

Exhuming Easter



via Scaughdt & the “Word of God”
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“The Word of God is living and active.”
~ Hebrews 4;12

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Part 1: Reconciling the Resurrection

Harmonizing the six Biblical accounts*
of the last days of Jesus Christ

[*Matthew 26-28, Mark 14-16, Luke 22-24,
John 13+18-21, Acts 1:3-11, Acts 9 & 1 Cor. 15:4-8]

Introduction

Several months ago, I came across an article entitled “Leave No Stone Unturned”, in which its author (Dan Barker) challenges Christians & non-Christians alike to reconcile the six different Biblical accounts of Jesus’ resurrection. In essence, Mr. Barker’s challenge read as follows:

“Tell what happened on Easter ... In each of the four Gospels, begin at Easter morning and read to the end of the book: Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20-21. Also read Acts 1:3-12 and Paul's tiny version of the story in I Corinthians 15:3-8. These 165 verses can be read in a few moments. Then, *without omitting a single detail* from these separate accounts, write a chronological narrative of the events that occurred between the resurrection and the ascension ... The narrative does not have to present a perfect picture--it only needs to give at least one plausible account of all of the facts.”

Needless to say, upon reading this I was more than a bit inspired. A weighty gauntlet had been thrown down before me ... and I decided to pick it up.

Now it had already come to my attention during my thousands & thousands of hours of Biblical study over the previous ten+ years that there are indeed quite a few contradictions easily found within the Bible’s pages. Of course, this intensive study had also revealed the fact that -- while a few of these contradictions are indeed quite dramatic -- the vast majority of them are either easily reconciled or essentially inconsequential. And yet despite this fact, over the past decade I have personally witnessed dozens of otherwise extremely intelligent people (Christians & non-Christians alike) become thoroughly distracted from the Bible’s deeper meanings by focusing instead on its banal trivialities. And nowhere has this form of self-delusion been more poignantly displayed than in discussions I have engaged about the story of Jesus’ death & resurrection.

Yes, I know -- most folks don’t take these literary discrepancies so seriously (Indeed, I would wager that most folks probably do not even know they exist). After all, I think it is even fair to say that most people understand that almost everything found in the Bible is essentially hearsay; that its texts were written by a variety of different authors (mostly anonymously) over a large swath of time, that almost none of said authors were first-hand witnesses to the events they portray; that we have not a single original copy of any of their writings; and that -- at a minimum -- the path that their words took (if they were indeed divinely inspired) traveled from God, to actual eyewitnesses, to several generations of storytellers, to the Biblical authors, to several generations of copyists, to several decades of translators & interpreters ... and finally to us.

While this Truth doesn't make the Bible "false" or "wrong" or "untruthful" by any means, it does – at least for most of us -- open its pages up to insightful introspection & individual interpretation ... That having been said, there are a handful of folks – both Christian & non-Christian alike – for whom the apparent contradictions in the Bible pose a serious problem.

For some *human secularists*, these discrepancies are used to justify their summary dismissal of the entire contents of the Bible's texts; casually (and sometimes a bit arrogantly) noting that the contradictions and fallacies therein prove that the entire Bible is nothing more than a collection of fables and fictions and fantasies. ...

And this is too bad, for the Bible is also literally filled with intellectual intrigue and practical principles that *could* make the lives of even those "non-believers" far more interesting and indeed far more pleasant & Purpose-full – were they to read them and comprehend them by applying them in their daily interactions with others, of course.

On the other side of the spectrum – namely, the *Christians* who consider themselves to be "conservative" or "evangelical" or "fundamentalist" – such Biblical discrepancies are often dismissed just as casually; with said "devout believers" often noting that the Bible is flawless; that it is "the inerrant Word of God"; that everything within its pages is "the absolute Truth"; and that therefore all of its apparent contradictions are due solely to our own lack of understanding, not to the Bible's inaccuracy – that the Bible's contradictions are actually not contradictions at all ...

And this is too bad as well, for – while admittedly possibly accurate – this close-minded approach to reading the Bible prevents these same folks from noticing and comprehending many of the more subtle and far deeper Truths contained therein ... Ironically, in the Bible's own words, such a "hard-hearted" mentality keeps those very believers from ever having "the eyes to see and the ears to hear" the Bible's more magnificent wisdoms!

And hence, we have the sharing of this particular treatise.

For indeed, if any of us are to ever uncover the deeper Truths of the Bible's resurrection story (many of which I will be sharing in Part 2 of this work), then we need to understand – *from a Biblical perspective* – both what happened to Jesus & his disciples, and the actual order in which those events might very well have occurred ... In other words, if we are ever going to accurately rediscover the underlying WHY within the tale of Jesus' death & apparent rebirth, we must first know WHAT the Bible actually says about the same.

Now, to take this challenge a bit further -- and to thereby make it a bit more valuable for each of you -- I have decided to reconcile the Bible's *entire* Easter Story -- telling not only the tale of Easter morning, but also including the story's preamble and its epilogue as well; starting just before the Last Supper and concluding with the last of Jesus' *three* "ascensions".

In doing so, please NOTE that there are several things that I am NOT trying to establish or prove with this article -- namely:

*... that I am **not** trying to establish that the Resurrection of Jesus as presented in the Bible is historically accurate (or even that it happened at all -- though any truly humble person must admit it certainly *might* have);

*... that I am **not** trying to state that the Christian dogma surrounding this story is in any way correct -- or support that dogma in any way -- or validate any of its spiritual claims -- or even hint that the beliefs espoused by the Christian church are actually affirmed by God or Jesus Christ (though they as well very well *might* be);

*... & that I am **not** trying to say that these six stories -- written by at least six different authors several decades after Jesus' death -- do not, in fact, contradict one another (they very well *might*).

That having been clarified, what I **am** trying to do here is help us *ALL* get past debating about &/or arguing over such silliness ... What I **am** trying to do is to present the Gospels in a fashion that allows us *ALL* (Christians & non-Christian alike) to set our petty conflicts aside and get to the true Heart of a truly great story -- something I intend to do in the second part of this two-part series ... And what I **am** trying to do, ironically enough, is to get us *ALL* to remember the pure & perfect unconditional Love which the Jesus Christ in the Gospels embodied & spoke of during his life -- and then to go forth and empower that same pure Compassion in our everyday lives as well.

So, to that end, please accept the following Gift: a reconciliatory retelling of the Easter Story in a way that eradicates all apparent Biblical contradictions; giving us in its place a single, consistent, lucid tale of humble service & brave self-sacrifice.

As allWays ... enJOY!

Scaughdt

*website link for further info:
www.InspiringtheAltruisticMoment.com



“The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes -- and be killed -- and on the third day be raised again.” ~ Jesus Christ (Luke 9:22)

“Up to now I have spoken to you in figures of speech. And yet the hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in metaphors.” ~ Jesus Christ (John 16:25)

“What is unsought will go undetected.” ~ Sophocles

*“Seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened.”
~ Jesus Christ (Matthew 7:7)*

Our Story Begins ...

Now it was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread when Jesus, who knew that his hour had come to depart this world and return to the Father, turned to his disciples and said, “The Son of Man will soon be handed over to be crucified.” ... Shortly thereafter the chief priests and the scribes gathered in the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, and conspired to arrest Jesus and kill him, though by stealth – for they were afraid, saying “We should do nothing against him during the festival, lest there be rioting among the people.” [Matthew 26:1-5, Mark 14:1-2, Luke 22:1-2 & John 13:1a]



*The Third*Anointing ...*

Thereafter, while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar filled with nard, and as he sat at the table, she broke open the jar and poured the costly ointment on his head. [Matthew 26:6-7 & Mark 14:3] ... But when the disciples saw her do so, some of them became angry and scolded her (echoing the same criticism that Judas Iscariot had levied on Mary a few days earlier for a similar deed), saying “Why [again] such waste? For this ointment [too] could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” [Matthew 26:8-9, Mark 14:4-5 & John 12:1-8] ... And yet Jesus, upon hearing this, rebuked them, saying, “Leave her be. Why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. You will always have the poor with you, and will be able to show them kindness whenever you wish, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment over me she has prepared my body beforehand for burial. Truly, I tell you, wherever the Good News is proclaimed throughout the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.” [Matthew 26:10-13 & Mark 14:6-9]

*Jesus' *first anointing* in the Bible is seen in Luke 7:36-48. It was also effectuated by a woman named "Mary" (seemingly the same woman referenced in John 11:2), and was also performed in the house of Simon the Pharisee (who happened to have a skin ailment that caused him to also be known as a "leper" – see Matthew 26:6 & Mark 14:3). That this initial anointing was **not** the same one mentioned above is evidenced by its stark differences – that there Mary anointed Jesus' feet, not his head; and that then she did so to honor him, not to prepare him for imminent burial ... Jesus' *second anointing* in the Bible is seen in John 12:1-8, and took place "six days before the Passover" in the home of Lazarus – just three days prior to the *third anointing* mentioned above. [again, see Matthew 26:10-13 & Mark 14:6-9]



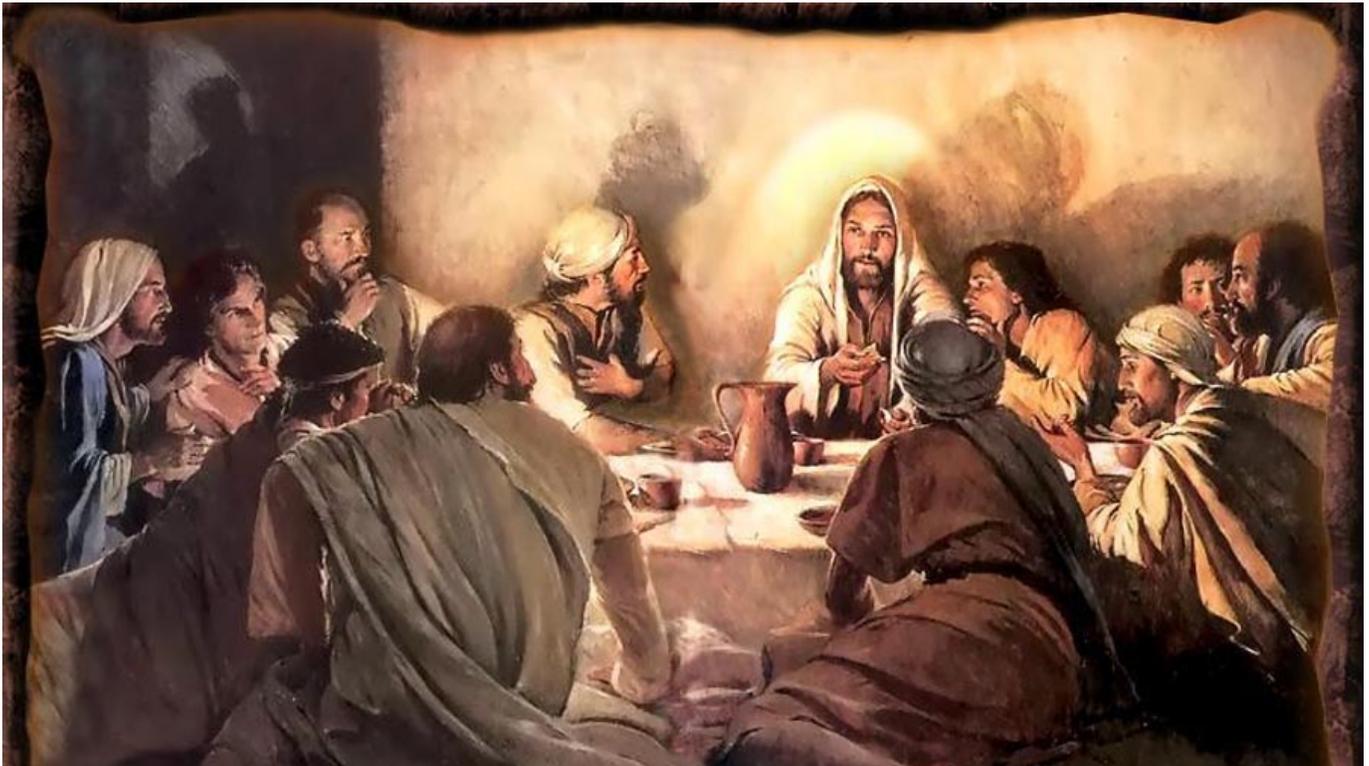
The Betrayal ...

Shortly thereafter, one of the twelve, Judas Iscariot – some say influenced by Satan – went to the chief priests and asked, "What will you give me if I hand Jesus over to you?" When the priests heard this, they were greatly pleased, and offered to give Judas thirty pieces of silver for the completion of the deed. Judas agreed to this sum, and from that moment onward began to look for an opportunity to deliver Jesus to them when no crowd was present. [Matthew 26:14-16, Mark 14:10-11 & Luke 22:3-6 ... also John 13:2]

The Last Supper ...

