

Reply to Evan Fales: On the Empty Tomb of Jesus

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Evan Fales' curious hypothesis that the gospel narratives of the empty tomb are of the genre of mythology and so were not taken to be historical accounts by either their purveyors or their recipients is critically examined. Then Fales's responses to eleven lines of evidence supporting the historicity of the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb are considered.

"Reply to Evan Fales: On the Empty Tomb of Jesus." *Philosophia Christi* 3 (2001): 67-76.

Evan Fales writes with a self-confidence and matter-of-factness that belies the unconventional character of his rather maverick views on New Testament studies. Fales thinks that the gospel narratives are neither fundamentally historical accounts of the ministry of Jesus nor largely legendary stories of the same. Rather they are of the genre of *mythology*, akin to contemporaneous pagan myths, which neither their purveyors nor their recipients thought to take literally as history.

Now from D. F. Strauss through Rudolf Bultmann the role of myth in the shaping of the gospels was a question of lively debate in New Testament scholarship. But with the advent of the so-called "Third Quest" of the historical Jesus and what one author has called "the Jewish reclamation of Jesus,"^{1} that is, the rediscovery of the Jewishness of Jesus, scholars have come to appreciate that the proper context for understanding Jesus and the gospels is first-century Palestinian Judaism, not pagan mythology. A most informative article on the demise of myth as a useful interpretive category for the gospels is Craig Evans's "Life-of-Jesus Research and the Eclipse of Mythology," in which he chronicles and accounts for the "major shift" away from mythology as a relevant factor in gospel interpretation.^{2}

Given that Jesus and the gospels find their natural home in first century, Palestinian Judaism, recourse to pagan mythology to explain them has become otiose. Hence, we find James Dunn, called upon to write the article on "Myth" for the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, questioning even the need for such an entry in the dictionary: "Myth is a term of at best doubtful relevance to the study of Jesus and the Gospels... The

fact that 'myth' even appears here as a subject related to the study of Jesus and the Gospels can be attributed almost entirely to the use of the term by two NT scholars"—Strauss and Bultmann. {3} In lamenting that most commentators have no "knowledge of—or at least, they certainly ignore—the tools that modern anthropology has provided for the analysis of myths and myth construction," Fales tacitly recognizes that his views in gospel interpretation would be rejected by the vast majority of NT critics (and not, therefore, simply by "fundamentalists!"). What he does not appreciate is that the construal of the gospels in terms of myth has been tried and found wanting by NT scholarship.

Fales's own view (as he has expressed it elsewhere) is what we might call a sociological theory of myths. He thinks that people in their myths are exhibiting a theoretically explicit and far deeper awareness of the ontology of social structures than has been held to be the case. Native myth-making is *literally* intelligent, native speculation about social interaction and articulation of the legal charter for it. Myths are intended primarily as social charters about the way society is or ought to be structured. Thus, Fales thinks that talk about gods, spirits, and so forth is really at root theoretical talk about social phenomena and norms. Presumably the gospel resurrection narratives are expressions of such social theorizing, but the truth they mean to express is part of the "long story" that Fales repeatedly declines to tell.

Now on the face of it this sociological theory of myths (which Fales admits is rejected by the majority of experts) is extraordinarily implausible. The half-truth it embodies is that myths do serve to found social institutions and practices. But it is an enormous jump to claim that native myth-making literally *is* theoretical speculation about social structures. Surely native peoples really do believe in the gods, spirits, and so forth which they say they believe in. Fales's view is presumptuous in thinking that we know better than they do what they believe in.

In any case, the application of this theory to Christian origins is a category mistake. Contrary to Fales, the gospels are not of the genre of myth. The gospels are closest in their genre to ancient biography. The Acts of the Apostles, the second part of Luke's double work, is indisputably historical writing—and accurate history, to boot, as amply demonstrated by Colin Hemer in his *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*. {4} According to Greco-Roman historian A. N. Sherwin-White, "For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. . . . any attempt to reject its basic historicity even in matters of detail must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted." {5} Luke's historical interest and demonstrated accuracy in the book of Acts give us reason to take seriously his avowed historical interest and care throughout his double work (Lk 1.1–4).

