

# THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IN ITS JEWISH CONTEXT

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## **Abstract**

Perfectly valid and important historical questions may be raised about the burial of Jesus, the discovery of his empty tomb, the apparitions to his companions (if, where, when, why, etc.), and the purpose of those latter stories in their present gospel contexts. In this article those questions are temporarily bracketed and, however integrated, the gospel stories are stipulated as factually given and accepted as historically accurate (*dato non concessio*, of course). The purpose of this temporary strategy is to raise three more fundamental questions. First, what, be it in belief or disbelief, did a first-century Jew mean by “resurrection.” Second, what, against that background, did a first-century Christian Jew mean by claiming that God had raised Jesus from the dead? Third, in a pre-Enlightenment world where such wonders were culturally and permanently possible, why would anyone (especially a pious pagans) have cared?

It is now almost a truism to say, but it must still be said repeatedly, that Jesus lived and died as a Jew. His life incarnated Torah for a land which, since it belonged to a God of justice and righteousness, had to be distributed fairly and equitably among a people of justice and righteousness. And, as land, so world (Ps 82, for example). Unlike John, Jesus did not announce a monopoly but a franchise, so that both his own life and all others so lived entered into the Kingdom of God. But, by Antipas in Galilee and Pilate in Judea, that time and place’s normal process of civilization executed both John and Jesus for opposing globalization by Romanization through urbanization (free cities) for commercialization. Jesus, for example, was executed legally and publicly for asserting in both vision and program the different Kingdom of a different God. But it must also be said with equal insistence that Jesus not only lived and died as a Jew, he also rose as a Jew. In other words, the bodily resurrection of Jesus can only be understood

correctly within the faith and theology about resurrection present in certain circles of his contemporary Judaism. In this paper, therefore, I am asking historical questions, questions about the meaning of Jesus' resurrection within its contemporary context. That question is absolutely prior, both then and now, to whether one believes or not in Jesus' resurrection. To affirm or deny something, one must first know its content and meaning.

In order to focus absolutely on those primary historical questions I intend in this paper to bracket certain more secondary historical ones. The latter are absolutely valid and important but too often a focus on them has impeded access to historical questions equally valid but even more basic. Here, therefore, I stipulate (*dato non concessio*, of course) that the burial of Jesus, the discovery of the empty tomb, and the subsequent apparitions took place more or less as recorded from Mark through Matthew and Luke into John. However one reconciles their differences and discrepancies, I accept their historical accuracy (*dato non concessio*, I repeat) as the strategy for this paper. That acceptance allows me to ask this more fundamental question: Even if all of that happened as recorded, why did anyone call it "resurrection"? Does empty tomb and risen vision ineluctably indicate "resurrection" so that no other term, interpretation, or understanding is possible within that first-century Jewish context?<sup>1</sup>

The paper has four main sections. The first section is preparatory but fundamental. How do we get post-Enlightenment ears and eyes, hearts, minds, and imaginations back into a pre-Enlightenment time and place?

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1 This is neither more nor less than a hermeneutical strategy to bracket surface problems in search of deeper ones. I have not changed my own views that (1) Jesus' burial and the empty tomb's discovery were deliberate Markan creations to avoid ending with risen apparitions (to Peter and the Twelve!), that (2) risen apparitions among Jesus' companions were the almost inevitable result of such a terrible death, and that (3) the gospels conclude not simply with such experiences of continued presence by Jesus but with assertions of apostolic authority from Jesus. And, emphatically, (4) I do not accept as historically accurate but only allow as strategically useful, a position like the following one. "In modern memoirs written by real people about another real person we should expect just that sort of diversity which we find in the Gospels.... Take, for example, the various accounts of the Resurrection appearances at the Sepulchre. The divergences appear very great on first sight.... But the fact remains that *all* of them, without exception, can be made to fall into a place in a single orderly and coherent narrative without the smallest contradiction or difficulty, and without any suppression, invention, or manipulation, beyond a trifling effort to *imagine* the natural behaviour of a bunch of startled people running about in the dawnlight between Jerusalem and the Garden" (Sayers 1943,28-29).

How do we return to a world where, since the miraculous was culturally a permanent possibility, its assertion needed not just evidence but, more importantly, relevance? The second section asks the first of those two more profound questions: What did a first-century Jew *mean* by the term “bodily resurrection”? If, for example, a Pharisee disputed with a Sadducee about it, what was the content of their debate, what common meaning did they presume as its basis? The third section asks the second of those more profound questions which asks, dependent on the preceding one: What did a first-century Jew mean by claiming that God had raised Jesus from the dead or by asserting the bodily resurrection of Jesus? The fourth and final section raises two interacting questions intended especially for future consideration. One is the choice between bodily resurrection understood literally or a metaphorically. Another is the choice between Jesus’ bodily resurrection: Jesus as individual and personal or communal and structural.