Then, on the first day of Unleavened Bread, *traditionally* the day when the Passover lamb was to be sacrificed, Jesus called to Peter & John and said, “Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat of it.” In return they asked him, “Where would you like us to make preparations for it?” And he answered, “Go into the city, where a man carrying a water jar will meet you. Say to him: ‘The Teacher says – My time is near. I will keep Passover at your house with my disciples.’ Then follow him, and whatever home he enters, say then to the owner of that house: ‘The Teacher asks -- Where is my guest room, that I might eat the Passover there with my disciples?’ he will then show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready for us. Make our preparations there.” So the disciples set out and went into the city as Jesus had directed, and found everything just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover meal. [Matthew 26:17-19, Mark 14:12-16 & Luke 22:7-13]

When it was evening and the hour came, Jesus arrived and took his place at the table with the twelve, and said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat until all is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.” [Luke 22:14-16]



Then Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands -- and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his robe, and tied a towel around himself. He then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" And Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." To which Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" And Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not completely." [John 13:3-10]



After he had washed their feet, Jesus put back on his robe, and returned to the table. He then said to them, "Do you know what I have done for you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do for each other as I have done for you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you understand these things, you are blessed when you do them." [John 13:12-17]

A short time later, while they were eating, he said to them, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is even now eating with me. The one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is even now on the table, for the Son of Man is going as it has already been determined. And yet woe to the one by whom he is betrayed. It would have been better for that one not to have been born!” And the disciples began to be distressed and ask one another which of them it could be who would do this. Then they turned to Jesus one after the other and asked, “Surely, not I?” And Jesus answered, saying “I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. And this is to fulfill the scripture: ‘The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am. Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.” Judas then spoke up and asked, “Surely, not I, Rabbi?” And Jesus replied, “You have said so.” Then Simon Peter motioned to one of the disciples to speak more clearly about who would betray him, and that disciple – the one whom Jesus especially loved – leaned over and asked Jesus, “Lord, who is it?” And Jesus answered him, “It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread after I have dipped it into the dish.” And then he dipped his bread, and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. [Matthew 26:20-25, Mark 14:17-21, Luke 22:21-23 & John 13:18-26]

And after receiving the bread, Satan seemed to enter into Judas, and Jesus said to him, “Go and do quickly what you are going to do.” And no one at the table knew why Jesus said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the festival”; or, that he should give something to the poor. Either way, after receiving the piece of bread, Judas rose immediately and went out. And it was night. [John 13:27-30]

A bit later, while they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it once, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take this and divide it amongst yourselves. Eat it; for it is my body. Do this in remembrance of me.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them as well, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s Kingdom.” [Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25 & Luke 22:17-20]



Then a dispute arose among the disciples as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a Kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. [Luke 22:24-30] For the hour is coming, indeed it has already come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me. Yet I am never alone because the Father is always with me. [John 16:32]

And then he turned to Simon Peter and said, “Simon, Simon, listen to me! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and that you, after you have turned back, might strengthen your brothers.” [Luke 22:31-32]

And Peter replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and even to death!” Jesus then said, “I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day until you have denied three times that you even know me.” [Luke 22:33-34] And Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” And Jesus answered, “Where I am going, you cannot follow me; but you will follow afterwards.” Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” And Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.” [John 13:36-38]

Then Jesus turned and said to them, “When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?” They answered, “No, not a thing.” And he continued, “But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was counted among the lawless’; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled.” Then they said, “Lord, look, here are two swords.” He smiled and replied, “It is enough.” [Luke 22:35-38]

And Jesus then spoke with them at length about many things – including his own true nature, the requirements for their discipleship, the omni-presence of the Holy Spirit, his upcoming crucifixion and departure, and the Loving nature of God the Father. [known as Jesus’ “Johanine Farewell Discourse”; read from John 14:1 to John 17:26]

To Gethsemane ...

Then, after Jesus had spoken these words and they had all sung the Passover hymn, they departed, walking across the Kidron Valley towards the Mount of Olives, as was Jesus’ custom. [Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26, Luke 22:39 & John 18:1a]

While they were underway, Jesus turned to them and said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. My children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you: ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you show love for one another.” [John 13:31-35]

And then Jesus faced Simon Peter and said, “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” [Matthew 26:34] And then Jesus said to them all, “And you will indeed all become deserters; for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ And yet after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” Then Peter said to him, “Even though all become deserters, I will not.” And Jesus turned to him and said, “Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And yet Peter answered vehemently, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And the rest of them said the same. [Mark 14:27-31]

In Gethsemane ...

After they had arrived at their destination (a garden called Gethsemane) and entered there, Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I go pray, and pray yourselves that you might not come into the time of trial.” [Matthew 26:36, Mark 14:32, Luke 22:40 & John 18:1b] He then took with him Peter and James & John (the two sons of Zebedee), and said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.” Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and threw himself on the ground and began to be grieved and agitated, praying that the hour might pass from him, saying, “Abba, my Father, if it is possible – and for you all things are indeed possible, remove this cup from me. And yet not my will, but yours be done.” [Matthew 26:37-39, Mark 14:33-36 & Luke 22:41-42] Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. And in his anguish he prayed even more earnestly, and his sweat fell like great drops of blood down upon the ground. [Luke 22:43-44]



Then he returned to the three disciples and found them sleeping (because of grief); and he said to them, “Could you not stay awake with me for one hour? Rise up and remain awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial. For the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” He then went away for the second time and prayed again, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, then your will be done.” And again he returned and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy, and he did not know what to say to them. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he returned to them a third time and said, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! Get up, and let us be going ... For the hour is at hand and so is my betrayer. See, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.” [Matthew 26:40-46, Mark 14:37-42 & Luke 22:45-46]

And while Jesus was still speaking, Judas (who also knew the place, because Jesus had met there often before with his disciples) arrived, leading a large crowd (who were carrying lanterns & torches, and who were armed with swords & clubs) that included a detachment of soldiers and police from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders of the Pharisees. [Matthew 26:47, Mark 14:43, Luke 22:47a & John 18:2-3] Judas approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, “Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?” [Luke 22:47b-48]

Now the betrayer had given the group a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” So Judas went up to Jesus at once and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. And yet Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked the crowd, “For whom are you looking?” They answered, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus replied, “I, I am.”* And when he said this they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, “For whom are you looking?” And again they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” And Jesus answered, “I told you that I, I am.* So if you are looking for me, let these others with me go.” Then Jesus turned to Judas and said to him, “Friend, do what you are here to do.” And the crowd came and laid hands on Jesus to arrest him. [Matthew 26:48-50, Mark 14:44-46 & John 18:4-8]



*NOTE that Jesus does not merely say “I am” here (as is commonly translated), but rather “*ego eimi*”, a Greek term defined by scholars to actually mean “I, I am”; a term similar to the one believed by the Jews to have been offered to Moses by the Elohim as the name of God (who is, of course, nameless) in Exodus 3:14. Such a verbal resemblance would explain the crowd’s unusual response to Jesus’ answer here.

Suddenly, in the midst of the turmoil – with the crowd moving in on Jesus and Jesus’ disciples asking him if they should attack in return, Simon Peter drew his sword and struck Malchus, the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear. [Matthew 26:51, Mark 14:47, Luke 22:49-50 & John 18:10] But Jesus said, “No more of this! Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels to defend me? But if so, then how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen in this way? Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?” And then Jesus reached out to Malchus, touched his ear and healed him. [Matthew 26:52-54, Luke 22:51 & John 18:11]

Then Jesus turned and said to the crowd, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me, as if I were a bandit? Day after day I sat openly in the temple teaching, and yet you did not arrest me. For this is your hour, under the power of darkness! And yet I understand ... All this has taken place so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Upon hearing this, his followers deserted him and fled. One of them, a young man wearing nothing but a linen cloth, was briefly caught, and yet his cloth fell away, and he ran off naked. Then the crowd seized Jesus and led him away to the high priest’s house. [Matthew 26:55-56, Mark 14:48-52 & Luke 22:52-54a]



The Inquisition of Jesus & Peter's 3 Denials ...

On the way to taking Jesus to the home of the high priest (Caiaphas, who was the one who had advised the Jews that it was wise to have one person die for the people), the crowd stopped briefly at the house of Annas, Caiaphas father-in-law and the previous high priest. [John 18:12-14]

Now Simon Peter, who had followed them at a distance [Luke 22:54b], was sitting outside in the courtyard, warming himself by the fire there, when one of the servant-girls of the high priest saw him in the firelight and approached him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean, the man from Nazareth. Are you not also one of his disciples?" But Peter denied it, saying, "I am not. Indeed, I do not even know him, nor do I understand what you are talking about." And then Peter left the fire and went out into the forecourt, and the cock crowed the first time, albeit quietly. [Matthew 26:69-70, Mark 14:66-68, Luke 22:55-57 & John 18:17-18]



Meanwhile, Annas (who was still revered by many as though he were still high priest, even though he had been deposed from that office by the Romans some years before) was questioning Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. And Jesus answered him, saying, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; for they know what I said." And after he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" And Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?"

Then Annas bound him and sent him to Caiaphas, the official high priest [John 18:19-24], in whose home all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes had already gathered. [Matthew 26:57 & Mark 14:53]

And Peter, this time accompanied by yet another disciple who had joined him, continued to follow at a distance, going as far as the gate of the high priest's courtyard. Because this new disciple was known to the high priest, he was able to follow Jesus into the courtyard while Peter was forced to wait outside at the gate. Upon seeing this, the disciple returned and spoke to the woman guarding the gate, and was allowed to bring Peter inside. And Peter followed him in and sat down quietly with the guards, and again warmed himself by their fire. [Matthew 26:58, Mark 14:54, Luke 22:54b & John 18:15-16]



For quite some time thereafter, indeed late into the night, the chief priests and the assembled council were looking for testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, and yet they found none. For even though many witnesses came forward, their testimony did not agree. [Matthew 26:59-60 & Mark 14:55-56] At last, two witnesses came forward and said, “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’” And then the high priest stood up and said, “Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?” But Jesus remained silent. [Matthew 26:61-63a & Mark 14:57-58]

About this time, a small group of people had gathered in the forecourt near Simon Peter, and another servant girl saw him there, and both she and his first accuser said to the bystanders, “This man is one of them. This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” And yet again Peter denied it with an oath, “Man, I am not! I do not even know him.” And yet about an hour later another one of the bystanders accused him yet again, saying, “Certainly you are one of them, for your accent betrays you -- You are a Galilean. Are you not also one of his disciples?” Then Peter began to curse and he swore aloud an oath, denying it a third time, saying “I do not know this man you are talking about!” And at that moment, the cock crowed again – this time loud enough for all to hear. And Jesus turned and looked at Peter, and Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he went out, and broke down and wept bitterly. [Matthew 26:71-75, Mark 14:69-72, Luke 22:58-62 & John 18:25-27]



And then, when morning had come, the high priest finally said to Jesus, “I put you under oath before the living God. Tell us, are you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the Blessed One?” And Jesus said to him, “If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I question you, you will not answer. But from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” And the rest of them asked, “Are you, then, the Son of God?” And he replied to them, “You say that I am.”

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?” And those gathered there answered, “What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips. He deserves death!” And some of them spat in his face and struck him and heaped insults upon him, and the two men who were holding him blindfolded him and mocked him; slapping him and saying more than once, “Prophecy to us, Messiah! Who was it that struck you?” [Matthew 26:63-68, Mark 14:61-65 & Luke 22:63-71] And then the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and the scribes and the entire assembled council in order to bring about Jesus’ death. And they bound him, and led him away to hand him over to Pilate the governor. [Matthew 27:1-2, Mark 15:1, Luke 23:1 & John 18:28]

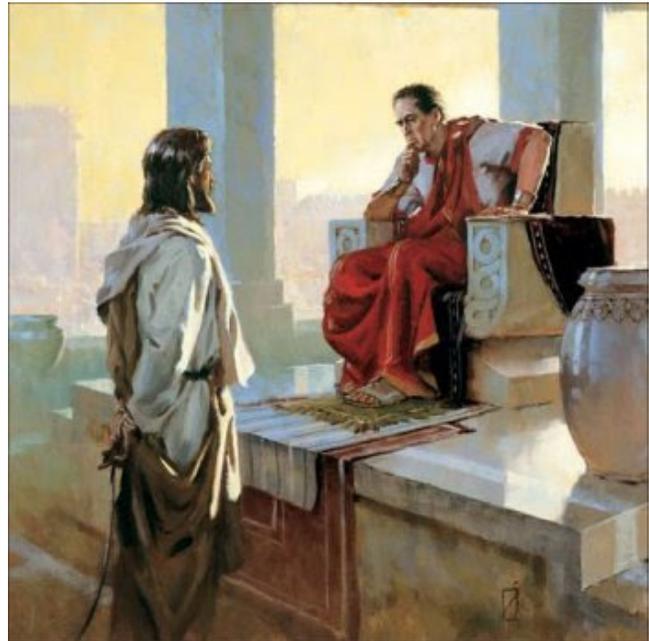


Pilate's Cross-examination ...

