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An Apologetic for the Death, Burial, and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Lawrence Garten Carmichael

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AN APOLOGETIC FOR THE DEATH, BURIAL, AND
BODILY RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

A Research Paper
Presented to
The Faculty of
Western Evangelical Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Lawrence Garten Carmichael
May 1980

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1 INTRODUCTION.	1
The Problem	1
Justification of the Study.	1
Basic Assumptions	2
Limitations of the Study.	2
Method of Procedure	2
2 THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST	4
The Claim of Death.	4
Historical Background of Jesus' Crucifixion and Death	6
The Historical Background of Crucifixion.	6
The Reason for Jesus' Crucifixion	9
The Scourging of Jesus.	12
The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ	16
The Actual Cause of Jesus' Death.	20
Proof of Jesus' Death	25
The Meaning of the Blood and the Water.	25
Further Confirmation of Jesus' Death.	29
The Church's Claim Justified.	31
Endnotes.	32
3 THE BURIAL OF JESUS CHRIST.	37
The New Testament Emphasis.	37
The Historical Background of Jewish Burial.	37

Chapter

Page

Family Obligation	40
The Time of Burial.	40
The Tomb of Jesus Christ.	41
Probable Description.	42
Owned by Joseph of Arimathea.	44
Burial Procedures	44
Handling of the Body.	45
The Graveclothes.	45
The Use of Spices	46
Some Conclusions Concerning the Burial of Jesus	49
Endnotes.	52
4 THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD. . .	55
The Historical Problem.	55
The Modern Historian's Methodology.	56
Divergence Caused by Presuppositions.	58
A Criticism of the Modern Historian's Methodology	61
An Inductive Examination of the Evidence. . . .	66
Possible Explanations for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ	66
Three Categories of Proof	69
The Empty Tomb.	69
The Post-Burial Appearances	77
The basis for the apostolic proclamation. . .	77
Liberal explanations for the resurrection appearances	80
Biblical accounts of the resurrection appearances	85

Chapter	Page
Historical Confirmation Since Pentecost	89
The Evidence Summarized	95
Endnotes.	97
5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	102
Method of Summarization	102
Summary of the Historical Data.	102
The crucifixion and death of Jesus.	103
The burial of Jesus Christ.	104
Summary of the Philosophical Data	105
Explanations for the Available Data	106
Proof of the actual death of Christ	107
Proof of Jesus' burial.	109
Proof of the resurrection	109
Conclusions	113
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	114

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ has been a tenet of the Christian faith from its inception. This study will examine the evidence that has been adduced for the resurrection. It is the author's purpose to find out if the resurrection of Jesus Christ can be supported both historically and logically.

Justification of the Study

The proposition of the bodily resurrection of Jesus has always been contended. This is no less true today than it was at Pentecost. The major opponents today are not the religious leaders in Jerusalem, however. Today the major opponents are to be found in two religious camps. The first are the liberals. They wish to flatly deny the resurrection and propose some other explanation for the evidence. The other camp also rejects the resurrection, though more subtly. This group of neo-orthodox scholars denies the importance of the resurrection, as well as the resurrection itself. Since the Bible stresses the importance of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is in the best interest of evangelical Christians to know what evidence is in favor of the

resurrection, what the arguments against it are, and what conclusions can be drawn.

Basic Assumptions

There are two major assumptions in this study. The first basic assumption is that the New Testament is historically reliable. This assumption will be held unless there is conclusive evidence to the contrary. The second major assumption is that of the possibility of an open system. The evidence for the resurrection can then be examined to see if it did or did not happen. If the resurrection is to be discounted, it will be on the basis of the available historical data and not by a philosophical presupposition.

Limitations of the Study

This study will be limited to an investigation of the historicity of the death, burial, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. The theology which stems from the resurrection will not be dealt with. The nature of the resurrection body will not be dealt with at length either.

Method of Procedure

This study will be divided into five chapters. The first chapter is introductory and is concerned with (1) stating the problem, (2) justifying the study, (3) presuppositions, (4) the limits of the study, and (5) the method of

procedure. The second chapter concerns the death of Jesus. In it the historical background of Jesus' crucifixion and the proof of His death are examined. The third chapter deals with the historical background and proof of Jesus' burial. The fourth chapter investigates (1) the presuppositions necessary for an unbiased study, (2) possible explanations for the resurrection, and (3) data that proves the resurrection. The final chapter summarizes the evidence and draws some conclusions.

Chapter 2

THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST

The Claim of Death

When one begins to examine the facts surrounding the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, he needs to begin at the very foundation of that assertion. "Did Jesus truly die?" If He did not actually die, then there was no resurrection. Though some would try to build a case for the idea that there was no historical Jesus or crucifixion,¹ the common confession of the church has consistently been, ". . . Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. . ."² One can see this proposition emphasized in the early church, as well as in the Scriptures. The church father Ignatius (ca., A.D. 40) wrote, "He was, then, truly born, truly grew up, truly ate and drank, was truly crucified and died, and rose again."³ Approximately seventy years after this, the church father, Irenaeus, was emphasizing the same fact that Jesus truly suffered in the flesh⁴ and was crucified, buried, and rose again.⁵ However, this fact is not found in Christian sources only.

The Jewish historian, Josephus, made mention of Jesus Christ. When writing his history of the Jewish nation (ca., A.D. 93), he recorded a short section concerning Jesus of Nazareth. F. F. Bruce attempted to reconstruct what

Josephus actually wrote in this passage. According to Bruce, Josephus probably wrote:

this man was the so-called Christ. When Pilate, acting on information supplied by the chief men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who attached themselves to him at the first did not abandon their allegiance.⁶

Josephus, then, was aware of Jesus' crucifixion during the rule of Pilate. Other Jewish writers make mention of Jesus and His crucifixion. F. F. Bruce summarized these Jewish traditions from the Tannaitic Period (ca., A.D. 70-200) succinctly as this:

Jesus of Nazareth was a transgressor in Israel, who practiced magic, scorned the words of the wise, led the people astray, and said he had come neither to take away from the Law of Moses nor to add to it He was hanged on Passover even for heresy and for misleading the people.⁷

One can find, then, both Christian and non-Christian references to the fact of the crucifixion of Christ under Pontius Pilate.

Most would agree, then, with the historian, Michael Grant, who wrote concerning the crucifixion, "This, again, must be true, because no one would have invented such a degraded end, a fatal objection to Jesus' Messiahship in Jewish eyes."⁸ If Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate, as the Christian church proposes, one would want to know more of the historical background of this method of execution.

Historical Background of Jesus' Crucifixion and Death

The Scriptures mention several major and seemingly minor incidents that happened during Jesus' trial crucifixion and death. One would want to know more about crucifixion, why Jesus was crucified, scourging, the details of Jesus' crucifixion, and what actually caused His death. This historical data needs to be examined to see if it confirms, contradicts, or explains the scriptural data. What information can one receive from the history of that day?

The Historical Background of Crucifixion

The origin of the death penalty of crucifixion is not easy to trace. One can find reports of crucifixions among the Assyrians, Egyptians, Persians, Greeks and Romans.⁹ The Romans probably picked up the idea of crucifixion from the Carthaginians,¹⁰ while the Jews may have received it from the Persians.¹¹ This method of execution, then, was a common punishment during this historical period.

This punishment was meted out for differing reasons among differing people. The Persians and Carthaginians practiced this upon high officials and commanders.¹² Among the Romans, this death penalty was inflicted upon an entirely different group of people.

In the Roman world, there was a sharp distinction

drawn between the upper and lower classes. Crucifixion was the supreme punishment that was inflicted upon the lower classes (humillores). This class distinction was generally drawn between Roman citizens and foreigners (peregrini). Later, after Caracalla introduced universal Roman citizenship, it became a matter of true class distinction. The upper classes (honestiores), those who were born into wealth, power and influence, could expect more "humane" punishment; while the lower classes received crucifixion.¹³ It is seen, then, that "only the scum of the earth by Roman interpretation, that is, are to actually be crucified, hurled to wild beasts, or impounded to penal labor in metal mines."¹⁴ For the lower classes, crucifixion was a common form of punishment.

Crucifixion was inflicted upon the masses for a variety of serious crimes against the State. Crucifixion was one of the three supreme penalties that the State inflicted for serious crimes. The three in descending order of severity were: the crux (crucifixion), cremation (cremation), and decollatio (decapitation).¹⁵ Crucifixion could be imposed for

desertion to the enemy, the betraying of secrets, incitement to rebellion, murder, prophecy about the welfare of rulers (de salute dominorum), nocturnal impiety (sacra impia nocturna), magic (ars magica), serious cases of falsification of wills, etc.¹⁶

In Israel, it was also used

as a means of waging war and securing peace, of wearing down rebellious cities under siege, of

breaking the will of conquered peoples, and of bringing mutinous troops or unruly provinces under control.¹⁷

This was also used against robbers, pirates,¹⁸ and as the "typical punishment for slaves."¹⁹ As one surveys the historical records, he can see that this was a very common form of punishment.

The Roman method of execution, both preceding the time of Christ and after, was commonly crucifixion. The records show that "in 71 B.C., during reprisals against the Slaves Revolt led by Spartacus, 6,000 crosses are said to have lined the road from Capua to Rome."²⁰ Approximately 67 years later, Quintilius Varus crucified 2,000 freedom fighters in the mountains near Jerusalem.²¹ Josephus states that crucifixion was the only mode of execution practiced by the governor of Judea.²² In 52 A.D., Quadratus crucified all the Zealots who were rebelling.²³ When Jerusalem was besieged by Titus, in 70 A.D., as many as 500 Jewish prisoners were crucified on the walls every day.²⁴

Death by crucifixion then, was an almost everyday occurrence during that period. The common man viewed crucifixion with a combination of disgust and fear. The Jews detested death by crucifixion because: "cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree" (Gal. 3:13b; cf., Deut. 21:23). The Romans, as well, loathed the cross. The Roman statesman and philosopher, Cicero's sentiments were, "Let the very name of the cross be far away, not only from the body of a

Roman citizen, but even from his thoughts, his eyes, his ears."²⁵ However, this horrible form of execution was still retained until outlawed early in the fourth century.²⁶ This humiliating form of execution is what Jesus submitted to. One can see from these facts that it would not be unusual for Jesus to be crucified. From this point, then, one would want to know why Jesus would be crucified.

The Reason for Jesus' Crucifixion

The Gospels state that, after Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jews led Him to the Roman governor, Pilate, to have Him executed. Though their Law condemned Jesus to death for blasphemey,²⁷ they knew Pilate would not execute Jesus on that account. Therefore, Luke states that the Jews accused Jesus before Pilate with three political charges. They stated that He was subverting the Jewish nation; was opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar; and that He claimed to be the Christ, a king (Luke 23:2). If blasphemy was punishable by death under Jewish Law, why would they want to go to Pilate? Why didn't the Jews put Jesus to death themselves?

The answer can be found in the fourth Gospel which quotes the Jewish leaders as saying, "We have no right to execute anyone . . ." (Jn. 18:30b). Though some authors doubt the truth of this,²⁸ the weight of historical evidence points to the accuracy of the statement. Provincial

governors were invested with the ius gladii, the right of the sword. This means that they had the imperial right to perform capital punishment.²⁹ This right was reserved for their use alone. "Permission to provincials to exercise it was a very rare concession, conceded only to such privileged communities as free cities within the empire." Not only was Jerusalem not a free city, but it was a scene of continual upheaval and violence. It is very unlikely that the Jews would have had the right of carrying out capital punishment.³⁰ To have Jesus executed, they brought Him to Pilate with the charge that He claimed to be "the King of the Jews."

The emperor retained the sole right of appointing any "King of the Jews." If any other appointment was made of a king, including self-appointment, it implied several things: first, the power of the emperor would be usurped; second, the emperor's sovereignty would be denied; third, insurrection would be assumed; and, finally, defection would be implied. Any such claim of kingship was equal to insurrection and treason. This was a

capital offense known as crimen laesae maiestatis, the crime of causing injury to the majesty of the emperor. This injury comprised not only treason proper, but all insurrections and uprisings against Roman rule, desertion from Roman forces, usurption of powers reserved to the emperor or his nominees, and all acts calculated to prejudice the security of Rome or of the emperor or of Roman governments in the provinces.³¹

When Pilate questioned Jesus as to the truth of this charge of kingship, Jesus readily answered that He was a king

(Luke 23:3). This alone was grounds for Jesus' conviction.

The law was broken simply by making the claim. Conviction did not rest upon whether a following was gained or not; the simple claim of kingship, even if one had no following, constituted the offense.³² The fact that Jesus did have a following made the offense even more serious. However, upon further questioning, Pilate was inclined to dismiss the charges.

Jesus was not claiming to be a king over an earthly kingdom. He stated that "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn. 18:36a). After hearing this, Pilate was no longer able to take seriously the charge of sedition.³³ Pilate desired to set Jesus free, but the Jews would not allow it (Jn. 18:39-40). The Jews confronted Pilate with the claim, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar" (Jn. 19:12b). This statement carried more weight than it would appear on the surface.

Pilate was placed in a position where, if Jesus would not renounce His claim to kingship, he would have to crucify Him. The governor was not only given the right to administer the law, he was obligated. The emperor's mandate to administer justice was binding upon Pilate. If Pilate would have refused to try Jesus or would have simply overlooked Jesus' claim to be a king, then Pilate would be

guilty of holding the emperor's command in contempt.

When a man was suspected of actual treason or insurrection against the emperor, or of attempting or making overt preparations for it, it would have been equally treasonable of the governor not to prosecute, try, and punish him according to the law. The governor was not only competent to try him, but under obligation to.³⁴

The Jews knew this and they pressed it to their advantage.