### **1. Impossibility or Uniqueness in a Pre-Enlightenment World**

In a post-Enlightenment world the following argument is at least quite understandable. From a polemicist, be it village atheist or simple unbeliever: Such things as virginal conceptions, divine births, miraculous powers, resurrections and ascensions, never have happened and never could happen. They are opposed to physical law and/or divine consistency. From an apologist, be it pious pastor or simple believer: While it is true that such things do not happen regularly, they all happened to Jesus once and for all long ago. The twin sides of that dispute are the polemical and anti-Christian *Impossibility Option* which battles with the apologetic and pro-Christian *Uniqueness Option* and, while the former may be hard to prove, the latter is equally hard to disprove. But fundamental for this paper is my claim that, however valid those options may be in a post-Enlightenment world, they are equally invalid and irrelevant in a pre-Enlightenment world. Why? Because, *in that world it is generally or popularly accepted that such things can and do happen*. In that world, therefore, one may certainly debate about whether such things happened to this or that individual (for example, did or did not happen to Jesus) but, on the one hand, the non-believer cannot invoke the *Impossibility Option* and, on the other, the believer cannot invoke the *Uniqueness Option*. That is not only logically obvious, it is textually certified.

I focus on two second-century texts, one by the pro-Christian apologist Justin and the other by the anti-Christian polemicist Celsus to show how they avoid, respectively, *Uniqueness* or *Impossibility* and use instead the *Relevance Option*, the so what? or *cui bonum* criterion. In other words, granted that such things can and do happen, why should anyone care about this one in particular? Here is Justin Martyr in his *First Apology* 21-22, written around 150 C.E.:<sup>2</sup>

And when we say also that the Word, who is the first-birth of God, was produced without sexual union, and that He, Jesus Christ, our Teacher, was crucified and died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven, we propound nothing different from what you believe regarding those whom you esteem sons of Jupiter. For you know how many sons your esteemed writers ascribed to Jupiter: Mercury, the interpreting word and teacher of all; Aesculapius, who, though he was a great physician, was struck by a thunderbolt, and so ascended to heaven; and Bacchus too, after he had been torn limb from limb; and Hercules, when he had committed himself to the flames to escape his toils; and the sons of Leda, and Dioscuri; and Perseus, son of Danae; and Bellerophon, who, though sprung from mortals, rose to heaven on the horse Pegasus. For what shall I say of Ariadne, and those who, like her, have been declared to be set among the stars? And what of the emperors who die among yourselves, whom you deem worthy of deification, and in whose behalf you produce some one who swears he has seen the burning [Julius] Caesar rise to heaven from the funeral pyre? .... But if any one objects that He was crucified, in this also He is on a par with those reputed sons of Jupiter of yours, who suffered as we have now enumerated. For their sufferings at death are recorded to have been not all alike, but diverse; so that not even by the peculiarity of His sufferings does He seem to be inferior to them; but, on the contrary, as we promised in the preceding part of this discourse, we will now prove Him superior — or rather have already proved Him to be so — *for the superior is revealed by His actions*. And if we even affirm that He was born of a virgin, accept this in common with what you accept of Perseus. And in that we say that He made whole the lame, the paralytic, and those born blind, we seem to say what is very similar to the deeds said to have been done by Aesculapius.

Justin does not and could not argue for *Uniqueness* in the ancient world's general cultural context but neither does he presume that all those cases are

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2 *ANF I*, 316-18.

equal. He is emphatically ready to argue the superiority of Jesus over all others (my italics added above). That is the basic principle on which that ancient pre-Enlightenment culture agreed: *the superior is revealed by his actions*, divinity is manifested by extraordinary service to the world (but who gets to define “service”?).

If Justin must avoid the *Uniqueness* defense, so must Celsus avoid the *Impossibility* attack. He, like Justin, agrees on the basic criterion-question: what has Jesus done for people? But while Justin answers “everything,” Celsus answers “nothing.” He wrote his polemic, *On the True Doctrine* [i.e., paganism] around 170 C.E. but his text must be reconstructed from Origen’s century-later rebuttal.<sup>3</sup>

After all, the old myths of the Greeks that attribute a divine birth to Perseus, Amphion, Aeacus and Minos are equally good evidence of *their wondrous works on behalf of mankind* - and are certainly no less lacking in plausibility than the stories of your followers. What have you done [Jesus] by word or deed that is quite so wonderful as those heroes of old... Has there ever been such an incompetent planner: When he was in the body, he was disbelieved but preached to everyone; after his resurrection, apparently wanting to establish a strong faith, he chooses to show himself to one woman and a few comrades only. When he was punished, everyone saw; yet risen from the tomb, almost no one.

The basic principle is equally clear there (my italics above): *where are Jesus’ wondrous works on behalf of mankind?* That *Relevance Option* was where both sides met and where alone they could meet in that pre-Enlightenment world.

The purpose of that first preparatory section is to remind us that whatever the meaning of bodily resurrection and whatever is claimed about Jesus under that rubric, you would have, in that first-century context, to argue not just for belief but for concern, not just that it happened but why anyone should care about it. Put bluntly, in the free-market of religious ideas which was the Roman Empire, you had to get out there and hustle for your God, and if you seriously and deliberately (as distinct from just enthusiastically or hyperbolically) argued for the superiority of your Son of

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3 Hoffman 1987, 57-58, 59, 68.