Shortly after arriving at Pilate's headquarters (but not entering that place, as otherwise they would be ritually unclean and not be able to partake of the Passover meal), Pilate came out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" And they answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate then said to them, "Then take him yourselves and judge him according to your own law." But the Jews replied (seemingly to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die), "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." [John 18:29-32]

Then the high priests began to accuse Jesus, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the Emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." To these charges, Jesus remained silent and made no reply. And Pilate looked at Jesus and said, "Do you not hear how many accusations they are making against you?" And yet Jesus gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. Then Pilate retreated into his headquarters, summoned Jesus before him, and asked him privately, "Are you truly the King of the Jews?" And Jesus answered him, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" And Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to them. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." And Pilate asked him, "So you are indeed a king?" And Jesus replied, "You say that I am. And yet for this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." And Pilate asked, "What is truth?" [Matthew 27:11-14, Mark 15:2-5, Luke 23:2-3 & John 18:33-38a]

Then Pilate returned to the chief priests and the crowds and said, "I find no basis for your accusations against this man. I find no case against him" But they were insistent and said, "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all of Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place." When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was indeed a Galilean, and when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. [Luke 23:4-7 & John 18:38b]



Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard a great deal about him and was hoping to have him perform some sort of sign. And he questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him., and even Herod with his soldiers treated Jesus with contempt and mocked him. Then Herod put an elegant robe on Jesus, and sent him back to Pilate. That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies. [Luke 23:8-12]

Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him.” [Luke 23:13-16]

The Festival of Forgiveness ...

Now it just so happened that it was a personal tradition of Pilate’s during this festival for him to release a single prisoner; anyone the crowd demanded. So the crowd raised its voice and began to ask Pilate to honor this custom. And at that time a man named Jesus Barabbas was in prison with the other rebels who had supposedly committed murder during a recent insurrection in the city. So Pilate, realizing that it was out of jealousy that they had handed Jesus over to him, addressed their demands by saying, “You do indeed have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah, the King of the Jews?” And they all shouted in reply, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas for us!” [Matthew 27:15-18, Mark 15:6-10, Luke 23:17-19 & John 18:39-40]

Then Pilate sent Jesus away and had him flogged. And his soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on Jesus’ head, and they dressed him in a purple robe, and they repeatedly came up to him and struck him on the face, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” Then Pilate went out again to the crowd and said to them, “Look, I am bringing him out to you again to let you know that I find no case against him.” So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!” And when the chief priests and their police saw him, they shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” But Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.” And the Jews answered, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.” [John 19:1-7]



Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever, and he entered his headquarters again with Jesus, gave Jesus back his own clothes and asked him, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, “Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you as well?” Then Jesus answered him, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.” [John 19:8-11]

Then, while Pilate was still sitting on the judgment seat – and while the chief priests and the elders were still inciting the crowd to keep demanding to have Barabbas released and Jesus killed, Pilate’s wife sent word to him, saying, “Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.” [Matthew 27:19-20 & Mark 15:11]

And so Pilate tried again to release him, pleading with the crowd for a third and final time, asking again, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they answered once again, “Barabbas.” And Pilate said, “Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah, the man you call King of the Jews?” And they shouted back, “Let him be crucified!” Then Pilate asked, “Why? What evil has he done?” And yet they shouted all the more, “Crucify him! Let him be crucified!” And again Pilate said to them, “What evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death, and will therefore have him flogged again and then release him.” But the crowd kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified, saying, “If you release this man, you are no friend of the Emperor, for everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the Emperor.”

And so, at about noon on the day of preparation for the Passover, Pilate heard these words and brought Jesus outside once more to the judge’s bench (the place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha) and said to the Jews assembled there, “Here is your King.” And they cried out, “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!” And Pilate, incredulous, asked them, “Shall I really crucify your King?” And the chief priests answered, “We have no king but the Emperor.” [Matthew 27:21-23, Mark 15:12-14, Luke 23:20-23 & John 19:12-15]

And so, when he saw that he could do nothing -- but rather that the crowd must be appeased in order to avoid a coming riot, Pilate took some water and washed his hands openly before them, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood. See to it yourselves.” And the crowd as a whole answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” And so Pilate gave his verdict that their demands should be granted, and he released Barabbas; and, after flogging Jesus, handed him over to them to be crucified. [Matthew 27:24-26, Mark 15:15, Luke 23:24-25 & John 19:16]

Enduring the Soldiers' Abuse ...

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the inner courtyard of governor's headquarters and had the whole cohort gather around him. There, they once again stripped him naked, and – after first dressing him in a scarlet chlamus [a short, military cloak; see Matthew 27:28], they once again draped the purple robe about his shoulders [called a “porphura; see Mark 15:17] and once again placed the crown of thorns upon his head. Then they placed a reed in his right hand and mockingly knelt before him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they spat on him, and took the reed from his hand and struck him on the head with it. Then they stripped him of the robe and cloak, put his own clothes on him again, and led him away to be crucified. [Matthew 27:27-31 & Mark 15:16-20]

And as they led Jesus away, they came upon a man who was coming in from the country – Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander & Rufus). And they seized him, and laid Jesus' cross upon his shoulders, and compelled him to walk behind Jesus while carrying the cross. [Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21 & Luke 23:26]

And a great number of the people followed him; among them women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but rather weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’ For then they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ For if they do this already when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” [Luke 23:27-31]



*Meanwhile, having seen that Jesus had indeed been condemned to death, Judas Iscariot returned to the high priests, repented before them, threw their thirty silver pieces back into the Temple, and reportedly committed suicide by hanging himself ... [Matthew 27:3-5]

The Crucifixion ...

And then, after Jesus retrieved his cross from Simon the Cyrene [John 19:17a], they led him on to Golgotha (which means Place of the Skull). And once they arrived there, they offered him sour wine mixed with gall, and he did taste its bitterness, but would not drink it down. And then they offered him wine sweetened with myrrh, but he would not drink of it at all. And then they crucified him alongside two accused robbers, one to his left and one to his right [Matthew 27:38, Mark 15:27-28, Luke 23:33b & John 19:18].

And there was a sign over his head that read “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” – with the former title written somewhat illegibly, and the latter title written in Aramaic & Greek & Latin & Hebrew.* [Matthew 27:37, Mark 15:26, Luke 23:38 & John 19:19-20] And the soldiers continued to offer him the sour wine, and they mocked him, saying, “If you are truly the King of the Jews, save yourself!” [Matthew 27:33-34, Mark 15:22-23, Luke 23:33a+36-37 & John 19:17] And as they were doing so, Jesus looked heavenward and said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they are doing.” [Luke 23:34a]



* The chief priests had objected to the wording of the sign, and yet to no avail, with Pilate dismissing them their complaints with a curt, “What I have written I have written.” [John 19:21-22]

And immediately after crucifying him – at about nine o’clock in the morning, the four soldiers divided his clothes into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic, which was seamless and woven in one piece from top to bottom, and said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but rather cast lots to see who will get it.” And they did so, fulfilling what the scripture says: “They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.” And after this was done, the soldiers sat down nearby and kept watch over him. [Matthew 27:35-36, Mark 15:24-25, Luke 23:34b & John 19:23-24]

And many stood by, watching, and some who passed by derided Jesus, shaking their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are truly the Son of God, come down from the cross.” And the elders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is indeed the Messiah of God; His chosen one!” [Matthew 27:39-40, Mark 15:29-30 & Luke 23:35]

In the same way the chief priests and the scribes were mocking him, saying, “He saved others; yet he cannot save himself. If he is the King of Israel – if he is the Messiah, then let him come down from the cross now, that we may see and believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for indeed he said, ‘I am God’s Son.’” [Matthew 27:41-43 & Mark 15:31-32a]



And the bandits who were crucified with him also initially taunted him in the same way. [Matthew 27:44 & Mark 15:32b] And yet then, after the first bandit continued to deriding Jesus, saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself -- and us!”, the other bandit finally rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he looked at Jesus and said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” And Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, now you will be with me in the Garden.” [Luke 23:39-43]

Now also standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” And then to the disciple he said, “And here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. [John 19:25-27]

Then, from roughly noon until about three in the afternoon, darkness descended over the land. [Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33 & Luke 23:44-45a] And just after three o'clock, Jesus called out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli! Lema sabachthani?" – which means "My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?" [Matthew 27:46 & Mark 15:34] Some of the bystanders who heard this mistakenly thought that Jesus was calling out for Elijah [when in reality he was only announcing his deep loyalty to God by reciting the first verse of the 22nd Psalm], and one of them ran and retrieved a sponge filled with sour wine and raised it up to Jesus on a hyssop stick to give him a drink. The mistaken bystanders saw this and said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will indeed come to save him." And yet Jesus, who knew that all had been completed, once again fulfilled scripture by saying, "I am thirsty." And at that moment, they refilled the sponge with a different wine and raised it back up to his mouth to let him drink. [Matthew 27:47-49, Mark 15:35-36 & John 19:28-29] When Jesus had drunk the wine, he whispered, "It is accomplished." [John 19:30a], and then he cried out in a loud voice [Matthew 27:50a & Mark 15:37a] and said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." [Luke 23:46a] And having said this, he bowed his head, breathed his last, and yielded up his Spirit. [Matthew 27:50b, Mark 15:37b, Luke 23:46b & John 19:30b]

At that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. [Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38 & Luke 23:45b] And the earth shook*, and rocks were split, and the centurion (alongside those who were with him; those who had been keeping watch over Jesus) saw what had taken place, he stood in awe and said, "Certainly this man was innocent. Surely, this man was a Son of God!" [Matthew 27:54, Mark 15:39 & Luke 23:47]

*It was also reported that many tombs were opened, and that the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised and exited their graves – and that they thereafter entered the holy city, appearing to many. [Matthew 27:52-53]

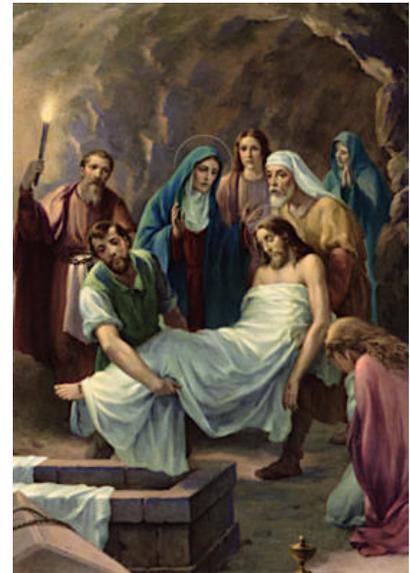
And when the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. [Luke 23:48] And yet all of Jesus' acquaintances, including many of the women who had followed him from Galilee and provided for him (including Mary Magdalene, Mary -- the mother of James & Joses, and Salome -- the mother of the sons of Zebedee), remained there, watching at a distance. [Matthew 27:55-56, Mark 15:40-41 & Luke 23:49]

To the Tomb ...

Now since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, especially because that particular Sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken so their bodies could be removed more quickly. And Pilate obliged their request, and the soldiers came and broke the legs of the bandits who had been crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, whereupon blood and water came forth. And these things also occurred so that the passages of scripture might be fulfilled: "None of his bones shall be broken." and "They will look on the one whom they have pierced." [John 19:31-37]

That evening [Matthew 27:57a, Mark 15:42a & Luke 23:54], a good and righteous wealthy man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was both a member of the Sanhedrin council (though he had openly disagreed to their plan regarding Jesus) and also a disciple of Jesus who was expectantly awaiting the Kingdom of God (though in secret, because of his fear of the Jewish elders), boldly came to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. After hearing this request, Pilate marveled that Jesus could actually be already dead, and so he summoning the centurion and asked him whether Jesus had truly passed on. When he learned that Jesus had indeed been ruled dead, Pilate ordered that the body be given to Joseph. [Matthew 27:57-58, Mark 15:42-45, Luke 23:50-52 & John 19:38]

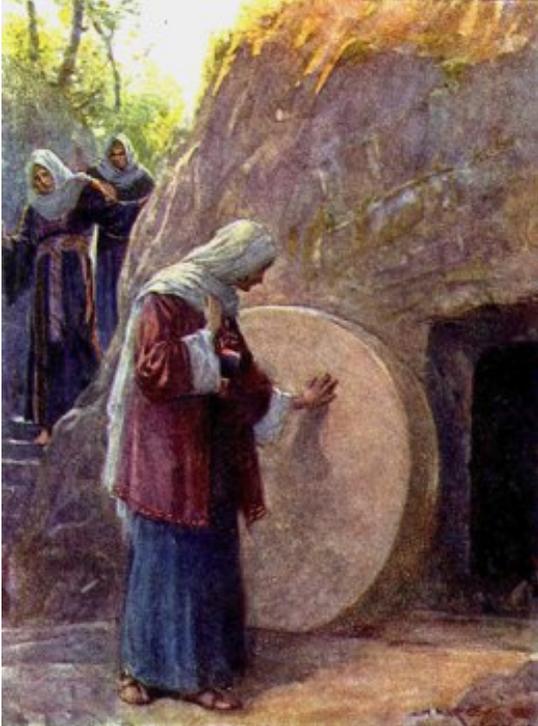
So Joseph purchased a linen cloth and went with Nicodemus (who had brought a large mixture of myrrh & aloes weighing about a hundred pounds) to Golgotha, where they took down Jesus' body and wrapped it with the spices in the new cloth. [Matthew 27:59, Mark 15:46a, Luke 23:53a & John 19:39-40] And they took the body to a nearby garden where an unused tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea had been hewn into the rock, and they laid Jesus' body therein. And then Joseph alone rolled a great stone over the tomb's portal, and they departed. [Matthew 27:60, Mark 15:46b, Luke 23:53b & John 19:41-42] A small group of women who had come with Jesus from Galilee, including Mary Magdalene and Mary – the mother of James & Joses, had followed Joseph & Nicodemus. They were sitting opposite the tomb when Jesus' body was placed there, and they saw where the body was laid. [Matthew 27:61, Mark 15:47 & Luke 23:55] Then they too returned to prepare more spices and ointments. [Luke 23:56a]



The next morning, while all the Jews were resting according to the Commandment [Luke 23:56b], the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, namely, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead', and the last deception would be worse than the first." And Pilate said to them, "You have your own guard of soldiers; so go and make it as secure as you know how." So they went with their own guard that mid-morning (on the Passover Sabbath) and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone. [Matthew 27:62-66]

The Resurrection ...

