

Resurrection: Fact or Fabrication?

Sunday April 4 – Jerusalem - Empire News Late Edition

Jerusalem is once again in an uproar this evening because of Jesus of Nazareth, the itinerant man of faith, who was crucified and died Friday at 3:00 PM, then laid in a sealed and guarded tomb. Rumours are circulating that Jesus' tomb was found empty this morning. Even more spectacular rumours are circulating that Jesus was seen alive today!

Roman authorities confirmed that Jesus indeed died on Friday. A government-issued press release confirmed Jesus death and that his last words were, "Father, into your hands, I commend my Spirit." The crucifixion team confirmed that there was no way any man could have survived what Jesus had suffered. He had endured a severe beating and scourging, administered by some of Rome's best, followed by hanging on the cross for hours, then the infliction of a severe wound in his side with a regulation army spear as a final confirmation of his death.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a palace spokesman confirmed that shortly after Jesus' death, a wealthy and well connected man from the village of Arimathea, named Joseph, approached Pilate for permission to remove Jesus' body from the cross and give him a proper burial. Pilate agreed to the request. Joseph and a friend took the body down off the cross. In conformance with Jewish burial practices, Jesus' body was washed, wrapped in linen cloths and placed in a tomb, a cave that Joseph had carved in the rock for his own burial. The entrance to the cave was sealed with a large rock. The anonymous spokesman believed Joseph was one of Jesus' disciples; however, Joseph was not available for comment.

The same palace source confirmed that on the next day, Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, Pilate was visited by certain Jewish political and religious authorities, including the chief priest in charge of the Jewish Temple, and other dignitaries. The purpose of their visit was to obtain a Roman decree that would allow them seal the tomb Jesus was buried in and secure it until today (Sunday). Jesus had promised he would rise from the dead on the third day after his death. They reasoned that his disciples need only steal Jesus' body from the tomb and then declare he had risen from the dead in order to create the ultimate deception. The whole city would be thrown in turmoil. Pilate was convinced their arguments had merit. He issued a proclamation that permitted them to make the tomb as secure as was possible. Armed with a Roman edict, the Jewish religious authorities sealed the stone with a Roman seal and posted a 72 hour guard outside the tomb.

Jerusalem was awoken this morning by a magnitude four earthquake. The quake did more than shake a few plates off shelves. Another anonymous source acquainted with Jesus attributed the earthquake to an angelic being that rolled the stone from the secured tomb. The being was described as being white as snow, or like lightning. The source said the Roman guards shook like leaves and fell to the ground like dead men. It was rumoured that the heavenly being spoke to women who were near the tomb. He convinced them not to be afraid of him. He announced that the crucified and dead Jesus was not in the grave. Jesus had been resurrected. Jesus was now in Galilee, waiting for his disciples. The women were to direct the disciples to go to Galilee to meet Jesus.

Another anonymous source, close to the Jewish High Priest Caiaphas, reported that when the guard at the tomb regained their senses, they went straight to the Jewish authorities and told them the whole story. Caiaphas allegedly bribed them with a great sum of money. As a condition of receiving the bribe,

they swore to make this report, if anyone asked them, "His [Jesus'] disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep." Aware that the soldiers would lose their lives if their superiors learned that they had fallen asleep while guarding the tomb, the High Priest promised he would intervene with Pilate and keep them out of trouble.

Pilate's press secretary and the Jewish High Priest's personal assistant were both questioned by the press concerning reports of the empty tomb, the resurrection appearances of Jesus, and the bribery of Roman officials. With one voice, they called these reports 'preposterous, complete fabrications and lies'. The High Priest's assistant declared, "If the tomb was found empty and the stone used to seal it was rolled away, they were obviously at the wrong tomb." When pressed further, he responded, "You can quote me. Read my lips. Dead people do not just get up and walk away. Be reasonable!"

What are we to believe? Is Jesus' resurrection fact or fabrication? This reporter was ready to call the whole thing a fabrication, if it wasn't for a poignant moment observed during Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus was crucified along with two known criminals. One of the criminals hurled insults at Jesus. He said: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

The other criminal took offense to this insult. He said: "Don't you have respect for God? All three of us are sentenced to death, we are dying. You and I are being punished justly, we committed the crime and we are getting what we deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

This criminal on the cross thought of himself in a new way and saw Jesus in a way that no one else could see. He no longer denied his own guilt. He no longer blamed others for his problems. He no longer begged everyone, including Jesus, for help and escape. He admitted he deserved his punishment and accepted his punishment and death. He perceived Jesus' suffering as different to his own. He believed Jesus' suffering was truly innocent. He also saw a power and majesty in Jesus. He believed that this Jesus was a king and was going to his kingdom. He believed that they were both going to die, but he also believed that Jesus was going to come back to life and was going to enter into his kingdom, the kingdom that was 'not of this world'. The same kingdom Jesus confessed to Governor Pontius Pilate during his trial. He came to believe that Jesus had the power and authority to invite people into that kingdom. Jesus turned to the expiring felon and said, "I tell you the truth, today you will be in paradise with me."

This reporter felt jealous of that convicted felon. He had experienced truth about himself and faith in what we all hope for, that there is life after the agony and suffering of death. If we, like that felon, get what we deserve, what hope is there for us? Death is just punishment; a fitting end. The convicted felon was allowed to see that the death of this man Jesus, who he believed was innocent, could change death, the criminal's death. The criminal was given eyes to see that Jesus was suffering for him and for his sordid life. This gave him the faith and courage to humbly ask Jesus for permission to enter his kingdom. His faith was rewarded and grew when Jesus granted his humble request. Jesus gave him the courage to die.

Is Jesus resurrected? Is he with his Father? Is the thief in paradise with Jesus?
Is there hope for us? ...

Staff Report – Empire News - Jerusalem Bureau

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May you enjoy a Blessed Easter.

Pastor Ed Skutshek