Pilate, then, had to try Jesus for the crime of crimen laesae maiestatis. Jesus claimed to be a king without first gaining the emperor's approval and that was equal to treason. From that point, there were three avenues that were open to Pilate. He could find Jesus "guilty and sentence Him (condemnatio); he could find Him not guilty and acquit Him (absoluto); or he could find the case not proven and ask that further evidence be adduced (ampliatio)."³⁵ Since Jesus would not waver from His confession of kingship, Pilate was forced to impose the death penalty upon Him. But before Pilate had Jesus crucified, he first had Him flogged.

The Scourging of Jesus

Scourgings were a normal part of the Roman procedure of execution by crucifixion. This pattern of scourging prior to crucifixion was probably learned from the Carthaginians.³⁶ That this form of torture was a regular practice is confirmed by the Roman historian, Livy (59 B.C. - 17 A.D.). Jesus, then, was taken from Pilate's judgment seat and

scourged.

That scourging was an extremely painful form of punishment, as noted by the Roman poet, Horace (65-68 B.C.), who described it as the horribile flagellum.³⁷ The whip that was used had a short wooden handle to which several leather thongs were attached. At the end of the thongs were either lead weights or sheep astragalus bones.³⁸ The condemned man was then forced to bend over and his hands were tied to a post. He would then be beaten on his back, loins, and at times, on his face and abdomen.³⁹ These jagged ankle bones and sharp pieces of metal would have the effect of causing "severe laceration of the skin, the subcutaneous tissues, and the muscles, but no damage to the ribs, and no damage to the internal organs of the thorax."⁴⁰ Though the Jews were limited to forty strokes by their law, the Romans were under no such limitation. Their only restriction was that the condemned was not to be whipped to death.⁴¹ Death was reserved for the extreme agony of the cross. There were several motivating factors to Pilate's scourging of Jesus.

Scourgings were inflicted upon prisoners in hopes of bringing about three desirable end results. The first purpose that scourging served, for the Romans, was that of deterrence. For instance, when someone was found to be a troublemaker, he would be beaten with rods. This is what happened to Peter and the apostles by the Jewish religious

leaders (Acts 5:40) and to Paul and Silas by the civil authorities at Philippi (Acts 16:22). A second reason that scourging was employed was to obtain a confession. The Roman commander at Jerusalem would have employed this method of interrogation upon Paul, but he was persuaded not to because Paul was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:24-25). Finally, flogging was an integral part of capital punishment.⁴²

"Under Roman law, scourging, as a matter of course, was included in every sentence of death, and it is commonly assumed that the scourging of Jesus formed part of the capital punishment inflicted on Him."⁴³ All three of these aspects probably came into play in motivating Pilate to scourge Jesus.

One thing that Pilate may have wanted to accomplish was to discourage those in Israel who claimed to be the Messiah. The Messianic promise was a continual source of hope to the Jews.⁴⁴ They were looking for a man of war who would be sent from God to deliver them from their enemies.⁴⁵ At different times various leaders claimed to be the Messiah and upset the peace in Palestine. Pilate, then, may have scourged Jesus as an example of what the Romans do to those who would claim the Messianic office. Secondly, if at all possible, Pilate would like to have Jesus recant His claim of kingship.

If Pilate could have forced Jesus to give up His claim to kingship, he would have set Jesus free. This

desire did not spring from purely humanitarian motives. Herod Agrippa, the elder, in a letter to the Emperor Gaius, in 40 A.D., described Pilate as "naturally inflexible, a blend of self-will and relentlessness."⁴⁶ His desire to set Jesus free was motivated by his antagonism towards the Jewish religious leaders. He did not like being in a position of being forced to give assent to their demands. Malcom Muggeridge believes that this antagonism was mirrored in Pilate's numerous references to Jesus as king of the Jews (cf. Jn. 18:37, 39; 19:3, 14, 15, 19, 21, 22). He sees these references as "deliberately intended to infuriate the Sanhedrin--which they succeeded in doing."⁴⁷ If Jesus would have recanted, Pilate could have thwarted the plans of the Council. Jesus did not, however, and Pilate was put in the position of having to have Him crucified. This type of procedure has other historical precedence. There is record of a Christian tutor, Ptolemy, who was arrested for being a Christian.

The city prefect had him manacled and tortured lengthily after he admitted his Christianity; it was when after the torture, he had reasserted his faith, that his execution was ordered.⁴⁸

Even if Pilate had no desire to free Jesus, the third factor of scourging being part of the process of execution would have necessitated the scourging of Jesus. The Bible then states that Jesus was led away after His scourging to be crucified.

The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ

The Bible records that when Jesus was crucified, they placed above His head the written charge (Mt. 27:37). This was a common part of the crucifixion procedure. The titulus was a placard that explained the causa poenae, the reason for the punishment. Jesus probably would have worn the titulus around His neck as He was led to the place of His execution. This would have informed all onlookers as to the cause of His punishment.⁴⁹

This explanatory placard was required by Roman law. In this execution, the titulus qui causam poenae indicat, the title that explained the reason for punishment, was the simple phrase, Rex Judaeorum, King of the Jews. This confirms the proposition that the death sentence Jesus received was incurred because of sedition.⁵⁰ After they hung the placard around His neck, they led Him off to the place of His execution.

There were four different types of crosses that could have been used in His crucifixion. The crux immissa was the type of cross that is normally portrayed in Christian paintings. It has the long upright beam with a shorter crossbeam. The second type was the crux commissa or Saint Anthony's cross. This type took the form of a letter "T." Later, Greek crosses of a third type had both crossbeams and uprights of equal length. The fourth type of cross was

the crux decussata or Saint Andrew's cross. This type took the shape of the letter "X." Jesus was probably crucified on a crux immissa.⁵¹

The crux immissa, generally, did not exceed nine feet in height. The palus or upright beam was often left permanently in the ground. The patibulum or cross⁵² beam was generally carried to the place of execution by the condemned. After the prisoner was nailed to the patibulum, it was affixed to the palus some distance from the top. The titulus was nailed above the prisoner's head so that onlookers would know the reason for his execution. This was the normal procedure followed in Roman crucifixions.⁵³ The Bible states that Jesus carried His own cross to the place of His execution (Jn. 19:17).

It is probable that Jesus did not carry the entire cross, which would have weighed 200 pounds or more. Condemned men normally carried only the patibulum, which weighed about 100 pounds. At the place of His execution, Jesus would have been placed on the crossbeam and nailed to it. The nails would probably have been driven through His wrists and not through His palms. Experiments performed by a surgeon, Pierre Brehant, showed that bodies, which were nailed to a cross through the palms, tear free.⁵⁴ This is confirmed archaeologically, as well. At a site near Jerusalem, Givat ha Mivtar, were found the buried remains of a man who was crucified. This man was evidently nailed to the

patibulum through the lower third of his arms. This skeleton has a groove in the right arm's radial bone which was probably caused by the nail being driven through the lower arm.⁵⁵ There is no biblical problem with this supposition. Even though Jesus told Thomas to examine His hands, (Χεῖρ), this may as easily have meant His wrists (cf. Gen. 24:22; LXX;⁵⁶ Acts 12:7⁵⁷). His feet may have either been nailed directly to the upright beam⁵⁸ or have been placed in a wooden box or form with a large nail driven through them; the box in turn being nailed to the cross.⁵⁹ When the condemned was thus affixed to the cross, his whole weight would have been supported by his arms.

This suspension of the body would bring several forces into play. If the weight of the body is carried by the arms, then there is traction applied to the chest. This would have restricted the thorax causing asphyxiation. To relieve this the condemned could shift his weight to his feet, which would enable him to breathe. Also, to prolong the amount of time a prisoner could survive on the cross, a peg was often nailed into the upright for him to sit on, thereby, supporting some of the weight of the body. The agony, then, could be stretched out over several days before the prisoner would finally succumb to exhaustion and die.⁶⁰ There was a way, if necessary, for the death process to be speeded up. The executioners could perform crurifragium. In this, the crucified man's legs were broken,

thus making it impossible for him to raise himself up to be able to breathe. The Bible states that this is what happened to the prisoners executed with Jesus and would have happened to Him as well if He had not already died (Jn. 19:31-33). This is what happened to the man whose remains were found at Givat ha Mivtar. Both tibia and the left fibula in His lower legs were broken, probably with an axe or sword.⁶¹ Until the prisoner died, he would suffer exceedingly.

The full horror of this process is hard for Western man to grasp. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia has summarized it well in the following:

The suffering of death by crucifixion was intense, especially in hot climates. Severe local inflammation, coupled with an insignificant bleeding of the jagged wounds, produced traumatic fever, which was aggravated by the exposure to the heat of the sun, the strained position of the body and insufferable thirst. The wounds swelled about the rough nails and the torn and lacerated tendons and nerves caused excruciating agony. The arteries of the head and stomach were surcharged with blood and a terrific headache ensued. The mind was confused and filled with anxiety and dread forboding. The victim of crucifixion literally died a thousand deaths. Tetanus not rarely supervened and the rigors of the attending convulsions would tear at the wounds and add to the burden of pain, til at last the bodily forces were exhausted and the victim sank to unconsciousness and death. The sufferings were so frightful that "even among the raging passions of war, pity was sometimes excited."⁶²

Although Jesus would have gone through excruciating agony, one would want to be sure that He actually died.

The Actual Cause of Jesus' Death

When one examines the actual cause of Jesus' death, it can be seen that there were a wide range of factors to consider. Upon closer examination, one can see that there are two important categories of evidence to consider: the first being factors that would accelerate any problems and, secondly, factors which could actually cause death. The factors which would aggravate any problem will be considered first.

There are six factors that would compound any problem without actually being a cause of death. These are: (1) mental agony, (2) exposure, (3) hunger and thirst, (4) loss of blood, (5) infection (i.e. gangrene and sepsis), and (6) shock.⁶³ These need to be considered as possible aggravating factors to the cause of Jesus' death.

That Jesus would have been under extreme mental agony is obvious from the biblical record. He had been up all night, went through a religious trial (Mt. 26:57-27:1), endured a civil trial (Lk. 23:1-5, 13-25), a third interrogation (Lk. 23:6-12), and endured the humiliation of crucifixion. This agony would tend to produce a state of shock which would increase the other problems. The exposure that Jesus went through would not be an important factor. He was crucified during a mild part of the year and during the warmest part of the day. Hunger and thirst would not have been a significant factor either. Jesus had not been without

either one long enough to be a serious factor. There would have been some loss of blood to be considered in Jesus' death. Jesus was flogged (Jn. 19:1), had thorns jammed on His head (Jn. 19:2), and had His wrists and feet pierced by nails. The normal process of haemostasis would have caused the hemorrhaging to cease, though. Blood loss, therefore, would not have been an exceptionally important factor. Nor would infection have been a significant factor in Jesus' death. Blood poisoning and gangrene would have taken more time to develop than the few hours that Jesus was actually on the cross. The final factor, shock, does not appear to have been a significant factor either. Shock has the effect of slowing down all bodily functions. It does not appear that Jesus was seriously affected by shock. This can be seen when one considers the fact that Jesus "never lost consciousness until He died. He was able to take an interest in His surroundings and even initiate a conversation with those around Him."⁶⁴ These factors would not have seriously intensified the actual causes of Jesus' death.

There are four actual causes that could have ended Jesus' life. He could have: (1) had a rupture of the heart, (2) suffered an embolism, (3) died of asphyxia, or (4) died from acute dilatation of the stomach. These are the usual causes that are proposed to account for the death of Jesus.

In the nineteenth century, rupture of the heart was the accepted theory for the cause of Jesus' death. This

theory is the one Josh McDowell proposes as most acceptable.⁶⁵ It has several serious drawbacks, however. Rupture of the heart, generally, is the result of a history of heart disease, especially arteriosclerosis. The amount of time Jesus spent in walking throughout the length of Israel would preclude this theory. Some have thought the heart rupture was due to intense spiritual and mental stress.⁶⁶ It has never been demonstrated, though, and cannot be accepted. Finally, when a rupture of the heart occurs, one does not die immediately. If Jesus had a ruptured heart, He would have died after several days of illness, not in a matter of a few hours as the Scriptures record.⁶⁷ The serious difficulties found in this theory cause one to look for a more satisfying explanation.

Another possible explanation for the death of Jesus is that of an embolism. It has been suggested that this blood clot would have come from the scourging that Jesus received. For an embolism to have taken place, there would have to have been an injury or disease in the pelvis or legs. It is not very likely that Jesus had an injury or disease in this part of His body; therefore, another explanation needs to be sought.⁶⁸

Some have proposed that Jesus' death was caused by asphyxiation. This is what normally would cause the death of a man who was crucified. A Czech physician in World War I reported an incident that would lend support to this

proposition.

The physician witnessed a punishment in the Austro-German army, whereby, the condemned was hung by his hands on a rope, his feet barely touching the ground. Muscle contractions rapidly followed. The thoracic cage filled with air, but could not be emptied. Oxygenation of blood gradually stopped and cyanosis followed. Asphyxia was the end result. Similar reports . . . come from eyewitnesses in Nazi concentration camps.⁶⁹

However, there are some major difficulties to this theory, as well. There may have been a peg (sedile) for Jesus to sit on, thereby, relieving most of the strain from His arms. Also, it is seen in Scripture that Jesus was still able to carry out a conversation (Jn. 19:26-27, 28); and, when He died, He cried out in a loud voice (Mt. 27:46), thus showing that His breathing was relatively unimpaired. Finally, He died suddenly, not after a long period of increasing asphyxia.⁷⁰ The final theory that should be examined is that of Jesus' death having been by acute dilatation of the stomach.

This theory was first proposed by Dr. John Lyle Cameron in the paper that he wrote, "How Our Lord Died," which he presented to the third International Congress of Catholic Doctors at Lisbon, Portugal, in June 1947. He believed that acute dilatation of the stomach was caused by the injuries Jesus incurred and would explain the meaning of John's reference to the water and the blood (Jn. 19:34). R. V. G. Tasker believes that this is the most suitable explanation for Jesus' death and has an extensive quotation

from Cameron in his commentary on John in the Tyndale series.⁷¹ This theory would be a possible explanation for the water and the blood, but it also has serious deficiencies. Acute dilatation is caused by a reaction to surgical shock, which causes the stomach wall to become paralyzed. The stomach becomes enlarged with gas and then fills with a dark watery fluid. This does not properly explain Jesus' death, however, because it does not occur until a few days after the operation or injury which caused the shock.⁷² Medically, then, there is no compelling reason for Jesus to die as quickly as He did.