Very early the next day, at the dawn's beginning -- while the sun was rising but also while it was still relatively dark [Matthew 28:1a, Mark 16:1, Luke 24:1a & John 20:1a], the same group of women (including Mary Magdalene, Mary – the mother of James & Joses, Salome & Joanna) headed to the tomb, bringing with them the spices that Salome had bought and that they had all prepared. [Matthew 28:1b, Mark 16:2, Luke 24:1b & John 20:1b]



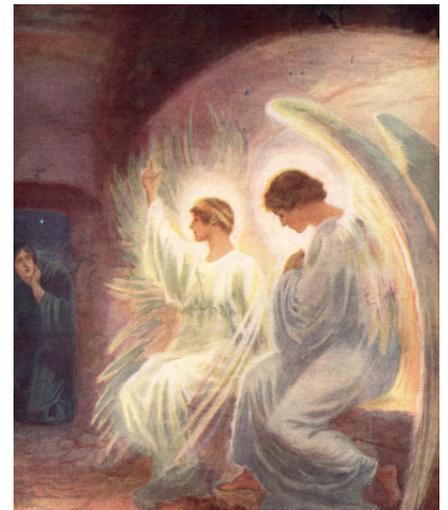
After arriving, the two Mary's approached the tomb first, and when they did so they felt the earth tremble and saw what appeared to be an Angel of the Lord descend from heaven, roll back the stone covering the tomb's portal, and sit upon it. It was at this time that the guards who were present fainted ("became like dead men") and fell out of sight. [Matthew 28:2-4] Shortly thereafter, the other women approached the tomb and found it already opened. [Mark 16:3-4, Luke 24:2 & 1 Corinthians 15:4]

Upon realizing that the others did not see the Angel, Mary Magdalene then could no longer see him either, and began to believe as well that the stone had already been removed prior to their arrival. [John 20:1b] Understandably upset by recent events (as well as her possible hallucination), Mary turned immediately and ran away. [John 20:2a]

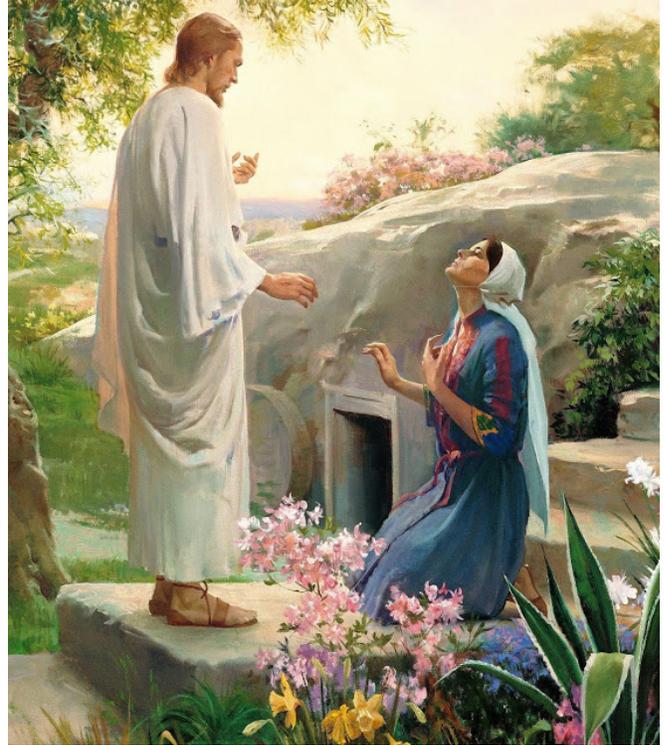
And yet the Angel was still visible to several others who remained there, and spoke to them, saying, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, just as he said. Come closer, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." [Matthew 28:5-7]

And so they entered the tomb, and could see right away that there was no body. And at that moment, while they were perplexed by this, suddenly two men dressed in dazzling white robes* were standing by them. This frightened the women greatly, and they looked away and bowed their faces to the ground. But the men repeated the angel's previous message, saying to them, "Do not be afraid; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. But why do you look for the living among the dead? You see, just like he said, he has been raised, and is not here. Look, right there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples that he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." [Mark 16:5-7 & Luke 24:3-7]

*As a few of the women did not enter the tomb fully, those that did not do so could only see one of the two "men in white".



And then the other Mary, the mother of James & Joses -- who had, like several of the women, remained outside the tomb and had been weeping there, bent over and looked into the tomb. And when she did so she also saw two men in white (who she took to be angels) sitting near to where Jesus had been lying, one at the head and one at the feet. And then men in white turned to her and said, "Woman, why are you weeping?" And she said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." And at this moment, just as she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was him. And Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?" And, supposing the man to be the gardener, Mary replied, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him." And Jesus said to her, "Mary!" And she turned towards him fully and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). And Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" [John 20:11-17]



And so Mary -- the mother of James & Joses, in fear mixed with great joy, set out quickly with the other women, originally planning to tell no one what they had seen. [Mark 16:8] And yet on their way, Jesus appeared again, saying, "Greetings!" And they all came to him, and took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. And then he said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." [Matthew 28:8-10] And all that these women had been so commanded to tell, they told to those who had been with Jesus, when they returned and found them mourning and weeping. [Luke 24:8-10] And the disciples refused to believe their story. [Luke 24:11]

And yet while the women were able to tell most of the disciples, they were not able to tell Simon Peter or the disciple whom Jesus loved, for these two had already been told of Jesus resurrection by Mary Magdalene, after she had left the other women at the tomb to run and tell those two that "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." [John 20:1-2] And after hearing this, Peter and the other disciple had set out and went towards the tomb. The two had been running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.

Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, he who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture; that said that he must rise from the dead. And then they returned to their homes. [Luke 24:12 ... John 20:3-10]

A time after Peter and the other disciple had left to head to the tomb, Mary Magdalene heard the tale of the empty tomb from the other women who returned thereafter, and at that point realized that the Angel she had seen rolling back the stone had been Jesus himself. So she also told the remaining disciples that she had seen him. [Mark 16:9-10 & John 20:18] And yet once again, they refused to believe. [Mark 16:11]

Meanwhile, some of the guards who had been at the tomb returned to the chief priests and informed them about what happened. The priests then assembled with the elders and decided to bribe the soldiers with a large sum of money to spread the rumor that Jesus' disciples had come in the night and taken his body away. [Matthew 28:11-15]

Reappearances & Ascensions ...

Now after his resurrection Jesus presented himself alive to his disciples many times, appearing to them repeatedly over the course of "forty days" and speaking often with them about the Kingdom of God. [Acts 1:3]

The first place this occurred was in Galilee. The eleven disciples went there to the mountain to which the two "men in white" and Jesus himself had originally told them to go. And when they saw him there, they worshipped him; and yet some still doubted. [Matthew 28:16-17]

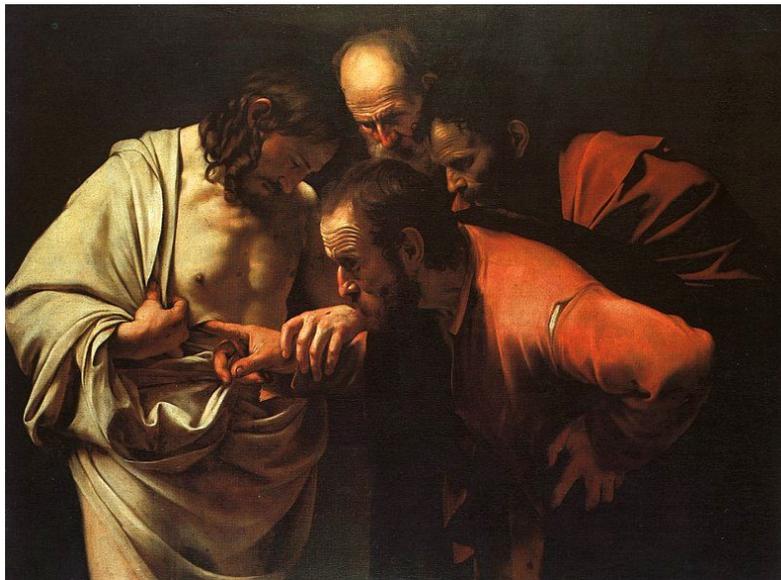
Thereafter, Jesus appeared to two of the disciples on a walk to Emmaus [Mark 16:12 & Luke 24:13-32], though when they returned and told the other disciples of this visit, there was still skepticism. [Mark 16:13 & Luke 24:33-35]



He later appeared two separate times to a smaller group of disciples (Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John and two others) who spent a great deal of time together fishing. [John 21:2+14] And he thereafter appeared to Peter privately, and then as well as once more to “the twelve” [1 Corinthians 15:5 ... NOTE: Mattathias was present at this sighting, and counted as the 12th Disciple, even though he had yet to officially replace Judas at the time – see Acts 1:12-26]

Jesus then appeared to over 500 people at one time [1 Corinthians 15:6], to James individually [1 Corinthians 15:7a], and then to almost all the apostles one night while they were eating together. It was at this particular repast that Jesus suddenly appeared before them, so subtly that they thought they were shocked and thought they were seeing a ghost. [Luke 24:36-37] Jesus then upbraided their lack of faith in his previous appearances [Mark 16:14] and gave them his first Great Commission [Mark 16:15-16 – “Go into all the world and proclaim the Good News to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned.”] Then he verified his presence by showing them his wounds and eating with them. [Luke 24:38-44 & John 20:19-20] It was at this meal that Jesus ordered them not to leave Jerusalem for a time. [Acts 1:4-5] And then he departed from them, and ascended up into Heaven to sit at the right hand of God. [Mark 16:19]

Now Thomas was not with them when Jesus appeared at that particular meal, so when he joined them later – and the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” – he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” And so, a week later the disciples were again in the same house, and this time Thomas was with them. And although the doors were shut, Jesus “descended” quietly and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” And then he turned to Thomas and said, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” And Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” [1 Corinthians 15:7b & John 20:24-29]



And then he opened their minds to the deeper meaning of the scriptures, and gave them his second Great Commission, saying, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here near the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” [Luke 24:45-49]

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. And while he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into Heaven a second time. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God. [Luke 24:50-53]



And it was a few days thereafter that Jesus returned and showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, both the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples. Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” And they said to him, “We will go with you.” So they all went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just after daybreak, Jesus was standing near them on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was he. So Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” And he said to them, “Then cast the net to the right side of your boat, and there you will find some.” So they did so, and they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish in it. The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” And when Simon Peter heard that this, he put on some clothes (for he was naked) and jumped into the sea.

But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land. When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. And Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them. And Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to this particular group of disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Then feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

And Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them ... When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about him?” Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!” So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die. [John 21:1-25]

And later that night, after they had all once again come together to eat, the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” And he replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” [Acts 1:6-8] And then he gave them his third Great Commission, saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” [Matthew 28:18-20]

And when he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up a third time, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them, and they said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come again in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” [Acts 1:9-11]

And at last, some days later, as Saul of Tarsus was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” And a reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”



The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. There he met a man named Ananias, who entered the house where Saul was staying and laid his hands on him, saying, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and his sight was restored.

Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” ... And Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by preaching that Jesus was the Messiah. [Acts 9:3-9 + 17-22 & 1 Corinthians 15:8]



*“Jesus of Nazareth; a man attested to you by God
with deeds of power, wonders and signs
that God did through him among you ...”*

~ Luke (Acts 2:22+)

*“Why do you call me good?
No one is good but God alone.”*

~ Jesus Christ (Mark 10:18)

Part 2: The Crucifixion Conspiracy

What the Bible itself infers actually happened
on the very first “Easter weekend”



*“He is not here; for he has been raised,
just as he said he would.”*

~ Matthew 28:6

*“I am the resurrection and the life.
He that believes in me,
even though he were dead, shall live ...
And whomever lives and believes in me
shall never die. ... Very truly I tell you,
whomever truly believes in me
will do the works I do.”
~ Jesus Christ
(John 11:25-26 & John 14:12)*

Introduction

*“If you believe whatever you happen to like in the Gospel,
and reject whatever you happen to not like,
it is not the Gospel in which you believe,
but rather yourself.” ~ St. Augustine of Hippo*

Easter comes anew with each new spring, providing us with a time of rebirth; a time of renewal; and – at least for Christians – a time for redemption. While the first half of this treatise succeeded in reconciling the many apparent contradictions related to the when’s & who’s & where’s & what’s of the Bible’s resurrection story, this latter portion will provide an alternative answer to the all-important question of “Why?” ... and in so doing, will prove to be an alternative analysis that not only more accurately reflects the general narrative of the Bible’s ancient manuscripts, but one that actually gives more honor & pays more homage to its main protagonist (Jesus Christ) as well.

