Ever heard of *Occam’s razor*? It is a principle attributed to the fourteenth century English logician and Franciscan friar William of Ockham (later misspelled to Occam). Occam’s razor is best described as “*all things being equal, the simplest solution tends to be the best one.*” In other words, when competing theories are equal in other respects, the principle recommends selection of the theory with the fewest assumptions and the fewest hypothetical entities. In this exhibit, we will see that it takes more faith to believe an alternative explanation than to accept the conclusion that Jesus actually resurrected from the dead. The evidence is convincing. Logically, Occam’s razor does not give you any other choice.

Over the centuries many have proposed alternative explanations to the events in Jerusalem shortly after the execution of Jesus of Nazareth. Wild conspiracy theories, hallucinations, and hoaxes have been suggested. We will assess the basics of these theories. Looking at these alternatives, it is important to realize there is consensus among believers and non-believers that:

- Jesus was executed as a criminal by crucifixion.
- A short time after the crucifixion, the original group of disciples started to boldly proclaim a message of the resurrection of Jesus and founded what we now call Christianity.

**Alternative #1: The Resurrection is a Legend**

Simply stated, many believe “it never happened.” The resurrection is just a legend, an embellished account by followers of the initial disciples. A game of “telephone,” and at each next link (next generation) the story gets added on to.

Clearly this is not a viable alternative. Legends take several generations to develop (a period of one hundred years or more) and will only be widely accepted once the generation of the original witnesses has died out.

We have seen that the manuscript evidence of the New Testament texts date to within 100 years of writing, as well as confirmations and quotations from the Early Church Leaders. Even today only few words or sentences are challenged by even the most critical scholars.[46] Furthermore, the resurrection claims can be traced back to the original eyewitnesses: the apostles, Paul and James, the brother of Jesus. They were not told about a resurrection that happened years earlier, no, they were the witnesses to this event. They proclaimed it and they gave their lives for it.

Bottom line, the sources for the resurrection claims were too close to the event and the written accounts appeared much too soon to consider this a serious alternative. It is so much in conflict with the evidence, even well informed non-believers do not consider this as a serious option.[47]

**Alternative #2: The Apostles Lied (and Stole the Body)**

The apostles were lying – it is all a hoax. What if the resurrection never happened, but the apostles just pulled off the most elaborate hoax in human history? Perhaps after the crucifixion and death of Jesus, they came together and agreed to claim that Jesus resurrected...
from the dead. To make this happen, they also would have to steal the body from the tomb to destroy the evidence. After all, this is also what the Jewish priests claimed that happened, as we can read in Matthew 28:12-13: “When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, ‘You are to say, “His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.”’” There are two major flaws with this theory.

First, there is no evidence to support it. The evidence indicates honest testimony by the original apostles and Mark, Luke, and Paul. Nothing suggests that immediately after Jesus’ death the disciples were capable of the daring initiative to go the tomb of Jesus (on the Sabbath, the day of rest) and retrieve the body. These men not only claimed the resurrection, they also believed in it. Soon after Jesus’ crucifixion, they were willing to endure imprisonment, sufferings and even martyrdom. Their claim of the resurrection sprang out of a strong sincere conviction that they truly had seen Him. In other words: They not only talked the talk, they also walked the walk. And lastly, why would they do this? What did they gain from these alleged lies? History and tradition might not always agree on all the details of the subsequent ministries and martyrdom of the apostles, but all agree that none of them gained any wealth or luxury. Their only “gain” was poverty, persecution and a horrendous death.

Second, can you imagine any situation where a large group of people agree to a lie and maintain it the remainder of their lives, despite torture and death; and nobody denies it? Just how unlikely this is, is demonstrated by the following illustration by Chuck Colson. Mr. Colson was an aide to President Richard Nixon and a former accomplice to the 1972-1973 Watergate scandal. As a result of Watergate, Colson spent time in prison, became a Christian and founded Breakpoint Prison Fellowship. He writes in a Breakpoint commentary:

“I have been challenged myself many times on the resurrection. My answer is always that the disciples and five hundred others gave eyewitness accounts of seeing Jesus risen from the tomb. But then I'm asked, 'How do you know they were telling the truth? Maybe they were perpetrating a hoax.'

My answer to that comes from an unlikely source: Watergate.

*Watergate involved a conspiracy to cover up, perpetuated by the closest aides to the President of the United States — the most powerful men in America, who were intensely loyal to their president. But one of them, John Dean, turned state's evidence, that is, testified against Nixon, as he put it, "to save his own skin" — and he did so only two weeks after informing the president about what was really going on — two weeks! The real cover-up, the lie, could only be held together for two weeks, and then everybody else jumped ship in order to save themselves. Now, the fact is that all that those around the President were facing embarrassment, maybe prison. Nobody's life was at stake.

But what about the disciples? Twelve powerless men, peasants really, were facing not just embarrassment or political disgrace, but beatings, stonings, execution. Every single one of the disciples insisted, to their dying breaths, that they had physically seen Jesus bodily raised from the dead.

