

THE RESURRECTION

A. Resurrection: Origins and Beliefs

1 Paganism

- a Immortality of the Soul was the focus, the body was a temporary cage
 - A shadowy existence in a nether world for most, blissful eternity with the Gods for a few
 - In either case, the bodies of the dead stayed dead

2 Judaism

- a Understanding of resurrection was progressive
 - First seen as a vague hope in some life after death
 - Eventually seen as an undoing of death; a part of God's redemption of Israel
- b Variety of beliefs in how resurrection would look
 - Seen variously as the same physical body, or other-worldly but similar body, or shining stars, etc
 - Ezekiel 37: a metaphorical hope in redemption and return from exile
 - 2 Macc 2 – a literal hope for resurrection of this body at the end of history
- c Variety of Jewish beliefs at the time of Christ.
 - Sadducees – no life after death at all
 - Some Jews (Hellenized) – eternal spiritual existence after death, no literal resurrection
 - Pharisees – literal, physical resurrection at the end of the age
 - Resurrection is tied to the Kingdom of God and Messiah
 - Kingdom of God was seen as the return of God, defeat of Israel's enemies, the forgiveness of sins, and the redemption of all creation (Israel at center)
 - i Resurrection is a component of redemption. A once, for all, event at the end of history.
 - Messiah was God's chosen agent to inaugurate the KOG, his earthly representative
 - i Appearance of the Messiah is an indication that the KOG is at hand
 - Many in Jewish history were thought to be the messiah (until they were killed)
 - The messiah was never conceived of as dying at the hands of the enemy
 - Messiah therefore never seen as a part of the resurrection.

B. Evidence for the Resurrection

1 The Empty Tomb

- a There was an empty tomb; if not, resurrection would never be preached in the same city as the body, within weeks of burial.
- b His burial site was not lost or misplaced, as we might lose track of a grave site today
 - Bones needed to be moved to permanent resting site after about 1 year.
- c If the tomb was empty, and there were no appearances of Jesus after death, no one would make the leap to resurrection. There would be a much simpler explanation (e.g. grave robbers).
- d The role of Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the ruling Sanhedrin, is mentioned in all 4 gospels
 - There are no conflicting traditions for the burial narrative, at all.
 - He could not be made up, or his actions invented, so soon after the events (35-60 AD)
- e Early Jewish response to the resurrection story never disputed the empty tomb, but assumed it.

2 Resurrection is at the core of Christianity from day one.

- a 1 Cor 15:3-7 – written by Paul in early 50's, from earlier oral tradition
 - If untrue, easily disputed by listeners

