

HE HAS RISEN, INDEED!

Luke 24:1-12(p. 1642)

April 12, 2020

*"Why do you look for the living among the dead?
He is not here; he has risen!"*

Luke 24:5



Celebrating with the witnesses to resurrection

*On the first day of the week, very early in the morning,
the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.*

*They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,
but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus*

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others

Luke 24:1-9

1) The women were expecting _____

2) The women encountered _____

The problem of forgetfulness

... *But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.*
Luke 24:11 (see Spurgeon's definition of resurrection)

- 1) This disbelief is not _____ but rather _____
- 2) Circumstances (in God's providence) had them trapped in the order of _____

When they believed

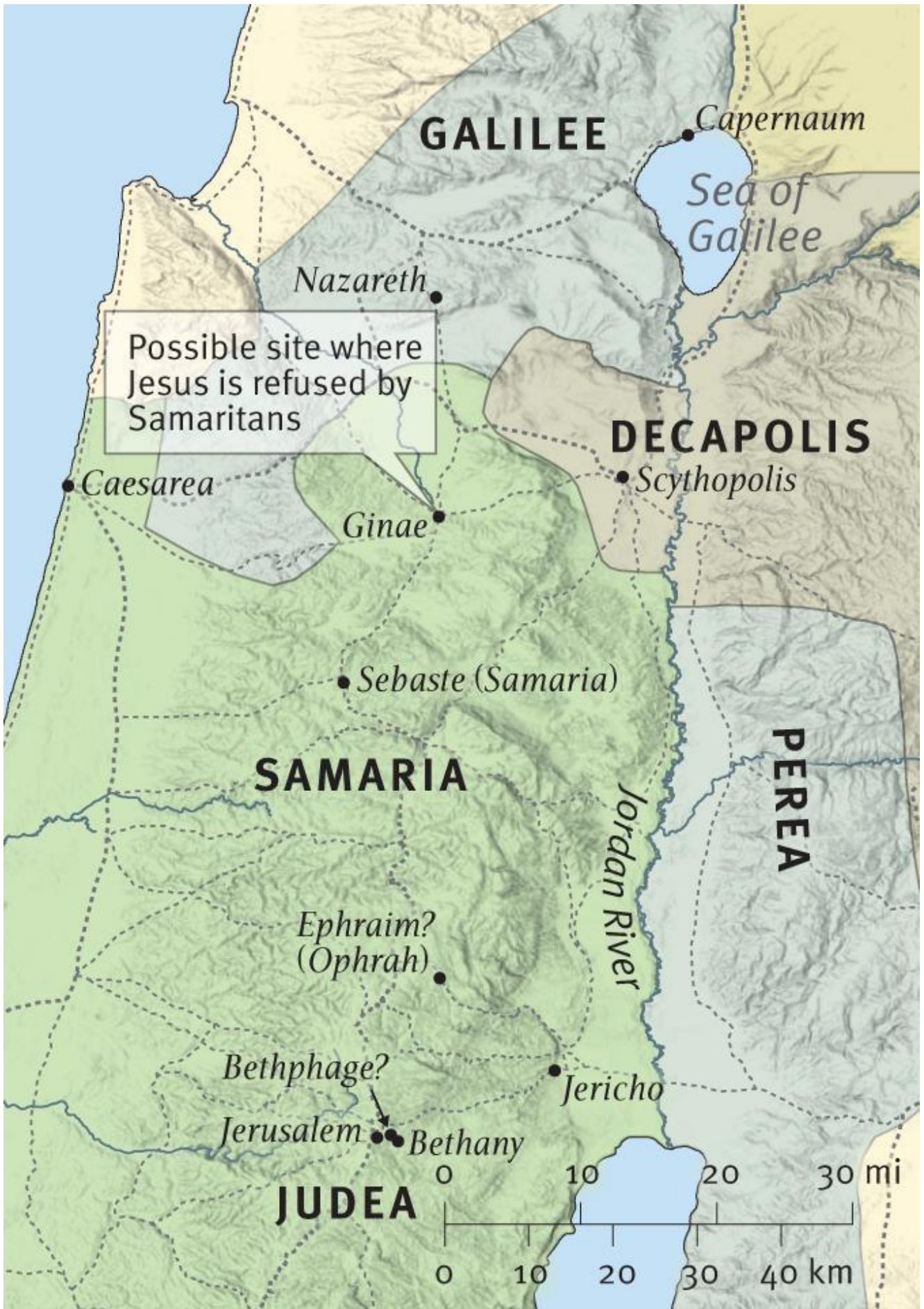
Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.
Luke 24:12 (compare to 24:33-48; John 21 and Peter's reinstatement)