That, at least, was my humble intention while penning this epistle. You the reader will have to determine to what degree I have succeeded -- or not.

As allWays ... enJOY regardless!

Scaughdt



Preamble

In the Bible's New Testament, the self-proclaimed "apostle" Paul established the contemporary Christian church's beliefs related to the death & resurrection of Jesus Christ – namely, that Jesus did indeed die on the cross, that he was indeed buried for three days thereafter, and that he did indeed rise from the dead into everlasting life ...

“For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day ... If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and our faith has been in vain.” ~ Paul (1 Corinthians 15:3-4+13-14)

And in those same epistles, Paul often quite adamantly stated that any theological divergences from his own beliefs about Jesus Christ were not only illegitimate, but damned as well ...

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or a messenger from heaven itself should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we have already proclaimed, let that one be accursed.” ~ Paul (Galatians 1:6-8)

Now this is all fine & good for those Christians who are still satisfied worshiping a god of wrath & judgment; a god whose “love” is given only conditionally, and given only to those few who prove themselves “worthy” of the same. And yet for thousands upon thousands (if not hundreds of thousands – if not even millions) of their spiritual brethren, such a godhead reeks of unjust tyranny. For these slowly reawakening “Followers of Jesus’ Way” (and those already walking that Way), the brittle love of such a petty god is simply not enough. These believers know deep within their Souls that God is somehow greater; that His LOVE knows no such limitations – and that the LOVE of His son Jesus Christ was & remains just as perfect & just as true.

And as it turns out, in a delicious twist of irony, Jesus himself had a similarly progressive -- if not downright “radical” -- view of Heaven & Salvation, along with the LOVE that was (& still is) required for us to attain both or either. Consider the following small sampling of the hundreds of similar verses showing this to be so:

***Jesus on Heaven:** “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of Heaven is even now at hand. Alter your ways, and believe in my Good News ... For the Kingdom of Heaven is not coming in the future with material things that be observed ... For in fact, the Kingdom of Heaven is already within you.” ~ Mark 1:15 & Luke 17:20-21

***Jesus on Salvation:** “I am an embodiment of the resurrection, and a reflection of the Life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, are truly alive.” ~ John 11:25 [note that the Greek “zao”, normally written as “shall” or “will be” in English Bibles, is actually more appropriately translated in the present tense – as “is” or “are”]

***Jesus on Redemption:** “And behold, one came to [Jesus] and said, ‘Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I might have eternal life?’ And [Jesus] said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? There is no one good but one, and that is God. And yet if you would enter into eternal life, keep the Commandments ... Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and will do even greater works than these ... And by this will everyone know that you are my disciples: when you show Love to one another.’” ~ Matthew 19:16-17 & John 14:12 & John 13:35

For those of you who resonate with these more gentle passages of scripture (and any others like them) – for all you newfound “Followers of The Way” who are letting the Truth in their Souls speak louder than the transcripts of each Sunday’s sermons, it is becoming less & less important to worship Jesus Christ as the physically resurrected Son of God – and more & more important to simply live as he lived, to serve as he selflessly served, and to care as he courageously cared.

Of course, for a still-significant portion of the Christian community (all evangelicals, fundamentalists, and literalists – really any Christians who still consider themselves to be spiritually “conservative”), these ideals are borderline blasphemy -- if not downright heretical. For these folks, there is only one set of beliefs supported by the scriptures – *their* beliefs – and all other ideas or interpretations thereof are to be dismissed, or rejected, or ridiculed ... or even condemned.

Needless to say, this is not a recipe for Peace ... And seeing as how a significant portion of the world’s population (over 32%, as of 2012), how the vast majority of Americans in general (over 77%, also as of 2012), and how almost all of the so-called “leaders” of the United States (over 90%, as of 2013) consider themselves to be members of a Bible-based religion, we come to the crux of the matter: namely, what does the Bible itself have to say on this very important matter? Or a question better posed: does the Bible itself provide an alternative explanation for what happened that very first Easter weekend; an explanation that is – for believers & non-believers alike -- more-peaceful, more-accepting &, for lack of a better term, more Loving?

Well I have some Good News for you all: **INDEED IT DOES!**

Now before I begin illuminating this new & nuanced theory, I want you all to know right up front that I in no way intend to claim that I have hereby found “*the* answer” related to what the Bible “actually says”, nor do I wish in any way to intimate that I know what “actually happened” on those fateful days in & around Jerusalem some 2000+ years ago.

In essence, I admit right away that atheists might be right in saying that none of it actually happened; that the entire Bible is just a collection of fairy tales & primitive superstitions; that the early Christians merely mass-hallucinated the return of their dearly missed Savior; or that Jesus didn’t physically return to them at all ... *And* I admit as well that conservative Christians might be just as correct in believing that it all happened just as the church says it did; that Jesus was indeed the only Son of God; that he was merely obediently following the “spiritual script” that God mandated him to follow; that he really did die on the cross, that he really was entombed for three days, and that he really did physically rise from the dead to spread a message of redemption for those very few who eventually chose to worship him as their only “personal Lord & Savior”.

“Fair enough”, to both these extremes, I say ... Neither resonates with my own personal take on the either the contents or the worth of Biblical scripture, and yet I humbly admit that either of these theories *might* be truthful.

Of course, right or not, the former group (composed primarily of secular humanists & “New Ager”) is completely missing out on the amazing psychological & sociological Truths that can only be gleaned & appreciated by actively emulating The Way of Christ that the Jesus of the Biblical Gospels illustrates ... while the latter group (composed exclusively of conservative Christians), right or not, is completely missing out on worshiping an equally worthy, equally available & equally “real” God of perfect Love & unconditional Mercy & compassionate Justice – a deity who just happens to cohabitate with their more wrathful god; who can just as readily be found in the neighboring verses of the very same Bible.

That having been said, what I *AM* offering with this short book is an alternative – a “Middle Path” or “Narrow Way”, if you will ... one that is both ethically sound and fully supported by scripture.

So, regardless of your particular religious inclinations – be they Christian or atheist or anything “in between”, I offer the following deeper glimpse into the very first Easter, with the faith that opening yourself to its possibilities will make the deep-seated Peace & radiant Joy of Jesus’ selfless Way more readily available to you & yours in your everyday lives.

Amen ... Let it be so.



A Historical Backdrop

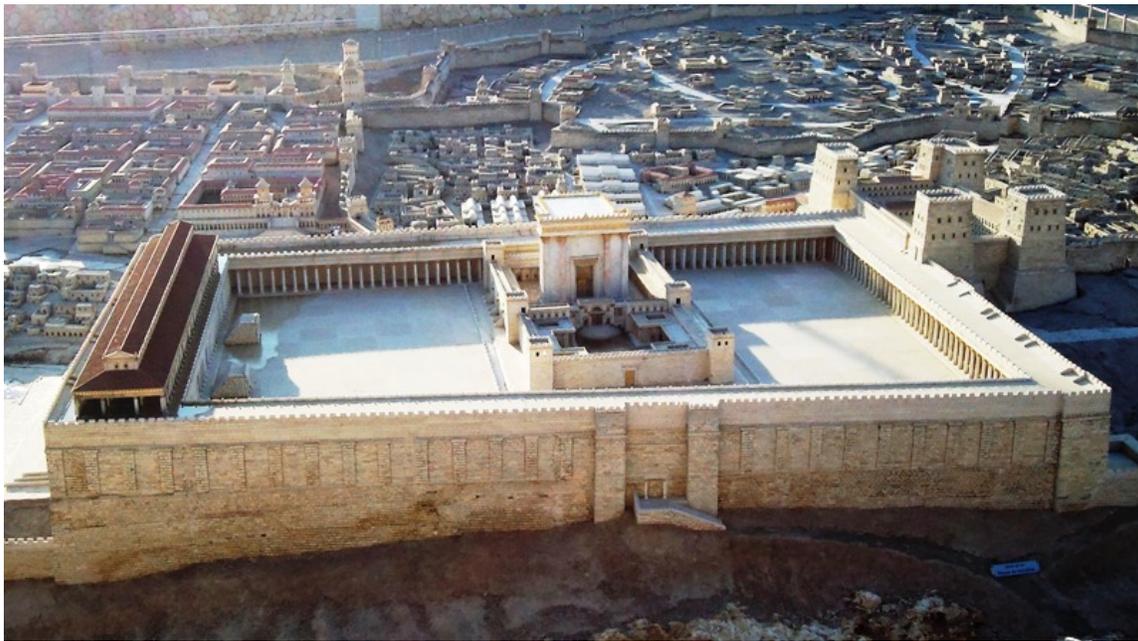
No written document can be truly comprehended without also understanding the basic cultural environment in which it was penned. As such, a brief glimpse into the cultural climate of Jesus' day & time can prove helpful to understanding the Bible's texts more deeply, and can provide additional insight into the contents of the same as well. Consider the following ...

Political Climate: By the time Jesus was 10 years old, the Romans had taken over rulership of his home-region, and all direct relations between tenant farmers and their landowners had been severed (see Mark 12:1-9). Tax pressures were considerable, leading to open disdain for all "tax collectors", along with the Roman rulers who employed them (see Luke 15:1-2 & Matthew 18:17). It was even common for Roman soldiers to extort goods & services from the populace (see Matthew 5:41). Jesus "home-base" was Capernaum, a town which lay along the "Great Trunk Road" – a well-traveled major road that connected the large trade-hubs Damascus and Caesarea -- the latter having been the lavish resident metropolis of the Roman governor of Judea (mentioned in Acts 8:40, 9:30, 10:24, 11:11, 12:19-33, 18:22, 21:8, 23:23 & 25:1-13). Herod Antipas ruled the region at this time, and resided at Sepphoris (which lay less than 5 miles away from Nazareth) while he built a new grand resident-city, Tiberia (where Jesus and his male family members might very well have worked). This situation gave Jesus ample opportunity to experience the intense social tensions that certainly existed between the Roman occupying forces and his landsmen.



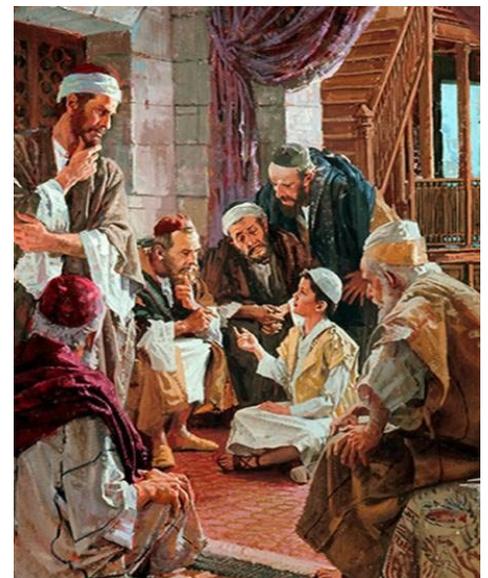
Economic Climate: During the years of Jesus' life (and extending for many decades beyond) there also existed entrenched class tensions between those who participated in the rural, labor-based economy (the focus of Jesus' ministry) and those whose lives revolved around the urban, trade-based economy (the focus of Paul's missionary ministry). Of two-fold interest for the earnest student: **A)** that the region of Galilee was relatively well-off economically (as evidenced by Galileans only participating in the 1st Jewish revolt for one year before returning to their everyday, comfortably familiar Roman-ruled lifestyle), and **B)** that fisherman (like the disciples Peter, James & John) were *relatively* sophisticated traders in their day. Still, most "Christians" were rather poor (1 Corinthians 1:26-30) and class tensions remained piqued during these times (see 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 & James 2:1-13).

Religious Climate: The religious activities of the Jews in Jesus' day centered in one way or another around The Temple, where Head Priests had been hereditarily installed until Herod began appointing them regardless of lineage (a source of tension that would not have affected Jesus directly, and yet one that existed nonetheless).



At this time, there were three major sects of Jews – the Sadducees (aristocratic & conservative priests), the Pharisees (conservative laymen observing in local synagogues, who became the forefathers of rabbinic Judaism after the Temple's fall in 70 CE), and the Essenes (a group whose members had completely seceded from Temple-based worship and – like its most famous member, John the Baptist – generally lived lives of austere selflessness). In addition, both the Samaritans (who followed Samaritanism – an Abrahamic religion closely related to Judaism) and the Zealots (whom the historian Josephus called the “fourth sect”, and yet who were primarily a politically active subset of the Pharisees with an extreme attachment to personal liberty, whose radical & violent tactics ultimately contributed to the aforementioned Temple razing) played major cultural roles in the region as well.