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- b Paul's teaching collapses completely without the resurrection.
 - Examples: 1 + 2 Thess., Romans, 1 + 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, etc.
 - Take out any other event in the life of Jesus, and Paul's teaching survives virtually untouched.
- c Resurrection suddenly becomes clearly conceived and universally accepted; as opposed to Judaism (everything from reanimated bones to stars, literal reality to metaphorical hope). Why?
 - Resurrection understood well enough to be used as an illustration of other ideas within 25 years of Christ (Ex: Resurrection illuminates baptism in Romans 6, and ethical behavior in Colossians 3)
- 3 Resurrection is suddenly and dramatically redefined**
 - a Resurrection is now something that happens within history, to one man first
 - Recall the difficulty disciples had in understanding Jesus' statements on his (still future) resurrection – they could not conceive of this redefinition.
 - Even after the resurrection, Christians still held firm to the Jewish concept of a once for all resurrection (e.g. Lazarus seen as resuscitated in John 11, Peter seen as a spirit in Acts 12)
- 4 Messiah and Kingdom of God (KOG) proclaimed by disciples. Why so, if he obviously failed?**
 - a Messiah was supposed to usher in the KOG: fight God's battle against the pagans; rebuild or cleanse the Temple; and bring God's justice to the world, including resurrection for the righteous.
 - Jesus, it appeared, had done none of these things.
 - Not only had he failed, he failed spectacularly – humiliated and crucified by the pagan enemy
 - b Like Resurrection, the concept of Messiah is suddenly redefined and sharpened by early Christians.
- 5 Change in Sabbath day from Saturday to Sunday**
 - a Early Christians argued, often bitterly, over everything from circumcision to dietary laws, but quickly and without debate moved Sabbath day to Sunday
- 6 Redefinition of Monotheism to include Jesus in the Godhead**
 - a Monotheism is a core, defining attribute of Judaism
 - b The trinity contradicts the universal understanding of the Shema (Deut. 6:4), and the first commandment
 - c Jesus is declared divine immediately.
 - d Goes far beyond seeing Jesus as Messiah (the Messiah was not divine)
- 7 This redefining of Monotheism, Sabbath, KOG, Messiah and Resurrection so radically and quickly has only one possible explanation:**
 - a Jesus described himself as Son of God, Messiah, and the KOG as breaking in (just as gospels report)
 - b Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday, vindicating each claim, while redefining each concept
- 8 The Gospels give us early, authentic, unvarnished eye-witness testimony**
 - a Gospel passion accounts lack OT scriptural references (Ex: compare Matthew ch. 2 to ch. 27-28)
 - b Gospel's lack Paul's descriptive language to better explain the nature of resurrection (1 Cor 15, etc)
 - c Gospels do not reference the future Christian hope (e.g. "You too can have a resurrection body").
 - d The incongruence of the physical (empty tomb, eating fish, fleshy wounds) and non-physical (moving through doors, unrecognized, ascending to heaven) without attempt to harmonize.
 - e The conflicting small details (# of angels, who saw Jesus first, etc) are not evidence that nothing happened, they are evidence that something extraordinary and disorienting happened.

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C. Counter Claims

1 Swoon Theory

- a Romans knew how to kill.
- b Battered and bruised Jesus would convince no one of resurrection.

2 Hallucination

- a Disciples did not expect resurrection, so would not imagine it.
- b Does not fit with multiple, compatible, simultaneous experiences of observers.

3 Everyone, or at least closest disciples and Paul, are lying.

- a Do the gospels feel like a lie being told?
- b Is the picture of Paul that emerges from his letters, one of a liar?
 - What would the motivation be?
 - Would anyone die for something they knew was a lie?

4 Jesus died; disciples had visions & experiences, which over time developed into resurrection stories.

- a Since the belief in the resurrection was itself the foundation for Christianity, it cannot be explained as the later product of Christianity.
 - Paul was preaching resurrection in the 50s.
- b Fails to explain the conversion of Paul.
- c Gospel accounts do not bear hallmarks of legendary development or scriptural awareness.

5 Often, opponents to the resurrection will hold two arguments simultaneously:

- a Jesus never prophesized his own resurrection.
- b The disciples resurrection stories are just wishful thinking based on Jesus' prophesies about himself
 - How can both be true?

D. Why does it matter?

- 1 Resurrection proves that what Jesus said about himself, God, and scripture was true
- 2 Resurrection affirms that God accepted Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf.
- 3 Resurrection shows us God's plan for our own future, and that of the entire world.
- 4 The resurrection offers itself, not as a very odd event within the world as it is, but the prototypical and foundational event within the world as it has begun to be.
 - a The fact that it is an in-breaking of new creation requires that it not conform to old rules. If it did, what would be new or creative about it?
- 5 The Christian redefinition of resurrection carries within the idea of collaborative eschatology:
 - a If Jesus was God's future arriving in person in the present, then those who belong to Jesus are charged with transforming the present, as far as we are able, in the light of that future.

FURTHER READING

Wright, N.T. (2003). *The Resurrection of the Son of God (Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 3)*, 740 pages: Augsburg Fortress Press

Wright, N.T. (2008). *Surprised by Hope*, 352 pages (esp. Chapters 3 & 4): Harper Collins Publishers