The Scriptures may give the best explanation for Jesus' death. The Bible infers that Jesus was not killed (cf. Jn. 10:18); His was "a completely voluntary decease. . . ; death was not forced upon Him."⁷³ This can be seen when one examines closely the terms used to describe Jesus' death. The normal word that is used to describe death is θνήσκειν (to die).⁷⁴ None of the writers of the Gospels used this common term. Although Mark, in his terse manner, used the term ἐκπνέω (to expire) (Mk. 15:37), Matthew uses the term ἀφίγημι (to send away [His spirit]) (Mt. 27:50), Luke states that He παρατίθημι (set before [God]) His spirit (Lk. 23:46), and John states that He παραδίδωμι (handed over [to God]) His spirit (Jn. 19:30).⁷⁵ What is seen upon examination is that Jesus, by

an act of the will, chose to give up His life and was not killed.

Since Jesus died as quickly as He did, doubt naturally arises as to the fact of His death. Mere crucifixion was not sufficient proof of death to the first century Jews.⁷⁶ It was normal for prisoners to survive several days on the cross and Josephus had one friend who survived after being taken down from a cross.⁷⁷ Can Jesus' death be verified other than by His crucifixion, then?

Proof of Jesus' Death

There are three major categories of proof for the death of Jesus Christ. The first is the blood and water from the spear wound; the second is the witnesses; the third concerns His burial. The meaning of the blood and water will be examined first.

The Meaning of the Blood and the Water

The Scriptures state that it was the intent of the Roman soldiers to break the legs of Jesus to hasten His death. When they came to Him, the soldiers noticed that He was already dead and one of them "pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water" (Jn. 19:31-34). John presents this incident of the blood and the water in a literal way as an actual, not mystical, event. A medical doctor investigated the evidence

surrounding John's observation and came up with a very plausible interpretation of the event.

The doctor made some careful observations that later had a bearing on the medical interpretation of the event. When the soldier pierced Jesus' side, it was probably motivated both to verify Jesus actually being dead or if not, to bring about His death.⁷⁸ The result of the thrust of the spear was the immediate appearance of the blood and the water. The Greek verb used in Scripture does not suggest a spurting forth of the blood and the water, only the prompt appearance of it.⁷⁹ He notes, then, that

when our Lord's side was pierced, the two fluids, blood and water, ran out as recognizably distinct and separate forms. This means they must have existed separately in the body in a place or in a form in which they could not mix.⁸⁰

There are two possible explanations for the place from which the fluids came: either, (1) the blood and the water came from the same place, or (2) they came from separate locations.

If the blood and the water came from the same place, there were four possible locations for the fluids. They could have flowed from (1) the skin, (2) the pleural cavity, (3) the pericardial sac, or (4) from the abdomen.⁸¹ Dr. Wilkinson rejected these as unlikely possibilities.

The skin, as a possibility, was rejected quickly because of the size of the wound. Even if Jesus had many welts and blisters from His scourging, the single wound

would not be sufficient to explain the amount of fluid. Blood in the pleural cavity (the lining around the lungs) has to be discarded as well. For blood to hemorrhage into this area, there would have had to have been either a fracture of the ribs or else a penetrating injury of the chest wall.⁸² The scourging of Jesus would not have broken His ribs. Besides this, there would not have been sufficient time for the blood to separate into the clear serum and for clotting of the red blood cells. Jesus had only recently died and "the normal post-mortem changes would barely have begun to occur."⁸³ Blood and water from the pericardial sac (the membrane surrounding the heart) had to be discounted. This could only have been the result of a ruptured heart. This was previously discounted because of Jesus' obviously good health and His rapid death. Finally, the proposition that the fluids came from the abdomen could not be accepted. For this to be possible, two wounds would have to be postulated: one for the water from the abdomen and the other for blood from the heart. John only notes one wound (Jn. 19:34).⁸⁴ It is very unlikely, then, that the two fluids came from the same location. This leaves the option that the blood came from one area and the water from another.

If two locations are postulated, then there are three possible combinations that could explain the fluids: (1) the blood could have come from the heart cavity and great blood vessels and the water from the stomach; (2) the

blood came from the heart cavity and the water from the pericardial sac; or (3) the blood came from the lungs and the water from the pericardial sac.⁸⁵ Dr. Wilkinson examined these three possibilities with care, as well.

Upon examining the evidence, Wilkinson quickly dismissed the first proposition. The water in the stomach could only have come from dilatation of the stomach. Besides the previous objections to this suggestion, Wilkinson notes that the water from this cause would look very dark and muddy. It is doubtful that John would have described the event by the simple term water if that is what he saw.⁸⁶ The second explanation was not an unlikely one. The only reason Wilkinson did not accept it is the order of the fluids mentioned. If the pericardial sac was pierced and then the heart cavity, the order of the fluids would be water, then blood; not blood followed by water (Jn. 19:34, Greek text). The final proposition is the one that Wilkinson favored. The blood would have come from major blood vessels that were severed in the lungs followed by water from the pericardial sac.⁸⁷ That the water came from the pericardial sac can be confirmed by the French doctor, Brehant. He notes that

pericardial effusion is frequently observed during autopsy in patients who have suffered before dying. And experiments by Dr. Barbet indicate that if a cadaver is struck with a knife in the sixth intercostal space, pericardial transudate sometimes issues from the wound.⁸⁸

This incident witnessed by John would have been a good

indicator of death.

From Wilkinson's investigation, then, two important facts have come to light. The first strong indicator of death is the fact that the blood did not spurt out. If Jesus had still been alive, the blood would have come forth strongly, due to the action of His heart, and the centurion would have known He was yet living. The second strong indicator of death would be the pericardial fluid. This water-like fluid would only have accumulated around His heart after His death. There are some other non-medical reasons to believe that Jesus actually died, as well.

Further Confirmation of Jesus' Death

Merrill C. Tenney, in his apologetic for the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, emphasizes the importance of the witnesses of Jesus' death other than John. He considers three groups of witnesses in his apologetic. The first witness that he considers is the centurion.

The centurion would have been a valuable witness in this case. Centurions in the Roman army were chosen for their intelligence. He would have been a man of experience. The Romans chose their centurions from those who displayed alertness and ability. He would have been an expert on war and executions.⁸⁹ Pilate would have been leery of giving the body of Jesus to Joseph of Arimathea (Mt. 27:57-58), if he did not have someone as astute as the centurion to

confirm Jesus' death (Mk. 15:43-44).⁹⁰ The second pair of witnesses would have been Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

These men were the ones who went to Pilate to ask permission to bury Jesus. They would have been sure of His death, or else they would not have embalmed and buried Jesus. Both their viewing Jesus on the cross and their handling Him during burial confirmed to them His death.⁹¹ The final group of witnesses would be the women.

There were several women who were witnesses to both the death on the cross and the burial of Jesus. The women were Mary (Jesus' mother), Salome (her sister), Mary of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. These women were witnesses to the crucifixion and would have been sure of His death, as well.⁹² Beyond the witnesses to Jesus' death would be the certain physiological consequence of the burial of a severely injured man.

There were two things that would insure death if there was any life remaining in the body. If Jesus was still alive, the spices would have killed Him. The hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes would have been very pungent, have had a strong smell, and been very bitter. With these spices in such abundance and having been placed about the head as well as the body, they would have been suffocating.⁹³ The tomb, in conjunction with the spices, would have ensured death. Josh McDowell quotes Bishop E. LeCamus in this respect. The Bishop noted that:

If Jesus had been taken down from the cross while still alive, He must have died in the tomb, as the contact of the body with the cold stone of the sepulchre would have been enough to bring on syncope through the congelation of the blood, owing to the fact that the regular circulation was already checked. Besides, . . . the strong odors of aromatics in a place hermetically sealed would have killed a sick person whose brain was seized with the most unyielding swoon.⁹⁴

These evidences, then, lead to a firm conclusion.

The Church's Claim Justified

The Christian proposition that Jesus truly died at His place of execution has been amply demonstrated. There are contemporary sources, both Christian and non-Christian, that attest to His death during the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate. These sources are confirmed by early second century sources as well. It has been seen that the trial, scourging and crucifixion portrayed in Scripture were all in accord with known patterns of Roman law and executions. The medical evidence that has been seen both indirectly agrees with the scriptural cause of Jesus' death and directly confirms the fact of His death. Finally, logic confirms that Jesus died by showing that: (1) Pilate would have made sure of Jesus' death by questioning the centurion concerning it, (2) by the fact that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea handled His body and would not have buried Him if He was alive, (3) by showing that the women both saw Him die and saw Him buried, and (4) by the certain outcome of the burial of a severely injured man.

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Chapter 3

THE BURIAL OF JESUS CHRIST

The New Testament Emphasis

In the New Testament, one finds that the burial of Jesus Christ receives emphasis, as well as His death and resurrection. The Apostle Paul highlights its worth by telling the Corinthians that it was part of that which was of "first importance" (1 Cor. 15:4a). Each of the writers of the Gospels include reference to the burial, as well. Though the fact of Jesus' burial has no monumental intrinsic worth, it does have extrinsic value. The value of this event lies in the way it ties together both the death and resurrection and in the way it helps to validate each one. For this reason, then, one finds it worthwhile to investigate the burial of Jesus.

The Historical Background of Jewish Burial

When one examines Jewish history from an archaeological perspective, one finds that the Jews have always buried their dead. Early Jewish literature both confirms and commands this act to be done, as well. One can find various teachings in the Talmud on the burial of the dead. In the part of the Mishnah titled "The Sanhedrin," the law of burial was derived in part from Deuteronomy 21:23 which

states, "Be sure to bury him on that day."¹ Elsewhere in the Talmud the Scripture, "You will eat your food until you return to the ground . . . for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:19), was seen as a clear reference to burial in the earth.² Burial in the earth was seen as being closely associated with the will of God (Deut. 34:6).³ And burial of strangers was looked upon as an act of charity, equal to giving clothes to the poor and food to the hungry.⁴ In sharp contrast to this was denial of burial.

To be denied burial would be one of the most "humiliating indignities that could be afforded to the deceased."⁵ This held true for the Israelites as well as for the rest of the peoples in the ancient Near East. The Egyptians had elaborate burial customs to care for the dead; and those dwelling in Mesopotamia were very much concerned with adequate burial as well. As an illustration of this, one finds that "may the earth not receive your corpse" was a powerful curse to invoke.⁶ For the Jews as well, it is seen in 1 Kings 14:11 and 2 Kings 9:34-37, that if a corpse was left for dogs and vultures, it was a sign of disgrace and God's judgment.⁷ The land itself had significance in burial as well.

Not only did the Jews bury their dead out of reverence, but they were also concerned about their homeland. They did not want their land ceremonially or physically defiled by an unburied corpse. Because of this, even a

Nazarite, who was forbidden from handling the dead, was commanded to bury a corpse if he found it unattended.⁸ The Jews also would want to bury the dead so that the soul of the deceased would be able to find rest.⁹

The common belief was that if one died, his soul would no longer be enclosed in his body. If one was not buried, his soul would flit about unceasingly and never find rest.¹⁰ Burial, however, "confined the soul to the body so as to give it repose and save it from injury."¹¹ The Jews, then, tried to bury everyone, including slaves, pagans and criminals.¹² This has been confirmed by the excavations at Givat ha-Mivtar. One can see that those who died of malnutrition, from normal causes, from war, or from execution all received careful burial.¹³ Proper burial did not include cremation.

Cremation was practiced in Palestine during pre-Canaanite times, but not during the Israelite period. Cremation was seen as the penalty for "certain flagrant crimes," as a means of disposal when plagues made quick burial impossible, and for other exceptional cases. The rule, however, was burial and the Roman historian, Tacitus, noted that the Jews made it a "matter of piety."¹⁴ The piety that was associated with burial was gained in a great measure from its familial relationship.

Family Obligation

Burial was primarily an obligation that was to be performed by the heirs of the deceased.¹⁵ Kinship was seen as extending beyond death. The common desire of the Israelites was to be buried in a family tomb and, thereby, be united with those who had previously died.¹⁶ These tombs were only for family members. Public cemeteries were provided for the "very poor, for foreigners, and for criminals."¹⁷ If one could not be buried with family, then, at the least, burial was to be performed in the land of Israel.¹⁸ In the early Israelite period the dead were buried without the benefit of a coffin. The body was simply laid face up in the tomb. As soon as the flesh had fully decomposed, the bones were gathered up with the bones of other family members into an ossuary.¹⁹ This may be what is meant by the Hebrew idiom, to be "gathered to their fathers" (Judges 2:10). Upon death, then, the body would be quickly interred in the family tomb.

The Time of Burial

Although there is no specific biblical reference as to when burial should take place, the Israelite custom was to bury the dead within a day of death. This was probably necessitated by the fact that the weather hastened decomposition and the Israelites did not practice embalming.²⁰ Though it was forbidden for corpses to be left unburied,

there were certain mitigating factors that would hasten the burial of the dead.

There were three factors that could affect the speed with which a corpse would be buried: (1) Sabbaths or festivals, (2) evening or early morning, and (3) death by execution. Sabbaths and festivals were a particular factor in hastening burial. There were to be no burials during those time periods. If there was a death, even of parents whose burial rites normally took longer, the body would be interred before the festival or Sabbath began. The time of day also could hasten the burial procedures. The dead were not to be buried during the "time of the reading of the Shema Prayer" (Keriath Shema).²¹ These were said in the evening after darkness had fallen and burial was to take place before them. Finally, executed criminals were to be buried before sunset of the day of their execution.²² It would appear that all of these factors came into play in the burial of Jesus. His death occurred before a Sabbath (Jn. 19:31), evening was approaching (Matt. 27:57), and He was an executed prisoner (Matt. 27:31). The Bible states that He was then taken from His place of execution to a tomb nearby (Jn. 19:42).

