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*symposium: Uppståndelsen*


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In the autumn of 2013 both N.T. Wright and Gary Habermas visited Sweden for two independent conferences and speaking tours, both talking on the resurrection of Jesus. In light of this we reproduce one scholarly article of each, which express their thinking about this important issue. N.T. Wright's article has previously been published in *Passionate Conviction: Contemporary Discourses in Christian Apologetics* (Nashville: B&B Publishing Group, 2007) 123-137 and Gary Habermas' article in *Contending with Christianity's Critics* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 113-125. The editorial board of *Theofilos* is grateful to B & B Publishing group for allowing us to reproduce this material.

## Jesus' Resurrection and Christian Origins<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

The question of Jesus' resurrection continues to haunt the thinking and writing of many scholars. I shall not debate in detail with them here; there are other places for that.<sup>2</sup> I want instead to sketch in broad strokes a historical argument about what happened three days after Jesus' crucifixion.

The question divides into four. First, what did people in the first century, both pagans and Jews, hope for? What did they believe about life after death, and particularly about resurrection? Second, what did the early Christians believe on the same subjects? What did they hope for? Third, what reasons did the early Christians give for their hope and belief, and what did they mean by the key word *resurrection*, which they used of Jesus? Finally, what can the historian say by way of comment on this early Christian claim?

### Life after Death in the First Century

1. *Paganism*. Homer was hugely important in the world of late antiquity; and in Homer life after death is pretty bleak. Odysseus's journey to the underworld (in books 10 and 11 of the *Odyssey*) hardly encourages readers to suppose that death will take them into a better world. Hades, the abode of the dead, is a place of shadows and wraiths who can just about remember what life was like but not much more.

Plato held out a different possibility, the chance of a blissful afterlife at least for some. He even speculated about reincarnation, though this is not central to his thought, nor is it stressed in later Platonism. His ideas come through into popular first-century culture not least in the mystery religions. Once philosophical speculation began devising alternatives to the Homeric viewpoint, other positions emerged; for instance, that of Stoicism, that

the entire world would be destroyed by fire and be reborn, phoenix-like, only for everything to happen again in exactly the same way as before.

Whenever the question of bodily resurrection is raised in the ancient world the answer is negative. Homer does not imagine that there is a way back; Plato does not suppose anyone in their right mind would want one. There may or may not be various forms of life after death, but the one thing there isn't is resurrection: the word *anastasis* refers to something that everybody knows doesn't happen. The classic statement is in Aeschylus's play *Eumenides* (647–48), in which, during the founding of the Court of the Areopagus, Apollo himself declares that when a man has died, and his blood is spilt on the ground, there is no resurrection. The language of resurrection, or something like it, was used in Egypt in connection with the very full and developed view of the world beyond death. But this new life was something that had, it was believed, already begun, and it did not involve actual bodily return to the present world. Nor was everybody fooled by the idea that the dead were already enjoying a full life beyond the grave. When the eager Egyptians tried to show their new ruler Augustus their hoard of wonderful mummies, he replied that he wanted to see kings, not corpses.<sup>3</sup>

2. *Judaism*. When we turn to ancient Judaism, the picture is both similar and different. The Hebrew Sheol, the place of the dead, is not very different from Homer's Hades. People are asleep there; they can sometimes be woken up, as with Saul and Samuel, but to do so is dangerous and

forbidden.<sup>4</sup> That is the picture we get from most of the Old Testament.

The Psalms begin to explore ways in which YHWH's love will be known after death. It is notoriously difficult to date these passages, and they remain controversial. Psalm 73 is perhaps the clearest statement of a postmortem hope. Unlike Plato, the biblical mentions of a hope beyond the grave are not predicated on the existence of an immortal soul which will automatically have a future life but on the love and faithfulness of YHWH in the present, which must, the poets suppose, continue into the future.

The Jewish hope burst the bounds of ancient paganism altogether by speaking of resurrection. The supposed Zoroastrian origin of this belief is still argued by some but strenuously denied by others who see the metaphors of Isaiah 26 and Ezekiel 37 and the earlier hints in Hosea 6 as opening the way for a new view, generated by Israel's own basic beliefs and contingent circumstances, which comes to full expression in Daniel 12. Despite what is often supposed, this belief, when it arises, is in paradoxical continuity with the ancient Hebrew belief in Sheol. Unlike Platonists, who preferred a disembodied immortality, those who believed in resurrection agreed with the ancient Israelites that real life meant embodied life. The difference is that in the earlier view those in Sheol cannot have it again (as in the book of Job, apart from the controversial passage in chapter 19), whereas in the resurrection passages they can and will.