- 1) _____ belief is _____
- 2) Peter's restoration started when he _____

Two keys to remembering

“Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:
‘The Son of Man must be delivered in the hands of sinful men,
be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” Then they remembered his words.
Luke 24:6-8 (don't miss Lockridge's “That's My King”)

- 1) _____ to Jesus words
- 2) _____ to where Jesus us waiting



Resources on resurrection

Spurgeon's sermon on resurrection at <http://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs1653.pdf> and his sermons on resurrection in general at <http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0066.htm>

My favorites Spurgeon quote on resurrection: "This, then, is the doctrine of the resurrection. We do not believe--at least I do not--that law has been rudely violated in one extraordinary and unparalleled episode. We believe that a universal law of life, overmastering death, and always superior to it, has had once a visible witness."

John Calvin's sermons on resurrection in <https://www.heritagebooks.org/products/crucified-and-risen-sermons-on-the-death-resurrection-and-ascension-of-christ-calvin.html>

My favorites quote is 'If we seek for salvation, the name of Jesus alone teaches us that it is in him. ... If we desire the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we will find them in his anointing. If we are looking for strength, we have it in his lordship... If we ask for redemption, his passion provides it. In his condemnation we have our absolution. If we want pardon for sin's curse, that gift lies in his cross. Atonement we have in his sacrifice and cleansing in his blood. Our reconciliation was effected by his descent into hell; the mortification of our flesh lies in his burial, and newness of life in his resurrection, through which we also have the hope of immortality.'

Allstair Begg's sermon on Luke 24:1-12 at <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/resurrection/>

Deffinbaugh's sermon on the resurrection at <https://bible.org/seriespage/39-burial-and-resurrection-christ>

Horatio Bonar's thoughts on resurrection as a part of his commentary on Revelation at

<https://awakeninggracedotorg.wordpress.com/2011/12/19/horatus-bonar-three-reasons-to-fear-not-from-the-risen-jesus/>

I like J. C. Ryle's short commentary on the Luke 24 at <https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/l24.htm>

For a classic apologetic approach to the resurrection, see Michael Horton's "Risen, Indeed!" at

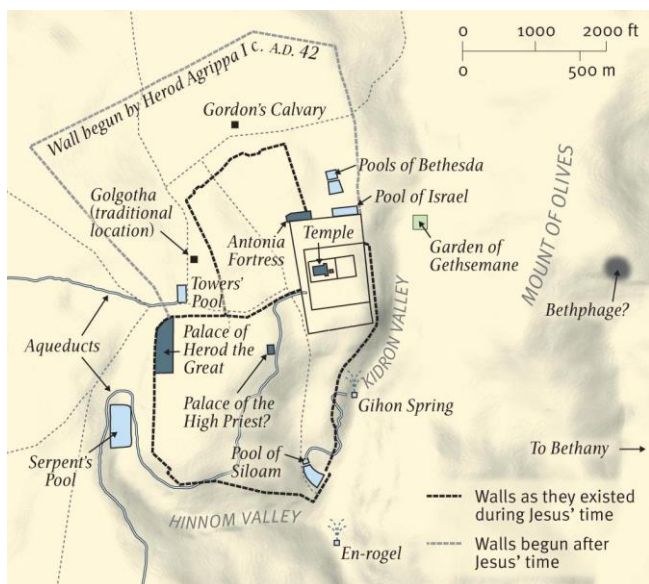
<https://www.whitehorseinn.org/2011/04/risen-indeed-2/> or John Piper's "Eight Reasons" at

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/eight-reasons-why-i-believe-that-jesus-rose-from-the-dead>

or Frank Morrison's *Who Moved the Stone* or the updated versions from Josh McDowell (*Evidence That Demands a Verdict*) and C.S. Lewis (*Miracles* or *Mere Christianity*)

No Easter would be complete with Lockridge's "That's My King" at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzqTFNfeDnE>



Live stream of an empty Western Wall during Pesach

Risen Indeed!

