

The Best Explanation

People who _____ the resurrection of Jesus from the grave have offered alternative explanations. Do those explanations fit the _____? We know the Scriptures are _____ any other book in the world, ancient or modern. We know that they accurately _____ what God wishes for us to know about the Lord Jesus, about morality, and about salvation and eternal life. We don't want to settle for anything _____ than the truth, so we turn to the Holy Scriptures. We can trust them.

After the death and burial of Jesus, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to the governor Pontius Pilate and asked for a _____ to secure the tomb. They were afraid of a conspiracy; they imagined the disciples would _____ the body and tell everyone Jesus arose from the dead on the third day like He predicted. Pilate told the Jews, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how" (Matthew 27:65). They were determined that He would _____ buried. They wanted to make sure His prediction _____, so no one would believe in Him. They even started a _____ that they knew was false rather than admit the truth.

Their plans, however, failed. Nothing could _____ Jesus in the tomb. God raised Him up, and all the authorities and armies could not _____ God. Psalm 2 reminds us that the rulers and the kings of the earth took their _____ against Jesus Christ, God's anointed. God laughed and scoffed at these men. God Himself installed Jesus as _____ upon Zion on the day of Pentecost. Peter declared, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for _____ that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36).

Our reading today comes from 2 Peter 1:16-21.

When people deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they must _____ an explanation for the events reported by eyewitnesses and recorded during their lifetime. In recent centuries, several have tried to _____ what they think happened rather than believe the eyewitnesses that Jesus rose from the dead. After serious study of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, scholars and truth seekers haven't _____ the alternate theories denying the resurrection to be convincing. While they focus on certain aspects of the resurrection account, they lose sight of other relevant _____ from the eyewitnesses. One can hardly imagine these theorists many centuries after the events and showing no proof should be _____ over the first century eyewitnesses who saw the events first-hand.

Let's examine some of these theories to see if they could have happened. First, we'll look at the _____ theory. They say Christ didn't die but He merely _____ from exhaustion. When he was laid in the tomb he _____ and later showed himself alive to the disciples. The idea that Jesus survived the crucifixion was first put forth by a deist, Peter Annet in 1768. In recent years Hugh Schonfield in *The Passover Plot*, theorized that Jesus, believing Himself to be the Messiah, plotted to _____ His death, intending later to sweep triumphantly into power. Nearly all the historians and medical doctors who have researched the evidence of the New Testament _____ that Jesus Christ died as a result of a brutal, Roman crucifixion. The belief that Jesus survived the crucifixion is a convenient _____, while His death on the cross finds solid footing among those who have searched for an answer from the eyewitnesses and from the historical records.

Longer quotations may not appear in the Study Sheet, but can be read in the accompanying transcript.

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Jesus was in a weakened condition from a loss of _____ due to the scourging before He was crucified. He suffered _____ hours upon the cross. When the soldier pierced His side, blood and water came from the _____. John 19:34 talks about that and it's a _____ sign that He actually did die. The Roman soldiers were experts in executing and they _____ when a man was dead. The Romans practiced crucifixions, and they did it to _____. They were expert, well-practiced executioners. They knew how to use this form of torture and they made _____ it killed their victims.

Some have suggested that Jesus took a _____ that caused Him to lose consciousness, but this wouldn't account for the flow of blood and water from having His side pierced. It wouldn't account for how He survived alone in the _____. Jesus' body had gone through preparations for _____. Jesus' body was wrapped in about a hundred pounds of cloth and spices, and placed in a sealed tomb until the third day (according to John 19:39-40, and Matthew 27:60). If Jesus had not died from his previous torture, he would have died in the _____ from a lack of food, water, and medical treatment.

