

Explanations for the Resurrection Series

Jesus Was Never Resurrected (Mt. 27:62-66)

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At A Glance:

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Jesus Was Never Resurrected

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Jon Noyes and the Resurrection¹

1. Greg Koukl is the founder and president of an organization called Stand to Reason, which is a wonderful resource with lots of great material for helping disciples understand and clearly articulate the Christian perspective to others. They have training classes and many articles designed to help you grow as a Christian.
2. In their main weekly podcast, Greg was interviewing one of his staff, Jon Noyes, who was describing his journey from atheism to Christianity. Jon explained how he came to a critical moment when he was confronted with the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.
3. As Jon was trying to explain the facts about Jesus as an atheist, someone who doesn't believe any God exists, he was attempting to find a view that allowed him to avoid having to say Jesus was resurrected. He began following one of the alternate explanations for the resurrection of Jesus that holds to the idea that advanced aliens beamed the dead body of Jesus up to their spaceship to heal Jesus. Using their advanced medical knowledge and technology, the aliens brought Him back to life and then beamed Jesus back down to earth.
4. It was at this moment Jon asked himself the question, "What is it that I'm so desperately trying to avoid here?" He knew he was searching for any other explanation to explain what he knew to be true about Jesus and avoid the well-grounded conclusion that Jesus was resurrected. He knew it wasn't a lack of evidence that was keeping him from believing in God; it was something else.

B. We are continuing to look at the various ways people use to explain what happened to Jesus regarding the events at the end of his life—mainly the resurrection. Our focus is going to be a second type of explanations that acknowledge the death of Jesus. This time, a category of views regarding the resurrection of Jesus denies the resurrection.

C. Views that promote the idea that Jesus died and was never raised back to life align with the earliest alternate explanation for the fate of Jesus found in Matthew 27:62-66. On these views, Jesus died and He stayed dead. Do these views fit with the evidence we have about Jesus?

II. The Earliest Alternate Explanation

A. We looked at one of the ways some people attempt to explain the resurrection of Jesus. Some people think Jesus never truly died. Therefore, when Jesus appeared again after His "death", although it was claimed to be a resurrection, Jesus' appearance after being placed in the tomb was simply Jesus recovering from only the appearance of having died. Jesus either appeared to die intentionally as a brilliant deception, or unintentionally after regaining consciousness in the tomb. However plausible this explanation may seem to some people, it is at odds with the

¹ STR podcast for 3/25/26 *Interview: Jon Noyes—Noyes on the Streets* <https://www.str.org/w/interview-jon-noyes-noyes-on-the-streets>

evidence and facts we have regarding Jesus. The death of Jesus is one of the most well-established facts about the historical Jesus.

- B. Another way of explaining the fate of Jesus and maintaining a naturalistic explanation for the “resurrection” of Jesus is a group of views that claim Jesus never reappeared after His death. Jesus died and He stayed dead. Anyone who claimed to see Jesus was mistaken. The supposed appearances of Jesus could have been due to extreme grief, wishful thinking, hallucinations, a made-up story, or some other reason, but these views all share the perspective that Jesus died but never came back to live again. This is the explanation we will be exploring.
- C. Not surprisingly, the Bible clearly identifies this type of response to the resurrection of Jesus. The assertion that Jesus’ resurrection didn’t happen and an alternate explanation for the claim of His resurrection is the first competing explanation to Jesus’ statement that He would rise again. The idea that Jesus was never resurrected and the story of His resurrection was a fiction, made up by the disciples, is the oldest alternate explanation offered about Jesus.
- D. Here is how another group of people responded to the claim that Jesus was resurrected from the dead:

⁶² Now on the next day, *that is, the day* which is after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, ⁶³ and they said, “Sir, we remember that when that deceiver was still alive, He said, ‘After three days I am rising.’ ⁶⁴ Therefore, give orders for the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise, His disciples may come and steal Him, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last deception will be worse than the first.” ⁶⁵ Pilate said to them, “You have a guard; go, make it *as* secure as you know how.” ⁶⁶ And they went and made the tomb secure with the guard, sealing the stone. (Mt. 27:62-66)

