

## Did Jesus rise again from the dead?

Throughout history there have been three major theories regarding the events surrounding the death of Jesus. Christians have always held that Jesus rose again from the grave three days after he was crucified. Skeptics have usually varied between two options. Either Jesus really didn't die on the cross, known as the swoon theory, or, the disciples stole the body. Those who hold that Christianity simply evolved in the years after Christ's death have not considered the historical facts very closely. The early church burst on the scene with such force that it is not historically sound to claim that the church took years to develop the doctrine of the resurrection. This is because the resurrection was at the heart of Christian worship in Jerusalem even back as far as 35-37 AD.

We will look at each of the three positions regarding Jesus' death in light of the historical facts and see which one fits best. When someone sets out to investigate a past event, they are dealing with historical knowledge. Historical knowledge is not like scientific knowledge. Since history is past, you cannot experiment with it in a laboratory. Historical knowledge must come from placing what we do know on the table and then making the most educated theory as to the reality of the event in question. Since no one ever has all the information regarding a historical event, historians have come up with guidelines to help them come to the right conclusions when studying the past. If more than one theory is given as to how a certain historical event occurred, the better theory will be the one that is:

- **More probable.**
- **Has more of the observable evidence on its side.**
- **Implies fewer known false statements than its rival hypothesis.**

With these in mind, we now turn to what most scholars, regardless of religious persuasion, agree upon regarding the life of Jesus.

- **Jesus was crucified.**
- **He was buried.**
- **His disciples lost hope and despaired.**
- **His tomb was found empty.**
- **The disciples were transformed from doubters to bold preachers.**
- **Their preaching of a resurrection was the focus of the message of the early church.**
- **The Christian church was born in Jerusalem, the same city Jesus died in.**

### **The Swoon Theory**

The premise of the swoon theory is that Jesus didn't die on the cross but merely sunk into a coma like state. The people around him mistook him for dead and buried him. The cool rock enclosure of the tomb and three days rest revived Jesus enough so that he could get up and resume contact with his disciples. At this point they were overjoyed and in their zeal began to proclaim that Jesus had come back to life. This theory may seem ridiculous to the average person, but there are many who have held it through the years. As far as meeting the historical criteria, it accounts for the empty tomb. So from that standpoint, it is conceivable that it could have happened. However, the swoon theory begins to run into problems regarding the physical nature of the torture that Jesus endured before and during his crucifixion. Remember, scholars agree that Jesus was crucified. To be crucified was a horrible punishment. Additionally, leading up to the crucifixion, if we look closely at the gospel accounts, we find that Jesus was beaten on two separate occasions in the twenty-four hours before the cross. He was also whipped severely by the Roman guards. He was then further beaten by having a crown of thorns placed on his head which was pounded in with a bamboo rod. The gospels record that he was already so

physically exhausted he could not carry his cross to the place of crucifixion. Worst of all, the practice of crucifixion is perhaps the height of torture. The victim's arms are nailed to the cross by driving a five to seven inch nail through each of the lower arm bones at the base of the wrists. This almost always crushes the median nerve, the largest nerve running up the arm. This alone causes excruciating pain. The very word, excruciating, means literally, "out of the cross." The victim's feet are also nailed to the cross, one on top of the other. The entire purpose of the cross is to make the victim die by asphyxiation, (a lack of air) but only after an intensely horrific struggle. The placement of the victim's arms and legs caused suffocation if the victim did not continue to push up with his feet to exhale. He would then slouch down to rest, sometimes causing his arms to slip out of their sockets, and breathe in. This process would go on and on until the victim no longer had the strength to push himself up. Since he could no longer exhale, he could not breathe out the leftover carbon dioxide in his lungs and carbon dioxide poisoning would ensue. This is what Jesus underwent, only after he had been beaten twice, whipped and struck repeatedly on the head with a rod. It is unlikely that Jesus could have survived this torture. It is even more unlikely that he survived this torture and then got up and appeared to his disciples as a risen savior. And how did he get out of the tomb in the first place? He would have had to remove a boulder from the entrance of the tomb, something a man in his condition at the time would have found impossible to do. This theory also has a problem in that it accepts the biblical record that Jesus hung on a cross, yet denies the same biblical record when it claims that during that crucifixion event, Jesus was pierced through the heart by a Roman soldier, causing blood and water to pour out. To think that the Roman soldier on duty mistook Jesus for dead is totally implausible. Roman soldiers were well acquainted with torture and execution. Besides all of this, Jesus was wrapped with spices and placed in a cool tomb for three days without any food or water. To speculate that this helped him is ridiculous. Finally, even if Jesus were able to accomplish all of this, would he have appeared to his disciples as one who had a total mastery of death? More likely they would have had to help him care for his wounds. The resurrection appearances absolutely changed the perspective of the disciples. They were left with the attitude of having been with a man that conquered death, not of one who barely escaped its clutches. Because of these factors, we must conclude that the swoon theory is not a realistic alternative.