If Jesus awoke in the tomb, how did He _____ the burial wrappings in such a weakened condition? How could Jesus alone have _____ the huge stone in his weakened condition, considering it would take several men to move it? How did He move it unnoticed by the _____? After the 40 days of appearances, how did Jesus disguise himself as a fit Conqueror of Death and keep up the _____ for the rest of his life? One who was so brutally beaten and crucified on a Friday would not appear _____ enough to do much of anything on the following Sunday. If Jesus' resurrection was a hoax, why didn't the _____ disavow him? Why did they suffer and die for their _____ in the resurrection?

Second, some suggest the resurrection was merely a _____ or a hallucination. Since the disciples were expecting to see Jesus, it would seem only natural for them to _____ that they did. They say that the vision took the _____ of a bodily appearance. David Strauss made popular a more detailed statement of the hallucination hypothesis in the 19th century. He didn't believe it was possible for a person to _____ after being dead for three days and therefore proposed that the disciples, and later Paul, experienced "hallucinations" or "subjective visions".

A vision is a miraculous _____; it's an encounter with God. This theory really just substitutes one miracle for another and doesn't _____ the theorist's case at all. Where is the _____ from the eyewitnesses that it was only a vision? In Acts 10:10 Peter fell into a trance, which he called a vision in verse 19. The early disciples surely knew the difference between seeing Jesus for themselves and a vision. Peter and John say they were eyewitnesses (John 20:24 and 2 Peter 1:16). Why did the disciples _____ that they witnessed a physical body? Jesus, in his appearances, could speak, hear, eat, touch and be touched (according to 1 John 1, and Luke 24). Jesus proved himself alive by "many infallible _____" (Acts 1:3). How could the same hallucination occur to more than 500 people at one time? Hallucinations are individual matters. The vision theory doesn't _____ what happened at the tomb. What happened to the _____ of Jesus? What frightened the guards? Who rolled away the stone? Why were the linen wrappings left behind? While this theory sounds intriguing, it falls far _____ of explaining all the other evidence for these events.

Furthermore, the disciples didn't _____ to see Jesus prior to His appearances. Despite His prophecies, the crucifixion and burial of Jesus _____ the disciples to be skeptical, doubtful, hopeless, and unbelieving according to the New Testament. A vision alone would have not given the disciples sufficient _____ to accept the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. It would not have led them to the full commitment that they made to His cause. No, hallucinations don't do that.

Third, some suggest the disciples really did _____ the body. Of course, the chief priests wished this conspiracy to be _____. The Roman soldiers came to the chief priests to tell them what happened. They saw the _____ move the stone and declare that Jesus had risen from the dead. Matthew 28:12-15 reports: “And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of _____ to the soldiers, and said, ‘You are to say, ‘The disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were _____.’ ‘And if this should come to the governor’s ears, we’ll win him over and keep you out of _____.’” They took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely _____ among the Jews, and is to this day, according to Luke.

It wasn’t the disciples who conceived a conspiracy; it was the Jewish elders who _____ to make this story known! Stealing the body to produce a fraudulent narrative is certainly out of _____ for the timid, fearful, unbelieving, and hiding disciples. To go up against the trained and armed Roman soldiers at the tomb to steal his body would be most difficult. They were hiding because they _____ jail for themselves (John 20:19). This small band of Jews would have been so frightened of the soldiers who were under punishment of death if they failed in their _____ to protect the tomb. This kind of idea just doesn’t make sense. What could a few, poor fishermen do against a disciplined and well-armed group of soldiers? If there had been an altercation, why didn’t the report that someone was wounded or killed in this attempt to steal the body, go out to everyone? If the disciples stole the body, how could they have enough _____ to roll the stone away, take off the grave clothes, and leave undetected? Why would they undress the body? Why did they leave the clothes orderly, rather than just thrown? What did they do with the body?