- E. The earliest alternate explanation for the resurrection of Jesus was created by the religious leaders of the Jewish people. They heard Jesus and understood Jesus to be predicting His own resurrection before it happened (“Sir, we remember that when that deceiver was still alive, He said, ‘After three days I am rising.’”, v. 63). These Jewish leaders didn’t believe Jesus could fulfill that claim, but they were still concerned about what would happen if the tomb of Jesus was found empty. This is why they were asking Pilate to guard and protect the burial place of Jesus.
- F. The alternate explanation provided for the possibility of Jesus’ tomb being found empty was that the disciples were going to come and steal the body of Jesus to make it look like Jesus’ claim to be resurrected would be illegitimately fulfilled (“His disciples may come and steal Him, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’” (v. 64). The claim of Jesus being resurrected from the dead is viewed as a “deception” (v. 64).
- G. From the very beginning, the day after Jesus was killed, an alternate explanation was given for the fate of Jesus, other than the description given by Jesus Himself. This explanation preceded the event of the resurrection! An alternate explanation was provided before anything happened. Even some who participated in the events themselves were not interested in truth. Jesus remaining in the grave and the resurrection being a made-up story as articulated by the Jewish leadership can’t possibly be true, yet it is the earliest alternate explanation.

- H. The Jewish officials stuck with their original assumption, even after the tomb was found empty (despite a guard being in place to protect the tomb from being found empty):
- ¹¹ Now while they were on their way, some of the *men from the guard* came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. ¹² And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, ¹³ and said, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came at night and stole Him while we were asleep.’” ¹⁴ And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and keep you out of trouble.” ¹⁵ And 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.* (Mt. 28:11-15)
- I. The chief priests and Pharisees didn’t think Jesus was going to be resurrected; instead, they assumed another explanation for what might happen. Now, the story had to be adjusted to fit the new facts. The simple statement that the disciples came and stole the body of Jesus out of the tomb was not enough. Why? Because there was a military presence guarding the tomb.² Now, more detail was needed if the explanation being offered was going to make sense. The guards needed to be asleep for the disciples to steal the body because it is not reasonable to think the disciples could overpower the trained and armed guards. Notice the irrationality of the alternate explanation (“You are to say, ‘His disciples came at night and stole Him while we were asleep.’”, v. 13). If all the soldiers were asleep, how would they know who came and stole the body?³ Plus, how would the guards not wake up when the disciples were rolling away the large stone covering the entrance of the tomb? How would the disciples who were so scared for their safety that they locked themselves in a room for protection be bold enough to attempt to steal the body of Jesus? This early alternate explanation is obviously incoherent and incompatible with what happened. The soldiers were forced to spread a lie. Ever since the very beginning of the events of the resurrection, there has been the truth of what happened and false explanations of what happened.
- J. Some people will say that the disciples, including the gospel writer Matthew, are simply making this story up about the Jewish leaders. The Bible is telling us what those who opposed Jesus did, but it is a fictional story. Instead of viewing the information being communicated by Matthew as accurate history, it is assumed the Jewish response is a myth to support the non-existent resurrection of Jesus. However, support for the reliability of Matthew’s description of events can be found in the fact that this very explanation of the body being stolen is also documented by Justin Martyr as the Jewish explanation at his time in the second century. Matthew’s claim about this explanation is confirmed (“and this story was widely spread among the Jews and is to this day.”, v. 15). The story of the stolen body was a fabrication, not the reaction of the Jewish leadership.

² While there is some question as to whether the group of men guarding the tomb was the temple security or Roman soldiers, my view is that the guard at the tomb was made up of Roman soldiers. Making a case for this viewpoint is beyond the focus of this message.

³ Donald A. Hagner, [Matthew 14–28](#), vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 876–877.

