

## Was Empty Tomb of Jesus a Legend?

The gospels say that a miracle healing man called Jesus Christ lived. They say he died by crucifixion and three days later he rose again. Jesus was supposedly buried after his crucifixion in a tomb on Friday which was found empty on Sunday morning. The tomb he was placed in was found wide open with the stone that had been across the entrance moved back and the tomb was mysteriously empty. His body was gone. Certain witnesses claimed that Jesus appeared to them as a resurrected being.

Jesus may have had no tomb at all or maybe nobody knew if he had. The legend that he rose could lead to a legend that he was entombed and rose.

There are tombs in the world that should not be empty but they are and we do not know why. Herod the Great's body is missing from his tomb which was discovered in 2007 though the real mystery is why it took so long to rediscover it. As Jesus was invested with royal importance and it was not unknown for royalty to vanish from the tombs this could have been the trigger for a Jesus legend wherein he was not in his grave. It was easier to get fame for a mystic if a mystery could be engineered about his corpse. Princess Eadgyth's hands and feet and part of her skull were stolen by grave robbers as if she were a saint though she had no reputation for holiness! King Harold II of 1066 fame was reported alive after his death and nobody knows where his body is and even then in his century there was only hearsay and speculation.

It seems on the face of it that those making such claims about Jesus as they do would have to be asking to be considered to be mad if sincere. But that assumes they held to this faith with extreme devotion. Most Christians do not. Jesus seems to talk as if there would only be weak faith among the believers. So that would mean that if their claims were odd they could still be seen as sane. Jesus in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus says that people are hard to convince even should a man rise from the dead that they should believe that there may be no point in anybody rising. Weak belief implies that a legend can develop easily. The way the apostles vanished from history suggests either that they did not exist or the Church wanted to forget them for they fell away.

Mark was the first gospel and it says that Jesus' tomb was declared empty to women who came along on Sunday morning. It gives no hint that there was any evidence that the men in white saying Jesus' body was gone were telling the truth. So it is hearsay. Mark's text cuts off at the point where the women leave the tomb. An account considered to be the work of somebody else continues the story but as a clear instance of forgery it is not reliable. There is no reason to consider the faked Mark one as the first resurrection account and even if it were it would not count. The next gospel Matthew gave us the first resurrection account and we read of Jesus appearing. It is riddled with absurdities such as asking us to believe the soldiers at the tomb were going to say that they slept on duty in order to pretend that Jesus's disciples stole the body. So far legend is not an option but the only option.

Why can't the empty tomb be a fact? Why do we not even know which tomb in Jerusalem was Jesus'? While having the tomb would not prove it was empty or that Jesus rose, it is still important, very important to have it. Why was nobody interested in protecting and preserving evidence in writing that there was an empty tomb? Why do we have to do without such an important fact entirely?

Some say that if Jesus were in his tomb it would be venerated. A non-venerated tomb is not evidence for or against anything for the gospels are not about the tomb and only mention it where they have to. We just don't know.

Matthew says the Jewish leaders agreed that Jesus was not in the previously tomb for he was taken and they plotted to do damage limitation by getting his disciples blamed for it. Why didn't the Jews reseal the tomb and say nothing? Or why not say Jesus was inside and there was a risk of the body being taken so people had to be banned from going in? There was a legal procedure that would help. The Jews telling people to say Jesus was stolen and not in the tomb was not the best way to try and quash a resurrection rumour. A body being admitted to having been taken would only fan the flames.

The gospels never try to explain the empty tomb nor do they ask us to do so. Jesus could have been stolen from the tomb and still rise. Or perhaps he rose and somebody opened the tomb and he got out. These realisations could indicate that the story is true or false. There is no way to tell for legends follow no rules and are often incoherent or badly thought out for they tend to follow traditions rather than plausibility.

Interestingly a piece of Mark that was censored by early Christians says that empty tombs were not too out of the ordinary! And they came to Bethany. And there was a woman there, whose brother was dead. And she came and fell down before Jesus and said to him: Son of David, have mercy on me. But the disciples rebuked her. And in anger Jesus went away with her into the garden where the tomb was; and immediately a loud voice was heard from the tomb; and Jesus went forward and rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb. And immediately he went in where the young man was, stretched out

his hand and raised him up, grasping him by the hand. But the young man looked upon him and loved him, and began to entreat him that he might remain with him. And when they had gone out from the tomb, they went into the young man's house; for he was rich. And after six days Jesus commissioned him; and in the evening the young man came to him, clothed only in linen cloth upon his naked body. And he remained with him that night; for Jesus was teaching him the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. And from there he went away and returned to the other bank of the Jordan.