It’s impossible to believe that _____ the guards fell asleep at the same time. The Jews were permitted to make the tomb as _____ as they knew how (Matthew 27:65). So there were probably _____ soldiers at the tomb. The soldiers were either awake or asleep. If they were asleep, how did the soldiers _____ the disciples stole the body? If they were awake, why would they _____ the body to be taken? Let’s remember that a Roman soldier would be brutally killed if he were _____ sleeping on the job. Herod put Peter in prison and chained him between _____ soldiers. When the angel of the Lord rescued Peter from Herod’s prison and he could not be found, Herod ordered “that they (that is, the soldiers) should be put to _____” (Acts 12:19). If the Jews really believed the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus, they would have pursued them for this _____. If they wished to thwart the preaching of the apostles, why didn’t the Sanhedrin apprehend the apostles on Pentecost and imprison them until they confessed? Why didn’t they search for the body and expose the lie. This shows the Jews did really _____ their own lie.

Fourth, some suggest that Mary Magdalene and the women who went to the tomb early in the morning on the first day of the week went to the _____ tomb. Kirsopp Lake, who first offered this theory, assumed the women who reported the body was missing had mistakenly gone to the wrong tomb. If this is so, then Peter and John, who went to check upon the women's report, must have _____ gone to the wrong tomb. We may be certain that Jewish authorities, who asked for a Roman guard to be stationed at the tomb to prevent Jesus' body from being stolen, would not have been mistaken about the _____. Nor would the Roman guards, for they were _____! If the resurrection-claim was merely because of a geographical mistake, the Jewish authorities would have lost no time in producing the body from the _____ tomb, thus effectively quenching for all time any rumor of resurrection.

Matthew reported the guards were there at the tomb in the _____ of all, when the women went to the tomb. The women who visited the tomb knew _____ the guards were. The guards may well have heard what the angel said to the women. Since the tomb was in the garden adjoining Golgotha, and the women likely

stayed with His body as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus dressed the body, they surely knew the _____ location of the tomb and were not mistaken.

None of these alternative theories explain _____ James the brother of Jesus was convinced of the Lord's resurrection and converted. In the end they are misleading and _____. None of them explain why the persecutor Saul of Tarsus left his old life and became a defender of Christianity and willing to _____ repeatedly for his faith. The apostle Paul gave the earliest written, biblical report of the resurrection of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15. Since several people witnessed the resurrection of Jesus, no one could offer some radical theory of what happened unchallenged by the disciples. Once the disciples saw, heard, and touched Jesus for themselves, they would laugh at silly theories that some have claimed.

The alternative theories that deny the miracle of Christ's resurrection go against the _____ accounts of the eyewitnesses. They fail to deal with all the _____ and offer only faulty explanations. They merely offer a skeptic's _____, something he convinces himself in order to justify his own assumptions. He imagines that if he can offer some other explanation—however absurd it may be—that he can avoid the _____. The truth is: Jesus really did arise from the dead bodily and appeared to many people with convincing proofs, just as Acts 1:3 says. If this were not so, there would never have been a church and the New Testament would never have been written and become the most published book of ancient times.

When people really want to believe something they cherry pick ideas that support their view and _____ anything that may show it to be false. People often _____ to themselves when they don't want to admit the truth. People often say something is morally acceptable, even though God calls it sin. People who condemn _____ for some sin often permit themselves to commit that very sin. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" These alternative views, which deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus, fall into that category. Although our hearts may deceive _____, they cannot deceive _____. We may try to excuse and justify our sins and our faulty beliefs, but God sees through our deception. God said in the next verse, Jeremiah 17:10, "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds." You may lie to yourself, but God sees and knows the truth. God is testing your heart. What does God see?

To be right with the Lord we must be honest about our sins. God must forgive them, and He does so when we place our faith in the Lord Jesus and obey the gospel. We obey Him by lovingly repenting of our sins, confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38). Early Christians baptized or immersed penitent believers in water so their sins would be washed away (Acts 22:16). When we're baptized into Christ, we're born again and begin a new life. Have you been baptized? It's not enough to be born again, we have to continue to walk in the way of the Lord throughout our lives. We must love and live for the Lord.