- K. Here is what Justin quotes from Jewish sources opposed to Christianity:

As I said before you have sent chosen and ordained men throughout all the world to proclaim that a godless and lawless heresy had sprung from one Jesus, a Galilæan deceiver, whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb, where he was laid when unfastened from the cross, and now deceive men by asserting that he has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven.⁴

- L. The strategy used in the earliest alternate explanation for the resurrection of Jesus has been repeated in various forms since the time of Jesus until today. Jesus clearly died and was put in a tomb; after that, the tomb was found empty. The empty tomb needs to be explained somehow, but the reason it is empty can't be the actual resurrection of Jesus (according to some). Therefore, some other explanation for the empty tomb is offered (usually from a naturalistic perspective). People find these other explanations more believable, not because it is a better explanation of the historical evidence, but because it agrees with their assumptions about the nature of the world—no God and no miracles.

III. Jesus Was Never Resurrected Explanations

- A. The earliest version of an alternate explanation for the resurrection of Jesus is part of a category of views that claims Jesus died, but He was never resurrected. Jesus died and He stayed dead, just like everyone else. No one comes back to life after they have truly died. Other versions of this view have been offered over the years, in addition to the theory that says the disciples came and stole the body of Jesus. We will look at a few of these views.⁵
- B. Like the apparent death views previously examined, the no-resurrection views also come in a variety of forms. While these alternate explanations of the resurrection of Jesus are different from each other, they can be grouped together because they all share the underlying perspective that Jesus stayed dead and there was no real resurrection. These theories seek to provide an alternate explanation for either the empty tomb or the resurrection appearances of Jesus.
- C. One of the most common explanations for the resurrection of Jesus is called the Hallucination Theory. This view claims those who saw the resurrected Jesus had a real experience, but it was an internal, subjective experience in their mind. Jesus never rose from the dead. Those who claimed to have seen Jesus alive after His death were hallucinating due to grief or strong desire to reunite with Jesus. This explanation for the resurrection of Jesus has been around a long time.
- D. Celsus, a critic of Christianity from the 2nd century, explained the resurrection of Jesus as a hallucination and delusion:

That while alive he was of no assistance to himself, but that when dead he rose again, and showed the marks of his punishment, and how his hands were pierced with nails:

⁴ Justin Martyr, "[Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew,](#)" in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 253. In this work Justin defended Christianity against the objections of the Jews and cited Jewish sources including the one quoted here.

⁵ For those who may be interested in more information on the possibility that the resurrection of Jesus was copied from other pagan religions, see the sermon by Andy Davis title *Is Jesus' Resurrection Copied from Other Religions?* In the 2018 Easter sermon series

who beheld this? A half-frantic woman, as you state, and some other one, perhaps, of those who were engaged in the same system of delusion, who had either dreamed so, owing to a peculiar state of mind,⁸ or under the influence of a wandering imagination had formed to himself an appearance according to his own wishes,⁶

- E. Another naturalistic explanation for the resurrection of Jesus suggests the women went to the wrong tomb because of their emotional state, early morning light, and similarity of appearance among the tombs. The women observed an empty tomb, but it was not the tomb in which Jesus had been placed. The women got confused and disoriented and weren't thinking clearly. Then they incorrectly reported to the other disciples that Jesus' tomb was empty.
- F. Professor Kirsopp Lake, in his book *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, writes:
 - I. It is seriously a matter for doubt whether the women were really in a position to be quite certain that the tomb which they visited was that in which they had seen Joseph of Arimathea bury the Lord's body. The neighborhood of Jerusalem is full of rock-tombs, and it would not be easy to distinguish one from another without careful notes.⁷
- G. Yet another alternate explanation for the claim that Jesus had been raised from the dead is the notion that the disciples and New Testament authors made up the story of Jesus' resurrection and they were inspired by resurrection stories from other religions. Christianity copied from others and assigned other religious claims to Jesus. Inspiration for the fictional story of Jesus came from Jewish miracle workers, Hellenistic magicians, or Greek gods.
- H. James George Frazer, in his very influential book *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, claims the resurrection of Jesus is copied from other pagan religions:
 - I. Only it is to be observed that if the death of Christ was dated on the twenty-fifth of March, his resurrection, according to Christian tradition, must have happened on the twenty-seventh of March, which is just two days later than the vernal equinox of the Julian calendar and the resurrection of Attis...However, another Christian tradition, followed by Lactantius and perhaps by the practice of the Church in Gaul, place the death of Christ on the twenty-third and his resurrection of the twenty-fifth of March. If that was so, his resurrection coincided exactly with the resurrection of Attis.⁸
- I. While different naturalistic explanations for the resurrection of Jesus abound, they all share the perspective that the empty tomb and the resurrection appearances of Jesus can be explained in a way that doesn't require a miracle or supernatural event. The early disciples were wrong about the resurrection, but the false message about Jesus was spread, and Christianity has been teaching inaccurate information about Jesus based on the incorrect experiences or views of the early disciples.

