


Theories of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

I. Occupied Tomb Theories

| Theory | Explanation | Refutation |
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| Unknown Tomb Charles A. Guignebert | The body of Jesus was buried in a common pit grave unknown to his disciples. Therefore, the resurrection account arose out of the ignorance as to the whereabouts of the body. | Not all criminals were buried in a common pit. The New Testament gives Joseph of Arimathea as a witness to the burial in a specific family tomb. The women saw the body being prepared for burial and knew the tomb's location. The Romans knew where the tomb was, for they stationed a guard there. |
| Wrong Tomb Kirsopp Lake | The women came to the wrong tomb, for there were many similar tombs in Jerusalem. They found an open tomb and a young man who denied that this was Jesus' tomb. The frightened women mistakenly identified the man as an angel and fled. | The women did not come looking for an open tomb, but for a sealed one. They would surely bypass the open tomb if they were unsure of the exact location of the correct tomb. The man at the tomb not only said, "He is not here," but also "He is risen." The women had noted the tomb's location seventy-two hours earlier. The Jews, Romans, and Joseph of Arimathea knew the location of the tomb and could easily have identified it as proof against any resurrection. |
| Legend Early Form Critics | The resurrection was a fabrication that evolved over a lengthy period to vindicate a leader long since dead. | Recent historical criticism has shown that the resurrection stories are of mid-first-century origin. Paul, in 1 Corinthians (A.D. 55), speaks of the resurrection as a fact and points to five hundred eyewitnesses, many of whom were still alive for his readers to question. |
| Spiritual Resurrection Gnostics | Jesus' spirit was resurrected though his body was dead. | This denies a Jewish understanding of resurrection (bodily not spiritually). Christ ate and was touched and handled. The Jews could show the occupied tomb to their fellow Jews to prove the resurrection false. |
| Hallucination Agnostics | The disciples and followers of Jesus were so emotionally involved with Jesus' messianic expectation that their minds projected hallucinations of the risen Lord. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Over five hundred different people, in different situations, with differing degrees of commitment to Jesus, with different understandings of Jesus' teachings all had hallucinations? 2. Many appearances occurred to more than one person. Such simultaneous illusions are unlikely. 3. The disciples were not expecting Christ's resurrection. They viewed his death as final. 4. The Jews could have pointed to the occupied tomb to prove them false. |

II. Unoccupied Tomb Theories

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| <p>Passover Plot Hugh Schönfield</p> | <p>Jesus planned to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies of both suffering servant and ruling king through a mock death and resurrection. Joseph of Arimathea and a mysterious "young man" were co-conspirators. The plot went bad when the soldier speared Jesus, who later died. The "risen Lord" was the young man.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The guard posted at the tomb is ignored in Schönfield's theory. 2. The basis of the theory is faulty. The resurrection myths on which Jesus supposedly based his plot were not evident until the fourth century A.D. 3. Such a "resurrection" could not account for the dramatic change in the disciples. 4. All but four biblical witnesses are not accounted for, especially the five hundred eyewitnesses whom Paul spoke of as still living. 5. The whole plot of enduring crucifixion (and in doing so, alienating his national supporters) seems unlikely. |
| <p>Resuscitation (Swoon) 18th-century Rationalists</p> | <p>Jesus did not die on the cross; he fainted from exhaustion. The cold temperature and spices revived him.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Medical science has proved that Jesus could not have survived the scourging and crucifixion. 2. Could this nearly dead Jesus make an impression as the risen Lord? |
| <p>Body Stolen by the Disciples Jews</p> | <p>The disciples stole the body while the guards were sleeping.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If the guards were sleeping, how did they know that the disciples stole the body? 2. Severe penalties, even death, would be the result of sleeping on duty. The highly disciplined guard would thus not have slept. 3. There is no way that the disciples could possibly overcome the guard. 4. It is preposterous to believe that the disciples died for a lie that they created. |
| <p>Existential Resurrection Rudolf Bultmann</p> | <p>A historical resurrection will never be proved, but it is not necessary. The Christ of faith need not be bound to the historical Jesus. Rather, Christ is raised in our hearts.</p> | <p>The early disciples were convinced by historical events. They claimed to base their faith on what they saw, not on an existential need nor an a priori faith (Luke 24:33-35; 1 Cor. 15:3-8).</p> |
| <p>Historical Resurrection Orthodox Christianity</p>  | <p>Jesus was resurrected by the power of God. He showed himself to his disciples and later ascended into heaven.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This view requires presuppositional changes, belief in God, supernaturalism. 2. This view virtually demands a faith in Jesus. |