With regard to the resurrection narratives in particular, Fales's theory resuscitates the old *religionsgeschichtliche Methode* of the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries. Scholars in comparative religion at that time ransacked ancient and contemporary mythology in the effort to find parallels to various Christian beliefs, and some even sought to explain those beliefs on the basis of the influence of such parallels. The resurrection narratives and even the disciples' coming to believe in Jesus' resurrection were thought to be explained through the influence of myths about Osiris (a.k.a. Tammuz, Adonis) or divine-human figures like Hercules. Apart from his general sociological theory of myths, Fales does not appear to add anything new to this old story.

The *religionsgeschichtliche* approach to the resurrection soon collapsed and is today almost universally abandoned, primarily for two reasons: (1) *The supposed parallels were spurious*. The ancient world was a virtual cornucopia of myths of gods and heroes. Comparative studies in religion and literature require sensitivity to the similarities and differences, or distortion and confusion inevitably result. Some of these mythological figures are merely symbols of the crop cycle (Osiris, *et al.*); others have to do with apotheosis by assumption into heaven (Hercules, Romulus); still others concern disappearance stories, which seek to answer the question of where the hero has gone by saying that he lives on in a higher sphere (Apollonius, Empedocles); others are cases of political Emperor-worship (Julius Caesar, Augustus). None of these is parallel to the Jewish notion of resurrection from the dead. With respect to the resurrection narratives, David Aune, a specialist in ancient literature, concludes that "no parallel to them is found in Graeco-Roman biography." {6} Rather the resurrection narratives, like the gospels in general, are to be interpreted within a Jewish context.

With respect specifically to the empty tomb narrative, what putative parallel to such an account will Fales find in ancient mythology? The closest would probably be apotheosis stories such as told by Diodorus Siculus. As Hercules climbs up on his funeral pyre, lightning strikes and consumes the pyre. No trace of Hercules is to be found. The conclusion: "he had passed from among men into the company of the gods." {7} Now the empty tomb story is essentially different from such a myth. The resurrection is not the transformation of the man from Nazareth into God. "The notion of deification," says Aune, "is totally alien to the Synoptic Gospels." {8} Rather what we have in the empty tomb story is not apotheosis, but the Jewish idea of resurrection. The literary key to the story is the angel's words, "He is risen! He is going before you into Galilee." (Mk 16. 6–7). If this were an apotheosis story, the angel would say something like, "He has passed from the realm of mortal men and become like God." {9} The empty tomb story is thus illustrative of the general point that once one sees how the gospel narratives are naturally at home in Judaism there is no reason to ignore this immediate context and reach further to putative pagan parallels. {10}

(2) *There is no genealogical connection between pagan myths and the origin of the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection.* Orthodox Jews knew of these pagan myths and found them abhorrent (Ez. 8. 14–15). Thus, even though Philo (*Life of Moses* 2. 2888) and Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews* 4. 8, 48 § 326) are willing to call Moses a divine man because of his great virtue and good works, they reject any attempt to immortalize or deify him. According to Hengel, Jewish belief in the resurrection of the dead actually served as a prophylactic against the pagan myths:

The development of the apocalyptic resurrection–, immortality–, and judgment–doctrine in Jewish Palestine explains why—in a contrast to Alexandrian Judaism—the Hellenistic *mystery religions* and their language could gain virtually no influence there. Insofar as the apocalyptic Hassidic piety took up the question of the fate of the individual after death, it answered that basic question of human existence, which arose in a more elementary way in Hellenistic times and abetted the spread of the mystery religions from the second century B. C. {11}

Therefore, we find almost no trace of cults of dying and rising gods in first century Palestine. {12}

Moreover, as Hans Grass observes, it would be "unthinkable" in any case that the original disciples would come sincerely to believe that God had raised Jesus from the dead just because they had heard myths about Osiris! {13} Fales seeks to avoid this knock–out punch by claiming that the disciples did not *really* believe that Jesus was risen from the dead; this myth was in reality a statement about social structures (sociological theory of myths). But this move is surely the *reductio ad absurdum* of Fales's reconstruction. As Gregory Boyd aptly writes,

If anything is clear from Paul's writings, it is that he and his audience held deep convictions about the story of Christ...*They believed it was true.* Now one can certainly argue that they were wrong... But we need seriously to question whether anyone 2,000 years [later] is in a position to assume that their fundamental motivation for believing their story was not what *they* thought it was. Such an approach constitutes a presumptuous, speculative psychologizing of the evidence.