The Tomb of Jesus Christ

There is no way of knowing for certain where the tomb is in which Jesus was buried. One can know the

approximate area of His burial, however. From archaeological excavations it has been found that the majority of the burial caves from the second temple period were located either in the Mount Scopus or the Givat ha-Mivtar regions.²³ This would place Jesus' tomb just north of Jerusalem or just north of Mt. Olivet.²⁴ The tomb would probably have been just outside the city walls, no closer than seventy-five feet from the walls.²⁵ Tombs fitting this description were very common in this period and usually occurred in groups.²⁶

John records the fact that this was a new tomb located in a garden. This was one of the three places of burial that were common in Jerusalem at that time. Royalty often had their sepulchers near the temple mount. The poor and strangers would not have the privilege of burial within the city walls. The lower classes were interred in public burial places, since they would not be able to afford family tombs. Those who were wealthy had family sepulchers in their gardens.²⁷

Probable Description

One can find evidence of tombs from the early period of Israel's history. The earliest tombs were natural caves in which the bodies were buried.²⁸ Four kinds of graves appear later on in Israel's history. The first type were recess graves. These were rock-hewn graves approximately six

feet long by one and one-half feet square. They usually were chiseled straight back into the side of the burial chamber perpendicular to the wall. The second type were sunken graves similar in style to a modern grave, only covered with stone. The third type was a bench grave. This was similar to the first, except the place of burial was cut parallel to the wall, not perpendicular. Finally, there were trough graves which were a combination of the sunken and bench graves.²⁹ It is probable that Jesus was buried in a bench-type tomb, since this was the oldest and most common type. A large stone would then be rolled across the mouth of the tomb to secure it.

The stone that was at the front of Jesus' tomb would be a large cylindrical piece of limestone. The stone would be held in place by a wedge on a slight incline until the body was buried. After burial, the wooden wedge was removed and the stone, weighing at least a ton, would roll down a groove until it came into place in front of the sepulchre.³⁰ The force of gravity would hold the stone in place preventing the disturbance of the corpse by animals or men. Stones of this type have been found in the tombs of the king of Adiabene in Jerusalem and in the tomb of Herod's family situated in the upper city.³¹ The Scriptures state that Jesus was interred in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (Jn. 19:38).

Owned by Joseph of Arimathea

Joseph of Arimathea is presented in the Scriptures as a man of wealth (Matt. 27:57). The Scriptures also state that the tomb that he owned was a new one (Jn. 19:41). It could be that Joseph was a new member of the Sanhedrin (Lk. 23:50) and wanted to have a family tomb near his new place of residence.

After Jesus died, Joseph asked Pilate for permission to bury the body. The Jews would have wanted to bury all three crucified men and Jesus would have probably been buried in a potter's field if Joseph had not asked.³² The fact that Joseph buried Jesus in his family tomb indicates two things about Joseph. The first is that he was a man of firm conviction. Jewish Law stated that convicted criminals were to be buried in separate burial places from other men. Joseph was willing to bury Jesus in his family tomb, since he knew Jesus was not truly a criminal. Secondly, Joseph had an extremely high regard for Jesus. Burying someone, other than one's family members, in the family tomb was considered an extremely high honor. Joseph's act of kindness kept Jesus from being buried in a potter's field, which would have been a matter of shame and disgrace.³³

Burial Procedures

The Scriptures do not go into a lot of detail concerning the actual burial procedures used in interring

Jesus Christ. They do, however, comment on three particular aspects of the burial: (1) the actual handling of the body, (2) the burial clothes used, and (3) the use of spices. Both the Scriptures and secular history provide information concerning the handling of the body.

Handling of the Body

Under normal circumstances, "the first act of the bystanders, of the nearest of kin who might be present, was to close the eyes and mouth of the corpse" (cf. Gen. 46:4).³⁴ Joseph and Nicodemus would probably have performed this kindness for Jesus. Next the body would be washed before burial. Even in modern times this has been the custom of the Samaritans. Their rites of burial include a careful and ceremonial washing of the corpse prior to burial.³⁵ Next Jesus' body would have been carried to the tomb. Though royalty were sometimes carried on golden biers,³⁶ Jesus' body would probably have been carried on a plain wooden plank. The body would then have been carried to the tomb and prepared in the antechamber of the sepulchre for interment in one of the burial slots (kokim).

The Graveclothes

The first thing that would be taken care of at the place of burial would be the graveclothes. Jesus would have been without clothing during His crucifixion (Jn. 19:23). It would have been a disgrace and a dishonor for Jesus to have

been buried without garments.³⁷ Joseph, therefore, purchased some cloth and wrapped the body of Jesus in it. There may have been two types of clothing used in Jesus' burial. It may be that Jesus' body was wrapped in a shroud or sheet when it was taken from the cross to the tomb, and then wrapped in linen swathes or bandages at the tomb. At the tomb, the body would be placed face up and straightened. A square of cloth would be placed over the head and tied under the chin to keep the jaw from sagging. The body would then be wrapped in the linen bandages with aromatic, gummy spices placed between the folds.³⁸

The Use of Spices

The spices that would have been used would not have been for the purpose of embalming. The Egyptians embalmed their dead for the purpose of keeping the flesh intact. One sees that the Egyptians embalmed both Jacob and Joseph (Gen. 50:2, 26), but this was not the normal Jewish custom. In the apocryphal "testaments of the twelve patriarchs," Judah specifically commanded his sons not to cut his body open to embalm him.³⁹ The Jews were not interested in keeping the corpse intact; they wanted the flesh to deteriorate. The sooner the flesh decomposed, the sooner the bones could be placed in an ossuary with the remains of other family members, thereby completing familial obligations towards the dead. The spices, then, were not used to embalm the body.

Spices fulfilled two important functions in the burial of the Jewish dead. The first function was that of covering the odor of death.⁴⁰ Aloes, myrrh and other spices would have been used for this purpose. Aloes was a fragrant wood that was pounded or reduced to powder. The myrrh was an aromatic gum that was mixed in with the aloes. The second function the spices performed was that of holding the wrappings in place. The semi-liquid ointment, nard, would be used to accomplish this task.⁴¹ The Bible states that Nicodemus was the one who brought the myrrh and aloes for the burial of Jesus.

The Bible states that Nicodemus brought about one hundred pounds of spices (Jn. 19:39). This would be equal in modern terms to about seventy pounds of spices. This amount would have been far more than was necessary for a proper burial.⁴² If this can be explained as generosity, it would help to explain his close acquaintance with the equally generous Joseph. The men, then, would have buried Jesus' body, while "the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee . . . saw the tomb and how His body was laid in it" (Lk. 23:55).

This raises a problem concerning the women. The Bible states that the women also brought spices and perfumes to finish the burial procedure after the Sabbath was completed (Lk. 23:56-24:1). One would want to know why the women would bring spices for the body if they knew Joseph

and Nicodemus had already placed spices in the folds of the wrappings. Several answers have been proposed as a possible solution for this problem. Four of these will be examined. The first plausible explanation is that the task of preparing Jesus for burial was not completed.

This is a very reasonable explanation. It is obvious from the biblical record that, due to the nature of the time of day and the approach of the Sabbath, the body may have been hastily wrapped, making it necessary for someone to return and complete the task.⁴³ The next two possible explanations are closely related to the first.

It may be that, because of the haste with which the body had to be interred, there would not have been time to prepare an unguent such as nard to hold the wrappings. The spices that Nicodemus brought would have been dry spices. These would not, of themselves, have been able to hold the wrappings in place. It is possible that the women came to anoint the entire body with the perfumed ointment that they had prepared and to rewrap the body.⁴⁴

The third possible explanation is that the women only intended to anoint the head and shoulders of Jesus. This would be due to the fact that the head and upper surface of the shoulders would have been left bare.⁴⁵ The final possibility is the one that George Eldon Ladd believes is a fair possibility.

This reason has no utilitarian motive to it. Ladd points out that it would have been useless for the women to anoint a body that had already been in the grave for two days and nights, coupled with the fact that the tomb was sealed with a heavy stone. What may have motivated them was simply a response of love. There may have been no practical motivation for it at all.⁴⁶

One can see, then, that this is not an overwhelming problem. There are several possible explanations that could account for this activity. Though one cannot be sure of the correct interpretation, one does not have to worry about this being a contradiction or error in the biblical record.

Some Conclusions Concerning the Burial of Jesus

Three conclusions can be reached when one examines the evidence concerning the burial of Jesus: (1) He was not buried in a common grave with other criminals; (2) the women would have known where the body was buried; and (3) the Jewish religious authorities would have known where the body was buried. His friends and enemies were not ignorant of the place of His burial. The location of His gravesite was common knowledge.

Some critics would disagree with this biblical teaching. They would postulate that Jesus was not buried by His friends, but rather, was buried by His enemies in a common

grave or unknown tomb and that the Christians made up the story of burial by Joseph to take away some of the stigma of His being buried by His enemies.⁴⁷ This proposition can be shown to be false by one important statement. The Scriptures state that Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (Matt. 27:59). Joseph of Arimathea was not some shadowy figure invented for a Christian apologetic. He was a historical fact. His position in Jewish society was known (Lk. 23:50). His birthplace was identified (Lk. 23:51). He was a known figure in Jewish society of that time. Any reference to him and the burial of Jesus in his tomb could have been easily refuted by the Jews if they were not true. The women would have been witnesses to the burial as well.

The Scriptures state that the women who were with Jesus in Galilee (Matt. 27:55) and who witnessed His execution and death (Lk. 23:49) were the same ones who "saw the tomb and how His body was laid in it" (Lk. 23:55). There is no reason to doubt this biblical statement. The women could not have gained permission to bury the body, but they certainly would have been concerned enough to see where the body was buried. That the burial was "carried out in the presence of the women is a datum of historical value."⁴⁸ The Jewish religious authorities knew where the body was interred, also.

The tomb owned by Joseph must have been fairly well

known by the Jewish religious authorities. It could be that the tomb's location was previously known; or they followed Joseph and Nicodemus to the tomb; or else, Joseph later led them to it, but somehow they knew where Jesus was buried. This can be known by the fact that they knew where to post a guard to keep the disciples from stealing the body (Matt. 27:66). This evidence leads to the third proposition of major importance to Christians: the Resurrection of Jesus.

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Chapter 4

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD

The Historical Problem

When one begins to study the evidence surrounding the scriptural proposition that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, he finds that there is not a broad spectrum of thinking concerning this issue. One finds that there is almost no gray area whatsoever. Among authors who have written concerning the resurrection of Jesus, there are those who firmly state that the evidence can only lead to belief in the resurrection, and there are those who just as firmly state that no resurrection took place. It is not as though there is any lack of forcefulness in the biblical records.

Almost every author that one reads agrees with the Catholic author who stated, "The Scriptures take great care to verify the reality of the event by witnesses."¹ This is agreed upon by almost all who investigate the resurrection. There is no ethereal quality in the Scriptures concerning the risen Christ. The witnesses who saw did not relate His appearances as being in some spiritual realm, nor did it take any special esoteric sense to be able to see Him. The ones who saw Him after His death were able to see Him with their eyes, hear Him with their ears, and handle Him physically.

When some investigate the facts surrounding this event, the conclusion they come to is that the proposition as stated is what must have actually happened. However, others, when given the same evidence, are just as adamant that it could not have happened.

They see how the Scriptures present the resurrection. They clearly see that "for Paul and the writers of the New Testament the resurrection of Jesus was obviously a reality";² their "conclusion, though, is that the resurrection of Jesus was an event only in the minds and lives of Jesus' followers."³ Before one can really begin to investigate the resurrection logically and historically, he needs to try and understand what would cause this dichotomy among these authors.

The Modern Historian's Methodology

Strictly speaking it is impossible to investigate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from a historical perspective. This is because the resurrection was not an event that was open to public view. There were no witnesses who saw Jesus being raised from the dead.

The resurrection is inferred from the post-burial appearances of Jesus.⁴ When one examines the available evidence, it is seen that the resurrection, itself, was not observable; the appearances do not seem to have been seen by neutral or hostile witnesses; and the available records

(i.e. the New Testament Scriptures) only state that God raised Jesus from the dead without fully explaining the resurrection itself.⁵ When the historian approaches the resurrection of Jesus, he has to be especially careful as he tries to "reconstruct the past by the critical use of ancient records and documents."⁶ One would, then, want to know how an historian would approach this task.

The modern historian has a generally agreed upon method of investigation to which he conforms. His methodology consists of four different avenues of investigation. The first avenue concerns an investigation of the sequence of events. Any of the events have to be able to be observed by ordinary physical means. The physical eye is more important than the "eye of faith." Secondly, an empirical cause must be detectable. One has to be able to see what caused this event to happen. Thirdly, the event has to be "intrinsically intelligible." Any event that is inexplainable cannot be historical by definition. Finally, the historian has to be able to offer an analogy of this event by other events. He needs to be able to make comparisons of the one event by other historical events.⁷ According to these standards, then, some historians would narrow the investigation of Jesus' resurrection into several narrow categories.

A Catholic theologian, Gerald O'Collins, has stated the limits within which the investigation should proceed.

He has mapped out five areas in which the investigation should proceed: (1) An inquiry into the possibility of the tomb being empty can be made. (2) One can investigate if there were men who claimed to have seen Jesus. (3) Can the accounts be attributed to legend? (4) When was it supposed to have happened? (5) Are the New Testament records accurate?⁸ Even when historians take all of these factors into consideration and carefully examine the evidence, there is still a definite difference of opinion between these scholars. One would want to know why scholars can take the same evidence, follow the same methodological principles, and come up with radically different answers.

The problem, upon examination, is found to lie not as much in methodology as it is in philosophical presuppositions.