Postbiblical Judaism offers a range of beliefs about life after death. Resurrection is by no means the only option; and when it is specified, it is not a general word for life after death but a term for one particu-

lar belief. In fact, resurrection is not simply a form of life after death; resurrection hasn't happened yet. People do not pass directly from death to resurrection but go through an interim period after which the death of the body will be reversed in resurrection. Resurrection does not, then, mean "survival"; it is not a way of describing the kind of life one might have immediately following physical death. It is not a redescription of death and/or the state which results from death. In both paganism and Judaism it refers to the reversal, the undoing, the conquest of death and its effects. That is its whole point. That is what Homer, Plato, Aeschylus, and others denied; and it is what some Jews and all early Christians affirmed.

The second point to note about Jewish belief in resurrection is that, where it did occur, it was never a detached belief. It was always part of a larger picture of what God was going to do for the nation and indeed the world. Resurrection is one point on a larger spectrum; it will happen all at once as part of God's future for Israel and the world; and, third, it was fairly unspecific in detail. The rabbis debate whether God will start with the soul and gradually build up to the solid body; or whether, as in Ezekiel, God will begin with the bones and add flesh and sinews, finally adding breath as in Genesis 2. In each case, of course, what you end up with is what we would call a physical body; but there was no agreement as to whether this body would be exactly like the one you had before or significantly different in some way. The belief remains vague and unfocused.

Finally, some at least of those who believed in the resurrection also believed in the coming of the Messiah, though the relation between Messiah and resurrection is not usually clear. The Messiah would

defeat YHWH's enemies, rebuild or cleanse the temple, and establish YHWH's rule in the world. Belief in the coming of a Messiah was obviously political as well as theological, as the messianic movements in the period bear witness. Resurrection and Messiah together speak of the time when God will be king and the present rulers (Caesar, Herod, the Sadducees) will be deposed. Together they speak of the coming reign of God.

It was from within one such prophetic and messianic renewal movement that the early Christians emerged, saying two things in particular: Jesus was and is the Messiah, and this is proved because He has been raised from the dead. But before we can look at these claims, we must set the early Christian views about future hope, including life after death, resurrection, and some wider issues like messiahship, in parallel with Judaism and paganism.

### **The Early Christian Hope: Modified and Realized**

Early Christian views about life after death clearly belonged within the Jewish spectrum, not the pagan one, but were also clearly different. This gives us a fresh purchase on the question, why did they reshape the hope in that way?

Almost all early Christians known to us believed that their ultimate hope was the resurrection of the body. There is no spectrum such as in Judaism.

This almost complete absence of a spectrum of belief itself demands explanation, but before we can offer one, we must add two further points. First, the early Christian belief in resurrection had a much more precise shape and content than anything we find in Judaism. In early Christianity, obviously in Paul but not only there, resurrection will be an act

of new creation, accomplished by the Holy Spirit, and the body which is to be is already planned by God. This will not be a simple return to the same sort of body as before; nor will it be an abandonment of embodiedness in order to enjoy a disembodied bliss. It will involve transformation, the gift of a new body with different properties.

The other way in which early Christian belief about resurrection is significantly different from that of second-temple Judaism is that, particularly in Paul, "the resurrection" has split into two. Paul still sees the resurrection of the dead as a single theological event,<sup>5</sup> but it takes place in two phases: first the Messiah, then at His coming all His people.<sup>6</sup> This too only makes sense within second-temple Judaism, but it is something no second-temple Jew had said before. Resurrection had been a single all-embracing moment, not a matter of one person's being raised ahead of everybody else.

Finally, the early Christians speak of one major aspect of the Jewish hope as already emphatically realized. Jesus Himself was and is the Messiah, and they looked for no other. This deserves much more elaboration than I can give it here.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus had not done what messiahs were supposed to do. He had neither won a decisive victory over Israel's political enemies nor restored the temple (except in the most ambiguous symbolic fashion).

Nor had He brought God's justice and peace to the world; the wolf was not yet lying down with the lamb. But the early gospel traditions are already shaped by the belief that Jesus was Israel's Messiah; Paul regularly calls Him *Christos*, and if that term had become for him merely a proper name (which I dispute) that only goes to show how firmly Jesus' messianic identity was already established by Paul's

day. For Revelation, Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The historian is bound to face the question: once Jesus had been crucified, why would anyone say that He was Israel's Messiah?