If we had independent compelling evidence that these early Christian communities were creating myths to justify their social program, that would be another matter. But no such evidence is available. The fact that what Paul and his audience believe may not fit into the naturalistic worldview cannot itself justify the presumption of telling the apostle and his audience what they were 'really' doing. {14}

The New Testament expectation that in light of Jesus' resurrection the general resurrection of the dead was imminent, Paul's energetic disquisitions in response to the Corinthians' sceptical question about the general resurrection, "With what kind of body do they come?" (1 Cor. 15.35), as well as the portrayal in the apostolic sermons in Acts of the resurrection as a literal event verified by witnesses, show that belief in

Jesus' resurrection was a historical claim, not a disguised social theory. We have every reason to think that the disciples and the churches they founded believed that Jesus was literally risen from the dead.

Thus, Fales's whole approach to the gospels is fundamentally wrong-headed and is recognized as such by NT scholarship.

What, then, may be said of his responses to the specific lines of evidence I adduced on behalf of the historicity of Jesus' burial and empty tomb?

1. *Multiple, independent attestation of the burial.* Fales says that he does not see why John's independence of the Synoptics implies an independent source. The answer is simply that the differences between John and Mark's accounts show that they are not using the same source. {15} Minimally, John's literary independence proves the existence of a shared pre-Markan burial tradition. Moreover, Matthew and Luke have other sources than Mark. Then there is Paul's early tradition (1 Cor 15.4). This multiplicity of sources is important because it is, according to Marcus Borg, the "first" and "most objective" criterion of historicity: "The logic is straightforward: if a tradition appears in an early source *and* in another independent source, then not only is it early, but it is also unlikely to have been made up." {16} The burial narrative passes this test and so should be assessed as historical.

2. *Joseph of Arimathea.* Fales makes no response. But notice that Jesus' interment by a Sanhedrist renders implausible the suggestion that the tomb's location could have remained unknown, even if it was at first known only to Joseph.

3. *Simplicity of the burial account.* No response by Fales.

4. *Jewish interest in burial sites.* No response.

5. *No other burial traditions.* Fales sees independent traditions preserved in Acts for a burial of Jesus by the Jews. What Fales fails to appreciate is the antipathy in the early Church toward the Jewish leadership, who had, in Christian eyes, engineered a judicial murder of Jesus. {17} Thus, Luke tends to blame the Jews for everything that was done to Jesus, even going so far as to attribute the *crucifixion* of Jesus to the Jews (2. 23, 36; 4. 10)! Oblivious to this *Tendenz*, Fales takes literally the verses stating that the Jews executed Jesus and "hanged him from a tree." This is cringingly bad exegesis. The three NT authors who use this metaphor for crucifixion also state explicitly that Jesus was crucified. The reason for the metaphor is to hark back to the curse of Deut. 21. 22. The purpose is to show that Christ took the curse of sin upon himself for our redemption (Gal. 3. 13). Moreover, the crucifixion of Jesus is incontestably a historical fact. {18} Hence, even the sceptical Robert Funk, chairman of the Jesus Seminar, declares, "The crucifixion was one indisputable fact which neither [the early Christians] nor their opponents could deny." {19}

6. *The burial supports the empty tomb.* Fales does not deny this implication, which is why those who deny the empty tomb find themselves obliged to attack the honorable burial of Jesus, "one of the earliest and best-attested facts about Jesus." {20}

7. *Paul implies the empty tomb.* No response. I note simply that Paul's identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6.3-4) in a spiritual sense in no way precludes literal, bodily resurrection (Rom. 8.11, 22-23).

8. *Pre-Markan passion source.* Fales does not deny the presence of the empty tomb story in this early source. But he lists four other public events in the passion story which he thinks are not historically credible. For if they were historical, we should expect them to be independently attested, which they are not. If they are not historical, then we should expect the Jews to have refuted them—unless, that is, the narratives are myths which neither friend nor foe took to be historical in character.

