

## SPOTLIGHT ON THE "EMPTY TOMB" OF JESUS

### FOREWORD

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. 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.

The gospels are legendary accounts of the figure we know as Jesus Christ. They could well be legend to the extent that Jesus never lived at all.

The plot for the Jesus story has been taken from the Old Testament and the alleged prophecies. The New Testament in fact claims that the only Bible you absolutely need is the Old Testament. The missing body could be prompted by 2 Kings 2:15-18 where the body of Elijah is sought and cannot be found for God took him to heaven on a magic chariot.

There are no independent sources for the resurrection tale about Jesus being put in a tomb and the tomb being found empty. Independent sources do not necessarily indicate that the information they give is the truth. They only indicate that the sources existed before they were written down. They are a help if you want to believe in the empty tomb but you cannot make too much out of them.

This book shows that the empty tomb of Jesus does not prove that he rose from the dead. The tomb does not give any evidence for it at all. Moreover, theft would not refute resurrection. This book shows that even if the gospels are perfectly right and truthful there could be several natural reasons for the tomb being empty.

The following possible scenarios show that if the gospels are accurate in what they report their interpretation of what happened may be wide of the mark. The interpretations are only assumptions and it shows that Christianity's bedrock, the empty tomb inferring the resurrection, is just the assumption of dead men and not necessarily a fact.

You can't go for a paranormal assumption when a normal one would suffice. Inexplicable does not imply paranormal. Jack the Ripper was able to slaughter women with police filling the streets. If Jesus' body vanishing from a tomb in less strict and less dangerous conditions deserves to be called a miracle then that would imply that the Ripper was a supernatural being and not a man and was a bigger miracle.

The Christians claim that the stone was very heavy. They like to claim that for it makes it look more likely that nobody could have stolen Jesus' body and started the resurrection legend. There is no evidence that one man or maybe a woman would have been unable to move it on their own. Why not suppose that if there was a miracle it was probably that somebody got the strength to get the stone shifted and the body out? Surely if you have to assume a miracle you have to assume a lesser one rather than a greater one? If you don't you will soon make a laughing stock of yourself.

The Church follows the gospels in saying that Jesus rose from the dead and the tomb was guarded against theft by guards who were frightened by an angel into a faint. The angel opened the tomb of Jesus by rolling back a big stone from the doorway. A group of women come to anoint the body of Jesus and are carrying spices and find the tomb empty. They see Jesus who announces that he has been raised from the dead. They tell the disciples that the tomb is empty and has risen and then Jesus starts appearing to the disciples. Later he ascends into Heaven.

### THE EMPTY TOMB INDICATES THEFT

Let us pretend that the gospels are accurate about the empty tomb. It is hard to believe that if the Jews wanted rid of Jesus as desperately as the gospels say so that they were going to get one of their own subjected to a degrading death to show he was not the prophet and Son of God he claimed to be that the Jews would have tolerated Pilate releasing the body of Jesus for burial. All sources agree that Jesus was accused of sorcery and black magic by the Jews. The body then would have been eagerly sought after by witches and warlocks for use as relics and in magical rites.

The tomb being empty indicates that something very suspect was going on. Matthew says that an angel that looked like lightning moved the rock but be careful. He says that the sight of the angel scared the guards but not that the guards saw the stone being moved. The women may not have seen any of this either even if they were near. The gospels never say anybody saw it. We don't know exactly when the stone was moved or how. Perhaps it was moved before and replaced sloppily and fell that morning. If Jesus was not moved until Sunday morning he would have been treated in the tomb. If he was removed

as soon as possible after internment then evidence for theft by somebody else had to be manufactured which meant the tomb had to be reopened long after the body was gone for it to work. The disappearance would come out and had to be prepared for.

In the context of the times, people found it easy to believe in a resurrection even if the body was still in the grave for they knew John the Baptist was buried and still they thought that Jesus was John back from the dead (Mark 6).

Some believe it makes most sense to hold that Jesus' burial was only temporary. It was Joseph's tomb, it was too near the city which the Jews would not have wanted, and the gospels say Jesus was buried there for speed.

