:20-21)

Because of his victory over sin and death, which was due to his unconditional sacrificial love for God and profound respect for His law and commandments; God has invested His son with all power and authority in heaven and earth. He has been given the power to raise from the dead and endow with immortality all who make him Lord of their life, follow his example and believe the gospel which states that he died for our sins, was buried and rose again the third day (1 Cor. 15:1-4). "All who die believing that Jesus died and rose again will be brought back to life like him" (1 Thes. 4:14).

To qualify for resurrection and immortality it is clearly crucial to believe in, and acknowledge the resurrection of Christ. It is the key-stone to the arch of Christianity. Take away this key-stone and the whole arch comes crashing down. No wonder the critics and sceptics have tried so hard for so long to refute the resurrection of Christ!

But it has all been to no avail. The evidence that demands the verdict that he must have risen from the dead is a truth that stands as sure and irrefutable today as it did on the day he rose from the dead and was seen by over five hundred witnesses (1 Cor. 15:1-8). The question is: Do you believe it? if not, why not?

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