For Jews like Jesus, religious education was also divided by one's sociological status, with only the basics being taught locally (and orally) and any advanced learning requiring the student to travel to a larger urban center. As such, it is intriguing to see Jesus as both the son of a carpenter and simultaneously learned (see Luke 4:16). Religious devotion was also divided along class-lines, with the laboring class expressing devotion via a yearly pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem, and the elites showing their devotion via an intensive interpretive study of Scripture. As such, it was quite provocative for Jesus to shatter these norms by debating with the rabbis in the Temple at the age of 12 (see Luke 2:41-52). It is also important to remember that Jesus was a Jewish reformer, and never intended to create a new religion at all (see Matthew 5:17, coupled with Jesus' lone Commandments as stated in Matthew 22:37-40 – both of which came directly from the “Old testament” scriptures of the Torah).



Jesus' Noble Intentions ...

For starters, in order to be able to better comprehend the alternative explanation of the “Resurrection Story” that will follow, let us briefly review what Jesus’ ministry was all about – let us review just what it was Jesus was trying to accomplish during the few years before his crucifixion.

***First of all**, it is important to remember that Jesus was a devout Jew from beginning to end. In Matthew 5:17-19, Jesus makes it very clear that he came to *reform* Judaism, not to create a new religion – “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish but to fulfill” (with the Greek word translated here as “to fulfill” actually meaning “to hone” or “to purify” or “to make perfect” ... see also Matthew 23:2, Luke 16:16-17, John 1:17, John 2:19, John 8:6-8, John 9:28-29, et al) ... In doing so, Jesus frequently interpreted Jewish laws more strictly than their traditional renditions (see Matthew 5:21-28, 5:31-48, Mark 10:20-22, Luke 11:42, 16:10 & 18:22), and sometimes made harsher conventional laws more open-ended (see Matthew 12:1-13, Mark 1:17, 2:18-20, 2:23-28, 3:1-4, 7:1-13, 10:2-9, Luke 5:31-32, 6:1-6, 6:37, 11:37-40, 13:12-17, 16:10, & John 7:23).

Indeed, even Jesus' two greatest Commandments were mere reiterations of the Jewish Law of his day (see also Matthew 13:52 & Mark 2:21-22, 13:2, Luke 5:36-39, et al) – with his first Commandment being an adaptation of the Sh'ma of Deuteronomy 6:5, and his second Commandment being a direct quotation of Leviticus 19:18 (see Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:29-31 & Luke 10:27-28). It is also interesting to compare these verses in Matthew with the oral tradition of Rabbi Hillel, who said, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your brother. That is the whole Torah; the rest is mere commentary ... Go and learn it.” (Talmud Shabb, 31a).

Love your
neighbor, period.

GOD

***Secondly**, it is important to remember that Jesus’ ministry began and ended as a radical religious reform of the conservative Judaism being practiced in his time. His *first major reform* centered on the forgiveness of all sins. In opposition to the oral tradition of the Jewish culture, which had God only forgiving sins against God (Mishna Yom 8:9), Jesus taught that, “The Son of Man [i.e. each & every human being] has the authority on earth to forgive sins.” (see Matthew 9:6, Mark 1:10, Luke 5:24, et al) ... His *second major reform* focused on exuding a purposeful & merciful Kindness towards all things “evil”. In opposition to the Hebrew Bible, which noted that we were to “burn the evil out from our midst” (Deuteronomy 17:7 et al), Jesus taught “Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also ... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:39+44, Luke 6:27-31+35-36, et al – see also Luke 10:29-37 & John 4:7-15) ... His *third major reform* noted that the only Way to Salvation was “through him”. In direct opposition to the Psalms which noted that “God is near to all who call unto Him” (Psalm 145:18 et al), Jesus taught instead that “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17 – see also John 10:9, John 14:6 & Luke 12:8-9) – where “the Son” was not Jesus arrogantly referring to himself in the 3rd person (see Mark 10:18), but rather referencing and encouraging all of humanity thereby (see also John 15:2-5, et al).

[NOTE: It is very important here to recognize & understand the critical distinction between Jesus’ use of “through” in this verse, in marked contrast to the Psalmist’s use of “call” – making it clear that Jesus was *NOT* saying that he was the *only* Son of God, as much as he was saying that The Way he was teaching had to be an active caring for others, as opposed to merely a verbal &/or mental form of worship (see Matthew 19:17-21, John 13:17, et al – and see also John 1:7, where “through him” is also used with regards to John the Baptist)]

[NOTE as well: For those of you interested in soaking up even more Biblical evidence of “Jesus as Judaic Reformer”, feel free to examine Jesus’ many anti-Pharisee &/or anti-scribe statements in Matthew 5:20, 15:12-14, 16:6-12, 21:45-46, 22:32, 23:2-10, 23:13-33, Mark 8:12, 8:14, 12:38-40, Luke 6:11, 12:1b, 12:11-12, 14:11, 16:14-15 & 19:46-47, et al]

***Thirdly**, and possibly most importantly, it is crucial for any earnest student of scripture to remember that Jesus taught a form of “Salvation” that was not a superficial, public, religious worship of himself as “the only Son of God”, but rather encouraged a deep-seated, private, spiritual transcendence of fear & suffering via an active Way of kindness & selfless service to others ... see Matthew 4:8-10, 5:3-16, 6:1-8, 6:19-21, 12:49-50, 16:24+27, 18:3-4, 19:14, 21:43, 25:35-40, Mark 3:35, 7:15-23, 9:35, 10:14-16, 10:43-45, 12:43-44, 13:21-23, Luke 6:20-23, 6:46-47, 8:18, 8:21, 9:48, 10:19-20, 11:46, 12:15, 12:31-34, 12:57, 13:18-21, 14:13-14, 14:25-33, 17:20-21, 17:22-24, 17:33, 18:16-17, 18:29-30, 19:19, 22:26-27, John 1:12-13, 3:3-8, 3:20-21, 3:27, 4:23-24, 6:27, 6:33, 6:53-57+63, 7:6, 7:24, 8:36, 13:17, 13:35, 14:20, 14:27a & 17:20-23+26, et al.

Jesus’ Ministry of Frustration ...

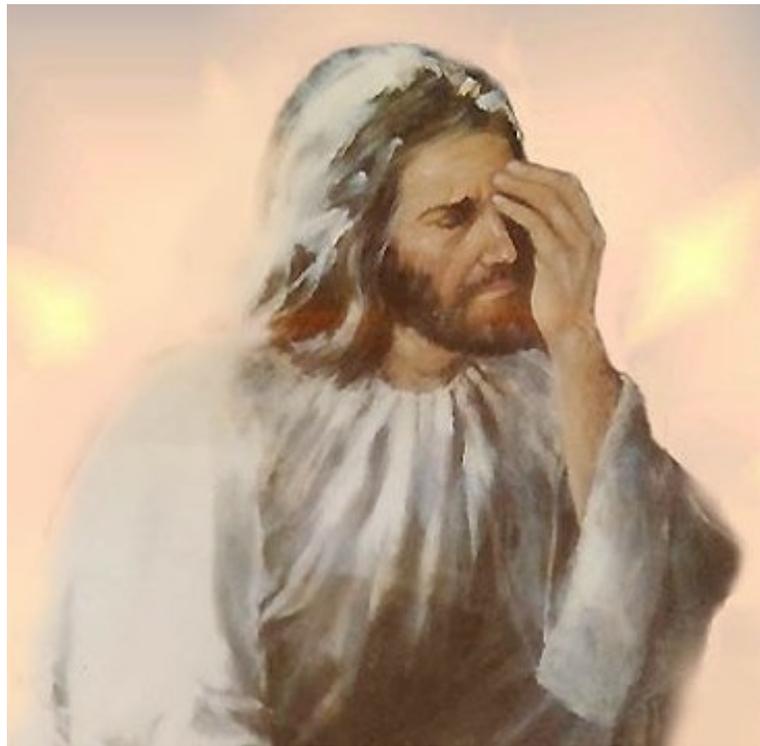
Now that we better understand Jesus’ probable intentions, let’s look at what happened during his pre-crucifixion ministry; namely the sources of the regular & immense frustration that ultimately led to his choice to be crucified ...

***First of all**, realize that the “everyday folk” to whom he frequently spoke repeatedly refused to hear or follow his Message of Love. Instead, the masses repeatedly came to him to attain healing & solace for themselves (see Matthew 4:24-25, 8:1+, 9:27, 12:15, 14:13-14, 14:35-36, 15:30, 19:2, 20:29-32, 21:14, Mark 1:32, 3:7-8, 5:23-24, 6:54-56, Luke 4:40, 5:15-16, 6:18-19, 8:40, 9:11, 9:37 & 12:1). And whenever they did so, Jesus repeatedly informed them that they had actually healed themselves (via their faith), but they repeatedly refused to believe him (Matthew 8:13, 9:29, Mark 5:34, 9:23, 10:52, Luke 7:50, 8:48, 17:19, 18:42, John 9:39 – contrasted with Matthew 13:57-58 & Mark 6:3b-6 & John 4:50).



Note as well that Jesus also repeatedly told these “followers” that they were not actually witnessing him doing any miracles (Matthew 12:38-39, 16:4, Luke 8:52, 11:29, John 11:4+11, et al), and that even if they did choose to believe that he was in fact doing so, they were under no circumstances to tell anyone else such falsehoods (Matthew 8:4, 9:30, 12:16, Mark 1:44, 5:43, 7:36, 8:26, Luke 5:14, 8:56, et al).

***Secondly**, realize that Jesus' own disciples never "got it" either, and this despite them living with him every day for years -- despite them being regularly privy to his deepest spiritual teachings. Instead, they continually chose to worship him as the Davidian Messiah who was going to soon save them from their Roman oppressors and richly reward them in a halcyon hereafter (see Daniel 7:13-14 + Matthew 14:30, 16:13-20, 18:1, 19:16-17, 19:25, 20:20-23, 20:25-28, Mark 10:36-37, 13:4, Luke 19:11, John 1:49, 6:65-66, 7:3-4, 10:24, 12:34, 12:37, 14:8, 14:22, et al), and this despite Jesus' repeated insistence to the contrary (Matthew 16:20, 22:18, 22:41-45, 24:1-2, 24:23-27, 26:63-64, Mark 1:25, 1:38, 3:12, 8:27-30, 9:9, 10:17-18, 10:31, 10:39-40, 12:14-17, 12:35-37, 14:3-8, Luke 4:5-8, 4:35, 4:41, 8:39, 9:18-21, 11:28, 17:14-15, 18:18-19, 19:20-26, 19:41-44, 22:70, 23:35, John 5:41+44, 6:15, 6:35+6:45, 7:18, 8:50, 8:54, 12:3-7, 12:44-45, 12:49 & 13:13).



***Thirdly**, remember that it is not mere hypothesis or conjecture that Jesus eventually "lost his cool" and strayed into the "sin" of anger. Indeed, despite being a Son of God and a devout champion of perfect LOVE, Jesus became so frustrated with being surrounded by "ears that did not hear and eyes that did not see" that he repeatedly strayed from his Way of kindness & forgiveness by openly & aggressively expressing his frustrations with others (see Matthew 12:34, 15:7-9, 17:17, Mark 9:19, Luke 9:41, John 8:25, John 8:43, John 14:10, et al).

Jesus' Final "Sermon": His Own Crucifixion ...

So, seeing as how almost everyone was ignoring the profound wisdom he was trying to share, Jesus finally had no choice but to *SHOW* others what he meant; to *SHOW* them what willing self-sacrifice looked like; to *SHOW* them The Way of selfless Love. And the way he chose to do so was by organizing his own crucifixion!

Consider this while realizing the following highly probable Truths ...

***Truth #01: JESUS PRE-ORDAINED HIMSELF ...** Jesus was extremely well-versed with regards to the scriptures of the Hebrew Bible (what some today call "the Old Testament" – see Mark 7:6-7, Luke 4:17-19, et al). He was not only well-versed in the Messianic prophecies therein, he consciously chose to fulfill them (see Matthew 4:13-14, 8:17, 12:17-21, 13:35, John 12:14-15, et al). And in addition, he often told his disciples that he was purposefully doing so (see Matthew 3:15, 13:14-15, 26:54-56, Luke 4:21, John 5:46, 13:18b, et al). Indeed, Jesus seemed to use both Isaiah II (Isaiah 40-55) & Psalm 22 as personal "Holy Handbooks" for his ministry, and is even "heard" quoting the first verse of the latter immediately prior to "dying" on the cross (see Matthew 27:46 & Mark 15:34).



***Truth #02: JESUS PRE-PLANNED HIS CRUCIFIXION ...** If we have the humility to read it with an open mind, the New Testament clearly shows that Jesus planned his crucifixion himself (see John 13:1-3, John 18:31-32, et al). Note that he is seen reconnoitering Jerusalem on several occasions (see Mark 11:11, Luke 9:52, 10:1, 19:5 & John 7:10), and note as well the blatant evidence that he had pre-arranged obtaining the donkey upon which he rode to enter Jerusalem (see Matthew 21:1-6, Mark 11:1-6 & Luke 19:29-32), and that he had pre-arranged for a man carrying a water jar (traditionally a woman's job) to lead his disciples to the obviously pre-arranged "Upper Room" (Matthew 26:18, Mark 14:12-16 & Luke 22:10-13) where they later ate the Last Supper.

