

## A. INTRODUCTION

### 1. Centrality of the resurrection belief

**a. 1 Cor 15:17, 19.** “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins... we are of all people most to be pitied.”

**b. Gerd Theissen:** “Easter Faith involves the decision whether one can see the ground of one’s own existence in the story of Jesus... Easter faith involves a decision about one’s human self-understanding. If here something ultimate is disclosed (even through ‘subjective visions’), then death and anxiety about death do not have the last word. For however one thinks about Easter, it is a protest against death, and especially against violent death.”<sup>1</sup>

**c. Tom Wright:** “I have heard, for instance, that Jesus’ resurrection proves the existence of life after death. That certainly was not the point for the first Christians: they already believed in life after death... I have heard, too, that the resurrection means that Jesus is now alive, and one can enter into relationship with him. That is true so far as it goes, but it is not the specific truth of the resurrection... Rather, the meaning of the resurrection must begin with the validation of Jesus as messiah... the resurrection declares that the cross was a victory, not a defeat... It is the resurrection that declares that sins have indeed been dealt with... The deepest meanings of the resurrection have to do with new creation. If the stories are metaphors for anything, they are metaphors for the belief that God’s new world had been brought to birth.”<sup>2</sup>

### 2. Types of resurrection tradition

- Empty tomb accounts
- Appearance stories
- Exit (the tomb) story
- Resurrection confessions
- Ascension stories

### 3. Questions

- Was the tomb empty? Is that important or irrelevant?
- What is meant by “resurrection”? Bodily resurrection? Spiritual resurrection?
- Can we believe in the resurrection, if the tomb was not empty; that is, if Jesus’ body returned to dust?
- If Jesus rose bodily, where is his body now? Did it vanish into another dimension; ascend into heaven?

## B. EMPTY TOMB ACCOUNTS

1. Mark is the earliest account and it only has an empty tomb scene.
2. Matthew grafted unique material onto the Markan account, reworks the story, adding:
  - An appearance of the risen Jesus to the women near the tomb
  - The bribing of the Roman soldiers by the chief priests
  - An appearance of Jesus to the eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee
3. Luke grafted unique material onto the Markan account, reworks the story, adding:
  - A lengthy narrative of the appearance of Jesus to the two disciples near Emmaus
  - An appearance of Jesus to the eleven and others in Jerusalem
  - The ascension of Jesus near Bethany

<sup>1</sup> Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 474-75.

<sup>2</sup> N. T. Wright and Marcus J. Borg, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998) 125-126.

4. John account is unique and independent of the Synoptics and has:
- A story of the empty tomb with Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the beloved disciple
  - An appearance of Jesus in Jerusalem to the disciples minus Thomas
  - An appearance eight days later in Jerusalem to the disciples plus Thomas
  - A final appearance of Jesus beside the Sea of Galilee to disciples (secondary addition)

When historians are faced with the empty tomb account, here is what they are faced with?

Gospel	Events	Witnesses	Angels
<b>Matt 28:1-10</b>	<p><b>Earthquake?</b> Yes</p> <p><b>What happens to the stone?</b> Angel rolled stone away Did the women witness it?</p> <p><b>What do the women do?</b> Women went in</p> <p><b>Does Jesus appear?</b> Jesus meets with women</p>	<p><b>How many?</b> Two women</p> <p><b>Who were they?</b> Mary Magdalene, the other Mary</p>	<p><b>Angel?</b> Yes</p> <p><b>How many?</b> One angel</p> <p><b>Where?</b> Sitting on the stone</p>
<b>Mark 16:1-8</b>	<p><b>Earthquake?</b> No earthquake</p> <p><b>What happens to the stone?</b> Stone “had already been rolled back”. (Women were concerned)</p> <p><b>What do the women do?</b> Women went in</p> <p><b>Does Jesus appear?</b> Jesus does not appear</p>	<p><b>How many?</b> Three women</p> <p><b>Who were they?</b> Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, Salome</p>	<p><b>Angel?</b> No – young man</p> <p><b>How many?</b> One young man</p> <p><b>Where?</b> In the tomb</p>
<b>Luke 24:1-12</b>	<p><b>Earthquake?</b> No earthquake</p> <p><b>What happens to the stone?</b> Stone rolled away</p> <p><b>What do the women do?</b> Women went in</p> <p><b>Does Jesus appear?</b> Jesus does not appear</p>	<p><b>How many?</b> ?? – “Women”</p> <p><b>Who were they?</b> Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James and “others”</p>	<p><b>Angel?</b> No – “men”</p> <p><b>How many?</b> Two men</p> <p><b>Where?</b> In the tomb</p>

<p><b>John 20:1-18</b></p>	<p><b>Earthquake?</b> No earthquake</p> <p><b>What happens to the stone?</b> Stone “had been removed” from the tomb</p> <p><b>What do the women do?</b> Women <i>did not</i> go in</p> <p><b>Does Jesus appear?</b> Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene</p>	<p><b>How many?</b> Three</p> <p><b>Who were they?</b> Mary Magdalene, Peter and the “other” disciple</p>	<p><b>Angel?</b> Yes</p> <p><b>How many?</b> Two angels</p> <p><b>Where?</b> Sitting where Jesus’ body had laid</p>
<p><b>Gos. Pet. 13:1-3</b></p>	<p><b>Earthquake?</b> No earthquake (but noise, heaven opening, two men coming down, burst of light in 9:2-3)</p> <p><b>What happens to the stone?</b> Found the tomb open (the stone rolled itself away in 9:4)</p> <p><b>What do the women do?</b> Women <i>did not</i> go in; they stooped down and looking it.</p> <p><b>Does Jesus appear?</b> No.</p>	<p><b>How many?</b> Mary Magdala (12:1) and her friends (12:2)</p> <p><b>Who were they?</b> Mary Magdala (12:1) and her friends (12:2)</p>	<p><b>Angel?</b> No — a “handsome young man”</p> <p><b>How many?</b> One young man</p> <p><b>Where?</b> Sitting in the middle of the tomb</p>