### **The disciples stole the body?**

The second option for the modern person is that Jesus' disciples saw the event of the crucifixion but were so committed to their teacher that they stole his body from the tomb, disposed of it elsewhere and then began to proclaim that Jesus had risen from the dead. The main factor that this theory accounts for is the empty tomb, yet it still fails the historical test because it fails the test of historical probability.

First is the fact that the gospels are constantly reiterating that Jesus' disciples never understood what Jesus meant when he told them that He was going to suffer, die and be resurrected. To think that all of a sudden after the crucifixion, they realized Jesus' plan and began to act upon it on their own accord is ridiculous. The Bible records that they were scared and hiding out. They were perplexed and unsure of what to do next, John 20:8-9. In fact, up until Christ gave them the great commission in Matthew 28:18-20, they didn't know what to do with themselves.

Secondly, this plan presupposes that the disciples were able to overpower the guards at the Tomb of Jesus. To think that fishermen could overpower trained soldiers is stretching it just a bit.

Lastly, let's suppose that the disciples had a clear understanding of Jesus' message about his suffering and that they overpowered the guards at the tomb. They stole Jesus' body and buried it in a secret location. Then they spent the rest of their lives proclaiming a message that they knew to be a lie. More than that, they placed this message of a resurrection at the core of their teaching and suffered cruel torture and martyrdom for it. Every one of the original disciples except John and Judas suffered a martyr's death for the Christian faith. All of this never brought any of the disciples fame or fortune, but only degradation and persecution, for a lie, that none of them ever renounced. And on top of this, they

all spent their lives teaching Christians how to lead holy, righteous and upright lives, while living a lie themselves. They wrote some of the greatest literature ever recorded and changed the world in less than a generation, yet all started by their secret conspiracy to lie about the events of Jesus' death. This explanation does not seem to fit. Our modern media has given us examples of what happens when the truth is covered up. It doesn't take long for the real story to come out. There may be a short time span where the populace is deceived, but eventually, the truth seeps out. The entire course of world history was altered by the actions of the apostles and their message could not be stopped. Christians believe this is because their message was true. To believe that the disciples stole the body is a brutal miscalculation of the historical situation in which the disciples lived and a gross simplification of the movement that they started.

The only compelling argument that anyone has ever offered against the Christian view that Jesus rose from the grave is this: our experience tells us that dead people don't come back to life. This argument would be strong if we were dealing in the area of scientific knowledge. However, we are dealing with historical knowledge. It is not the historian's job to proclaim what can or cannot happen in a laboratory, only to evaluate what did happen in history in light of the facts that we now possess. Many unusual things have happened in history that are literally unexplainable, yet have to be accounted for. This belief needs to be evaluated right alongside the other possible explanations. Each of the historical facts that scholars agree upon is mentioned in the New Testament record of Jesus' life:

- **Jesus was crucified. Matthew 27:33-56**
- **He was buried. Matthew 27:57-66**
- **His disciples lost hope and despaired. John 20:19**
- **His tomb was found empty. Luke 24: 1-7**
- **The disciples were changed from doubters to bold preachers. Act 2:29-36**
- **Their preaching of a resurrection was the focus of the message of the early church. I Corinthians 15: 1-9**
- **The Christian Church was born in Jerusalem, the same city Jesus died in. Acts 2:46-47**

### **The Christian View**

Christians proclaim that Jesus did indeed rise from the grave. It lines up with the historical facts and with the powerful teaching and person of Jesus. Have you ever considered that it might indeed be true that death could not hold Jesus? He himself said in John 10:17-18 "I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it away from me but I lay it down on my own initiative and I have the authority to take it up again." And "I am the resurrection and the life; anyone who believes in me will live even if they die." John 11:25. The extraordinary words and life of Jesus of Nazareth cannot be dismissed. His resurrection cannot be explained away.

You can become a follower of Jesus by realizing that you too will face death one day and that you must turn over control of your life to him, so that when death comes, you will be under His care. If Jesus really did rise from the grave, it is the ultimate sign that He is God's only Son. Place your trust in Him today. Read the account of his life in the gospel of John found in the Bible. If you would like more information on this subject or others related to it, please visit [www.ranchodelreychurch.com](http://www.ranchodelreychurch.com) or contact Matt Tague at [Matt@ranchodelreychurch.com](mailto:Matt@ranchodelreychurch.com).

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