Don't you think that one of those apostles would have cracked before being beheaded or stoned? That one of them would have made a deal with the authorities? None did.

You see, men will give their lives for something they believe to be true — they will never give their lives for something they know to be false."
And we should not forget the testimony from Paul and James, who were not associated with the group of apostles at the time of the resurrection. Paul was even on a mission to kill them all. These men had no reason whatsoever to make up any resurrection stories. Therefore, only a small number of critical scholars have opted for this view during that last 200 years.\textsuperscript{[52]}

**Alternative #3: The Apostles Were Deceived: Jesus Did Not Die**

The lives of the Twelve as well as those of Paul and James provide clear evidence they were convinced Jesus really returned from the dead, but perhaps they were deceived. They believed it to be true, but had they been fooled?

Over the centuries there have been several variations of this notion, usually known as the *swoon theory*. All have been abandoned or died a quiet death. The general idea is that Jesus survived the cross and was later revived. His appearances to the disciples were therefore not miraculous, as he never died in the first place.

The theory comes in different flavors, some include:

- **The Passover Plot.**\textsuperscript{[53]} According to its author, Hugh Schonfield, Jesus was a deceiver who carefully plotted His career as Israel’s Messiah. Working closely with accomplices Lazarus and Joseph of Arimathea, He planned His survival of the cross. While on the cross, Joseph arranged to have Jesus given a drink to appear dead. On Saturday, Jesus was then removed from the tomb and revived.

- **The Jesus Scroll.**\textsuperscript{[54]} Donovan Joyce in 1964 asserted to have been told of a now lost scroll that might have been written by Jesus at the age of 80. He suggests that Jesus never died on the cross, but plotted with the guards, that after being drugged He was pronounced dead. In the tomb, a doctor, assisted by Joseph of Arimathea (Jesus’ uncle) nursed Jesus back to health. As Jesus recovered, He paid one last visit to His disciples and then lived as a monk at Qumran. Jesus married Mary Magdalene, fathered at least one son, and fought the Roman army at Masada, where He died.

- **Holy Blood, Holy Grail.**\textsuperscript{[55]} This account claims that Jesus was drugged to make Him appear dead. Pilate was bribed to the body’s removal from the cross alive. The Essenes (yes, they are part of this as well) then laid His body in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (a relative of Jesus). Jesus revived and went to France, together with His secret wife Mary Magdalene (remember, this book also inspired Dan Brown’s *The DaVinci Code*), Joseph and Lazarus (Jesus’ brother-in-law). There, Jesus and Mary’s children start a secret royal bloodline.

These accounts are a great illustration of Occam’s razor. How many more wild fantasies have to be invented to explain away the facts? How much better does the resurrection fit the events? The swoon accounts all assume that Jesus was administered some kind of drug to make Him look dead, and a number of unlikely accomplices helped him escape death and revive in the tomb. However, how wild are these speculations? Even with these speculative props, how could Jesus fool the other people at the crucifixion? How could He convince the Jews and Roman soldiers that He was dead when only drugged? And lastly, even for a moment, suppose He swooned, think about the shape Jesus would have been in. He was flogged and had been nailed to a cross for several hours. Even if still alive, Jesus would have been in desperate need of serious medical help. If He would have appeared to the disciples in this shape, they would have not believed for a second this was a glorious resurrection, instead they would have immediately realized that somehow Jesus had survived the crucifixion and needed immediate medical attention.
Alternative #4: The Apostles Were Deceived: They Had Hallucinations

What if Jesus indeed died on the cross and the resurrection appearances are just hallucinations, illusions, and visions? The apostles believed they were telling the truth about the resurrection because of the false notion that they had seen the risen Jesus.

Variants of this hallucination theory seem to be a preferred “way out” of the resurrection evidence for some modern scholars. For instance let's look at Gerd Ludemann and Jesus' resurrection. In What Really Happened to Jesus? atheist Gerd Ludemann concludes: "The critical investigation of the various resurrection appearances produced a surprising result: they can all be explained as visions.” Or, in the words of atheist Michael Martin: “A person full of religious zeal may see what he or she wants to see, not what is really there.”

Jesus seminar co-founder and spokesman, John Dominic Crossan, theorizes that Paul had a vision, a revelation when he met Jesus. The other apostles were making deliberate political dramatizations showing the priority of one leader over another. In Crossan’s own words: “Leaving aside Paul, whose experience was an experience of an altered state of consciousness, a vision of Jesus, the other experiences in the last chapters of our New Testament Gospels are not intended to be visions or hallucinations or anything else in that sense. They are calm, serene statements of who is in charge in this community and who is in charge in that other community.