This story has no obvious legend in it - its a man who was thought to be dead.

The Lazarus story in the gospel of John gives you an empty tomb as well.

Matthew says saints rose from their graves when Jesus died so if Jesus' tomb was empty that was nothing that special. And especially if Jesus' stone like the young mans only needed one man to move it.

The Gospel of Mark says that the women go to Jesus' tomb and are told he is gone and then they check the tomb.

The Gospel of Luke has the women finding the body gone and then being told he is not there for he rose.

In Matthew the women are told why the tomb is empty by men in white and then Jesus appears and says exactly the same stuff as if he didn't know they had heard it already.

In John it seems Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb and assumes Jesus has been taken away simply because the tomb is open. That is quite an assumption considering she didn't even look in! She says she thinks Jesus has been taken away and buried somewhere else. The gospel says nothing to contradict the notion that Jesus was stolen from the tomb or taken by friends in secret and buried in an unknown grave. That would not stop him rising again.

Acts 13:29 blames the Jews for having Jesus crucified on a tree and says they took him down and buried him in a tomb. This does not fit the gospels in which Jesus is buried by friends and not those responsible for his death. If such a big mistake was made can we trust the reference to the tomb?

It is all very suspicious!

"The poor wretches the Christians have convinced themselves first and foremost that they are going to be immortal and live for all time...by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws. Therefore they despise all things indiscriminately and consider them common property and receive such doctrines traditionally without any definite evidence. So if any charlatan and trickster able to profit by occasions comes among them he gets sudden wealth by imposing upon simple folk" - Lucian 165 AD, The Passing of Peregrinus.

## HISTORY OR LEGEND?

Some scholars tend to believe that the empty tomb is historical for the following reasons.

REASON 1. When Joseph of Arimathea was named as responsible for the burial it must have happened for he was an important member of the Jewish religion and nobody could get away with lying about him.

ANSWER. The gospels were hidden. There is no evidence that anybody who would have known saw the gospels. We must remember that the Jesus generation was largely wiped out in the disasters that followed Jesus' death. And there is no evidence contrary to the idea that Joseph was picked to be the mythical benefactor of Jesus simply because he vanished at that time and was out of the way so he could be lied about. The burial would have been secretive for only that would make sense in the situation if the gospels are true so even if Joseph had denied having buried Jesus he would not have been believed. What if he was telling the truth? It is likely that Joseph did vanish at the time for he had come out of the closet as a follower of Jesus and would have been lynched by those who would have thought him to be an infiltrator.

Joseph must have lied to the Jews for the gospel says he was a secret disciple.

Arimathea has never been identified. It is possible that Joseph of Arimathea was intended to be taken for a code name not a real one as the gospel is clear the man could be endangered by his association with Jesus. That means the argument is worthless.

REASON 2. The tomb would have been well-known.

ANSWER. This is pure speculation. There was no way Jesus could or would have been buried in a tomb that might attract scores of pilgrims. We have no evidence that the tomb was never treated as a shrine. Christians say it would have been had

Jesus been buried in it but it would have been a better shrine if Jesus had risen there. It seems there were fifty graves in Palestine at that time that were visited as shrines.

REASON 3. The suggestion that Jesus had risen while his body lay in the tomb would have been preposterous to the Jews.

ANSWER. They knew to expect the unexpected with Jesus according to the gospels so that would have made many of them open. The reason implies that Jews were fanatically devoted to the idea that dead bodies had to come back to life. That is silly for most believers in God today do not hold to God that deeply. Paul certainly believed that the physical body did not need to be restored to life. He refutes the reason.

REASON 4. Mark saying the empty tomb was found on the first day of the week indicates an early origin of the story for the first day of the week was an early expression.

ANSWER. Ugh!

Mark ended abruptly after we read that the women were told by an angel that Jesus rose and he was to appear in Galilee. The gospel says the women told nothing to anyone. If it deliberately ends there on a note of suspense, that means the gospeller discovered what had happened by revelation from God and not the women. If so, this was possibly the first time the empty tomb story appeared. If the women did not tell the apostles or disciples to go to Galilee then its possible that nobody ever saw the risen Jesus.

Some say the ending indicates that the women said nothing until much later. I prefer the notion that it is through divine revelation and not their testimony that Christians "know" that the tomb was discovered empty.