In addition, the destruction of the money-changing tables (see Matthew 21:12, Mark 11:15-18, Luke 19:45-46 & John 2:14-16 – which was a bold & flagrant attention-getting response to the priests' attempts to quietly dispose of him in Matthew 26:3-5, Mark 14:1-2, Luke 19:47-48, 22:2, John 5:18, 7:1 & 7:11) was immediately followed by Jesus hastily fleeing the city (see Matthew 21:17, Mark 11:19 & Luke 21:37).



Finally, while the crowd's cries of "Hosanna" (Hebrew for "save us") during Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem were *possibly* calls of adoration for him and his rebellious efforts, it is much more likely that they were being shouted as part of the traditional celebrations surrounding the Festival of the Booths that was in full swing at that time. Either way, there is little doubt that Jesus knew of this event and that he purposefully chose precisely this day to make his "triumphant entry" -- for the obvious dramatic effect it provided (see Matthew 21:8-9, Mark 11:7-10, Luke 19:35-38 & John 12:12-13).



***Truth #03: JESUS REFUSED TO SAVE HIMSELF ...** Whether or not he was indeed the one & only Son of God, there is little doubt that there were many times when Jesus could have easily avoided being crucified. Indeed, he actually went the opposite direction on many occasions – often demanding to be so punished. He commanded his disciples to allow him to be taken from the Garden of Gethsemane (see Matthew 26:52-53, Mark 14:47-49, Luke 22:50-51 & John 18:11a), he refused to defend himself when wrongfully accused by the authorities (see Matthew 27:12-14, Mark 14:61, Luke 23:7-12, et al), and he refused to save himself once up on the cross (see Matthew 27:42, Mark 15:31 & Luke 23:37).



***Truth #04: JESUS PRE-DISCLOSED HIS PLAN ...** Jesus informed his disciples of his crucifixion arrangements many times beforehand (see Matthew 16:21, 17:22, 20:18-19, 20:22, 23:34-36, 26:2, 26:6-12, 26:21, 26:24, 26:32, 26:45-46, Mark 8:31-32, 9:31-32, 10:33-34, 14:21, 14:28, Luke 9:22, 9:44, 11:30, 11:49-51, 13:33, 18:31-33, 22:15, John 2:21-22, 3:14, 6:51, 7:33, 8:21, 8:28, 10:11+15, 10:17-18, 12:8, 12:23-25, 12:27, 12:32-33, 14:30, 16:7, 16:16 & 18:11b).

Indeed, Jesus even not-so-subtly implicated himself as the originator of his own “betrayal” (see Matthew 26:23 + Isaiah 53:12, Matthew 26:39-42 + Matthew 27:48, Mark 14:20, Luke 22:21-22, Luke 22:42 & John 13:18), and even his intense weeping in the Garden of Gethsemane evidences that he knew exactly what lay in store; that he knew very well the immensely painful crucifixion that was waiting for him – a most torturous event that could very well have (& admittedly *might* actually have) ended with his own demise (see Matthew 26:36-56, Mark 14:32-52, Luke 22:39-46 & John 26:39-44).



Truth #05: JESUS HAD MANY PROBABLE CO-CONSPIRATORS ... Feel free to draw your own conclusions in this regard after considering the following canonical & non-canonical facts:

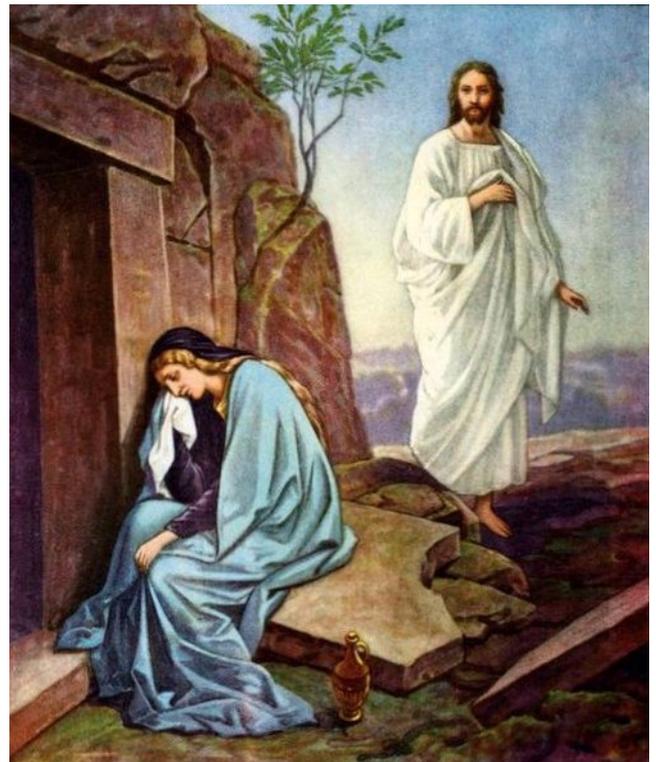
*Fact: *Joseph of Arimathea* (see Matthew 27:57, Mark 15:43, Luke 23:51 & John 19:38) was a disciple of Jesus (Matthew 27:57b, John 19:38a) and was good friends with Pontius Pilate (Gospel of Peter 2:2-5a).

*Fact: *Pilate*, who “became friends” with Herod during this episode (Luke 23:12 – note as well that Herod's uncle had already been exiled for plotting against Rome at this time), was also required by both Roman and Jewish laws to release Jesus' body to his nearest relative, which happened to be Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:58). By helping Jesus & Judas & Joseph, Pilate truly did “wash his hands” of Jesus' unjust conviction (Matthew 27:24). Note as well that Pilate also waited to place a guard on the tomb until the next morning (Matthew 27:62-66), giving Jesus and his accomplices more than enough time to vacate the tomb (more on that later). Joseph was also given the body directly, and he sealed the tomb himself, without any presence of either Roman or Jewish authorities ...

*Fact: *Judas* was ordered by Jesus to instigate his penultimate arrest (Matthew 26:50, Mark 14:10, 14:45, Luke 22:4-6, 22:48, John 13:18a, 13:26-27 & 18:15-16). Note that the thirty pieces of silver Judas supposedly received (Matthew 26:15) is either an allusion to the price of redemption from a religious obligation (Leviticus 27:1-8) or a reference to Zechariah -- indicting Temple authorities by depositing tainted monies into the treasury (Zechariah 11:12-13 – see also Matthew 27:9-10). Note as well that Jesus replies “You have said so” to Judas' self-incrimination, a response which meant “*not you*” (juxtapose Matthew 27:11/Mark 15:2/Luke 23:3 + Matthew 4:8-10 + John 6:15/John 18:36) ...

*Fact: *Mary Magdalene* & several other women are also seen witnessing the crucifixion &/or bringing large quantities of healing herbs to the tomb-site after the crucifixion (see Matthew 27:55-56, Mark 15:40-41, 15:47-16:1, Luke 8:2, 23:49, 23:55-56, 24:1-2, John 19:25, 19:39), though it admittedly remains unclear which if any of them were actually aware of Jesus' plans.

*Fact: Finally, *the Essenes* could very well have played a role in Jesus' survival. The ancient historian Hippolytus of Rome wrote about this particular sect of Judaism – noting that many of their beliefs harmonized with the teachings of Jesus (“And they despise wealth, and do not turn away from sharing their goods with those that are destitute.”) – in essence, that Jesus could very well have been an Essene himself. It is indeed intriguing that Hippolytus notes that Essenic overseers “appear always in white clothing” – eerily similar to the “young man dressed in a white robe” found sitting in Jesus' empty tomb in Mark 16:5.



***Truth #06: THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF JESUS' CRUCIFIXION ARE SUSPICIOUS ...**

First of all, it was well-known in Jesus' day that the Roman government openly respected the legal customs of the Jews. The historian Josephus mentioned the same in his writings, and August Caesar even passed a Roman law that stated: "Jews are to follow their own customs in accordance with their ancestral law." This is especially intriguing in our case because -- according to Jewish law -- Jesus the "blasphemer" should have been stoned to death (see Mark 14:64, Matthew 26:65-66, John 19:7 + Leviticus 24:16). And yet he wasn't stoned at all. Instead, he was crucified (at the behest of the Jews, no less -- see Matthew 27:22, Mark 15:13, Luke 23:21 & John 19:15) -- which was a Roman form of punishment typically reserved for political rebels.



In addition, it was typical for the Romans to deny the families of such "bandits" the right to bury their dead, allowing them to decompose for several days on the cross as an example to other "enemies of the state". This was a terrible insult to the Jews and a defilement of their culture. Pilate was known to be a particularly cold & cruel ruler, so such brazen callousness is not unreasonable to assume. Indeed, archaeologists have only found one body from the Holy Land which was clearly crucified, and the reason behind this lack of remnants was possibly because the Romans disposed of the bodies only after they had significantly deteriorated, disallowing any "normal" Jewish burial. As such, the removal of the bodies from these three particular crosses was in & of itself quite odd (though the Passover Sabbath in question does serve to mute this anomaly somewhat).



Finally, Joseph's going to Pilate and persuading him to give him Jesus' body was no small feat (see Matthew 27:58, Mark 15:43, Luke 23:52 & John 19:38). As a Jew, entering the court of a Gentile like Pilate would have made Joseph ceremonially unclean to eat the Passover the next day, and touching the dead body of Jesus would have compounded that uncleanness.

Truth #07: JESUS COULD HAVE EASILY SURVIVED THE CROSS ...

Please take note of the following highly unusual circumstances of Jesus' crucifixion:

* **Anomaly A)** Luke 23:16 & John 19:1, the only two New Testament references to the physical "torture" Jesus endured prior to his crucifixion, say only that he was "flogged". Thirty-nine lashes was the limit of Jewish law at the time, and – while definitely extremely painful – was not dramatically torturous. Keep in mind as well that it was a very sympathetic Pontius Pilate (probably a co-conspirator, even) who had him so punished, making it even more likely that Jesus was handled relatively gently before his end-ordeal.

* **Anomaly B)** While the average death by crucifixion required roughly three days (give or take a day), Jesus remained on the cross for only three hours (possibly six -- see Matthew 27:45-46, Mark 15:33-34 & Luke 23:44-46). This would explain why Pilate outwardly "marveled" that Jesus was already dead so soon, as well as why he demanded that a centurion verify the same (see Mark 15:44). Indeed, the other two "bandits" crucified to Jesus' left & right were also still alive at this time – hence the need to break their legs so they would suffocate in time for their bodies to be taken down before the beginning of the Passover Sabbath that evening (see John 19:30-32).

* **Anomaly C)** In three of the four Gospels, Jesus "dies" suddenly, immediately after drinking a mixture of gall & vinegar ("chole" in Greek – see Matthew 26:42, 27:48, Mark 14:36, 15:36 & John 19:29) -- a drought that was known to render one unconscious when imbibed.

* **Anomaly D)** Because the centurion had confirmed that Jesus was already "dead" -- the same centurion, by the way, who had already witnessed Jesus' "death" and proclaimed him to be "a Son of God" (see Matthew 27:44, Mark 15:39 & Luke 23:47), his legs were not broken (see John 19:33).

* **Anomaly E)** The Greek words used by the Gospel writers to describe Jesus' death ("gave up his spirit" in Matthew 27:50, Mark 15:37 & John 19:30 ... and "breathed his last breath" in Luke 23:46) all directly imply a connotation of volition; the presence of choice – that Jesus *chose* to give up his spirit; that he *chose* to breath his last breath; that it was *volitional* -- if not also pre-planned.

* **Anomaly F)** Ironically, the spear thrust that Jesus received from one of the soldiers (only in the Gospel of John) – a stabbing that was supposed to prove Jesus' death – actually is another piece of evidence showing that he was probably still alive at the time, as there was a "sudden flow of blood and water" that ensued (Greek = "flowed forth immediately"); something that would not have happened were Jesus already dead with an non-beating heart (see John 19:34). Though this portion of the tale is probably a later addition to the true story (reflecting the belief that the Messiah must come "with water and blood" – see Ezekiel 16:9, Psalm 79:3, 1 Corinthians 10:4 & 1 John 5:6), it would *not* indicate a fatal wound anyway, as the only place where such a piercing would yield any significant amount of water (or similar clear bodily fluid) would be the large intestine – an injury that, while grievous, would only have proven deadly several days later (unless tended thereafter by caring hands & medicinal herbs, of course – but more on that a bit later).

***Truth #08: JESUS COULD HAVE EASILY ESCAPED HIS TOMB ...**

Initially note that in three of the four Gospel accounts of the discovery of “the empty tomb”, the stone covering its entrance had been already removed before the witnesses’ arrival (see Mark 16:4, Luke 24:2 & John 20:1). In the divergent account (Matthew 28:2-3), it was an apparent “angel of the Lord” who did so, and yet Part 1 of this very treatise (“Reconciling the Resurrection”) points out that the only way to harmonize the four Gospel accounts at this point in the story is to have Mary Magdalene later realize that this “angel” was actually Jesus himself – that what she actually witnessed was Jesus rolling back the stone and exiting the tomb of his own accord.