This would suggest that somebody could have taken the body for reburial and did it discreetly. Why the secrecy? Could be any number of reasons.

The real owner paid somebody to steal the body and get rid of it to have the tomb back.

Jesus came out of his coma when he was being removed.

Jews could not afford to get a reputation of stealing a body.

Jesus would have been discreetly buried somewhere else.

The secretiveness enforced silence on the culprits when the resurrection report got out. However the gossellers and apostles themselves may not have known that Jesus was moved.

## NO WITNESSES TO THE STONE MOVING

Christianity says that Matthew says the tomb was opened as the women looked on. Well the rest certainly say it was opened before they arrived. If the tomb was already opened that means that the body could have been stolen before the women came. It is a bit less likely if the women were there when the tomb was opened.

Christians need to put aside the desire to pretend that the stone was sealed in front of witnesses who knew and seen Jesus being placed inside. They need to stop wanting the tomb to have been secure until it opened before the eyes of witnesses with no body inside. If Matthew is read properly, it only says the women SET OFF for the tomb and the angel opened the tomb and spoke to the women not that they saw him opening it. So we can hold that the women could not verify that the body wasn't stolen. This error that weakens the resurrection evidence in the gospels shows they are heretical and let Jesus down if he was the Son of God.

Some say Matthew can be translated as saying the women were at the tomb when the angel opened it. That would involve holding that when Matthew in our translation said they set out that he might have been indicating in his language that they got there. That is the only way it could be done. But even then you cannot be sure they saw the angel open the tomb. Maybe they were behind a bush comforting Mary Magdalene. The argument, "When Matthew can be translated as saying the women were there when these things happened as most Bible's have it and when he could mean that that is what he meant for he would have to be clear about that", misses the point and can be safely ignored.

Fundies need the women to see the tomb opened even though it contradicts the other gospels where they find the tomb opened and are baffled as to how this happened. The Christian solution to this contradiction is to assume that the gospels are not chronological! (bring up on [www](http://www) the Did Jesus Really Rise From the Dead?). There is no evidence for their solution being correct. Or that it helps.

The gospels were trying to show the resurrection was true so they could not afford to neglect chronology for that would make it possible to scoff at their evidence. Evidence can be destroyed by lack of chronology and we wouldn't be able to trust the order he puts on other events in the account unless he was in strict order. It would have been easy for him to put the right order in.

Nobody witnessed the opening of the tomb. Period. This means that the assumption that a miracle was taking place is a useless piece of wishful thinking.

## WHY WAS THE TOMB OPEN?

Matthew is the only one who mentions the earthquake that coincided with the moving of the stone. He says an angel moved it but we are not told how. Perhaps the angel moved the rock by sending the earthquake? It is best to hold that the earthquake moved the stone if you want to believe him. If the tomb was opened, naturally anybody at all could have taken

Jesus out of the tomb.

Perhaps the tomb was opened and shut again before nature reopened it. Maybe the body was stolen the first time it opened.

There are hundreds of ways people could get away undetected with a corpse. Perhaps the body was reburied elsewhere before dawn at a secret place or lost?

Do not forget how earthquakes and the confusion they cause

## COULD HAVE BEEN STOLEN

A miracle return from the dead means very little. The Christians sell the resurrection of Jesus as follows, "It is more than just a return from the dead. Jesus has risen to eternal life and can never suffer or die again and shows us what a perfect and saved person should be." The gospels never emphasise this or even teach it. The Church later invented the notion that the resurrection shows us what salvation is ultimately about and declared it shows that Jesus is with us now even more than he was on earth. He is alive as man but not man as we know man. The Church turned it into an existential magnet.

Christians say that if the resurrection was only supported by visions then that means little for visions are common enough and most are not to be taken seriously. So their faith demands that Jesus' body must have miraculously raised up in the tomb leaving it empty thus meaning that the resurrection visions are important for rather than being mere visions they were encounters with a man raised from the dead to eternal life. But the Bible itself gives no evidence that the disappearance of the body was a miracle. All you need to do to cast doubt on the miracle is to show that there was an opportunity for the body to have been taken. In fact if that could have happened, you should not believe in the miracle. Would you believe that the present appeared by magic under your Christmas tree when somebody had a two minute opportunity to sneak in and put it there?