Nobody said that about Judas the Galilean after his revolt ended in failure in AD 6. Nobody said it of Simon bar-Giora after his death at the end of Titus's triumph in AD 70. Nobody said it about bar-Kochbar after his defeat and death in 135. On the contrary, where messianic movements tried to carry on after the death of their would-be messiah, their most important task was to find another messiah.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that the early Christians did not do that but continued against all precedent to regard Jesus Himself as Messiah, despite outstanding alternative candidates such as the righteous, devout, and well-respected James, Jesus' own brother, is evidence that demands an explanation. As with their beliefs about resurrection, they redefined messiahship itself and with it their whole view of the problem that Israel and the world faced and the solution they believed God had provided. They remained at one level a classic Jewish messianic movement, owing fierce allegiance to their Messiah and claiming Israel and the whole world in His name. But the mode of that claim and the underlying allegiance itself were drastically redefined.

The rise of early Christianity, and the shape it took in two central and vital respects, thus presses upon the historian the question for an explanation. The early Christians retained the Jewish belief in resurrection, but both modified it and made it more sharp and precise. They retained the Jewish belief in a coming Messiah but redrew it drastically around Jesus Himself. Why?

### Reasons for the Development: From Theology to Story

The answer early Christians themselves give for these changes, of course, is that Jesus of Nazareth was bodily raised from the dead on the third day after His crucifixion. Jesus' own resurrection has given force and new shape to the Christian hope.<sup>9</sup> It was, they insist, Jesus' own resurrection which constituted him as Messiah, and, if Messiah, then Lord of the world.<sup>10</sup> But what exactly did they mean by this, and what brought them to such a belief?

We must now come to the third and fourth stages of my argument. First, we must establish, against some rival claims, that they really did intend to say that Jesus had been bodily raised; they were not simply using that language to describe something else, a different belief about Jesus or a different experience they had had. Second, we must enquire as historians what could have caused them to say such a thing.

It is out of the question, for a start, that the disciples were simply extrapolating from the teaching of Jesus Himself. One of the many curious things about Jesus' teaching is that though resurrection was a well-known topic of debate at the time, we only have one short comment of His on the subject, in reply to the question from the Sadducees – a comment which is itself notoriously cryptic, like some of its companion pieces in the synoptic tradition. Apart from that, there are the short repeated predictions of Jesus' passion and resurrection, which many of course assume are *vaticinia ex eventu* and two or three other cryptic references.<sup>11</sup>

These are scarcely enough to suggest that the disciples invented stories of Jesus' resurrection, on the basis of His teaching, after His death. Other Jews had died pro-

misg resurrection, the Maccabees being the most obvious example (2 Maccabees 7, etc.); their followers regarded them as heroes and martyrs and believed devoutly that they would be raised from the dead; but nobody said they had been, for the rather obvious reason that they hadn't.<sup>12</sup> And even if, against all probability, we were to suggest that the disciples had indeed invented resurrection stories on the basis of Jesus' sayings, this would still not account for the modifications and new focus they gave to the existing Jewish notions of resurrection.

One regular proposal, which has taken various forms, is that though the early church used the language of resurrection about Jesus, and eventually wrote down stories about how it had happened, this developed originally from something else, a different experience or belief. In particular, some have said, Jesus' followers came first to a belief in His exaltation, and they deduced from this, either by logic or devotion, that He had been raised from the dead.

This needs a little more unpacking. Sometimes it has been argued, or more often assumed, that early Christians believed Jesus had been in some sense exalted (though why they believed this remains uncertain), and they either expressed this belief by saying that He had been raised from the dead (misleadingly, because that was never what *resurrection* meant in their world) or deduced from this that He had in fact been raised from the dead (though again why they would make such a deduction in a world where *resurrection* was something to do with bodies, and for that matter something that would happen to all the righteous at once, is not clear). At other times it has been argued that the disciples came to believe in Jesus' actual divinity, perhaps by experiencing Him as

a divine presence, and again either expressed this by saying He had been raised or deduced from it the fact that He had been raised. In this case, too, the logic fails at every point when we remind ourselves of how these ideas worked within the historical world of the first century.<sup>13</sup>