And this is a fully reasonable assumption to make ... Archaeological evidence has shown that tomb-blocking stones in 1st-century Judea were actually relatively small – with most of them being between three and four feet in height. All of them are made of limestone, making them too heavy to lift, but certainly not too heavy to push over or roll to one side. Indeed, the Bible itself notes that Joseph of Arimathea rolled the tomb-blocking stone of Jesus’ sepulcher in place all by himself (see Mark 15:46 & Matthew 27:60), and if an elderly man could do so, then it is not unreasonable to believe that a wounded-yet-fit younger man (Jesus, after he awoke from his drug-induced stupor) could have done so as well.

And remember as well, there were no guards watching over the tomb until the day after Jesus was placed therein (see Matthew 27:62-65); meaning that Jesus could have awoken in his tomb that first night, rolled the blocking-stone away, and easily escaped unnoticed into the night.



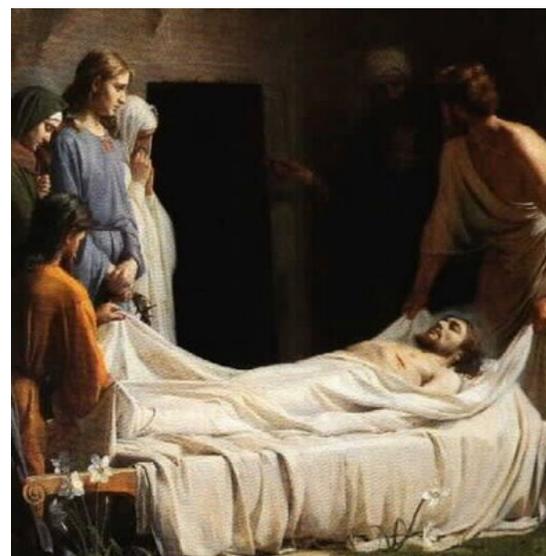
Truth #09: THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF JESUS' BURIAL ARE UNUSUAL ... There are actually quite a few details surrounding Jesus' "burial" that are just as intriguing as his quite unusual "death" ... Feel free to consider the following elements thereof:

* ***Intriguing Detail A)*** First & foremost, Jesus was actually not buried at all, but was rather entombed in a "sepulcher" – a most unusual practice in Jesus' day. Yes, it was a common practice to store bodies for a time – either to avoid violating Jewish cleanliness laws, &/or to make sure that the person involved was indeed dead, and it is indeed possible that this is what Joseph of Arimathea was doing with Jesus' body – that he merely stored it in his private tomb until he could bury it properly at a later time. AND YET we are dealing with the Bible here, and the Bible states that this was not the purpose of Jesus' entombment.



* ***Intriguing Detail B)*** Jesus' body was also placed in a tomb that had never before been used -- one that was privately owned by Joseph of Arimathea (see Matthew 27:60a, Luke 23:53 & John 19:41). Now, Jerusalem was about 25 miles from Joseph's hometown of Arimathea (no small distance in those days), so we have to wonder -- why would he have had a new tomb hewn out of rock so close to Golgotha at that particular time?

* ***Intriguing Detail C)*** Matthew 27:59 also confirms the fact that Joseph did not expect Jesus to be in the grave for long. In this verse, it says that Joseph took Jesus' body and "wrapped it in a clean linen cloth" (Matthew 27:59, Mark 15:46a, Luke 23:53 & John 19:40). The Greek word for "wrapped" here actually means "rolled up", and the word for "cloth" is sindon (like a sheet) – a different word than that used for traditional Jewish burial wrappings, which were strips of cloth that were traditionally wound around a body only *after* it had been covered with ointments and spices.



* ***Intriguing Detail D)*** Traditional Jewish burial practices had bodies prepared for burial before being taken to their tombs. Indeed, there is no mention of burial rites being given to Jesus' body anywhere in the Gospels.

Truth #10: HEALING HERBS WERE BROUGHT TO JESUS ...

Admittedly, while the Bible *seems* to have Nicodemus (see John 19:39) & several women (see Mark 16:2 & Luke 24:1) bring spices to anoint the body of Jesus for burial, in all probability this was *not* the case. Rather, Biblical evidence somewhat decisively suggests that these herbs & spices were brought to the tomb instead to help heal Jesus' wounds &/or revive him.

Feel free to consider the following Biblical evidence in support of this theory:

* **Proof A)** First of all, the women who had purchased their spices at market specifically for Jesus' burial (Mark 16:1), would have had to have done so before the Sabbath; namely, *BEFORE* Jesus was sentenced and crucified – implying that they, too, knew ahead of time what was going to happen – implying that they, too, were in on Jesus' plan.

* **Proof B)** Secondly, while the “anointing” of a body for burial was indeed a traditional facet of the Jewish culture (see 2 Chronicles 16:14 & Sirach 38:16 et al), this practice was not relevant in Jesus' case, because in the sacred traditions of 1st-century Israel (and even today among the Orthodox Jews) the blood spilled on the day of one's death it is not to be separated from one's body. The Jewish people of Jesus' time (especially the Pharisees) believed in a bodily resurrection. As such, if a person spilled their blood during their death — for any reason — then that blood was to go into the tomb along with the body for the day of resurrection. Orthodox believers of Jesus' time were so serious about this that they would sweep up the very dirt around a body to capture the blood of a victim and bury it with his/her corpse. The blood that Jesus spilled while on the cross was still there after he was taken down and placed in his tomb. With this all in mind, we can now see that it is extremely unlikely that Nicodemus would have brought roughly \$200,000 worth of herbs & spices to a dead body upon which he knew he couldn't use them ... unless, of course, he knew that Jesus was not actually dead, and that those same herbs & spices were going to be used for healing &/or rejuvenative purposes.

* **Proof C)** Thirdly, while there is some indication that myrrh was indeed used by the wealthy for burial (and there seems to be little doubt that both Nicodemus &/or Joseph of Arimathea would indeed have had the means to procure the large amount “spices” mentioned), myrrh was also a common medical remedy of the day – having known healing properties, and being seen as a traditional “blood moving” agent. Myrrh also made/makes an effective liniment against bruises, aches and sprains. Note as well that myrrh has been used to heal open wounds since the time of China's Tang Dynasty.

* **Proof D)** Fourthly, Jesus' extra-special treatment received after his “death” – the one hundred pounds of myrrh & aloes (John 19:39-40) – was enough for roughly one hundred traditional lay Jewish burials. Apparently, the more respected a person was, the greater the quantities of these very expensive embalming materials were used when they were buried. While it is true that Josephus recorded that the highly respected Jewish elder Gamaliel had fifty pounds of similar spices used at his funeral, the one hundred pounds that Nicodemus brought to Jesus was clearly over the top.

Truth #11: POST-CRUCIFIXION ANOMALIES TESTIFY TO JESUS' SURVIVAL OF THE CROSS ... The post-crucifixion events portrayed in the Bible contain a number of unusual happenings & occurrences that seem to indicate that Jesus survived his ordeal on the cross. Once again, feel free to consider the following evidence from the Bible itself:

*Initially, we have angels proclaiming that Jesus did not die at all in Luke 24:4-5+23 (“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”) ...

*Secondly, we have Jesus apparently triumphing over death and the stark & unjust persecutions of both the Romans & the Jewish religious elite, with *no mention whatsoever* of him showing himself to those same authorities after his “resurrection” ...

*Thirdly, we have Jesus only meeting with his disciples in private, secretive locations after his ‘return from the dead’ (see Matthew 28:9, 28:16, Mark 16:9, 16:12, 16:14, Luke 24:15, 24:36, 24:41-42, John 20:14, 20:19, 20:26 & 21:1-4+) ...



*Fourthly, we have Jesus himself never once proclaiming that he had transcended death. Instead, we have him comparing his ordeal to the one experienced by Jonah – where Jonah entered the belly of the whale (actually, the “large fish”) alive, only to come out *still alive* three days thereafter (see Matthew 12:39-40, Luke 11:29-32, Jonah 1:17) ...



*Fifthly, we have Jesus taking nourishment with his disciples in a supposedly divine & perfected “resurrection body” (see John 21:12-13), and we have that same divine & perfected “resurrection body” having fleshly wounds still evident to human sight & touch (see John 20:27) ...

*Sixthly, we have Jesus apparently renegeing on a promise to one day return to the “lost tribe of Israel” (see Matt 15:24) – a promise that we would not have been able to fulfill had he ascended into the heavens. On the other hand, if he was “merely” one of the bravest men of all time – if he had merely organized his own crucifixion to provide one final “sermon” to the masses; one last flagrant example of the selfless Way he had come to champion, then surviving that ordeal would have enabled him to leave the region and fulfill said promise ...

*And finally, we have the quite odd behavior of those who apparently knew Jesus best – namely, his disciples’ repeated doubts of the news that Jesus had survived his crucifixion (see Matt 28:17, Mark 16:11, Mark 16:13, Luke 24:11 & John 20:25), along with their repeated inability to even recognize him when he showed up to visit them in person (see Luke 24:16, John 20:14, John 21:4).

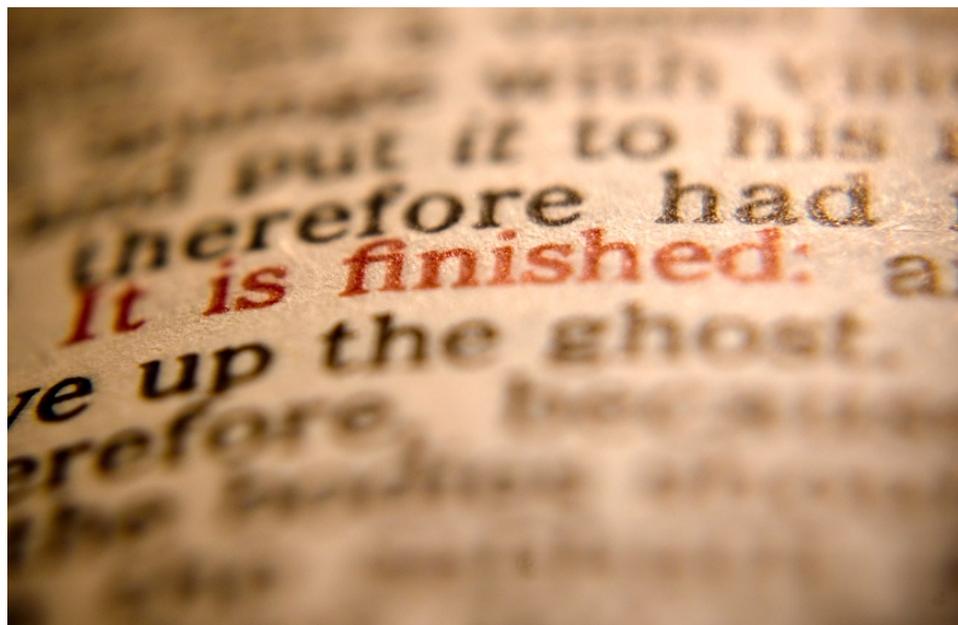
Conclusion

In summation, then, what we have here is a fresh, quite reasonable and Biblically sound alternative explanation of the Easter Story – one that can appeal to each & every person on the planet (regardless of his or her religious affiliation, or even his or her lack thereof) ... It is also an explanation that happens to reconcile the moral conundrum of the innate callousness (if not downright cruelty) of conservative Christianity (i.e. a Jesus who Loves all and who preaches unconditional mercy, and yet a Jesus who was the only Son of God; who literally championed physical death by being resurrected from the grave; and yet who only gives a someday reward of similar immortality to those who choose to worship him appropriately). Perhaps most important to Christians, this tome's explanation harmonizes the moral difficulties of the Bible not by blindly dismissing them (Hello, human secularists & "New Age" groupies), but rather by using the very words of the Bible itself.

And finally -- and at least for me most importantly of all, this particular explanation shows by far the greatest reverence for the stout courage & gentle humility of Jesus we read in the Gospels. For while none of us will ever know the objective Truth related to the events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion, there is no doubt that *far* more honor is given to Jesus when seeing him as a man of unassailable Purpose & self-sacrifice, as opposed to merely a Divine Being pre-destined to share & then suffer.

Indeed, when we compare these three vastly different interpretations of the New Testament with Jesus' own ministry, it is easy to see that this treatise's "Purposeful Swoon" theory -- the theory that Jesus organized his own crucifixion to provide his followers with one, final, flagrant example of The Way of joyful self-sacrifice -- is the explanation of Jesus' final days that is most in alignment with his own teachings in the Gospels; teachings that honor Love over the lover and the Giving over the giver; teachings that revere the Truth of the Way of Jesus' Life – *not* Jesus himself..

Amen ... Let it be so.



“The Christian religion has been persistently built up around the fact of the death of Christ instead of around the Truth of his Life.

The most magnificent thing about Jesus leaving his tomb is not his apparent resurrection from death, but rather the manner beforehand in which he rebirthed his living.”

~ inspired by Shane Claiborne



*“Jesus' resurrection is the beginning
of God's new project -- not to snatch people
away from Earth and enter Heaven,
but rather to re-colonize
the Earth with humans heavenly.”
~ inspired by N. T. Wright*





*“And I will take one from a thousand
and two from ten thousand,
and they shall Become a single One.”
~ Jesus (Gospel of Thomas 23)*