Dr. Michael Horton, Saturday, 23 Apr 2011

Every Easter affords fresh opportunities for national news magazines to take up the question of Jesus's resurrection. It's difficult to point with any firmness to a "consensus" in Jesus scholarship any more than in other studies. Nevertheless, even liberals recognize (and lament) a trend in New Testament scholarship away from many of the "assured results" assumed by their predecessors only a generation ago.

Many factors have contributed to this more conservative trend, but two are worth mentioning. First, there has been a trend toward earlier dating of the Gospel accounts, which undermines the critical presupposition that the most obvious reports of Jesus's bodily resurrection and deity are later interpolations. Second, especially since the last 40 years or so, there has been a trend toward placing Jesus in his Jewish milieu and this has led—generally speaking—to greater suspicion of the quite Gentile (Greek) biases that have dominated higher-critical (i.e., liberal) scholarship.

It's helpful for us to return to the "facts of the case." Here, speculation is useless. It does not matter what we thought reality was like: whether we believed in thirty gods or none. It doesn't matter what we find helpful, meaningful, or fulfilling. This is not about spirituality or moral uplift. Something has happened in history and we cannot wish it away. It either happened or it didn't happen, but the claim itself is hardly meaningless or beyond investigation.

The Facts of the Case

The earliest Christians testified to the following elements of the resurrection claim, even to the point of martyrdom:

1. Jesus Christ lived, died, and was buried.

Even Marcus Borg, co-founder of the skeptical "Jesus Seminar," concedes that Christ's death by Roman crucifixion is "the most certain fact about the historical Jesus."¹ There are numerous attestations to these facts from ancient Jewish and Roman sources. According to the Babylonian Talmud, "Yeshua" was a false prophet hanged on Passover eve for sorcery and blasphemy. No less a towering Jewish scholar than Joseph Klausner identifies the following references to Jesus in the Talmud: Jesus was a rabbi whose mother, Mary (Miriam), was married to a carpenter who was nevertheless not the natural father of Jesus. Jesus went with his family to Egypt, returned to Judea and made disciples, performed miraculous signs by sorcery, led Israel astray, and was deserted at his trial without any defenders. On Passover eve he was crucified.²

Suetonius (75-130 AD), a Roman official and historian, recorded the expulsion of Jews from Rome in 48 AD because of controversy erupting over "a certain Chrestus" (*Claudius* 25.4). Late in the first century, Tacitus—the greatest Roman historian—referred to the crucifixion of Jesus under Pontius Pilate (*Annals* 15.44). In a letter to the Emperor Trajan around the year 110, Pliny the Younger, imperial governor of what is now Turkey, reported that Christians gathered on Sunday to pray to Jesus "as to a god," to hear the letters of his appointed officers read and expounded, and to receive a meal at which they believed Christ himself presided (*Epistle* 10.96).

We know also from ancient sources how successful the Romans were at crucifixions. The description in the Gospels of the spear thrust into Christ's side and the ensuing flow of blood and water fit with both routine

accounts of crucifixion from Roman military historians as well as with modern medical examinations of the report.³ The so-called “swoon theory” speculates that Jesus did not really die, but was nursed back to health to live out his days and die a natural death. Yet, as Doug Powell observes, in addition to surviving the spear piercing his heart and one of his lungs, Jesus “would have had to control how much blood flowed out of the wound by sheer willpower.”⁴

In Surah 4:157, Islam’s Qur’an teaches that the Romans “never killed him,” but “were made to think that they did.” No supporting argument for this conjecture is offered and the obvious question arises: Are we really to believe that the Roman government and military officers as well as the Jewish leaders and the people of Jerusalem “were made to think that” they had crucified Jesus when in fact they did not do so? Furthermore, why should a document written six centuries after the events in question have any credence when we have first-century Christian, Jewish, and Roman documents that attest to Christ’s death and burial? Roman officers in charge of crucifixions knew when their victims were dead. Even the liberal New Testament scholar John A. T. Robinson concluded that the burial of Jesus in the tomb is “one of the earliest and best attested facts about Jesus.”⁵