Paul sometimes speaks simply of Jesus' death and exaltation without mentioning the resurrection explicitly, as in the poem of Phil 2:6–11, though it is equally true that in the same letter he speaks emphatically of the bodily transformation that Jesus will effect on believers still alive at His return.<sup>14</sup> And when he sums up the traditional gospel announcement in 1 Cor 15:21 a summary, which must have done justice to what Cephas and Apollos said as well, otherwise the Corinthians would have been able to challenge him on it, it is clear that the gospel is about an event which happened at some interval after Jesus' death.<sup>15</sup>

This has not, I think, been sufficiently thought through. If we assume, as is often done, that talking of Jesus' resurrection is simply a flowery, perhaps Jewish, way of talking about His "going to heaven when he died," so that His death and His "exaltation" were actually the same thing, and together constitute Him as divine, where did the notion of an interval come from? I have often heard it said, sometimes by people who should know better, that Jesus died and was "resurrected to heaven," but that is precisely not what the early Christians said. Raised from the dead, yes; exalted to heaven, yes; but resurrection never did mean "going to heaven when you die," and it certainly did not mean that when people used it to talk about Jesus. No: if the early Christians had been merely deducing Jesus' resurrection from some other belief about something He had become through dying, the

talk of an interval between death and resurrection would never have arisen, unless we are to postulate yet another cycle of improbable development of tradition, moving from exaltation to resurrection to a three-day gap.<sup>16</sup> Jews, after all, had well-developed ways of talking about martyrs being honored and respected, and they believed they would be raised in the future. If the early Christians thought Jesus, upon His death, had gone to a special place of honor with God, that would have been the obvious language for them to use.

The key questions here are the following: (1) whether Jesus' death would by itself have precipitated the language of exaltation or vindication; (2) if not, whether any subsequent experience (other than resurrection itself) would have done so; and (3) what reason there is, even if we were to grant that people had begun to speak of Jesus being exalted, being glorified, or even perhaps being seen as divine, to suppose that they would deduce from that that He had been raised from the dead? The answers are all obviously negative. One can understand why, if they believed that Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead, they came to believe, after He had ceased to appear to them, that He had now been exalted to heaven. But when you think about the options open to first-century Jews faced with a dead Messiah, there is simply no route in the opposite direction.

In any case, with all of these accounts which suppose that the disciples deduced Jesus' resurrection from something else, or expressed some other belief in the (misleading) fashion of "He's been raised from the dead," we are still faced with the major problem: why would resurrection itself, and the hope for a Messiah, have been so drastically adjusted as we find

them to have been in early Christianity?

We are forced to conclude that when the early Christians said that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and gave that as their reason for reshaping their beliefs about resurrection itself on the one hand and messiahship on the other, they were using the language in its normal sense. That which Aeschylus said couldn't happen to anyone, and Daniel said would, to all God's people at once, had happened to Jesus, all by Himself. That was what they intended to say. And this brings us, at last, to the resurrection narratives themselves.

The first point to make here is vital. I have argued that the early Christians looked forward to a resurrection which was not a mere resuscitation, nor yet the abandonment of the body and the liberation of the soul, but a transformation, a new type of body living within a new type of world. This belief is embroidered with biblical motifs, articulated in rich theology.

Were the four Gospels, then, all derived from this developed theology? Are they all later narrational adaptations of a doctrinal and exegetical basis, from which of course all traces of dogma and exegesis have, in each case, been carefully extracted? Hardly. It is far easier to say that the stories, or something like them, came first and that Paul and the other later theologians have reflected deeply upon them, have indeed reshaped and rethought one branch of mainstream Jewish theology around them, but have not substantially modified them.

A few more remarks about the narratives themselves. Matthew's story is often seen as anti-Jewish apologetic – not surprisingly because he tells us that he is countering a story current among non-Christian Jews of his day. But even if

Matthew does represent a later polemic, the debate itself – that some say Jesus' body was stolen, and others say it wasn't – bears witness to my more fundamental point, that in the first century resurrection wasn't about exaltation, spiritual presence, a sense of forgiveness, or divinization; it was about bodies and tombs. If someone had been able to say, "Oh, don't you understand? When I say 'resurrection,' all I mean is that Jesus is in heaven and He is my Lord, that I've had a new sense of God's love and forgiveness," the dangerous debate about tombs, guards, angels, and bodies could have been abandoned with a sigh of relief all round.<sup>17</sup>

Second, a word about Mark. When Mark says that the women "said nothing to anyone because they were afraid," he does not mean they never said anything to anyone. I do not think, in any case, that Mark finished his Gospel at chapter 16 verse 8. I think he wrote more, which is now lost. But I think his emphatic denial that the women said anything to anyone is meant to counter the charge, actual or possible, that if the women really had seen something remarkable – an empty tomb, a rolled-away stone, an angel – they would have been bound to tell everyone they met. This they had not done; so (the charge would run) maybe they had not seen anything after all? Certainly not, replies Mark: the reason they said nothing to anyone (until, we presume, they got to the disciples) is because they were scared stiff.