Divergence Caused by Presuppositions

There are two fundamentally different presuppositions that affect the outcome of any investigation of the evidence, and both concern one's understanding of reality. The Christian holds to a view of reality that includes both temporal and eternal elements. Not only is there a real physical realm in which man lives, but there is a very real spiritual realm in which God dwells. God is transcendent from His creation and, yet, can be imminent. It is, therefore, possible for God to sovereignly change the course of history if He so chooses. The Christian then approaches

the resurrection from the point of view of examining the evidence to see if God actually did raise Jesus from the dead. Most non-Christians and liberal Christians do not hold to this presupposition, however.

The presupposition that many theologians, philosophers, and historians hold to is that the universe is a closed system. If there is a God, He is only transcendent and, therefore, all that happens is a result of natural causes at the end of a chain of cause and effect. The resurrection account, therefore, must have some other explanation than the obvious one.⁹ The resurrection has to be rejected, then, as an absurdity. It is not that the evidence for the resurrection is weak; the naturalist worldview simply excludes the possibility of it.¹⁰

This point of view had its major proponent in the eighteenth century, Scottish philosopher, David Hume. Hume believed that:

Belief is justified by probability, and that probability is based upon or synonymous with uniformity in nature. We are justified, in other words, in believing that which is uniform to our experience in nature; but when it comes to something which is so utterly unique, so discontinuous with ordinary human experience as a miracle . . . we just have no right to accept it, to believe it.¹¹

When one accepts this presupposition, he has to look for another explanation for the resurrection other than the obvious one that it actually occurred.

There are with this presupposition two possible avenues of approach in the investigation. The first action

that can be taken is to simply deny the facts and set the evidence aside. This is what some historians have done when they say that the empty tomb was inferred from the disciples' belief in the resurrection. The second course that can be followed is to accept the evidence, but find a natural explanation for it.¹² Therefore it may be admitted that the tomb is empty, but the reason for it is that either the body was stolen; the women came to the wrong tomb, or Joseph reburied the body in another tomb. These are the options that are open to those who accept the philosophical presupposition of a closed universe.

One can see this presupposition being worked out in practice when one reads various non-evangelical authors. When one reads about Rudolph Bultman, he finds that Bultman explains the post-burial experiences as visions. He postulates that the foundation of the Easter faith has been "obscured in the tradition by legend and is not of basic importance."¹³ Willi Marxen, as well, believes that the disciples had some kind of vision. He believes that the disciples had preconceived ideas about what the vision meant. They interpreted it as being Jesus, and they became "convinced that the resurrection had taken place."¹⁴ The scholar, Gunther Bornkamm, speaks for:

The majority of New Testament scholars today when he says that historical scholarship can take us only as far as the fact that the disciples came to believe that Jesus was risen from the dead: history cannot establish the truth of the resurrection of Christ as a historical event.¹⁵

The authors have been forced into taking the position that Jesus did not raise from the dead, because it could not have happened. They have adopted the view that the resurrection was either a mythical or psychological event only, since a literal resurrection would be a philosophical impossibility. It would seem, then, that the two schools of thought are at an impasse because of their presuppositions. The closed system presupposition does have some real weaknesses, however.

A Criticism of the Modern Historian's Methodology

One of the ablest critics of the modern historical method is Ronald Snider. He addresses the historical methodology on four of its fundamental positions. The first aspect of the historical method that he speaks to is that of the negative function of scientific laws.

The belief of the modern historian is that "because of the negative function of scientific laws, it is impossible for modern man to believe in the supernatural world of pre-Newtonian man."¹⁶ At one time, it was firmly held that the universe was a closed system. This thinking came out of the Enlightenment and did much to further the knowledge that was gained through science. When men began to reject a free mixture of the spiritual, as well as physical forces at work in the universe, science was able to make much progress in understanding the physical universe.

However, scientists no longer firmly hold to "a natural order governed by immutable laws." There is now conceded to be a principle of indeterminacy by those who deal with physics. The physical universe is no longer seen as the seamless sheet of cause and effect that it once was. It is now believed that "scientific laws tell us what could have happened only in the case of natural events."¹⁷ One would want to know, then, how this precludes the possibility of miracles.

The impossibility is no longer stated as a logical or metaphysical impossibility. What it turns out to be is a "historically conditioned psychological impossibility on the part of the modern historian!"¹⁸ It is the age in which one lives that conditions him to either believe or disbelieve the resurrection. Snider takes the modern historian to task for allowing himself to be influenced by his environment.

The historian that is true to his position must set aside this psychological influence from his thinking. The only consistent position that the modern historian can take is that of a methodological agnostic. From this viewpoint, he would have to admit that:

The God of traditional theism may exist and that miracles would therefore be a real possibility. Hence, he must decide the historicity of alleged miracles on the basis of the evidence that can be adduced for each individual case.¹⁹

This would mean that the resurrection must be judged on the basis of the available evidence and may not be rejected on an a priori basis. The modern historian not only has a problem with his philosophical presuppositions, but he has a real question when it comes to the uniqueness of the resurrection event itself.

The definition of that which constitutes a miracle makes the investigation of the event difficult for the historian. If one defines a miracle as an absolutely unique event, then there are no analogies for him to compare the event with.

In the case of something absolutely unique, one would not know what one was talking about nor could one bring arguments for or against it, for there are no criteria for dealing with an event unlike another.²⁰

Snider would agree with the proposition that "one could neither perceive nor conceptualize an absolutely unique event."²¹ He does not agree that the resurrection is an "absolutely unique" event, however.

There are several aspects of the resurrection account that are analogous to nature and can be compared with present experience. The proposition that Jesus was raised from the dead three days after His burial cannot be fully explained in terms of present scientific knowledge. Other aspects of the resurrection can be grasped, however.

By analogy with one's present experience of living men, one could in principle at least decide whether or not one were seeing a living person and whether he bore any continuity with some person who had died.²²

The historian could examine the accounts of the appearances of Jesus; he could investigate the claim for the empty tomb; and he could "isolate data and mount arguments on the basis of the non-unique aspects of the resurrection."²³ Since this is so, the historian can investigate the New Testament claim for the resurrection of Jesus. The third reason the modern historian would reject the resurrection comes from the study of comparative religions.

As one studies the formation of various religions, he finds that "myth and legend are the most natural forms of expression for the veneration of the extraordinary founders, teachers, and saints."²⁴ From this, the historian deduces the explanation for the resurrection of Jesus. This, however, is not an adequate treatment of the resurrection of Jesus. It may be that this principle is, in fact, true in all instances, but it does not rule out the need to investigate all instances. The principle serves as a warning in the case of any "miraculous claim," but cannot be espoused as an absolute. "In each particular instance . . . the historian must evaluate the evidence for that case quite independently of all the false tales."²⁵ Frequency of occurrence only establishes the trend and not the fact. A fourth objection that the historian would raise is somewhat related to the third.

Many historians understand the resurrection as a "miracle-story . . . told by mythologically-minded folk

without any conception of natural law."²⁶ There is an element of truth in this proposition. Pre-scientific man would not have been as conscious of the cause and effect relationships of natural factors and, so, would have found it easier to accept unusual or miraculous events as being true. This does not mean, however, that the Palestinians of Jesus' time were entirely superstitious without any recognition of the natural order to be found in life. For instance, Snider points out the observation made by John that "nobody has ever heard of a man opening the eyes of a man born blind" (Jn. 9:32). This demonstrates that the people of Jesus' day were not entirely naive. One can see, then, that there is no a priori reason for the historian to rule out the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

The historian cannot prove that the resurrection of Jesus was due to divine causes. The best that the historian can do would be to affirm the historicity of the resurrection event without being able to explain it scientifically. Just because the historian cannot prove the resurrection was due to God's intervention does not mean that he cannot make a judgment concerning its actually happening. Since one needs to hold his presuppositions loosely and the resurrection, therefore, cannot be discounted on an a priori basis, the evidence can then be examined to either support or disprove the resurrection.

An Inductive Examination of the Evidence

The evidence concerning the resurrection of Jesus needs to be investigated in an inductive fashion. One cannot help but hold preconceived ideas and presuppositions that will color the inquiry, but as much as possible, an attempt must be made to view the facts objectively. To begin the investigation, then, the various explanations of the resurrection event will be noted.

Possible Explanations for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

There are several proposals that have been offered as possible explanations for the resurrection. These hypotheses generally fall into one of five different categories. The possibilities are: (1) the resurrection actually happened, (2) Jesus could not have been raised from the dead, (3) one cannot know one way or another, (4) Jesus' resurrection was a spiritual one, or (5) His appearances were psychic phenomena. These are the basic categories that the explanations cluster around.

The first explanation has been the choice of the Christian Church from its springboard of Pentecost. When one examines the biblical record, it becomes obvious that the disciples believed that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead actually occurred.²⁷ Not only is the resurrection proposed as an actuality, it has been identified by Paul

as the pivotal point of Christianity.²⁸ If it did not happen, then all of the rest of Christianity rests on a false foundation and is therefore worthless. In this regard, one theologian has stated that "from the perspective of early Christianity, the question of the resurrection of Jesus is indeed the basic question of the Christian faith."²⁹ The second category of answers proposed for the resurrection is that which approaches the resurrection from the point of view that it was impossible for Jesus to raise from the dead.

Rudolph Bultman would be one of the major proponents of the position. His historical methodology

. . . includes the presupposition that history is a unity in the sense of a closed continuum of effects in which individual events are connected by the succession of cause and effect.³⁰

This makes an investigation into the possibility of God breaking into space and time to effect Jesus' resurrection unnecessary. These presuppositions have been dealt with previously and have been demonstrated to be a feeble foundation. The explanations that have been offered because of this presupposition will be investigated later, however. The third position is very much similar to the second.

The third position is that of agnosticism. This position of not being able to know for certain if Jesus rose from the dead is one that finds popular acceptance today. One finds, however, that this position is heavily

influenced by the philosophy of the naturalists. There is little effort expended in trying to verify the resurrection and much spent in trying to explain it in terms of natural cause and effect. Thus one finds the theologian, Willi Marxen, explaining the resurrection by stating that the

. . . witnesses, after the death of Jesus, claimed that something had happened to them which they described as seeing Jesus, and reflection on this experience led them to the interpretation that Jesus had been raised from the dead.³¹

This explanation will be examined as well. The final two positions will be mentioned, but not seriously dealt with. They have been put forth as explanations, but have not been accepted as viable positions.

The older of these two positions is that of a spiritual but not a physical resurrection. One theologian at the turn of the century clarified this position by proposing that:

When He was glorified, He was made alive in a spiritual body, which was the perfect counterpart, in the spiritual world, of His earthly body. [The corpse then was] resolved into its original elements and thus escaped corruption not by glorification, but by its immediate dissolution.³²

This attempt at wedding German higher criticism with traditional orthodoxy has been accepted by neither. The final position is the most recent to be proposed.

These resurrection appearances have been explained as a series of psychic phenomena. The body of Jesus was

"withdrawn into a fourth or higher dimension, ready for reintroduction into our space-time when necessary. The communication of Jesus was not physical, but rather, telepathic. Though this explanation might have a certain amount of appeal to some modern men, "its thesis falls far short of demonstration . . . and as a scientific explanation, it must be reckoned to be inadequate."³³ The explanations that will be dealt with are found in three basic categories.

Three Categories of Proof

The three categories of proof that one needs to investigate are the same ones that have been put forth as evidence for the resurrection almost from the beginning. The evidence can be grouped around the empty tomb, the physical appearances, and the post-resurrection results.³⁴ The evidence, then, will be examined inductively to ascertain the best possible explanation that will accord with the historical facts. The questions being asked are: Did Jesus actually rise from the dead? Is there some compelling reason (on the basis of the evidence) to think He did not? Is there any evidence that can strongly sway the investigation one way or the other? The place to begin then, is the same place the Scriptures begin, at the tomb.

The Empty Tomb

The claim the New Testament makes concerning the place of Jesus' burial is that on the third day the tomb was

empty. There are only two possible conclusions that can be drawn from the evidence: either it was or it was not. The simplest answer to the Christian claim of Jesus' resurrection is that the tomb was not empty.

The major proponent of this hypothesis is Kirsopp Lake. According to Lake, the women mistook a nearby empty tomb for the one in which Jesus was interred. This came about because the women were Galileans and not natives of Jerusalem. When they saw Jesus being buried, it was at twilight. They would have returned to the tomb in the dim light of dawn as well. Having viewed the burial under these conditions, they could have mistakenly returned to a different tomb. Lake would reconstruct the events in the following fashion. The women, in fear, were returning to the tomb to finish the burial procedures. They returned to the wrong tomb, however. Fortunately:

A young man happened to be hanging about and, guessing what they wanted, said to them, "you seek Jesus of Nazareth. He is not here [pointing to the tomb they were looking at]. Behold the place where they laid Him" [pointing to another tomb].³⁵

The women, who were afraid already, were surprised at being discovered and fled. Later, when reflecting upon the incident, the women mistakenly thought the young man was an angel announcing the resurrection.³⁶

The theory has several glaring deficiencies that necessitate its rejection.

To reconstruct the women's visit to the tomb, in this fashion, first of all does violence to the gospel

narrative. According to the Scriptures, not only does the angel state, "He is not here" (Matt. 28:6a), it states, "He is risen" (Matt. 28:6b) as well. The second major problem that Lake's theory encounters is the fact of other witnesses of the empty tomb. Peter and John knew where the tomb was without having to be shown by the women. They investigated the claim of the women and found the tomb empty as well (Jn. 20:3-9). Finally, if the disciples went to the wrong tomb, the Jewish religious leaders would have been anxious to produce the body for them from the proper tomb as soon as the disciples started preaching the resurrection. The women did not go to the wrong tomb. It was a clearly marked grave known to Nicodemus, as well as to Joseph of Arimathea (Jn. 19:38-39), to the Jewish religious leaders (Matt. 27:62-66), to several of the women (Lk. 23:55-56), and to Peter and John (Jn. 20:3). Proposing that the body was still in the tomb cannot be used to disprove the resurrection of Jesus from the dead then.