The burial of Jesus in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea is mentioned in all four Gospels (Mt 27:57; Mk 15:43; Lk 23:50; Jn 19:38-39). This is a specific detail that lends credibility to the account. Furthermore, it’s an embarrassing detail that the disciples would not likely have forged. After all, according to the Gospels, the disciples fled and Peter had even denied knowing Jesus. Yet here is a wealthy and powerful member of the ruling Jewish Council (Sanhedrin), coming to Pilate to ask for permission to bury Jesus in his own tomb. Adding to the embarrassment, according to John 19:38-42, Joseph was assisted in the burial by another leader of the Pharisees, Nicodemus (who met with Jesus secretly in John 3). Joseph was of such a stature that Pilate conceded to deliver the body over to him, but only after confirming with the centurion that Jesus was in fact dead (Mk 15:44-45).

2. Jesus Christ’s tomb was empty after three days.

Not even this claim should be controversial today, since it was acknowledged by Romans and Jews as well as by the first Christians. Of course, there were widely divergent explanations, but there was a remarkable consensus on this point. The Jewish leaders claimed that the body was stolen by the disciples (Matthew 28:11-15). The very fact that they sought alternative explanations for the resurrection demonstrates that the empty tomb was a historical fact.

Looking for the Best Explanation

Now we finally reach the point at which the gospel provokes debate, scandal, belief and unbelief. An empty tomb is a necessary but not sufficient condition of a resurrection. Nevertheless, the following arguments are crucial.

1. The Disciples Stole His Body and Jesus Died a Natural Death Sometime Later

The Gospels themselves reveal an unflattering portrait of the disciples. They flee the scene after Jesus’s arrest, Peter even denying Jesus three times. It is the women who were the first eye-witnesses of the resurrected Lord and even then the men responded with incredulity. Nor were they in any position to steal the body of the most famous (or infamous) figure in Jerusalem. Luke reports that the Jewish leaders gathered before Pilate. Informing him of Jesus’s claim that he would rise again after three days, they warned that his disciples might steal his body to stage a resurrection. Therefore, Pilate sent a Roman guard (the temple security force) to secure the tomb (Mat 27:62-66).

Even more implausible is the idea that Jesus did not in fact die (as observed above, victims did not survive Roman crucifixions) or that he could have been nursed back to health, lived, and died a natural death without any notice. Jesus was charged by the Jewish Council with blasphemy and was intent on maintaining his equality with God to the end. It is unlikely that such a person would have changed course after a failed crucifixion. Nor could he have kept his whereabouts unknown to friends, neighbors, and former followers as well as enemies.

Would Peter, who repeatedly denied knowing Jesus, have committed his life to the cause of proclaiming his resurrection—even to the point of martyrdom—if he knew all along that Jesus was living out (or had lived out) his days somewhere in Palestine or beyond? Would the other apostles have done so, as well as the thousands who formed the nucleus of the mother church in Jerusalem? What about the 500 eye-witnesses Paul mentions, many of whom were still living? It is one thing to give your life for a cause that you believe in, but would so many embrace persecution and death for a hoax? What could they possibly have gained? Even if the disciples could have found sufficient motivation to remove the body and claim he had been raised, they did not have the means or the opportunity.

2. *The “Easter Experience” was a spiritual vision, not a literal appearance of Jesus bodily raised.*

Basically, when liberals use the language of faith but empty it of its content, the resurrection turns out to be little more than mass hallucination. Of course, it’s not usually put that baldly, at least when they are engaged in their public ministry. Rather, they typically speak of the impact that the “Easter experience” had on their lives—just as it continues to have on us today if we will open ourselves to its beauty. Years after Jesus’s crucifixion, it is suggested (with no explanation of the empty tomb), the disciples got together and recalled their sojourn with Jesus. In the process, they experienced again—in a very real way—the God of love they had encountered in Jesus. As a result, they could speak of his appearances to them in vivid terms. Regardless of how pious this may sound, it is just another way of saying—with many critics throughout the ages—that the disciples experienced a mass hallucination.

Does this really work as a plausible explanation?