REASON 5. The Church says that women were said to have found the tomb empty and seen the risen Jesus and since women were not regarded as valid witnesses their story must be true and the gospels didn't make their testimony up.

ANSWER. If you invent the story of an empty tomb among the first century Jews, you have to invent women to discover the tomb. The fact that John says Jesus was laid in the tomb according to Jewish tradition which means he would have been anointed already and the women coming to anoint him on Sunday morning according to the other gospels show that the women were up to no good for they lied about what they were doing at the tomb. Or maybe it is just one of the inconsistencies that emerge when stories are lies and cannot be put straight. You could say the women were invented because the anointing wasn't needed.

The story of the women would have had to have been invented because if it had been men people would be more likely to believe that the men stole the body. It was a thing that men would have been expected to do.

The women were reportedly the only ones present at the empty tomb and who might have been the only witnesses the Matthew gospeller could have had any confidence in for he did not trust the guards. Christians reject stories of visions as enough for most Christians reject the visions of Medjugorje so it follows that the real evidence for the resurrection must come from the women being able to prove that a physical miracle of a body coming back to life happened. The apostles came by later and so cannot count as witnesses of this – and yet the religion insanely claims that they are THE AUTHORITATIVE witnesses and that is why they are special. Christianity then has to fall back on the testimony of women who are never even said to have been reliable. So Christianity is just superstition for how do we know that the women did not see Jesus being stolen from the tomb but tried to cover it up with a resurrection story or the story that Jesus vanished in the tomb for the destruction of his body by God was the prelude to his spiritual resurrection? If the gossellers believed that women were unreliable witnesses and nevertheless made witnesses of them then were they trying to get it across to the Church that the whole story was a pile of nonsense? Christians argue that the absurdity of men who rejected female testimony using these women proves the story true. In other words, the more incredible a story is the more likely it is to be true! We will believe anything if we follow that principle.

The John Gospel says that the Samaritan woman was regarded as a valid witness for Jesus among the Samaritans who were just as sexist as the Jews (John 4:39). The Mishna says women can be witnesses under certain circumstances like when there are no men ones (Yebamoth 16:17; Ketuboth 2:5; Eduyoth 3:6). The Old Testament speaks of women like Deborah and Ruth and Esther who were valid and trusted witnesses so only heretical Jews comprising a minority among the Sadducees who regarded the Torah alone as scripture could have disparaged female testimony. It is simply a lie that the anomaly of women being witnesses means the story is true. Moreover, the story does not present them as legal witnesses at all and it was the tradition law that had reservations about women but not all agreed. Jesus himself said that women are forbidden to divorce their husbands indicating that they were considered to be valid witnesses by many and he was certainly saying a woman's testimony was valid here. The laws that are supposed to ban female witnesses are really against women being used as witnesses when male witnesses would do but with male witnesses they are okay.

If women were no good as witnesses if men saw the empty tomb then the women are a strong indication that no man saw the tomb empty and that the story of the disciples seeing the tomb was made up. The women were included as witnesses implying that the gospels rejected any tradition that women could not testify which makes any argument that since women were made the first witnesses though women were not considered to be any good as witnesses therefore women must have really seen what they said, to be wholly tripe.

We know that John's claim that the disciples actually went into the tomb is untrue for Roman law would have crushed them for that. (Unless you want to believe that they had obtained authorisation from Pilate which was why even if they stole the body nobody could do a thing about it for it was technically not stealing. This would explain why we do not hear of anybody being framed and punished for the theft. The Christians like to keep people from thinking that the body could have been legally stolen and all their apologetics centre around the notion that to take Jesus had to be theft.)

There is no evidence whatsoever apart from testimony, that is refuted by Paul who did not need the empty tomb in his system but who in listing the evidence for the resurrection denied the testimony of the women by omitting them, that there was an empty tomb.

The testimony of women then was considered to be better than Christians would have you think (Historical Evidence and the Empty Tomb Story, A Reply to William Lane Craig, Jeffrey Jay Lowder). The fact that the gospels were written for Jews in a Gentile culture that regarded women highly and even as potential goddesses and of course for the Gentiles means that nobody would have had a problem inventing women witnesses

*Finally*

The account of the empty tomb of Jesus is impossible to believe. It is pure legend. It is too much tripe to be anything different. Josephus wrote that Jerusalem was razed to the ground in 70 AD: "All the rest of the wall encompassing the city was so completely levelled to the ground as to leave future visitors to the spot no ground for believing it had ever been inhabited." If the gospels were written near or after that terrible time, it stands to reason that nobody would have evidence of Jesus' tomb.