Third, a word about Luke and John. They tell, of course, much fuller stories than Matthew and Mark, and it is they who are normally accused of having developed, or invented, these stories to combat the danger of docetic views within the early church, beliefs that Jesus in

His risen body wasn't really a physical human being but only seemed to be. Leave aside the fact that that is not what mainstream docetism wanted to say anyway – it was a belief about Jesus' precrucifixion humanity more than about His risen body – and concentrate on what Luke and John actually say. Yes, they have Him eating food. Yes, He invites them to touch Him, to inspect Him, to make sure He is a real human being. But these are the same accounts, in the same passages, which have Jesus appearing and disappearing, sometimes through locked doors. If Luke or John wanted to invent antidoctetic, no-nonsense, real-body stories, they surely could have done better than this.

I suggest, in fact, that the gospel stories themselves, though no doubt written down a good deal later than Paul, go back with minimal editorial addition to the early stories told by the first disciples in the earliest days of Christianity. They are not the later narrational adaptation of early Christian theology; they are its foundation.

This does not mean, of course, that they are photographic descriptions of "what happened." No historical narrative is ever quite that. But they challenge today's historian, as they challenged their first hearers, either to accept them or to come up with a better explanation for why Christianity began and why it took the shape it did.

### From Story to Event

This brings us, finally, to our fourth question. What can the historian say that will account for the early Christians' claim that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead, the explanation they themselves offer for their drastic modification of the Jewish hope?

There has been no shortage of hypo-

theses designed to explain why the early Christians really did believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead. These come in many shapes and sizes, but most of them feature one of three types of explanation. (1) Jesus did not really die; He somehow survived. (2) The tomb was empty but nothing else happened. (3) The disciples had visions of Jesus but without there being an empty tomb.

1. The first can be disposed of swiftly. Roman soldiers knew how to kill people, especially rebel kings. First-century Jews knew the difference between a survivor and someone newly alive.

2. The second is only a little more complicated. Faced with an empty tomb but with no other evidence, the disciples would have known the answer; the body had been stolen by someone. These things happened. They were not expecting Jesus to rise again; by itself an empty tomb would prove as little to them as it would to us.

3. Visions were frequent and well-known, including visions of someone recently dead. We did not have to wait for modern medicine, psychology, and pastoral records to tell us that these things happen. Faced with Peter knocking on the door when they thought he was about to be killed, the praying church assumed he had died and was paying them a post-mortem visit; "it must be his angel," they said.<sup>18</sup> Even lifelike visions would not prevent people conducting a funeral, continuing to mourn, and venerating the tomb.

To cut a long story short, to explain why early Christians really did believe that Jesus really had been raised from the dead, we must postulate three things: Jesus really had been dead; the tomb really was empty, and it really was His tomb; they really did see, meet, and talk with a

figure who was not only demonstrably the crucified Jesus but who seemed to be in some ways different—though not in the ways one would have imagined from reading Isaiah, Ezekiel, or Daniel.

Can we go beyond this? What then can and must be said?

Historical investigation, I propose, brings us to the point where we must say that the tomb previously housing a thoroughly dead Jesus was empty and that His followers saw and met someone they were convinced was this same Jesus, bodily alive though in a new, transformed fashion. The empty tomb on the one hand and the convincing appearances of Jesus on the other are the two conclusions the historian must draw. I do not think history can force us to draw any particular further deductions beyond these two phenomena; the conclusion the disciples drew is there for the taking, but it is open to us, as it was to them, to remain cautious. Thomas waited a week before believing what he had been told. On Matthew's mountain some had their doubts.