First, hallucination or wish-fulfillment may explain one person’s experience of a resurrected friend. Perhaps Peter, still remorseful over his cowardly disavowal of Jesus, conjured a vision of what he thought was his risen Lord. But does this explain the thousands of eye-witnesses, the tumult throughout Jerusalem, and the willingness of so many to give their lives for the claim? Not all of the witnesses saw Jesus at the same time or in the same place, so it was not a phenomenon of crowd psychology.

Second, regardless of what contemporary scholars think happened, it is indisputable that the first Christians testified to a physical resurrection. The myriad details, especially in the Gospel reports, are unmistakably historical. The circumstances and references to specific times, places, and individuals are too specific to imagine that the writer was merely conveying timeless eternal truths or expressing existential truths in mythological or allegorical language.

Neither for Jews nor for Christians did “raised from the dead” mean anything other than coming to physical life in the age to come. It is not a claim that Jesus was merely resuscitated; rather, he was raised by the Father, in the power of the Spirit, as the beginning of the new creation. Nor is it a claim that Jesus lived on in the hearts and experience of his followers. His post-resurrection appearances cannot be construed as psychological projections by grieving disciples. Thomas only believed after he inspected Jesus’ hands and side, but there was a Jesus to inspect before Thomas believed! His faith clearly did not create the experience of the risen Christ, but vice versa. Paul emphasized that Christ’s resurrection now past, like ours in the future, is bodily. It is not mere resuscitation, but a glorified body, and yet it is the same body that is transformed. “This mortal flesh must put on immortality” in the resurrection, he says, rather than, in the words of Shakespeare, “Let us slough off this mortal coil” at death.

Again it is worth pointing out that only Gentiles could find something salvageable in a non-literal, non-physical resurrection. Visions of loved ones are always proof that they are *dead*—communicating to us from another realm. However, this is far from what Jews meant by the resurrection of the dead—and far from the references in the Gospels to encountering the risen Christ in this world, even eating and drinking with his disciples.

In Jewish eschatology, the resurrection of the dead was the great sign that the age to come had in fact arrived. In this widely held view, there is no trace of any allegorical, spiritual, or psychological interpretation: the resurrection meant nothing less than the raising of bodies in indestructible life.⁶ One might have expected Greek Gentiles to have spiritualized the resurrection (as indeed the Gnostics did), but for Jews there was either a literal, bodily resurrection (according to the Pharisees) or no resurrection at all (according to the Sadducees).

Harvard University's distinguished professor of Judaism, Jon D. Levenson, marshalls overwhelming evidence that belief in the soul's re-embodiment in the resurrection of the dead was a widely and deeply held Jewish hope.⁷ This is one of the reasons that Jewish scholars like Pinchas Lapide conclude that Jesus rose from the dead. Quite apart from the question as to whether Jesus rose from the dead, his resurrection is consistent with first-century Jewish expectations; it is not imported from a Gentile (specifically Greek) milieu.

In 1982, noted Jewish scholar Pinchas Lapide surprised many (especially liberal Protestants) with his book, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective*, in which, after careful evaluation, he concludes that Jesus was raised by God from the dead after three days. Unsatisfied by alternative explanations (mass hallucination, a mere vision of a spiritually risen Christ, the disciples' theft of the body from the tomb, etc.), Lapide challenges liberal theologians:

I cannot rid myself of the impression that some modern Christian theologians are ashamed of the material facticity of the resurrection. Their varying attempts at dehistoricizing the Easter experience which give the lie to all four evangelists are simply not understandable to me in any other way. Indeed, the four authors of the Gospels definitely compete with one another in illustrating the tangible, substantial dimension of this resurrection explicitly.

For Jews, as well as for Christians, Lapide argues, God's faithfulness to his covenant promises is inextricable from history. One has to read Gentile philosophical categories (spirit versus matter, symbolic or existential truth versus historical fact) into Jewish texts like the Gospels in order to make them say what liberals require. "However, for the first Christians who though, believed, and hoped in a Jewish manner, the immediate historicity was not only a part of that happening but the indispensable precondition for the recognition of its significance for salvation."⁸

Therefore, belief in a "resurrection" that is short of literal and physical was not even an option for Jewish disciples of Jesus. In fact, a mystical, symbolic, or allegorical interpretation would have been a dead give-away that the claim was influenced by Greek thought. Therefore, it is not the early Christians, but liberal Protestants, who turn the deeply Jewish understanding of resurrection on its head. The spiritualization of the resurrection evidently arose in a Gentile Christian milieu and it is this interpretation, indistinguishable from the liberal view, that Paul refutes with the earliest Christian confession.