Fales's argument is insufficiently nuanced historically. In the first place, he fails to distinguish between legend, myth, and redaction. We have already seen that the gospels are not of the genre of myth. So Fales's insistence that myths (like redaction) do not require a long, formative period of gestation is quite irrelevant to the issue at hand, which is whether the gospel narratives can in their core be legendary. When A. N. Sherwin-White says that "even two generations are too short a span to allow the mythical tendency to prevail over the hard historic care of the oral tradition," {21} he is talking about legends, not myths. The early date of the passion tradition militates against its being legendary at its core. That does not preclude redaction of the tradition or even legendary accretions in the circumstantial features of the narratives.

All four of the events mentioned by Fales are circumstantial features of the crucifixion story. Even if these features of the narrative are judged to be unhistorical features due to legend or redaction, no one takes that to call into question the historicity of the core of the story, namely, that Jesus died by crucifixion—well, no one, perhaps, but Fales! Moreover, a closer look reveals that the resurrection of the saints is a Matthean addition to the story, not part of the pre-Markan passion narrative, and the centurion's confession can hardly be called a public event comparable to Jesus' crucifixion. The rending of the veil would have been a highly private event, since only the high priest had access to the Holy of Holies. If anything, Fales ought to have argued that so private an event as the rending of the veil could not have been known to the evangelists. So that leaves us with the darkness at noon as an example of an allegedly unhistorical public event in the earliest tradition. Could this have been a historical event? Fales's argument from want of independent attestation merely illustrates the mixed evidence typically facing the historian. The earliness of the tradition counts in favor of the historicity of the event; but the absence of independent attestation counts against it. {22} The historian must weigh such considerations against one another. If Fales is right, that gives us good reason to be sceptical about this feature of the narrative; but one would not therefore be led to deny the fact of Jesus' crucifixion, which *is* abundantly independently attested. Fales's contention that if this reported event were unhistorical, the Jews would have refuted the gospel report of it is exceedingly naïve. He does not seem to appreciate that we have scarcely any extant Jewish literature from the first century; the later references to Jesus (sometimes under pseudonyms) in the rabbinical literature are brief denunciations of him as a sorcerer. Were it not for Mathew's guard story, we should not even know what Jews of the period were saying in response to the proclamation of the resurrection. It is thus unrealistic *in excelsis* to think that unhistorical assertions in the gospels would produce a literary record preserved to this day of Jewish refutations—nor is such an assumption any part of my case for the historicity of the empty tomb.

But is Fales right? Again, the same paucity of literature mentioned above mitigates the force of his argument from silence. What is the probability that if such an event as the darkness at Jesus' crucifixion occurred, then it would have been mentioned by the principal source we have, Josephus? Josephus barely mentions Jesus at all—why would he relate the darkness at noon, which is not even evidently a miraculous event, if it occurred? I am just not confident that he would have recorded this event if it had occurred. But I am confident that our historical assessment of such circumstantial features of the narrative has no substantive impact on the historicity of its core.

9. *Absence of legendary accretions to the empty tomb narrative.* No response from Fales. But notice that the sort of elaborations Fales sees to the crucifixion account are noticeably absent from the empty tomb story.

10. *Women witnesses to the empty tomb.* Fales sees this feature of the narrative as derived from pagan mythology. We have already seen, however, the implausibility of such a provenance for the resurrection and empty tomb narratives. And with regard to the women's role in particular, one has only to read the myths of Tammuz, Adonis, Osiris, and so forth to see that Fales' suggestion is fanciful. In the cult of Adonis and Attis, women figure prominently in the annual funereal laments for the deceased god. But such a role bears no resemblance to the women's discovery of the empty tomb, nor does the empty tomb pericope (surprisingly!) involve any lament. Neither is Ishtar's journey into the underworld to bring back her husband Tammuz from the realm of the dead analogous to the discovery of the empty tomb. In the Osiris myth his wife Isis searches for the pieces of his dismembered body and buries them throughout Egypt (which serves to explain why so many burial sites for Osiris are claimed!); but the empty tomb

narrative involves no such search for the body because the place of Jesus' interment is known. Thus, it is a long stretch to see such myths as underlying the narratives when much closer at hand are the actual women followers of Jesus, who in accordance with Jewish custom would do precisely what they are portrayed as doing.

