

EXPLORATION: BIBLE

By Chip Thompson

THE EMPTY TOMB

The tomb of Jesus is a key piece of archeological evidence authenticating the story of Jesus. The tomb where the body of Jesus was laid is the most venerated Christian holy site in the entire world and rightly so, this is the place where Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Like Jamie in the photo below, millions of Christians have stood in awe at the empty tomb where Jesus conquered the curse of sin and rose from the dead.



The Tomb of Jesus would have looked like this 1st century "Rolling Stone Tomb" located in the Valley of Megiddo in central Israel. [Photo by Chip Thompson 2019]

What archeological evidence do we have that authenticates the tomb of Jesus? A LOT!!! We will start with an event that forever marked the place where the Lord's Apostles and the earliest Jewish Christians worshipped our risen Lord – AT HIS EMPTY TOMB.

In 132 A.D. a band of Jewish Zealots rebelled against Rome in what is called the Bar Kokhba revolt. In 135 A.D. Emperor Hadrian crushed the resistance and in a fury razed what remained of Jerusalem to the ground. He then created a new Roman City named Aelia Capitolina (Aelia—for Hadrian's family name. Capitolina—a city dedicated to the chief Roman god Jupiter). At the tomb where the earliest Jewish Christians were worshipping their risen Lord, Hadrian leveled the Hill of Golgotha and buried Christ's tomb. He then desecrated this Christian holy site by constructing a pagan temple in honor of the Roman gods Jupiter and Venus. Hadrian's Temple stood

directly over the tomb of Jesus until 325 A.D.

At that time a Christian historian named Eusebius brought Helena, Emperor Constantine's Christian mother, to Jerusalem. He directed Helena to Hadrian's temple and informed her that Christ's tomb was buried beneath the marble statues of Jupiter and Venus. This moved Helena to request that her son destroy the Roman temple and, in its place, build a church in honor of the risen Christ. In 325 A.D. Emperor Constantine commissioned the first Church of the Holy Sepulcher to be built. Exactly as described by Eusebius, Christ's EMPTY tomb was found beneath Hadrian's temple.

The tomb of Jesus was highly venerated for the first time when the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was constructed. The stone cliff containing Christ's tomb was carved away and the tomb was fashioned into a "monolith" (see: photos below) which made it the focal point of the site. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher was then built over this tomb to commemorate the risen Christ.



On the left is a "monolith," a tomb that was carved out of a rock cliff. On the right is Jesus Christ's tomb today. It was originally fashioned into a "monolith" and has marked the tomb of Jesus inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher to this day. [Photos by Chip Thompson, 2017]

What evidence has been found that identifies this as the authentic tomb site? In the 1970's Armenian Christians, deep in the bowels of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, unearthed the foundations of a grand staircase that originally led up to Hadrian's temple. In the rubble beside these foundations they discovered what is today called, "The Armenian Boat Inscription." This inscription was created by early Christian pilgrims and then buried in the rubble of Hadrian's temple, built in about 135 A.D. So, this inscription dates to the time of Hadrian's temple thus

proving beyond any shadow of a doubt that early Christians were coming to this tomb to worship the risen Christ.

Since Christ's death in about 30 A.D., Christians have been visiting the tomb where Jesus rose from the dead. Christ's empty tomb is by far the most visited tomb in the history of the world. On a normal day in Jerusalem thousands of Christians visit the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and this has been the case for thousands of years. It is safe to say that countless millions have come to worship Jesus at the empty tomb.



Here, an Armenian Priest named Father Samuel is interpreting the 'Boat inscription' for our Tour Group. It reads, "Yes Lord, We Will Go!" (In-other-words, "Yes Lord Jesus, We will obey, We will go and preach your gospel to the ends of the earth." Matthew 28:18-20). [Photo by Chip Thompson, 2014]

So, what does this prove? It proves that our faith is NOT IN VAIN. The empty tomb bears witness to the fact that Jesus did indeed conquer death. Our FAITH is in a risen Savior. Christians have a LIVING HOPE that our Savior does have power over death. With this power His promise of eternal life for all who follow Him is not in vain. Nine times in the Gospel of John, Jesus promised "eternal life" to his followers (see John chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, and 17). YOU SHOULD READ THE GOSPEL OF JOHN AND BELIEVE EVERY TRUTH PROCLAIMED BY JESUS. (NOTE: keep in mind that in the King James Bible, 'eternal life' and 'everlasting life' are the exact same Greek word in all ancient Bible manuscripts.) Jesus promises eternal life to ALL who by faith will believe and follow Him. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)