⁶ Origen, "[Origen against Celsus](#)," in *Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Frederick Crombie, vol. 4, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 453.

⁷ <https://beliefmap.org/mary-magdalene/witness/jesus/tomb/wrong>

⁸ <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3623/3623-h/3623-h.htm>

- J. We must again ask ourselves the critical question: are these explanations reasonable and convincing? Are they an adequate or best explanation of the evidence we have available about the life of Jesus? Each person will have to decide for themselves.

IV. Problems with These Explanations

- A. While there is significant variety in the various explanations that are offered for why Jesus' tomb was empty and why some people claimed to see Jesus after His death (other than the resurrection of Jesus), there are some common problems that face them all. We will deal with these "no resurrection" views together as a whole instead of dealing with them one by one. We are asking ourselves the question, are these "no resurrection" views the best alternative for explaining all the relevant evidence in the case of Jesus?
- B. In his book *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, John Dominic Crossan (a New Testament scholar who does not affirm the bodily resurrection of Jesus) lists four independent historical sources that confirm Jesus' appearance to all his disciples. According to one of the principles of historiography, multiple attestation, this resurrection appearance is on firm evidential ground. The sources supporting this resurrection appearance of Jesus include 1 Corinthians 15:5, 7, Matthew 28:16-20, Luke 24:36-39 and John 20:19-21, and Ignatius *To the Smyrnaeans* 3:2-3. The Luke and John texts are counted as coming from one source. Gary Habermas notes these are usually counted as five sources and provides five other sources for Jesus appearing to groups of people, not just individuals.⁹
- C. All this means that any theory of the empty tomb or the resurrection appearances must be aligned with the historical evidence of the well-established appearance of Jesus. Looking at the details of this appearance, we can learn a few important data points that are evidentially based. First, we note that Jesus appeared to more than one person at a time. Jesus is appearing to a group of people. This detail makes the explanations of Peter having a moment of insight and inspiration concluding that Jesus' death wasn't a defeat but a victory and convincing the other disciples by his passionate fervor untenable. Every view that explains the belief in the resurrection of Jesus on internal enlightenment fail to account for the evidence that needs explaining.
- D. Second, in this historically supported event, features of the encounter that are explained include the early disciples claim to have "seen" Jesus using their sense experience of sight (Mt. 28:17) and other sense experiences, such as touch and hearing (Mt. 28:18, Lk. 24:36, 24:39). No hallucination or bereavement vision will be sufficient here, and any misinterpretation of external stimuli (illusion or delusion) won't be able to adequately explain this data, either. Those who were familiar with Jesus and lived with him prior to his death would not mistake someone else for Jesus as they are touching Him. Plus, the physical wounds from the crucifixion were visible (Lk. 24:39-40, Jn. 20:20). Delusion is not an adequate explanation for this close proximity.

⁹ Gary R. Habermas, [Evidences](#), vol. 1, On the Resurrection (Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2024), 397.

