

"The Best Explanation"

People who deny the resurrection of Jesus from the grave have offered alternative explanations. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Do those explanations fit the facts? Stayed tuned and we'll see!

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. We know the Scriptures are unlike any other book in the world, ancient or modern. We know that they accurately reveal 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 less than the truth, so we turn to the Holy Scriptures. We can trust them. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

After the death and burial of Jesus, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to the governor Pontius Pilate and asked for a guard to secure the tomb. They were afraid of a conspiracy; they imagined the disciples would steal the body and tell everyone Jesus arose from the dead on the third day like He predicted. Well 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 stay buried. They wanted to make sure His prediction failed, so no one would believe in Him. They even started a rumor that they knew was false rather than admit the truth.

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

Now we offer this study free in a little book that we're offering this month on The Son Arose, talking about the resurrection. If you'd like a printed copy of our study and live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from 2 Peter 1:16 to 21, and explore the truth about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Our reading today comes from 2 Peter 1, verses 16 to 21. Where Peter talks about hearing God, and how important the message is. "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased'— and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." That's a reading from God's holy word.

Let's pray. "Oh Father we're thankful that those who are eyewitnesses told us what actually did happen in the scriptures. Help us to be faithful, to be committed and to be obedient to your will always. In Jesus name, Amen."

When people deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they must find an explanation for the events reported by eyewitnesses and recorded during their lifetime. In recent centuries, several have tried to explain 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 found 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 testimony from the eyewitnesses. One can hardly imagine these theorists many centuries after the events and showing no proof should be trusted 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 swoon theory. They say Christ didn't die but He merely fainted from exhaustion. And when he was laid in the tomb he revived and later showed himself alive to the disciples. Now 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 fake His death, intending later to sweep triumphantly into power.

And nearly all the historians and medical doctors who have researched the evidence of the New Testament agree that Jesus Christ died as a result of a brutal, Roman crucifixion. The belief that Jesus survived the crucifixion is a convenient myth, 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.

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

Some have suggested that Jesus took a drug 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 tomb. Jesus' body had gone through preparations for burial. 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 to 40, and Matthew 27: 60). Now if Jesus had not died from his previous torture, he would have died in the tomb from a lack of food, water, and medical treatment.

If Jesus awoke in the tomb, how did Jesus remove the burial wrappings in such a weakened condition? How could Jesus alone have moved the huge stone in his weakened condition, considering it would take several men to move it? How did He move it unnoticed by the guards?

After the 40 days of appearances, how did Jesus disguise himself as a fit Conqueror of Death and keep up the hoax for the rest of his life? One who was so brutally beaten and crucified on a Friday would not appear well enough to do much of anything on the following Sunday.

If Jesus' resurrection was a hoax, why didn't the disciples disavow him? Why did they suffer and die for their faith in the resurrection?

Second, some suggest the resurrection was merely a vision or a hallucination. Since the disciples were expecting to see Jesus, it would seem only natural for them to think that they did. And they say

that the vision took form 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 revive after being dead for three days and therefore proposed that the disciples, and later Paul, experienced "hallucinations" or "subjective visions".

Now, a vision is a miraculous event; it's an encounter with God. This theory really just substitutes one miracle for another and doesn't help the theorist's case at all. Where is the evidence from the eyewitnesses that it was only a vision? In Acts 10, verse 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).

Well, why did the disciples testify 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 proofs" (Acts 1 and verse 3). Now how could the same hallucination occur to more than 500 people at one time? Hallucinations are individual matters.

The vision theory doesn't explain what happened at the tomb. What happened to the body 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, far short of explaining all the other evidence for these events.