11. *The Jewish polemic*. Fales denies that we know what the earliest Jewish polemic was against the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection. All we have is a single, uncorroborated, Christian story which is probably a legend. My point, however, in no way assumes the historicity of Matthew's guard story. Rather what is important is that Matthew is so exercised by an allegation which was "widely spread among the Jews to this day" (Mt. 28. 15) that he includes a lengthy addition to the Markan empty tomb narrative in order to refute it. I have elsewhere argued on the basis of vocabulary and tradition history that this dispute is, indeed, early. {23} And the tradition shows that even the opponents of the nascent Christian movement recognized that Jesus' body was missing.

In short, we have good reasons for accepting the empty tomb as part of our picture of the historical Jesus, whereas Fales's *religionsgeschichtliche* alternative lacks credibility.

Notes

{1} Donald A. Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1984).

{2} Craig A. Evans, "Life-of-Jesus Research and the Eclipse of Mythology," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 3–36.

{3} *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, et al. (Downer's Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), s.v. "Myth," by James D. G. Dunn.

{4} Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 49 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989).

{5} A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 189.

{6} D. E. Aune, "The Genre of the Gospels," in *Gospel Perspectives II*, ed. R. T. France and David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), p. 48. In fact, it is doubted that there even was a category of "dying and rising god." Quoting Buckert to the effect that "The evidence for resurrection is late and tenuous in the case of Adonis, and practically non-existent in the case of Attis; not even Osiris returns to real life, but instead attains transcendent life beyond death," Mark Smith comments, "In view of the many difficulties, it is presently impossible to accept a general category of a 'dying and rising god' in the ancient Mediterranean and Levantine world" (Mark S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994], p. 70).

{7} Diodorus of Sicily *The Library of History* 4. 38. 4–5. Loeb Classical Library 303, trans. C. H. Oldfather (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935).

{8} Aune, "Genre," p. 47. "The empty tomb...and his various appearances are not evidence of deification; rather, they function to corroborate the reality of the resurrection" (Ibid., p. 48).

{9} Cf. Diodorus's verdict concerning Aristeas that he "was never seen again of men and became the recipient of immortal honors" (Diodorus *Library of History* 4. 82. Loeb Classical Library 340, trans. C. H. Oldfather (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939).

{10} A similar conclusion may be drawn concerning the resurrection appearance stories. See John Alsup, *The Post-Resurrection Appearance Stories of the Gospel-Tradition* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1975), who shows that neither the myths of Osiris, Adonis, Attis, and Tammuz, nor apotheosis stories of Apollonius of Tyana, Romulus, Aristeas, and others, nor cultic practices concerning Asclepius and Apullias, once examined, are of the same form as the resurrection appearance stories of the gospels.

{11} Martin Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 10 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1969), pp. 368–369.

{12} Gerhard Kittel, "Die Auferstehung Jesu," *Deutsche Theologie* 4 (1937): 159. Not until the time of Hadrian in the second century is there evidence of an Adonis cult in Bethlehem.

{13} Hans Grass, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), p. 133. See also Walter Künneht, *The Theology of the Resurrection*, trans. J. W. Leitch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), pp. 58–62.

{14} Gregory Boyd, *Cynic, Sage, or Son of God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1998), p. 177. Nor can Fales's appeal to anthropological studies of such contemporary phenomena as cargo cults, shamanism, and native American religion. These are simply irrelevant to first century, Palestinian Judaism.

{15} There has been some discussion as to whether John and Luke may have shared a tradition (which still leaves us with an independent pre-Markan tradition). But see my "The Disciples' Inspection of the Empty Tomb (Luke 24, 12.24; John 20, 1–10)," in *John and the Synoptics*, ed. A. Denaux, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* 101 (Louvain: University Press, 1992), pp. 614–619.

{16} Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1999), p. 12.

{17} See S. G. Wilson, "The Jews and the Death of Jesus in Acts," in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, vol. 1: *Paul and the Gospels*, ed. Peter Richardson, *Studies in Christianity and Judaism* 2 (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1986), pp. 155–164; see also Lloyd Gaston, "Anti-Judaism and the Passion Narrative in Luke and Acts," in *Ibid.*, p. 129.