Not only is there good reason to discount the theory of the women going to the wrong tomb, there is good reason to believe that the correct tomb was actually empty. The first fact one needs to take notice of is the Jewish understanding of that day of the meaning of resurrection. When the disciples preached the resurrection of Jesus, it would have been understood in terms of a bodily raising from the dead. They would have known that the resurrection entailed

a physical raising and an empty tomb.³⁷ A second point to note is the difference in the New Testament Scriptures between the gospels and the book of Acts.

The gospels were written to the Christian community to give them all the facts surrounding the resurrection account. In these are found the references to and explanations concerning the empty tomb. When one examines the public apostolic proclamation of Jesus' resurrection to unbelievers, it can be seen that the empty tomb is not mentioned. The fact of the resurrection is emphasized, but there is no reference made to the tomb. When one considers this, the reason behind it becomes clear.

There was no point in arguing about the empty tomb. Everyone, friend and opponent, knew that it was empty. The only questions worth arguing about were why was it empty and what its emptiness proved.³⁸

The final point to be considered is closely related to the second.

When one considers the proclamation concerning the resurrection from a slightly different angle, it can be seen that:

. . . the preaching that Jesus had been raised from the dead could not have been maintained for a single day in Jerusalem if it had been known to the authorities that the tomb was not empty.³⁹

It can be seen from these facts that the empty tomb was known to both friend and foe alike at that time. How, then, can one account for the empty tomb?

There are basically only seven options that can be

proposed as an explanation of the empty tomb. The first five posit an external mover. Either (1) the Jews, (2) the Romans, (3) Joseph of Arimathea, (4) thieves, or (5) the disciples moved the body. The other two options are: (1) Jesus was revived or (2) Jesus was resurrected. These possibilities will be examined in this order.

The idea that either the Jewish leaders or the Romans took the body can be dismissed for the same reasons. Neither group would have a strong motive for wanting to remove the corpse from its tomb. Both groups were glad to have Jesus dead and safely interred. The Jews, with Roman permission, even posted a guard to make sure that no one disturbed the grave (Matt. 27:62-66). Both groups would have had real cause not to want the disciples to preach the resurrection message. The Jews would be upset over the message that accused them of crucifying the Lord of glory.⁴⁰ The Romans, likewise, would not want the resurrection preached. Their motivation, however, would come from a desire to keep the Jewish populace from rioting.⁴¹ Either group could have crushed the Christian faith simply by producing the corpse of Jesus of Nazareth. Their silence, however, confirmed the fact that they did not have the body. Instead of producing the body to silence the disciples, they turned to violence in hopes of quieting them (Acts 5:17-42). Another explanation that has been proposed is that Joseph of Arimathea moved the body.

The explanation for this removal is that, after Jesus was buried, Joseph changed his mind about wanting Jesus buried in his tomb. He, therefore, had Him reburied in another grave. This theory has many difficulties that keep it from being accepted as well. If Joseph did move the body, he must have done it secretly. Neither the Jews nor the disciples must have known about it. If the Jews knew, they would have mentioned it. If the disciples knew, they would not have proclaimed the resurrection. Beyond the fact that secrecy would have been extremely difficult with a guard posted at the tomb, is the problem of the resurrection appearances. Jesus was seen by His disciples after His burial and He was alive. Finally, the Jewish leaders were passive concerning the resurrection proclamation. They did not bother to investigate the possibility of reburial because they knew Jesus was not reburied.⁴² Some have proposed, then, that thieves took the body.

This theory has been suggested by some who hold to the idea of a spiritual but not a physical resurrection. It has two basic defects that keep it from being an acceptable explanation. The first defect is the fact that the tomb was guarded. It would have taken several men to move the heavy stone from the entrance to the tomb. The stone, the men, and their tools all would have made a significant amount of noise in trying to open the grave. The guards would certainly have apprehended them.⁴³ Secondly, the

graveclothes were left intact in the tomb. The only thing of worth in the tomb was the spice in the wrappings and that was not disturbed. The only thing missing was the body.⁴⁴ These two problems, then, make it necessary to reject this theory. This rejection leads one to examine the fifth theory: the disciples stole the body.

This is one of the oldest explanations for the empty tomb. According to the Scriptures, the Jews first circulated this explanation to discount the resurrection (Matt. 28:11-15). In 1778, the German, H. M. Reimarus, proposed this theory in earnest. In his The Goal of Jesus and His Disciples, he states that the disciples were unwilling to give up the life they lived with Jesus. Therefore, they stole the body and after fifty days announced that Jesus was alive and would return. The body, if found, would be unrecognizable.⁴⁵ This theory is extremely difficult to accept also.

This theory runs into the same problem that most of the others have. That is, the movement of the body past the guards is not credible. The theory encounters ethical and psychological difficulties, as well. Ethically, there is a problem encountered when one compares the high degree of ethics in their preaching with a foundation based on a lie. It simply does not fit. Psychologically, there is a problem as well. They might try to foster a lie, but they certainly would not risk their lives and suffer martyrdom

for it.⁴⁶ The theory does not stand up under examination in the end either. There are only two possible explanations, then, for the empty tomb: either He swooned or else He was resurrected.

The swoon theory proposes that Jesus only appeared to die; the crucifixion caused Jesus to fall into a stupor. The spear wound was serious but not fatal. Then when He was buried, the cool grave and spices would have helped to rouse Him. These propositions have been thoroughly discounted previously. The spear wound in Jesus' side proved that He was dead. Also, the cold grave and pungent spices would have extinguished what little life may have remained. Finally, a skeptic of the resurrection has certainly destroyed any credibility in the swoon theory. He wrote:

It would have been impossible for a being who was sick and faint out of a sepulchre, needing bandaging, sustenance, and attention, to convince His disciples that He was the risen Lord of Life.⁴⁷

This leads to the traditional explanation for the empty tomb.

The Scriptures state that the reason the tomb was empty was because God raised Jesus from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20). This cannot be proven absolutely from history. It does, however, fit in with everything that is known surrounding the empty tomb and it is contradicted by none of it. The empty tomb, then, leads to a consideration of the

major evidence proposed by the New Testament authors as proof of the resurrection: the post-burial appearances.

The Post-Burial Appearances

The resurrection of Jesus Christ has been a significant part of the message of the Christian Church from its earliest days. There are two distinct aspects to be noted in this preaching. The first aspect is that the apostolic message was one of resurrection, not survival.⁴⁸ There was not the slightest doubt in the apostles' minds that Jesus lived through His crucifixion and burial. They knew that He truly died, not just in appearance, but in fact. The second fact to be noted is that the apostles preached a bodily, not just a spiritual, resurrection. In the Scriptures

. . . resurrection has no proper meaning if it is not understood as a bodily resurrection. Rising from the dead necessarily involves the resurrection of the body. If there is no resurrection of the body, there is no resurrection at all.⁴⁹

This risen Jesus would be "in a visually perceptible, bodily form."⁵⁰ Was this apostolic conjecture, or did they cite proof for what they said?

The basis for the apostolic proclamation. There was a significant problem in the Corinthian Church that warranted mention of its solution in Paul's first letter to them. The church at Corinth had at one time believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁵¹ They had, however, lost

that faith. They, at the time of Paul's letter, believed in some kind of existence after death but not in the resurrection.⁵² To correct this error, Paul wrote to them and presented them with the evidence he had that proved the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The heart of his proof was the fact that there were eyewitnesses who saw the risen Christ.⁵³

He first of all quotes a carefully preserved tradition (1 Cor. 15:3-6b), stating the fact that Jesus was seen by Peter, the twelve, and five hundred of the brethren. Paul may have received this traditional formula within ten years of its occurrence. He then stated that at the time of the Corinthian letter (55 A.D.), the majority of the five hundred witnesses were still alive.⁵⁴ If anyone wanted to verify the resurrection for himself, all he would have to do would be to talk to them himself. The eyewitnesses were still living, known, and accessible.⁵⁵ Before one can go on to consider the significance of these eyewitnesses, he must consider something that Paul did not mention in his 1 Corinthians 15 passage. He did not take note of the empty tomb.

Liberal scholars have attempted to attach a negative interpretation to this fact. Their theory is that Paul did not know about an empty tomb, nor did he preach a bodily resurrection. This interpretation goes against much of what Paul teaches directly (cf. Rom. 6:1-11; 1 Cor. 15:4,

12-20; Eph. 1:20) and implies indirectly (cf. Col. 2:11-12; 3:1). One would still want to know why Paul would not mention the empty tomb if he did know about it.

There are several good reasons that can be adduced for Paul's silence. The first may be that even if Paul did mention the fact of the empty tomb, it would not prove the resurrection. The empty tomb would support but not prove the resurrection. Secondly, it was the women who first found the grave empty. The fact that the first witnesses were women may have disqualified this evidence from being entered as proof. Thirdly, the Corinthians had no easy access to the tomb itself. To cite the empty tomb as proof would not have done the Corinthians as much good as citing proof that they could verify themselves. The proof they could easily verify would be in the form of the witnesses. It is probable that Peter (1 Cor. 1:12), or some of the other witnesses (1 Cor. 15:5-7), would have occasionally visited the Corinthians and could be personally questioned by the Corinthians. To top this off, Paul himself saw Jesus and they could personally verify Jesus' appearance by talking to Paul.⁵⁶ Paul may have simply deleted a reference to the empty tomb, since it would not be a useful contribution to his argument. Even allowing for this, some liberal scholars still would not want to seriously consider the evidence of the appearances of Jesus.

Liberal explanations for the resurrection appearances. Once the liberal presuppositions have been adopted, there are essentially five possible explanations that can be offered to interpret the data surrounding the resurrection appearances. The possibilities are that the appearances are: (1) something supernatural (i.e. occult), (2) fabrications, (3) legends, (4) visions, or (5) a reinterpretation of the meaning of Jesus' life and death. These will be examined in the order presented here.

Before these explanations can be investigated, one point, that is applicable to most of them, must be established: the inhabitants of the first century Roman empire, as a whole, were not excessively superstitious. The idea of the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not one that was easily accepted by the people of that day. Neither the disciples (Lk. 24:36-41), the Jewish leaders (Matt. 27:63), or the pagan Gentiles (Acts 17:32) easily believed in the resurrection. The man of the first century did not have any easier time accepting the resurrection than does modern man.⁵⁷ With this in mind, then, it is possible to examine the liberal explanations for the resurrection.

That the resurrection is to be explained as the result of spiritism is one of the least acceptable to both liberal and conservative alike. The resurrection appearances do not have the trappings that are normally part of the occult. There was no medium, no seeking after the

departed spirit, and no confinement to dimly lit rooms in the evening hours. In contrast to this:

The One who appeared seems to have been very different from alleged spirit emanations. He could be clearly seen in broad daylight, recognized with some difficulty (it seems), and could invite a finger to explore the print of the nails.⁵⁸

This explanation is not acceptable on these grounds. Another unlikely prospect is that the appearances reported were fabrications.

This particular position is not taken by most modern critics. There are too many factors that mitigate against its acceptance. When one looks at the number of the witnesses, their high moral character, their psychological condition following Jesus' crucifixion, and their willingness to suffer for their belief in Jesus' resurrection, then the proposition that the stories were lies has to be rejected.⁵⁹ A similar position is that which posits the resurrection messages as legend.

This position is probably not held by any modern critics, as well. If it was possible to date the gospels two or three hundred years after the fact, the proposition that the preaching of the resurrection is mere legend would be possible. The gospels, however, were all written within the first century and therefore would be read by eyewitnesses to the account. Not only that, but the accounts do not have the appearance of legend; they are dignified, restrained, and true to life and psychology. The difference

between the gospels and the third and fourth century apocryphal gospels is obvious. Therefore, this position is not tenable as well.⁶⁰ Most modern, liberal scholars hold to the last two positions: either they were visions of a sort or else they were reinterpretations of the facts.

This position, simply stated, is that the resurrection appearances were either hallucinatory, psychological, or pathological experiences.⁶¹ They did not happen objectively; they were subjective experiences. This explanation has too many drawbacks to be acceptable. The first objection that can be raised is that of the descriptions of the appearances.

When visions are described, they are usually described in terms of what is seen (cf. Rev. 1:12-18). In the New Testament accounts "the emphasis all lies not on what they saw but on whom they saw."⁶² Besides lacking the form of a vision, the resurrection narratives lack the necessary conditions for a vision.

The first condition that is necessary is that of a susceptible personality that would be likely to have visions. The disciples, however, cannot be categorized as belonging to this type as a whole. Secondly, visions happen only to individuals.

In the gospel accounts, some individuals did see the risen Christ. He did not only show Himself to one or two individuals, though. He showed Himself to several

small groups, as well as larger groups up to five hundred in number. From these facts it can be seen that the visions were not "purely subjective; it looks as if these experiences had some objective foundation."⁶³ For these to have been visions, they must have been expected as well.

The disciples were not expecting Jesus to rise from the dead. Jewish apocalyptic thought of that day conceived of the resurrection as a general resurrection of all men, to take place at the end of the age. No one expected just one man to rise from the dead. There was no compelling reason for them to await Jesus' resurrection from the dead.⁶⁴ A fourth requirement of visions was that of "suitable circumstances with suitable surroundings."⁶⁵

The resurrection accounts have been presented in the New Testament in a wide variety of persons, places, and moods. Jesus appeared to individuals, small groups, and large groups. He was seen in a garden, in the upper room, on the road to Emmaus, by Lake Galilee, in the mountains near Galilee, and on the Mount of Olives. The disciples met Him while in a variety of moods: some of the women were fearful, Peter was filled with remorse, Thomas was doubting, the Emmaus pair were deep in thought, and some of the disciples were distracted by their fishing.⁶⁶ These would not be conducive to a subjective experience of a vision.