- What do you *observe* when you compare the different resurrection accounts?
- What are the differences?
- Is there a core that all four (or five) accounts agree on?
- How do you *explain* these similarities and differences?
- Are the inconsistencies in the documents cause to question the historicity of the empty tomb?
- What are we to make of Kenneth Bailey and James Dunn’s idea that early oral tradition is both *informal and controlled*, allowed for *performance variation* and maintained stability over time

**Notes on Borg’s View:**

Borg argues that whether the tomb was empty or not is irrelevant.<sup>3</sup> Three reasons:

- (1) There is a difference between resuscitation and resurrection. *Resuscitation* means a corpse coming back to life. *Resurrection* does not mean resumption of previous existence, but entry into a new kind of existence. Christ can appear anywhere in more than one place at the same time. Resurrection does not mean the resumption of protoplasmic or corpuscular existence. The discovery of Jesus’ skeletal remains would not be a problem.
- (2) The truth of Easter does not depend on something happening to Jesus’ corpse. Paul does not mention an empty tomb. Jesus’ appearances were not available to everyone—it was not a physical event. Paul affirms a bodily resurrection, not flesh-and-blood, but anew type of body.

<sup>3</sup> N. T. Wright and Marcus J. Borg, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*, 131.

- (3) The nature of the resurrection stories themselves point to the irrelevance of the empty tomb. They are not reporting the type of events a video camera would record. Take for instance the story of the Emmaus Road. They point to the fact that “the historical ground of Easter is very simple: the followers of Jesus, both then and now, continued to experience Jesus as a living reality after his death.” They experience the power of the Spirit, the same presence they had known in Jesus.

## C. THE CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

### 1. What happened after Jesus died?

- Sanders believes that
  - \ Jesus was executed and was buried by Joseph of Arimathea
  - \ The disciples were disappointed—the kingdom of God sounded so marvelous, the first would be last, the meek would inherit the earth.
  - \ The disciples were afraid they would be next, so they hid from the authorities
  - \ The women knew where he was buried, went to the tomb, but the tomb was empty
  - \ After the women’s report, the disciples regained hope that Jesus would return and the kingdom would come as he had promised

### 2. Did the disciples stay in Jerusalem or go on to Galilee?

- Matthew and Mark: The disciples went to Galilee
- Luke: The disciples did not leave the Jerusalem area
  - \ But Luke has two different ascension accounts: Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:6-11

### 3. Who did Jesus appear to and in what order?

#### a. Matthew:

- \ Appears to Mary Magdalene and to the other Mary (28:9f)
- \ Appears once to the eleven disciples (28:16-20)

#### b. Luke:

- \ Does not appear to the women (see Lk 24:8-11)
- \ Appears first to two unnamed disciples (Lk 24:11-35)
  
- \ Appears to all the disciples and eats with them (Lk 24:36-49)
- \ Was with the disciples for 40 days, appearing on and off (Acts 1:3f)

#### c. Paul:

- \ First to Cephas (Peter)
- \ Then to the twelve (not eleven!)
- \ Then to more than 500
- \ Then to James (Jesus' brother)
- \ Then to all the apostles (more than the twelve!)
- \ Then to Paul himself (1 Cor 15:3-8)

## D. APPEARANCE TRADITIONS

### 1. Paul

**1 Cor 15:3-9.** 15:3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received:

that [*hoti*] Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 15:4 and that [*hoti*] he was buried, and that [*hoti*] he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5:5 and that [*hoti*] he appeared [*ōphthē*] to Cephas, then to the twelve.

5:6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 15:7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 15:8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (NRSV)

1. The two-line creedal formula emphasizes that Christ died (supported by the phrase buried) and that Christ was raised (supported by the appearances). It does not presuppose an empty tomb, according to Gerd Lüdemann. Mentioning that he was buried means that “He was really dead.”
2. It is important to note that Paul’s account is the earliest written account (53 A.D.) and also it contains the earliest creed that Paul inherited from believers before him. Scholars believe that the creed can be dated to the 30s.
3. Paul had plenty of time to confer with people who had experienced an appearance of a post-Easter Jesus. Paul had met with both Cephas and James (Gal 1:18-24). And 1 Cor 15:6 Paul states that more than 500, most of whom were still alive, had resurrection appearances of the same type that Cephas, the twelve, and he had experienced.
4. Most important, Paul’s account in 1 Corinthians is the only account written by someone who claims to have experienced an appearance of the resurrected Jesus.

## 2. Appearances of Jesus in the Gospels

See handout

## 3. Other Appearances of Jesus

See handout

## 4. Was the resurrected Jesus bodily or non-physical in nature?

### E. AN INTRACTABLE PROBLEM

"The followers of Jesus were sure that he was raised from the dead, but they did not agree on who had seen him" (Sanders 279).

- (1) Not a deliberate fraud—They dedicated their lives to Jesus and died for their beliefs (Sanders 279)
- (2) Not calculated deception—It would have produced more unanimity. Instead, it created competitors: I saw him first. No, I did. (Sanders 280).
- (3) Not mass hysteria—It is suggested by the appearance of Jesus before 500, but it does not explain the traditions (Sanders 279)
- (4) Paul’s evidence is suggestive—Paul does not distinguish between the Lord’s appearance to him and that of other appearances *in kind*. If Paul had a *vision*, maybe the others did too.