There is no consolation prize if Jesus was not raised bodily, no symbolic "Easter experience." Paul was unwilling to entertain the possibility that a subjective interpretation could count as faith in the resurrected Lord. He would not have sung, "You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart." Rather, Paul says in a rather straightforward way,

And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor 15:12-19).

3. The resurrection became exaggerated with time and distance from the original events.

We're all familiar with "big fish stories." Starting out as a modest four-inch trout witnessed by friends who were there grows larger in the telling. Long ago, David Hume used this argument in his critique of miracles. The furthest from the original scene, both in time and place, the more fabulous the claim. Undoubtedly, this strikes us intuitively as accurate in most cases of reported miracles. However, it doesn't take due account of the facts of *this* particular case.

The conviction that Jesus had been raised mushroomed within the precincts of Jerusalem, in the immediate aftermath of the report of the empty tomb. Most New Testament scholars agree that the resurrection claim is early; even Gerd Lüdemann, noted for his anti-resurrection polemic, concedes that the tradition of the formula "Christ died, was buried, was raised, and appeared to his disciples" dates within two years after the crucifixion.⁹

They also agree that the claim is widespread, with multiple sources available to us today. William Lane Craig repeats the observation of Greco-Roman historian A. N. Sherwin-White that “even two generations are too short a span to allow legendary tendencies to prevail over the hard historic core of oral tradition.”¹⁰

The *maximal* claim, “Jesus is risen, just as he said!”, was the earliest. So in this case, at least, the “fish” didn’t get bigger with each telling, far away from those who could dispute it. The resurrection claim began not in the Hellenized parts of the Jewish diaspora, but in Jerusalem itself where the authorities had the means, the motive, and the opportunity to disprove it. Paul made a similar argument before the court consisting of the Roman governor Festus as well as Jewish leaders and King Agrippa II. After hearing Paul’s testimony to Christ, Agrippa exclaimed, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.” “But Paul said, ‘I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. *For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.*’” Agrippa said to Festus, “This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment” (Ac 26:24-32, emphasis added).

Hume’s argument reveals a recurring modern Western hubris that consigns all other cultures to superstition and ignorance. N. T. Wright reminds us, “Proposing that Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead was just as controversial nineteen hundred years ago as it is today. The discovery that dead people stayed dead was not first made by the philosophers of the Enlightenment.”¹¹ Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) argued that religious claims that depend on history must submit to the canons of historical research. Among these canons is what he called the criterion of analogy: that is, that historical events are similar to each other. If resurrections do not occur ordinarily in history, then they do not happen. Besides ruling out historical events like the detonation of the first atomic bomb, this criterion determines from the outset that there can be no miracles in history. One need not actually evaluate the historical arguments and evidence in order to dismiss any claim to supernatural intervention. Yet again Wright cautions against such an a-historical method: “Ruling out as historical that to which we do not have direct access is actually a way of not doing history at all.”¹² Wolfhart Pannenberg answers Troeltsch’s criterion by saying that “the ultimate verification of the resurrection of Jesus Christ will eventually be provided through the final resurrection of those in Christ, which will constitute the required analogy.” But this gives away too much to Troeltsch, notes Wright. “We did not have to wait for the second space flight before being able to talk, as historians, about the first one.”¹³ Historians do not have to wait for analogies; their only question should be, *what happened?*¹⁴

There is good reason to treat the New Testament documents as historically reliable testimony. In fact, historians rely on source documents that are far weaker with respect to a host of widely established events: sources that are at far greater remove from the original time and place than these texts. For example, 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, written within twenty-five years of the crucifixion, reflects early Christian teaching, and Paul says that he is handing on what he had received—namely, that Christ died, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the scriptures. Jewish scholar Geza Vermes concludes that these verses record a creedal formula that Paul received at or soon after his conversion—one to three years after the resurrection.¹⁵ Paul also includes hymns and creedal formulas that confess Jesus as the God who became flesh, suffered for our sins, and was raised bodily (Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20).