The final necessary criteria would be that the

visions took place over a considerable length of time. Visions normally phase out by becoming more and more frequent until there is a crisis or else they gradually taper off. The resurrection appearances spanned a space of only forty days and then ceased. Not one of the disciples claimed to continue to see Jesus after that time.⁶⁷ One author has aptly stated that subjective visions

. . . require a certain conditioning to be experienced. These conditions did not prevail. Faith, then, did not create these experiences, the experiences created faith.⁶⁸

The final explanation given for the appearances is not so much that they were visions, but that they were a reinterpretation or restatement of the facts surrounding the resurrection. Different authors have proposed this theory in different ways. Johannes Weiss states that:

"The appearances were not external phenomena but were merely the goals of an inner struggle in which faith won the victory over doubt." In a similar fashion, Morton Enslin proposed that the disciples were still under the influence of Jesus' personality. That influence affected them even after His death and "There arose the inevitable confidence that He had not been--could not have been thwarted."⁶⁹

This position is plagued by a twofold problem. The first part of the problem is the attitude of the disciples; they were crushed by His death. They interpreted His crucifixion not as triumph but as proof of His failure. Something happened to radically change their minds. Secondly the apostles, after seeing Jesus raised from the dead, were now able to withstand persecution and martyrdom. Only their

belief in the facticity of the resurrection sustained them. Their faith was based on fact, not on a reinterpretation. Since the appearances cannot be discounted as something other than what they are (i.e. actual bodily appearances), there remains the task of examining the events themselves.

Biblical accounts of the resurrection appearances.

If one is to at least allow the possibility of the appearances being factual, there are some questions one would want to ask of the biblical records. One would want to know: (1) who saw Jesus, (2) what did they see, and (3) were they convinced themselves? These can all be answered from the biblical records.

The Scriptures identify at least eleven different instances when Jesus was seen during the forty days following His crucifixion. He was seen: (1) by Mary at His tomb (Jn. 20:11-17), (2) by the other women who were with Mary (Matt. 28:9-10), (3) by Peter in the afternoon of the resurrection day (Lk. 24:34), (4) by two disciples on the Emmaus Road (Lk. 24:13-35), (5) by ten of the apostles (Lk. 24:36-43), (6) by the ten plus Thomas (Jn. 20:26-29), (7) by seven disciples at the sea of Galilee (Jn. 21:1-23), (8) by five hundred at one time (1 Cor. 15:6), (9) by James, the Lord's brother (1 Cor. 15:7), (10) by eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-20), and (11) by His disciples on Mount Olivet prior to His ascension.⁷⁰ These appearance narratives have some important

aspects that add to their credibility.

The first thing to be noticed in these narratives is that the women have been mentioned as being the first to see Jesus. Women, however, were not used as witnesses in legal cases. The testimony of a female was not considered as binding evidence in Jewish legal cases.⁷¹ If the disciples wanted to fabricate an appearance, they would have had someone with a higher status than the women find the empty tomb. Since the women are cited, it lends credence to the idea that this is a historical incident, rather than a lie. The second fact to be noted is the vast number of witnesses.

If there were only a few witnesses to the resurrection, one might suspect collusion. However, there were an ample number of witnesses to the fact of Jesus' resurrection. Not only did those of Jesus' inner circle of disciples see Him (Lk. 24:34), but the rest of His apostles (Jn. 20:26-29), and five hundred of His followers saw Him alive after His death and burial. The sheer wealth of witnesses mitigates against collusion. Not all of the witnesses were amenable to the resurrection as well.

Two of the early witnesses did not readily believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Thomas wanted objective verification of the resurrection of Jesus before he would believe. When Jesus appeared to Thomas in the upper room, his skepticism melted. The bodily appearance of Jesus

allayed his doubts (Jn. 20:26-29). Jesus' brother, James, was not a believer prior to the resurrection (Jn. 7:3). His reluctance to believe was overcome by Jesus appearing to him, as well. As the result of his belief, he became one of the major leaders in the New Testament Church (Gal. 1:19).⁷² It cannot be said, then, that these witnesses had a predisposition towards belief. On the contrary, they were compelled by the strongest of evidence to change their doubt into faith. With these facts in mind, then, one can draw some conclusions concerning the quality of the witnesses.

The witnesses to Jesus' resurrection can be trusted. The narratives appear to be an accurate reporting of the events. They are not fabrications and, likewise, there does not appear to be any collusion between the witnesses. They are too numerous and too loosely knit to be perpetrators of a well-formed lie. Finally, the witnesses were not all predisposed to believe in the resurrection. James and Thomas believed only after being confronted by the strongest evidence: Jesus, Himself. If they were witnesses, then, what exactly did they see?

The Scriptures do not leave any doubt as to what the disciples saw; they saw Jesus Christ in the flesh. They did not see an ethereal vision. It is evident that Jesus, in His resurrected state, was able to do more than before He was crucified. After He was resurrected, He was

able to change His appearance at will (Lk. 24:13-35), He was able to pass through closed doors (Lk. 24:36-43), and He ascended bodily into the air (Acts 1:3-9). Though His nature now included more than it had before, yet it was still a body.

The disciples knew that these appearances were not visions. Thomas was able to touch the wounds that Jesus incurred at His crucifixion; Peter ate and drank with Him; and Mary talked with Him face to face. One can see, then, "that for these witnesses themselves, the manifestation was unquestionable. No room was left for any doubt of its nature."⁷³ The Scriptures do seem to imply that the appearances may not have been completely satisfactory evidence for them.

When Jesus appeared to His disciples on a mountain in Galilee, the Scriptures state that many worshipped Him but some doubted (Matt. 28:17). Does this mean that they were not sure if they were actually seeing the risen Christ or not? The Greek word for doubt used here does not indicate a lack of belief.

The Greek word used is distadzō. This is an unusual New Testament word having the flavor of hesitation.⁷⁴ The disciples were not doubtful about whether they were really seeing Jesus or not; they were hesitant about acting on their knowledge. Peter experienced the same problem when he saw Jesus walking on the water. He did not have a

problem with believing that Jesus was walking upon the water. His doubt came when he attempted to act upon his knowledge.⁷⁵ The disciples, then, were not doubtful about whether the appearance of Jesus was real or just a vision. They knew that the appearance was real. Their doubt came in actually trying to apply that knowledge. Thus, the three questions have been answered from the Scriptures.

The witnesses, then, can be accepted as trustworthy. The natural, artless picture that is drawn of them in the Scriptures commends their testimony as being trustworthy. What did they see? They saw their encounter with Jesus was tangible; He was not an ethereal apparition. Were they convinced? The Scriptures show that the witnesses believed they were actually seeing Jesus, though some were hesitant about acting on that knowledge. The final category of proof that supports the resurrection is that of the historical results.

Historical Confirmation Since Pentecost

Since the day of Pentecost, several institutions and situations have developed that are best explained by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no other explanation that accounts for all the data as well as the resurrection. There are at least eight historical developments that support the resurrection.

These developments and events are still, for the most

part, evident today and can be traced back to the day of Pentecost. The eight evidences are: (1) the institution of the church, (2) the growth of the church, (3) the change in the apostles, (4) Christian celebration on Sunday, (5) the celebration of eucharist, (6) the resurrection was foretold, (7) power in the lives of the saints, and (8) the present experience of the believer. The fact of the Christian Church is probably the strongest evidence that can be presented for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁷⁶

For the church to be founded at all is strong evidence for the resurrection. The Jews who lived during the time of Christ had high Messianic expectations. They were looking for the One who was of the line of David and who would deliver them from the oppressive rule of the Romans.⁷⁷ There were men who claimed to be the Messiah both before Jesus began His ministry⁷⁸ and afterwards.⁷⁹ Their claims were consistently nullified by Roman opposition. It would take more than a mere claim to Messiahship to prove it. Malcom Muggeridge illustrated this fact when he stated if "Jesus had been released and Barabbas crucified, it is extremely improbable that Barabbianity would have swept over the western world as Christianity did."⁸⁰ This piece of mild sarcasm illustrates an important point: it took more than simple belief in Jesus' claim to be the Messiah to found the church once He was executed. His post-burial appearances were powerful enough evidence for the disciples

to stop looking for another Messiah and to build the church on Jesus Christ. The church survived despite the crucifixion of Jesus. Not only did it survive, it grew!

This is the second major evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. One might concede that a small group of believers could be formed without an actual resurrection, but the church not only was established, it grew rapidly as well. It has grown steadily against powerful opposition.

The church has had to grow in the midst of difficult circumstances. In the first place, the church has grown in spite of cultural opposition. From the beginning, the Jewish religious leaders opposed the Christians. The Romans soon opposed them, as well, and labeled the Christians as atheists, antisocial and immoral.⁸¹ The opposition they encountered was both psychological and physical. Secondly, the church grew in the midst of people who would easily be able to disprove the claims of the church if they were not true. One of the best illustrations of this fact was the conversion of many of the priests (Acts 6:7). These men would probably have known the best arguments that could have been leveled against the Christians. Despite this, many of them became Christians. The case that could be argued against the resurrection was evidently much weaker than the evidence in favor of the resurrection.⁸² The continuity of the church through the centuries is another

testimony to the resurrection. Church growth

. . . in spite of ignorance, unbelief, and erosion of doctrine would be difficult to explain if there were not a solid basis for its origination and continuation in the historic resurrection of Christ.⁸³

The church has grown in spite of obstacles in its path. This growth was initially nurtured by the same ones who were afraid of adversity.

When one contrasts the disciples before and after the resurrection, he notes a dramatic change in them.

Scripture indicates that the disciples before the resurrection were utterly disheartened, were meeting in fear in obscure places and were dismayed at the death of Christ.⁸⁴

There is no indication that they were anticipating the resurrection. They were crushed. After the resurrection the disciples were completely changed. From being a frightened little band of followers of an executed criminal, they became joyous and fearless witnesses to the resurrection. Beyond this the fact that Thomas who actively doubted, James who was skeptical of Jesus, and Paul who persecuted the early church, all became advocates of the resurrection after seeing Jesus alive after His death. The radical change in these men is best explained by their becoming witnesses to the resurrection. This change did not occur in a vacuum!

The apostles preached something they obviously believed. This expression was made in an extremely dangerous context. They were preaching to the Romans that the man they executed for insurrection was now alive. They

proclaimed to the Jews that the man they turned over to the Romans was the Messiah. Their faith, then, was not only radically different than that which they experienced following Jesus' execution, but it was maintained at great risk as well.⁸⁵ That Jesus rose from the dead is the best explanation for this. The next major historical evidence is found in the changing of the day for worship from Saturday to Sunday.

The first believers were converted in the Jewish community. These Christians were dedicated Jews who had an almost fanatical attachment to the Jewish Sabbath, as did all the other Jews of that day.⁸⁶ Early in the apostolic church, the first day of the week became a special day of worship and praise. The reason they placed special emphasis upon this day was because Jesus arose on the first day of the week. This is the only explanation that has a historical foundation for the "change from the seventh day of rest to the first day of the week as a day of worship."⁸⁷ There is another celebration that is best explained by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It can be historically demonstrated that from the church's inception it has celebrated the eucharist. This act of worship

. . . took the form of a re-enactment of the episode on the dreadful night on which the Master had been betrayed and arrested, when He broke the bread and blessed the cup. The celebration of the judicial murder of a dead leader would have provided no occasion of joy and eucharista apart from the certainty that

Jesus was risen from the dead.⁸⁸

Not only did Jesus rise from the dead, but Jesus Himself foretold His resurrection.

This is startling proof in itself. There are ample references in the New Testament that Jesus knew and told His disciples that He would die and in three days rise again, even though His disciples did not understand it (Matt. 12:40; 27:63; Mk. 8:31; 14:59; Jn. 2:19, 21; 10:18).⁸⁹ To foretell an event that He had no control over and that others tried to stop is an unusual, though powerful, type of proof. The last two categories of events are valid proof, though they appeal more to the theist than to the atheist or agnostic.

In these two cases, God confirms the proclamation of the resurrection. In the first case, the confirmation is objective. In the second, it is subjective. God confirmed the resurrection objectively

. . . by supernatural acts of healing, by the divine judgment of Ananias and Sapphira, by the supernatural appearance of Christ to Paul, and numerous other events in which the supernatural power of God was evident. The book of Acts would have been meaningless and impossible if it had not been for an actual resurrection of Christ from the dead.⁹⁰

The second category is just as evident, though it is subjective and follows one's faith in Christ.

This final category of "historical evidence is confirmed in the experience of believers."⁹¹ Not only have people from every strata of society "found in the risen

Christ their joy and peace and certainty,"⁹² but there has been a "transforming power" that accompanies belief as well.⁹³ These historical evidences confirm the resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the best explanation for the fact of the church, the growth of the church, the change in the disciples, the practice of worship on Sunday, the observance of the eucharist, and God's confirming evidence. Any other explanation that can be offered will not be able to correlate all the known data. The resurrection alone is coherent.

The Evidence Summarized

When the evidence is examined concerning the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, there is only one conclusion that can be reached with surety. The first thing one can say is that the resurrection cannot be denied on an a priori basis. The evidence has to be examined to determine the best explanation for the facts. The facts, upon careful examination, only allow one explanation. The fact of the empty tomb, the post-burial appearances, and the historical institutions and events that have arisen following Pentecost leave room for only one explanation: Jesus truly was raised in bodily form from the dead. The proposition that it did not happen and the position of historical agnosticism, therefore, have to be rejected as unsound. The available evidence can be reconciled by the proposition

that Jesus rose from the dead.

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⁴⁶Stott, p. 51.

⁴⁷Anderson, p. 7.

⁴⁸A. Michael Ramsey, The Resurrection of Christ (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 35.

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⁵¹Snider, "St. Paul's Understanding," p. 130.

⁵²Snider, "St. Paul's Understanding," p. 131.

⁵³Snider, "St. Paul's Understanding," p. 132.

⁵⁴Anderson, p. 5.

⁵⁵Snider, "St. Paul's Understanding," p. 128.

⁵⁶O'Collins, p. 44.