However, the elegance and simplicity of explaining the two outstanding phenomena, the empty tomb and the visions, by means of one another, ought to be obvious. Were it not for the astounding and worldview-challenging claim that is thereby made, I think everyone would long since have concluded that this was the correct historical result. If some other account explained the rise of Christianity as naturally, completely, and satisfyingly as does the early Christians' belief, while leaving normal worldviews intact, it would be accepted without demur.

That, I believe, is the result of the investigation I have conducted. There are many other things to say about Jesus'

resurrection. But as far as I am concerned, the historian may and must say that all other explanations for why Christianity arose and why it took the shape it did are far less convincing as historical explanations than the one the early Christians themselves offer: that Jesus really did rise from the dead on Easter morning, leaving an empty tomb behind Him. The origins of Christianity, the reason this new movement came into being and took the unexpected form it did, and particularly the strange mutations it produced within the Jewish hope for resurrection and the Jewish hope for a Messiah, are best explained by saying that something happened two or three days after Jesus' death for which the accounts in the four Gospels are the least inadequate expression we have.

Of course, there are several reasons people may not want, and often refuse, to believe this. But the historian must weigh, as well, the alternative accounts they themselves offer. And to date none of them have anything like the explanatory power of the simple but utterly challenging Christian one. The historian's task is not to force people to believe. It is to make clear that the sort of reasoning historians characteristically employ – inference to the best explanation, tested rigorously in terms of the explanatory power of the hypothesis thus generated—points strongly toward the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and to make clear, too, that from that point on the historian alone cannot help. When you're dealing with worldviews, every community and every person must make their choices in the dark, even if there is a persistent rumor of light around the next corner.

## Notes

- 1 This essay is abridged from an article by the same title, originally published in *Gregorianum* 83/4 (2002): 615–35, by permission of the author. Its format has been adapted to the style used in this volume.
- 2 Details are given in N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).
- 3 Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 51.16.
- 4 1 Sam 28:3–25.
- 5 See e.g. Rom 1:4; 1 Cor 15:20–28.
- 6 1 Cor 15:23.
- 7 See, e.g., N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 2) (London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), chapter 11.
- 8 See N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 175–81 for a description of various movements.
- 9 1 Corinthians 15; 1 Pet 1:3–5; etc.
- 10 Acts 2:24–36, etc.; Rom 1:4; 15:12; etc.
- 11 The "sign of Jonah," or at least the comments on it which are paralleled in Matthew and Luke (Matt 12:41–42; Luke 11:30–32); the *palingenssia* in Matt 19:28; and the command not to tell about the transfiguration until the Son of Man has been raised (Mark 9:9f.). See further N. T. Wright, "Resurrection in Q?" in *Christology, Controversy & Community: New Testament Essays in Honour of David R. Catchpole*, ed. D. G. Horrell and C. M. Tuckett (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 85–97.
- 12 Against S. J. Patterson, *The God of Jesus: The Historical Jesus and the Search for Meaning* (Hamburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1998), chapter 7, who suggests that Jesus' first followers began by saying He would be raised from the dead in the future and soon changed this into the claim that He already had been.
- 13 Similarly with attempts along the lines of "they experienced the Spirit." Other people did this—e.g., Qumran—without deducing that their leader had been raised from the dead.
- 14 Phil 3:20f.
- 15 Verses 3–9; see too 1 Thess 4:14a.
- 16 Here belongs also, properly, an account of Paul's conversion and the ways in which it was, and he and the others knew it was, peculiar; in other words we cannot assimilate all encounters with the risen Christ to the blinding light on the Damascus Road.
- 17 I have in mind here not least the treatment of E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (London: Collins, 1979), e.g. 390ff.
- 18 Acts 12:15.

## The Resurrection of Jesus' Timeline

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Perhaps the majority of defenses of Jesus' resurrection concentrate on three different aspects: the failure of naturalistic theories to explain this event, historical evidences for Jesus' appearances, as well as the empty tomb. In this essay I will take a different tack. I will begin with the late first century and work my way back to the death of Jesus in about AD 30.<sup>1</sup> My purpose will be to establish a different approach to the proclamation of the resurrection. I contend that current critical scholarship even agrees to the exceptionally

early date of this proclamation as well as the eyewitness nature of those who made the claims.

Before beginning, we need to set a couple of key parameters regarding the study of historiography. Certainly in the recent writing of history, perhaps the two major components of any study are, wherever possible, to secure testimony that is both eyewitness and as close as possible to the events in question, especially when there are also enough data to answer alternative scenarios. Eyewitness testimony