- E. Third, Jesus interacted with physical objects (Lk. 24:41-42).¹⁰ Jesus ate during this resurrection appearance, and He cleared up the disciples misunderstanding of thinking that Jesus was a disembodied soul. No spiritual resurrection from Paul can compensate for this detail.
- F. All the views that claim Jesus never resurrected from the dead can't explain and are incompatible with this reliable historical evidence. This is the major failure of all the "no resurrection" views. They are forced to ignore, neglect, dismiss, or propose an explanation that is not consistent with the historical evidence we have.
- G. Every alternate naturalistic theory that attempts to explain away the physical resurrection of Jesus can't account for all the evidence. Some try to account for the empty tomb. Others try to explain the appearances of Jesus. There is no single theory that explains BOTH the empty tomb and the resurrection appearances at the same time.¹¹ Therefore, if someone wants to use naturalistic theories, they must combine several to try to explain the evidence. Even using multiple theories at the same time can't fully explain all the evidence that must be explained, and it compounds the difficulty of being more unreasonable and requires more evidence to support multiple theories. This is a serious liability for all the no-resurrection views.
- H. Further, anyone can tell any story they want to. Telling a story is not the same as having evidence, proof, or good reasons to think that story is true. Another major weakness of alternate explanations for the resurrection of Jesus is that they lack any (in some cases) to very little evidential support in their favor. There is no credible evidence, in the case of Jesus, to think He was buried in a common public grave with other criminals. Worse, the lack of evidence supporting these views certainly is not better or more abundant than the evidence supporting the fact that Jesus rose from the dead as a historical event. This is the hill that every alternate explanation will have to successfully climb, and none have done so.
- I. The primary reason why Bible scholars who reject the resurrection of Jesus all the way to the average person on the street accept these alternate explanations is not because it is more reasonable or based on better evidence, but simply because it aligns with what they already think. It is in harmony with their naturalistic worldview that rejects the existence of God and anything supernatural. Any naturalistic explanation is perceived as more logical and believable than any religious or supernatural explanation, regardless of the evidence supporting each view. This is why some people would rather accept the explanation of aliens or a Jesus look-a-like without any evidence instead of Jesus being supernaturally raised from the dead with much evidence. This is a clear example of confirmation bias.
- J. Philosopher Stephen Davis summarizes that naturalistic theories attempting to provide an alternate explanation for the resurrection of Jesus,
 - are unable to come up with a coherent and plausible story that accounts for the evidence at hand. All of the alternative hypotheses with which I am familiar are historically weak; some are so weak that they collapse of their own weight once

¹⁰ Another evidence in favor of this historical event comes from the principle of embarrassment as the disciples did not believe and had a difficult time accepting it was Jesus (Lk. 24:37, 24:41, Jn. 20:24-29).

¹¹ No theory that has any source of evidence supporting it. Yes, the alien abduction theory would explain both the empty tomb and the resurrection appearances but there is no historical evidence suggesting this took place.

spelled out ... the alternative theories that have been proposed are not only weaker but far weaker at explaining the available historical evidence.¹²

- K. Don't deny the truth. Don't follow in the footsteps of the Bible scholars that say, "I don't know what happened, but I know Jesus didn't rise from the dead." This assertion needs to be defended by evidence and good reasons. Follow the evidence wherever it leads. Be open-minded; strongly consider the possibility that Jesus may have risen from the dead, just as He claimed He would.
- L. Don't make the mistake of thinking any explanation that aligns with what you already think is the best explanation for what happened to Jesus, despite the evidence. It is not more reasonable to accept any naturalistic explanation without any evidence just because it aligns with your worldview than to take the evidence at hand and draw the conclusion that is the best explanation for that evidence. Reasonable and open-minded people follow the evidence wherever it leads. This is what it means to love truth.

V. Conclusion

- A. When hearing about the resurrection of Jesus, some people respond by assuming the whole resurrection story of Jesus never happened. Then they proceed to find some explanation that fits with their assumptions. But what do you do with the evidence?
- B. If an explanation can't explain all the of the evidence that needs to be explained, then it isn't a good explanation. Reasonable people desire and strive to have their views grounded in evidence, knowledge, and wisdom. How does your view of the resurrection of Jesus stack up?

¹² Gary R. Habermas, [Refutations](#), vol. 2, On the Resurrection (Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2024), 637.