Hence, the gap is closed between the Jesus of history (who actually lived) and the Christ of faith (confessed in the creeds). Just as there is not enough geographical distance from the location of the original events, there is not enough time to invent inflated Jesus-myths. There certainly is no space for any Gentile (Greek) influence in creating a so-called “Redeemer Myth.” Even liberal scholar John P. Meier allows, “The earliest fights about the person of Jesus that raged between ordinary Jews and Christian Jews after Easter centered on the Christian claims that a crucified criminal was the Messiah, that God had raised him from the dead.”¹⁶ Larry Hurtado, a New Testament scholar at the University of Edinburgh, supplies the building blocks of earliest Christian belief, attested not only by Christians themselves but by Jewish critics and Roman civil authorities. There simply is no evidence of a layer of Christian tradition between the crucifixion and the creeds where Jesus was not regarded as God who became incarnate, died, and was raised for our salvation.¹⁷

The Apostle Paul wrote, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me” (1 Cor 15:3-8). Writing this in the mid-50s—only 13-16 years after the reported events, Paul treats as public knowledge the bodily resurrection of Jesus as the earliest Christian belief. Some of the eye-witnesses are still alive, Paul says, in case anyone wants to interview them. Moreover, Paul now has to defend this truth to a largely Gentile church. This suggests that belief in Christ’s bodily resurrection was standard in the earliest (mostly Jewish) church and was only challenged or “demythologized” by Gentiles who wanted to make the faith more compatible with their Greco-Roman culture. This is exactly the reverse of what critics, from David Hume to John Spong, have argued: namely, that the resurrection claim became a “big fish story” over time and especially (according to Rudolf Bultmann and others) by merging with Greco-Roman mystery religions.

Trained by Gamaliel II—the greatest Jewish scholar of the day, Saul had a promising career as a Pharisee before him. So zealous was he for the traditions of the elders that he spearheaded many of the early persecutions of believers. Yet he was converted and, renamed Paul, became the Apostle to the Gentiles, convinced that the ascended Christ had appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Enduring well-documented persecutions, Paul ended his mission as a martyr in Rome, testifying to Christ’s resurrection to the very last—before Jewish and Roman rulers.

What could account for his conversion from persecutor of the church to the missionary-apostle who so decisively shaped the early church? How do we account for the rapid spread of Christianity, without a single shot fired in its defense, until within a few centuries it had conquered the Roman Empire that sought to extinguish it?

The religious leaders in Jerusalem and the Roman government set about immediately to eradicate the upstart sect of Jesus-followers. They proposed no public policies, led not a single march, and submitted to martyrdom. They eschewed all use of violence to support their cause, even in self-defense. And yet, as documented by Roman officials like the Bythinian governor Pliny and the Jewish historian Josephus, Roman and Jewish authorities considered the group a national security threat.

What would the disciples have to gain by proclaiming Christ’s resurrection, even in the face of martyrdom? Was there any incentive to lying about something that did not happen and could not therefore have any impact on their destiny, especially when it would cost them their own life? Mass hysteria or hallucinations simply are not plausible explanations of the rapid, immediate, and widespread growth of the resurrection message from Jerusalem to as far-flung regions as India, Turkey, and Spain. It is true that people often get caught up in political, religious, and cultural movements, but fervor wears off quickly when adherents are threatened with execution for their claim.

There are several things that a community would *not* do if it wanted to fabricate a new religion. First, its leaders would not represent themselves as having misunderstood their Lord’s mission, especially his repeated prophecy that he would die and be raised on the third day. They would not paint unflattering portraits of their own cowardice and despair. Second, they would not have invented a story in which women were the first to witness the resurrected Lord, since the testimony of women was not considered legally reliable in first-century Jewish and Roman courts. Nor certainly would they have represented themselves as so reluctant to embrace the news that the women reported. Finally, as the gap between the original events and the New Testament reports—or the “Jesus of History” and the “Christ of faith”—closes in contemporary scholarship, there is simply no other way of explaining the explosive rise of Christianity and expansion of the gospel, even in the face of often dramatic persecution.