Furthermore, the disciples didn't expect to see Jesus prior to His appearances. Despite His prophecies, the crucifixion and burial of Jesus caused the disciples to be skeptical, doubtful, hopeless, and unbelieving according to the New Testament. A vision alone would have not given the disciples sufficient reason to accept the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. You see, 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 steal the body. Of course, the chief priests wished this conspiracy to be true. You'll remember, when the Roman soldiers came to the chief priests to tell them what happened. They saw the angel move the stone and declare that Jesus had risen from the dead. Matthew 28:12 to 15 reports: And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, "You are to say, 'The disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' "And if this should come to the governor's ears, we'll win him over and keep you out of trouble." Well, they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread 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 paid to make this story known! Stealing the body to produce a fraudulent narrative is certainly out of character 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 feared jail for themselves (in John 20, verse 19). This small band of Jews would have been so frightened of the soldiers, and these soldiers who were under punishment of death if they failed in their duty to protect the tomb, well 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 time to roll the stone away, take off the grave clothes, and leave undetected? And why would they undress the body? Why did they leave the grave clothes? Why did they leave the clothes orderly, rather than just thrown? What did they do with the body?

You know it's impossible to believe that all the guards fell asleep at the same time. You see, the Jews were permitted to make the tomb as secure as they know how (Matthew 27:65). And so there were probably several soldiers at the tomb. Now the soldiers were either awake or asleep. If they were asleep, how did the soldiers know the disciples stole the body? If they were awake, why would they allow the body to be taken? Let's remember that a Roman soldier would be brutally killed if he were caught sleeping on the job. You remember Herod put Peter in prison and chained him between two 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 death" (Acts 12, verse 19).

Now if the Jews really believed the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus, they would have pursued them for this crime. 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? You see, this shows the Jews didn't really believe 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 wrong tomb. Kirsopp Lake, who first offered this theory, assumed the women who reported the body was missing had mistakenly gone to the wrong tomb.

Well if this is so, then Peter and John, who went to check upon the women's report, must have also gone to the wrong tomb. Now 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 location. Nor would the Roman guards, for they were there! 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 proper tomb, thus effectively quenching for all time any rumor of resurrection.

Matthew reported the guards were there at the tomb in the sight of all, when the women went to the tomb. The women who visited the tomb knew where 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, and they surely knew the exact location of the tomb and were not mistaken.

None of these alternative theories explain why James the brother of Jesus was convinced of the Lord's resurrection and converted. In the end they are misleading and false. None of them explain why the persecutor Saul of Tarsus left his old life and became a defender of Christianity and willing to suffer 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.

Now, the alternative theories that deny the miracle of Christ's resurrection go against the historical accounts of the eyewitnesses. You see, they fail to deal with all the evidence and offer only faulty explanations. They merely offer a skeptic's excuse, 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 truth. The truth is: Jesus really did arise from the dead bodily and appeared to many people with convincing proofs, just as Acts 1 and verse 3 says. Now 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.

Let's pray together. "Father, we're thankful that You help us to see the truth even when people suggest errors. Help us heavenly Father to be committed to You, to love You, to serve You and to be obedient to Your will always. In Jesus name, Amen."

When people really want to believe something, they cherry pick ideas that support their view and dismiss anything that may show it to be false. People often lie 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 others for some sin often permit themselves to commit that very sin. Jeremiah 17:9 says that "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" Now these alternative views, which deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus, fall into that category, as one can plainly see.

Now although our hearts may deceive us, they cannot deceive God. 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. Now 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 and verse 38). Now 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've got to love and live for the Lord.

We hope today's study about the resurrection of Jesus Christ has stirred you consider your soul. We're offering this free little book, *The Sion Arose*. And if you'd like a free printed copy of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now you can download these lessons or a newsletter online at www.searchtv.org. And there's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches that are in your area. You can also watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! We ask that you subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry", and like them whenever you watch the programs. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses, and we'd love to send you one. Now don't worry, we're not asking for money. We're here to help you get to heaven.

We do ask that you focus your heart on God today by worshiping at church. Everybody needs a church family. There's probably a church of Christ in your area. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Well, we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. And as always we say, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.