The body of Christ could have been stolen for Matthew says it was left unguarded during the day after he died. And then it was abandoned when the soldiers went to the Jews. Significantly Matthew never says they looked in the tomb at any stage. He would if they did. He would have to. So either they didn't look in or Matthew invented the story of the guards in a hurry leaving holes in it.

If there was an earthquake the time the stone moved as Matthew says then it might well be that Jesus was covered out of sight in debris and the soldiers panicked thinking he was gone for they were superstitious about the stories surrounding him and ran off leaving a couple of the apostles with the chance to steal the body which may have been living or dead and perhaps the thieves were Andrew and Simon Zealotes who disappear from the New Testament or the men in white or the women.

The men in white may have left the tomb tidied after finding the body gone and may have been Jews sent to investigate and who thought that Jesus rose.

The soldiers according to Matthew came to secure the tomb quite a while after Jesus had supposedly died. The soldiers might have looked into the tomb or ensure the body was still inside before they secured it if it had been left unsupervised for several hours before. But if they had checked, Matthew who was so anxious to give the main details about them would have said so. The soldiers might have been satisfied from the outside appearance of the tomb and from the fact that only a few knew where the body was that the body would still be inside. They might have taken Joseph or somebody's word for it that the tomb was the way they had left it. Joseph was an authority figure.

Christians might say somebody must have been watching over the tomb until the guards took over. But then the Romans would have gone to the tomb anyway when trouble was feared. If a gang of laymen supervised the tomb they were near enough to the city to summon the soldiers for help if a band of Jesus people were seen coming. Had there been a temporary guard before the professionals came we would be told. If the Romans were able to say that Jesus could have been stolen then we must take them at their word. We have every reason to. They would not have been there if it had been impossible.

The story says the soldiers kept watch until an angel made them faint. It is more sensible to believe that the soldiers did not faint but slept. They were allegedly bribed according to Matthew to say they slept. So the body could have been missing before they came on the scene. They could have been careless enough to let that happen for Matthew gives no hint that they were in any way professional. They were careless if Matthew is telling the truth that they claimed to have fallen asleep at the tomb which was a crime! He says they took bribes too.

There were no guards. They were clumsily made up to stop gossips saying that Jesus was stolen by his disciples which would have meant that they could have invented the resurrection visions for they were bent on tricking the people. It is interesting that the story is interested in defending the disciples against the charge of theft. Surely some other lot could have

robbed the grave. Matthew carelessly worries more about the good name of the disciples than indicating that Jesus could not have been stolen.

According to John, Magdalene stated that Jesus could have been stolen and she believed that he was. Significant. She testifies that it was possible. The man who speaks to her, supposedly Jesus, makes no effort to contradict her at all so he agreed that Jesus was stolen too. She would not have been asking the gardener what the mysterious "they" had done with Jesus had it been impossible for him to have been stolen say if there were guards there.

Magdalene found the tomb open. She did not see it opening. Anyway she fled according to John 20:2. Did she think she could have been accused of having done something illegal? She took it for granted that Jesus was stolen which does not necessarily mean she looked in and saw him missing. He could have been taken after she ran away. John would say if she had looked in.

The body thieves or the weather might have wiped away any telltale footprints or were they looked for at all?

Jesus could have been stolen.

## WOULD THIEVES HAVE LEFT JESUS' BURIAL CLOTHS BEHIND?

The Gospel of John has Jesus been buried in loads of expensive spices and oils and Christians assume without evidence that a copyist made a mistake and it was less (page 102, The Jesus Inquest). If he had been saturated in such a heap of extravagances, he would have been worth stealing so that the oils and spices could be sold.

The gospel of John alone says Jesus was wrapped in sticky cloths full of oils and spices according to the Jewish custom. But on Sunday morning it was found that these were stripped off and folded neatly. Would thieves strip a body and take it away? It seems not. How do we deal with that?