There are a number of solid reasons why the appearances cannot be explained by hallucinations:

- Hallucinations are generally experienced by one person alone. In the Bible accounts Jesus also appeared to various groups of people.
- Hallucinations generally develop from hopeful anticipation. They are usually caused by drugs or bodily deprivation. The disciples were grieving in despair after Jesus’ death, but they did not meet the medical conditions necessary to expect hallucination.
- It is unlikely that subjective experiences as hallucinations could inspire the disciples’ radical transformations, even being willing to die for their faith.
- What grounds do we have to think that James, Jesus’ non-believing brother, was in a bodily deprived condition and in a hopeful anticipation, to see Jesus?
- Why would Paul, the persecutor, have yearned to see Jesus?
- Hallucinations cannot explain the empty tomb.
- Hallucinations do not share a meal, nor can they be touched to feel wounds.

Alternative #5: Other Empty Tomb Explanations

The empty tomb and the missing body of Jesus are solid corroborations of the resurrection. The empty tomb is strongly supported by the presented evidence, but are there other alternative non-resurrection reconstructions that can explain the missing body?

- The wrong tomb. Perhaps the women just went to the wrong tomb? That wrong tomb was empty and they concluded that Jesus had risen from the dead. On the surface this could be possible; however, these same women are mentioned in all gospels to have been present at the burial of Jesus just two days earlier on Friday afternoon. It is not reasonable to assume that all of them developed the same amnesia in such a short period of time. Also, the tomb location was well-known. It was, after all, the tomb set aside for Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy and well respected individual. It would have been very little trouble to ask him where his tomb was, in case they would have been lost. And, after the proclamation of the resurrection surely some people
Joseph, the Jews or someone else) would have checked Joseph’s tomb to look for the body.

- **The body was stolen.** Who would want to steal the body? We have already seen that it is not probable that the disciples deliberately lied about the resurrection and had stolen the body to conceal the evidence. Did the Jews steal the body? They had even fewer reasons than the disciples and if they would have stolen the body, they certainly would have reproduced it later to stop the Christian movement in its very first days. The last potential thief, the Roman government, is also the most unlikely. These officials had no motive, and the last thing they wanted was more unrest in the city.

- **The body was eaten.** Jesus seminar founder and spokesman, John Dominic Crossan, claims that, consistent with crucifixion customs, Jesus’ corpse remained on the cross to be torn apart by wild beasts or was buried in a shallow grave, dug up, and then eaten by dogs[61]. Either way his conclusion is: “With regard to the body of Jesus, by Easter Sunday morning, anyone who cared did not know where it was, and anyone who knew did not care. Why should the soldiers, even if they had given him a quick burial and gone home, remember the death and disposal of a nobody?”[62] If Crossan is right, why would all gospels claim the women were present at the burial and went to the tomb? Unless of course, as Crossan believes, all gospels are lying. And even if he is right, would the disciples have been so gullible and naive to not have looked for the remains of Jesus near the crucifixion site upon the first claims of a resurrection?

**Alternative #6: The Teachings of the Qur’an**

Since Muslims have as unique view of Jesus’ resurrection, I’d like to mention their view in this section to be complete. Islam recognizes Jesus as one of the great prophets of Allah. The Qur’an (Islam’s most holy book) teaches the virgin birth of Jesus and that He preached the truth. However, according to the Qur’an Jesus was merely a human being chosen by God as a prophet and sent for the guidance of the people of Israel.[63]

The Qur’an explicitly denies Jesus’ crucifixion. In Surah (chapter) 4:157-159 we read:

“That they said (in boast), ‘We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, The Apostle of God’;— But they killed him not, Nor crucified Him, But so it was made to appear to them, And those who differ therein are full of doubts, With no (certain) knowledge, But only conjecture to follow, For of a surety they killed Him not:— Nay, God raised him up unto Himself; and God is exalted in Power, Wise;—And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in Him before His death; And on the Day of Judgment He will be a witness against them.”

One thing is absolutely certain to Islam: Jesus did not die on the cross. Although they cannot confidently say what did happen, Muslims boldly state what did not happen. Islamic traditions offer multiple possible explanations for what happened on the day of the crucifixion:[64]

- Jesus hid while one of His companions died in his place.
- God made Judas Iscariot to look like Jesus and to take His place.
- Simon of Cyrene replaced Jesus before the crucifixion.

It is quite puzzling to see how Islam ignores the mountain of evidence and confirmations for the crucifixion. As we have seen, even the most liberal and atheist scholars confirm Jesus’ execution on the cross as a historical event. Claiming that somebody else took His place without the Romans, Jews, disciples, or anybody else noticing seems more than a serious
person can imagine. Therefore, from an evidence perspective, the alternative view of the Qur’an on how Jesus supposedly escaped the cross does not seem to bear any significance.

### Alternative Explanations for the Resurrection Evidence

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<td><strong>It is a hoax</strong></td>
<td>The disciples conspired and made up the resurrection</td>
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<td><strong>The disciples were deceived, Jesus did not die but swooned</strong></td>
<td>Jesus was drugged, appeared to be dead and was revived</td>
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Overview of the Alternative Explanations

[46] See our discussion on *The Integrity of the Manuscript Texts* in chapter 11: [http://www.windmillministries.org/frames/CH11A.htm](http://www.windmillministries.org/frames/CH11A.htm)