⁵⁷R. G. Crawford, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ," Theology: A Monthly Review, 75:171, April, 1972.

⁵⁸Anderson, p. 8.

⁵⁹Anderson, p. 5.

⁶⁰Anderson, p. 6.

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⁶²C. F. Evans, Resurrection and the New Testament (Naperville, Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1970), p. 173.

⁶³Anderson, p. 8.

⁶⁴O'Collins, p. 31.

⁶⁵Anderson, p. 8.

⁶⁶Stott, p. 57.

⁶⁷Anderson, p. 8.

⁶⁸Ladd, p. 136.

⁶⁹Ladd, p. 136.

⁷⁰Walvoord, pp. 101-3.

⁷¹O'Collins, p. 44.

⁷²F. F. Bruce, New Testament History (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1969), p. 243.

⁷³Klaas Runia, "The Third Day He Rose Again. . . ,"
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⁷⁴I. P. Ellis, "But Some Doubted," New Testament Studies, 14:576, July, 1968.

⁷⁵Ellis, p. 578.

⁷⁶Richardson, p. 152.

⁷⁷Bruce, p. 133.

⁷⁸Bruce, p. 37.

⁷⁹Bruce, p. 390.

⁸⁰Malcom Muggeridge, Jesus: The Man Who Lives (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1975), p. 178.

⁸¹Tenney, pp. 138-40.

⁸²James Martin, Did Jesus Rise From the Dead? (New York: Association Press, 1956), pp. 67-68.

⁸³Walvoord, p. 108.

⁸⁴Walvoord, p. 105.

⁸⁵Tenney, p. 109.

⁸⁶Anderson, p. 9.

⁸⁷Walvoord, p. 107.

⁸⁸Richardson, p. 148.

⁸⁹Anderson, p. 9.

⁹⁰Walvoord, p. 106.

⁹¹Burholder, Cox, and Pannenberg, p. 12.

⁹²Anderson, p. 9.

⁹³Walvoord, p. 106.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Method of Summarization

In the preceding discussion of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the evidence has been presented in two slightly different ways. The death and burial of Jesus have been treated by scholars in a straightforward historical manner. Therefore, when the author approached these events, he investigated the historical background of each to see if there was any serious discrepancy between the Gospel accounts and what is known extra-biblically. Any major divergences between what can be learned extra-biblically and biblically would be grounds for skepticism. The resurrection of Jesus has been treated in a different manner by many scholars. Their presuppositions do not allow them to consider the resurrection event as true history. The author of this paper has, therefore, dealt with those presuppositions so as to be able to go on to the concluding section of each chapter.

Summary of the Historical Data

The historical background is divided up into two categories. The first category is that found in the death of Jesus and the second is found in the burial. The background of the death of Jesus will be summarized first.

The crucifixion and death of Jesus. What one can know about crucifixion from history both explains and confirms the Gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion.

From History

1. Crucifixion was a common form of execution mainly reserved for the lower classes.
2. Crucifixion was used for offenses, such as: murder, theft, rebellion, etc.
3. Scourging was a normal part of the process of death by crucifixion.
4. A placard (titulus) stating the reason for execution was required by law.
5. The cross used in Palestine at that time was a crux immissa in the shape of a "T."
6. Normally, prisoners were nailed to the cross through their wrists.
7. Death could be hastened by breaking the legs of the one on the cross to cause death by asphyxiation.

From the Gospels

1. Jesus was a carpenter from Galilee who was crucified between two criminals.
2. Jesus was crucified because He claimed to be a king, which was equal to sedition.
3. Jesus was scourged prior to His execution.
4. Jesus' titulus was nailed on His cross to inform bystanders of the charges against Him.
5. Jesus has normally been represented in paintings as being on a crux immissa.
6. Jesus showed Thomas the wounds in His wrists (Χεῖρ) after His resurrection.
7. The criminals on either side of Jesus had their legs broken by the Romans to hasten the death process. Jesus did not have His broken because He was already dead.

The above data illustrates the fact that the biblical accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus accord well with the known historical background of the time. The known biblical and extra-biblical data concerning the burial of Jesus

are compatible as well.

The burial of Jesus Christ. The historical data that can be gathered concerning first century Jewish burials confirms and explains the biblical accounts of Jesus' burial.

From History

1. The Jews were careful to bury all of their dead including the poor, slaves and criminals.
2. All corpses were to be quickly buried. No burials were to be performed on sabbaths or after dark.
3. Tombs for the wealthy were often located north or northeast of Jerusalem. They were often located in gardens.
4. The wealthy were able to afford large stones to roll in front of their tombs to keep out thieves and animals.
5. Those who were executed as criminals were not to be buried with their families.
6. The dead were wrapped in bandages. Spices were used to cover up the odors associated with death, and to keep the wrappings in place.

From the Gospels

1. Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea.
2. Jesus was buried soon after His death. The approaching sabbath and darkness caused Joseph and Nicodemus to have to hurry.
3. The traditional sites for Jesus' crucifixion are north or northwest of Jerusalem. The Scriptures mention a sepulchre in a garden.
4. There was a large stone that sealed the entrance to Jesus' tomb.
5. Jesus was buried in a new tomb that had never been used previously.
6. Jesus was wrapped up in linen and buried with one hundred pounds of spices.

When one examines the data surrounding the death and burial of Jesus Christ, it is clearly apparent that the biblical accounts fully agree with the known historical data of that day. The biblical accounts are historically acceptable. These accounts are philosophically acceptable, as well.

Summary of the Philosophical Data

When scholars investigate the data surrounding the resurrection of Jesus Christ, two major explanations are put forth: some believe strongly that He was resurrected; some are just as certain that He was not. The scholars who do not accept the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, generally, come to that conclusion from their philosophical presuppositions and not from the data. The major presupposition that nullifies the resurrection, in their thinking, is that of a closed universe. Because of this presupposition, they either deny the accounts of the empty tomb and post-resurrection appearances or else they try to explain them by natural causes (i.e. graverobbers, hallucinations, etc.). Ronald J. Snyder critiques this presupposition along with other presuppositions and proposes others which are more logical.

Liberal or Neo-Orthodox Presuppositions

1. The universe is a closed system.

Proposed Pre- suppositions

1. The universe is now known to have an element of indeterminacy. It is better to hold to a

methodological agnosticism. All data is to be evaluated on its own merits.

2. Miracles are absolutely unique events and are, therefore, unknowable.

2. Miracles are unique, but one can judge the event by examining the non-unique data that surrounds the event.

3. All major religions have exceptional or fantastic stories concerning their founders or great men.

3. Trends do not establish facts. All statements have to be weighed on the strength of the available data.

4. First century man was naive and would believe in the miraculous.

4. Their naivete is overrated. They were skeptical of many unusual events including the resurrection.

The most logical presupposition to hold to concerning the universe is that of methodological agnosticism. With this presupposition, one need not espouse either an open or closed universe. The data, then, can be evaluated on its own merits. The resurrection of Jesus Christ cannot be nullified by one's presuppositions. Therefore, though the modern historian cannot prove that the resurrection was caused by divine intervention, yet he can pass judgment on the fact of Jesus' being alive on the third day. This leads to the final means of verifying the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Explanations for the Available Data

Any conclusion that one can reach must be consistent.

It must be able to assimilate all the available data and give an answer that will not contradict any of it. The end result, then, will be a unified body of information. The conclusion one arrives at must give a satisfactory explanation for the available data. From this study one can conclude that Jesus truly died, was buried, and was resurrected in a bodily form.

Proof of the actual death of Christ. Though the Scriptures strongly imply that Jesus gave up His life by an act of His will and not because of natural causes, one can be sure that He did in fact die. There are three major categories of proof for the death of Christ. The first concerns the evidence gained from the witnesses.

There are three groups of eyewitnesses to the death of Jesus. The first eyewitness was a professional. This man was a centurion in charge of the executions and would be well acquainted with the earmarks of death. The second eyewitnesses were Joseph and Nicodemus. They actually handled the body and would be sure of His death as well. The third major group of eyewitnesses were the women who ministered to Jesus. They viewed His crucifixion, saw Him die, and witnessed His burial. There are secondary sources for the death of Jesus as well.

Several of the church fathers commented on the death of Jesus. Two of these early writers, Ignatius and Irenaeus, made specific mention of the actual physical death of Jesus.

The Jewish historian, Josephus, and early Jewish traditions attest to His death as well. The second major proof for Jesus' death is found in John's mention of blood and water coming from Jesus' side due to the spear wound.

This data, to the author, is the strongest evidence for Jesus' death. Since the blood ran out of Jesus' side and did not spurt out, it indicates that Jesus' heart was no longer pumping. The clear fluid that flowed out is indicative of death as well. This fluid does not collect in the pericardial sac in any quantity until the person is dead (normally following severe injuries). Since Jesus' heart was no longer beating and fluid gathered in the pericardial sac, one can conclude that He was dead. The final proof of Jesus' death is found in the fact of His burial.

If there was any life left in Jesus' body, there would have been physiological reactions that would have accompanied His burial insuring death. The cool, rock tomb would have had the effect of lowering His body temperature, slowing His heart down, and would have brought sure death in view of His weakened condition. The pungent spices would have been deadly as well. The vast amount of pungent spices in a hermetically sealed tomb would have been suffocating. The witnesses, the blood and the water, and the physiological consequences of the burial of a severely wounded man are sure indicators of Jesus' death. One can draw some firm conclusions concerning the burial of Jesus as well.

Proof of Jesus' burial. That Jesus was buried is both supported by the Jewish custom of that day and by the Scriptures. That the location of His place of burial was well known can be firmly supported as well. There are three major proofs that support this proposition.

The first major proof is that Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph was a known political figure in Jerusalem. Reference to Him could be easily verified. Secondly, the women who were with Jesus in Galilee knew where He was buried. They were present when Jesus' body was removed from the cross and they looked on as He was buried. Finally, the Jewish, religious authorities knew where Jesus was buried. They would want to know where He was buried so as to guard against fraudulent claims of His resurrection. When the time came, they knew right where to post their guard so as to prevent Jesus' disciples from stealing the body. The bodily resurrection of Jesus has strong evidence in its favor as well.

Proof of the resurrection. There are three major categories of proof for the resurrection of Jesus. The three categories are: the evidence around the empty tomb, the post-burial appearances, and the post-resurrection results. There have been theories proposed as to why the tomb was empty and what caused the disciples to believe they saw Jesus alive after His burial, but none of these are as consistent or as intellectually satisfying as the

proposition that Jesus actually was resurrected.

This fact can be seen when one examines alternative proposals. The empty tomb will be examined first.

Proposal

Logical
Inconsistency

1. Jesus was still in His tomb. The women went to the wrong tomb.

1. Joseph of Arimathea and the Jewish authorities knew where the body was. Any reference to an empty tomb could be disproved if it was not actually empty.

2. The Jews or the Romans took the body for safekeeping or some other reason.

2. They would have wanted the body left buried. If they did have the body, when the disciples preached Jesus' resurrection, they would have gladly produced the corpse.

3. Joseph of Arimathea moved the body.

3. He would not have been able to move the body secretly. The tomb was guarded. The Jewish authorities did not investigate the possibility of reburial, since they knew Jesus was not reburied.

4. Thieves stole the body.

4. The tomb was guarded. The only things of value (i.e. the wrappings and spices) were left.

5. The disciples stole the body.

5. They would not suffer martyrdom and death for a lie. They were psychologically crushed by Jesus' death. The tomb was guarded.

6. Jesus was not actually dead. He recovered in the tomb and came back to the disciples.

6. His death has elsewhere in the paper been proven. The burial would have ensured His death. A severely injured man could not convince His disciples that He was the Lord of life.

The explanation that is most consistent with the known facts is that the tomb was empty because Jesus was resurrected. The post-burial appearances are best explained by the resurrection as well.

Many theories have been offered to explain the appearances. These are not consistent either, however.

Explanation

Logical Inconsistency

1. Paul did not know about an empty tomb, nor did he preach a bodily resurrection.

1. Simply not true.
(cf. Rom. 6:1-11; 1 Cor. 15:4, 12-20; Eph. 1:20; Col. 2:11-12; 3:1).

2. The appearances were the result of spiritism.

2. There were no mediums, no seeking after the departed one, no dimly lit rooms.

3. The reported appearances were fabrications.

3. The witnesses had high moral character. There were too many witnesses for there to have been collusion. Their psychological condition following the crucifixion was one of defeat, not resistance. They were willing to suffer and die for their belief.

4. The stories of Christ's appearances were legends.

4. The Gospels have all been dated in the first century. Legends arise long after the fact. The

accounts do not have the literary quality of legends.

5. The appearances were hallucinatory, psychological, or pathological experiences.

5. There were too many witnesses, in too many moods, found in too many places, at too many different times, and under too many different circumstances for the appearances to be illusion.

6. The appearance narratives were a reinterpretation of the facts.

6. The disciples did not interpret Jesus' death as victory; it was defeat. After seeing Jesus, they were able to withstand persecution and death. The fact of resurrection, not their hope of victory in spite of death, sustained them.

The fact of the resurrection appearances is consistent with the available data.

There is a final confirming factor to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that is the historical result of the resurrection. Only the resurrection of Jesus Christ can fully account for the (1) institution of the church, (2) the rapid growth of the church, (3) the change in the apostles, (4) the change from Saturday to Sunday as a day of worship, (5) the celebration of eucharist, (6) the resurrection was foretold, (7) there was miraculous power in the early church, and (8) there is personal confirmation in the lives of believers. What conclusions can be reached, then, concerning the death, burial and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Conclusions

The death, burial, and resurrection have to be accepted as historical facts. The accounts of the death and burial of Jesus Christ agree with the historical framework of first century Palestine. The possibility of the resurrection has to, at least, be allowed on the basis of a presupposition of methodological agnosticism. Finally, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus are best explained by the Scriptures. No other explanations are as logically consistent, nor as intellectually satisfying as the simple proposition that they are historical facts.

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