First it is refuted by the story of Matthew and Mark and Luke that Jesus was not in sticky cloths for the burial had to be completed by the women two days later for they came to anoint the body.

We have three gospels against one so which side should we take? The three gospels of course. And this despite the fact that women would not come to anoint a body that should be smelling already if Jesus really was beaten to a pulp as Christians believe.

The cloths found in the tomb could be explained as replicas of the cloths used for Jesus. If the thieves were seen carrying a body wrapped up and anointed nobody would link them with the missing body for the cloths were in the tomb.

The view that the thieves would have had to hurry instead of taking time to strip Jesus is useless. Nobody knows if they needed to hurry that much.

Jesus could have been wrapped up excessively. If so they could have taken the shrouded Jesus and left the surplus cloths behind. Maybe these cloths fell off. Maybe the cloths were unused and left behind by the buriers and forgotten about.

Perhaps the thieves wanted people to think that Jesus rose and got out of the grave clothes himself. That way they kept within the law. Nobody can call you a thief for taking a body when you say you were not stealing but trying to save the man's life for he was in fact not dead.

Most thieves are not afraid to leave evidence that they struck if they are confident. Accordingly, the tomb of Jesus was left open. They knew nobody would be about until morning until they were well away. Or did they leave the tomb open because they were disturbed or to ensure a resurrection rumour would start?

And they knew that the more exposed a crime scene is, then the harder it is to pin down the criminals.

We conclude that if there were guards, the New Testament says nothing to allay the suspicion that the grave was robbed prior to their arrival. They were not reliable guardians anyway. They could have been bribed to let somebody take the body. Matthew says they took bribes. The tomb was open making it easy for anybody to have taken the body or for Jesus to have crawled out if he was not dead.

## THE SEAL

The Resurrection Factor claims that the seal of Rome was put on the tomb (page 77). The gospels never say that. Matthew only says Pilate told them to secure the tomb better and they sealed it meaning this was only part of securing it better. It

was not a legal seal. But suppose it was a real legal seal.

Matthew says the Jews put it on in the presence of the Roman soldiers which indicates that it was not the Roman seal. The Jews had seals of their own and since they demanded the guard it was up to them to put seals on the tomb. Had it been a Roman seal the women who went to the tomb to anoint Jesus on the third day would not have gone there at all for they would not get inside or get permission to get in to anoint for because of the popular beliefs regarding decomposition they could not expect permission. They might be willing to chance breaking a Jewish seal but not a Roman one. Weren't they all very devoted to the law of the land?

Pilate evidently did not care if Jesus was stolen or not when he had to be asked to put guards at the tomb and it seemed at that time that Jesus had no supporters to steal him. Pilate would not have cared enough about the body to let the Roman seal be used for he submitted the body to Jesus' fans who could have done anything with it including cut it up for miracle souvenirs or eat it in response to his prediction that he would be eaten. The Sabbath was believed to have started on Friday night for Jews calculated a day from dark the night before. Some say since the Jews could not do the sealing on the Sabbath the story is fiction or it was a Roman seal applied by Romans. But the fact is that one of them might not have worried about breaking the Sabbath under the circumstances. It is like a Protestant minister having an ecumenical service though his Church frowns upon it.

FINALLY

The inability of the Bible to abide by the rule that extraordinary claims need extraordinary evidence shows that it is no more divinely inspired than the Chambers English Dictionary. One can find plenty of statements in it to explain why Jesus disappeared. We can come up with any number of possible theories but we are not sure which one is the right one. But all that matters is that we know that whatever happened it WAS of this world.

Jesus could have been sneaked out of the tomb before it was closed after witnesses seen him placed in it. The tomb could have been opened before the guards came. The stone could have moved by itself enabling somebody to take the body. Maybe there was some other way somebody could have got in.

The bottom line is that nobody saw the tomb being opened. And the tomb was left unattended according to the gospels. It was unattended after it was found open. The Christian faith is based on lies and guesses.