4. Could Jesus Have Been Raised without Having Been the Messiah?

Viewing the risen Christ as a “preparation for the Messiah,” Pinchas Lapide does not believe that Jesus was the one for whom Israel had hoped. Nevertheless, he contends that God’s act of raising Jesus from the dead carried the nucleus of Israel’s faith to the whole world in anticipation of the Messiah’s kingdom. What leads Lapide to

reject Jesus' messianic claim, though affirming his resurrection, is the fact that this event did not coincide with the resurrection of *all* the righteous, the cosmic "end of the age" and last judgment.

However, Jesus himself taught that his resurrection would be the first—guaranteeing the resurrection unto life of those united to him at the end of the age. In between the resurrection of the Head and that of his members is the proclamation of the gospel, securing a remnant from Israel and the nations to participate in this general resurrection of the dead. If the last judgment had occurred immediately in Christ's earthly ministry, there would have been no space in history for the proclamation of the gospel to the ends of the earth. There would have been no ingathering of the remnant from the nations who would inherit that blessing promised to Abraham through his seed in Genesis 15. No repentance, no faith, no "day of salvation," but a sudden judgment that would have led to the condemnation of Jews and Gentiles together in one heap. Like Old Testament prophecy, the New Testament eschatology often employs a "telescoping" effect, where some events in a single series are immediately fulfilled while others await fuller realization. With Jesus's resurrection, the end-time resurrection of the dead has already begun. The age to come has dawned, glorifying our Head, securing the glorification of his body. The Spirit has been sent to bring sinners to Christ for the end-time feast through the gospel. The kingdom is here indeed, yet, following Jesus's own career, it expands now under the humiliation of the cross, awaiting its exaltation with Jesus in glory.

Before Agrippa, Paul recalled his pedigree as a Pharisee. "And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities." Paul then recalled his vision of the resurrected Jesus on the Damascus road and Christ's commission. "To this day I have the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles" (Ac 26:4-23).

So What Now?

Speaking to the philosophers in Athens, Paul proclaimed Christ's resurrection: "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Ac 17:30-31). Having heard the report, we are all faced with a decision. "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, 'We will hear you again about this.' So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them" (vv 32-34).

Today, like every day since the first Easter, some mock, others express openness to further discussion, while still others embrace the Risen Christ, exclaiming with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28). When Jesus was about to raise Lazarus, he promised Martha, "Your brother will rise again." "Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.'" Though she answered correctly, Martha may have thought it was an odd moment for a theological quiz. Yet there was something more. Jesus was pressing Martha not only to assent to the doctrine, but to put her faith in him: "Jesus said to her, 'I *am* the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in *me*, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in *me* shall never die. Do you believe *this*?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world'" (Jn 11:23-27, emphasis added). It was not the last day. Jesus had not yet been crucified for Lazarus's sins and raised for his justification as the firstfruits of the harvest. Lazarus's resurrection was only temporary, not the glorification beyond the reach of sin and death that could only follow in Christ's wake. One day, Martha's brother—and Martha herself—would become ill and die, but likely not

before they received word (perhaps were themselves witnesses) concerning the advent of the age to come with the resurrection of the Son of God. Through faith in him, who *is* the resurrection and the life, you too will be raised with Martha and Lazarus on that festive day.

Do you believe *this*?

He is risen indeed!

¹ Marcus Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1987), 179.

² Joseph Klausner, *Yeshu ha-Notzri* (Hebrew), Shtible, 1922. Translated and reprinted as *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Bloch, 1989), 18-46.

³ See, for example, William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 255 (1986). See also the extensive bibliography on this point in Gary R. Habermas, "The Core Resurrection Data," in *Tough-Minded Christianity*, ed. William Dembski and Thomas Schirrmacher (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 401 fn 10-11.

⁴ Doug Powell, *Holman Quicksource Guide to Christian Apologetics* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2006), 273.

⁵ John A. T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), 131.

⁶ N. T. Wright provides overwhelming evidence from Jewish sources on this point in *Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 108-206.

⁷ Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Kevin J. Madigan and Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁸ Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1982), 130.

⁹ Paul Copan and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment: A Debate Between William Lane Craig and Gerd Lüdemann* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 165.

¹⁰ Paul Copan and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment: A Debate Between William Lane Craig and Gerd Lüdemann* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 171.

¹¹ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 10.

¹² *Ibid.*, 16.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁵ Geza Vermes, *The Resurrection* (London: Penguin, 2008), 121-122.

¹⁶ John Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2:150.

¹⁷ Larry Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become God?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).