{18} As John Meier explains, "For two obvious reasons practically no one would deny the fact that Jesus was executed by crucifixion: (1) This central event is reported or alluded to not only by the vast majority of NT authors, but also by Josephus and Tacitus... (2) Such an embarrassing event created a major obstacle to converting Jews and Gentiles alike... that the Church struggled to overcome..." (John P. Meier, "The Circle of the Twelve: Did It Exist during Jesus' Public Ministry?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116 [1997]: 664–665).

{19} Robert Funk, video-taped Jesus Seminar lecture.

{20} John A. T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), p. 131.

{21} Sherwin-White, *Roman Society*, p. 190.

{22} It is only fair to note that the chronicler Julius Africanus, writing about 221, does say that the classical historian Thallus in his history (AD 52) refers to the darkness at noon: "This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his *History*, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun" (*Chronography* 18, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols., ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson [rep. ed.: Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994], 6: 136). Origen, as well as Africanus, takes the chronicler Phlegon's (b. 80) reference in the thirteenth or fourteenth book of his *Chronicles* to an eclipse during the reign of Tiberius to be an attempted explanation of the darkness at noon (Origen *Against Celsus* II. 33 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*; 4: 445; cf. Tertullian *Apology* 21 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3: 35). These references illustrate precisely the

problem before us. Since Thallus and Phlegon's works have been lost and neither Origen nor Africanus provides a direct quotation, we do not know whether these writers were referring explicitly to the event of Jesus' crucifixion or, if so, how they knew of it. A solar eclipse whose deepest penumbra cut right across Asia Minor and the eastern end of the Mediterranean occurred in AD 29 (see: sunearth.gsfc.nasa.gov/eclipse/SEHistory.html), so the Church Fathers could have mistaken references to this event as references to the darkness at the time of the crucifixion. Even if the ancient historians were referring to the darkness at the crucifixion, we do not know whether they had any independent knowledge of it. Phlegon evidently knew of the Gospel of John, so it is not unlikely that he was merely responding to the Gospel accounts. But such a conclusion is not so readily available for Thallus, since his history threatens to ante-date the time of the Gospels' composition. It would at least show an extremely early tradition concerning the event. So at worst we are left with agnosticism. We cannot justifiably claim with Fales that there just was no independent attestation of the event. And given the paucity of surviving literature from the first century, as well as the possibly merely local impact of the events, an argument from silence is by nature tenuous. See the sensible comments by R. T. France, *The Evidence for Jesus*, The Jesus Library (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986), pp. 19–20, 24.

{23} See my "The Guard at the Tomb," *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 273–281.

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Question: "What is the importance of the empty tomb?". Answer: From the earliest apostolic period, the reality of the empty tomb—the biblical truth that the tomb of Jesus of Nazareth was found empty by His disciples—has been at the center of the Christian proclamation. All four Gospels describe, to varying degrees, the circumstances surrounding the discovery of the empty tomb (Matthew 28:1–6; Mark 16:1–7; Luke 24:1–12; John 20:1–12). But are there any good reasons to think that these claims are historically accurate? Could a fair-minded investigator conclude that, in all probability, *Entrance to Jesus™ Tomb at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Just as Jesus was born of a “new womb” in Mary and her virginal birth, it is only fitting that Jesus be resurrected from a “new tomb,” born into new life. The tomb was also in a garden (John 19:41), placing the crucified Jesus (sacrificed for sin) in a new Eden symbolizing where sin began. Most tombs were dug out of the ground and lined with individual stones. Grave robbers could dig into graves and steal any gold or riches buried with a body. In Mark 15:46, Matthew 27:60, Luke 23:53 & John 19:41 (it be pretty important to put it in all 4 Gospel™s!), we learn that the tomb was “hewn out of the rock.” Even the most skeptical, cynical, and unbelieving historians, philosophers, and theologians agree that a man named Jesus died on a Roman cross on Friday and was later buried in a tomb that was empty on Sunday morning. Here are 10 things you should know about the empty tomb. Here are ten things that we need to know about efforts on the part of unbelievers to account for the empty tomb of Jesus. 1. Testimony of the Empty Tomb. Even the most skeptical, cynical, and unbelieving historians, philosophers, and theologians agree that a man named Jesus died on a Roman cross on Friday and was later buried in a tomb that was empty on Sunday morning.