God, you knew it was high treason when a Son of God sat on Caesar's throne.

## 2. The Meaning of Bodily Resurrection for First-Century Jews

This is something which everyone knows but which is so surprising that it must constantly be repeated. For most of their history before that first common-era century, the Israelites and/or the Jews disbelieved in an after-life.

### 2.1 Sanctions here below

First, after death, all individuals, good and bad alike, go down to Sheol which was, quite simply, the Grave writ large, the End with emphasis. It was neither Hell nor Heaven; it was simply Never No More. That is obvious when you look at those other terms that are paired in poetic parallelism with Sheol. Examples are Sheol/Pit in Ps 16:10; 30:3; Prov 1:12; Isa 14:15; Death/Sheol in 2 Sam 22:6; Ps 6:5; Ps 18:5; Ps 116:3; or Sheol/Dust in Job 17:16. Thus, from Sheol in Isa 38:18 at the end of the eighth century to Hades in Sir 14:16-17 at the start of the second century, the message is constant, the acceptance beyond discussion:

For Sheol cannot thank you, Death cannot praise you; those who go down to the Pit cannot hope for your faithfulness.	Give, and take, and indulge yourself, because in Hades one cannot look for luxury. All living beings become old like a garment, for the decree from of old is, "You must die!"
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You could certainly hope for your memory and/or family to live on afterwards and especially for the people of God, to which you had once and therefore forever belonged, to live on upon this earth. Sheol, however, meant eventually for everyone, dust, death, and darkness.

Second, I said "disbelieved" above rather than "did not believe" and that was quite deliberate. It was not that the idea of immortality or life after death had never occurred to the Israelites or ancient Jews. That would have been impossible for a people living next door to Egypt, for a people whose

distant ancestors might have seen the pyramids. But they never discuss any types or possibilities of after-life so we must infer (and it can only be an inference) that it was considered just one more pagan usurpation of rights and privileges that belonged exclusively to God.<sup>4</sup> It was, in other words, an act of faith *not* to believe in life after death.

Third, I emphasize, therefore, that the majesty of the law, the challenge of the prophets, and glory of the psalms, and the wisdom of the sages arose and flourished among a people for whom life below under God above was enough, was adequate, and was all there was.

In such a this-world-only situation, all sanctions for good or evil had to take place here below upon this earth and the classic and clearest statement of this theology is in Deut 28. The chapter is divided between blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Each of those twin sections begin with this parallelism:

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4 “Any reader who systematically surveys the oldest sections of the biblical text becomes impressed with how the Bible studiously avoids the concept of life after death. The reasons for this silence must be conjectures, and cannot be demonstrated; but one sensible guess would be that of the Hebrew text’s enmity towards foreign cults.” See Segal 1997, 91. But, of course, dead people, be they shades, ghosts, or spirits could return in corporeally recognizable form from Sheol or Hades and appear to the living. A female medium at Endor could “bring up” Samuel at Saul’s request in 1 Samuel 28:7-19 and he could tell him of the Philistine disaster ahead. So, also, and with equally terrible news, could the Trojan hero Hector, still showing the bodily desecration inflicted by Achilles after his death in Book 22 of the *Iliad*, appear to Aeneas in Book 2 of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and tell him to flee the doomed city.

<i>Blessings in Deut 28:1-6</i>	<i>Curses in Deut 28:15-19</i>
<p>If you will only obey the Lord your God, by diligently observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth; all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the Lord your God:</p>	<p>But if you will not obey the Lord your God by diligently observing all his commandments and decrees, which I am commanding you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you:</p>
<p>[1] Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field.</p>	<p>[1] Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field.</p>
<p>[2] Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb, the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your livestock, both the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock.</p>	<p>[2] Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.</p>
<p>[3] Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.</p>	<p>[3] Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb, the fruit of your ground, the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock.</p>
<p>[4] Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.</p>	<p>[4] Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.</p>

Despite the minor difference in the order of [2] and [3], the parallelism is quite close and deliberate. But, thereafter, the rest of the *Blessings* section take up only 28:7-14 while the rest of the *Curses* section takes up all of 28:20-68. The negative threats are, in other words, far more lengthy, detailed, and devastating than the positive promises.

Some comments are necessary on that chapter and especially on its ghastly catalogue of transcendental terrorism. First, it does not simply contain a general promise that with God all will be well and without God all will be disastrous. That might even be empirically true and experimentally

verifiable since, apart from their covenant with God, the Israelites would almost surely have dissolved into the general gene pool of the Middle East (like the Moabites, Edomites, or Ammonites). Second, however, its specificity puts it on a collision course with geography, history, and geopolitical realities. When the axis of imperial conquest ran north and south between the Mesopotamian plains and Nile valley, Israel was right in the way and, indeed, a good place to meet for battle. When that axis changed to west and east, with Greeks and Persians or Romans and Parthians, Israel was again on the highway of invasion, war, and conquest. Put bluntly, if Israelites had all been saints and spent their lives on their knees, it was only a question of which imperial wave would have conquered or killed them in that all-virtuous position. Third, there was one inevitable result from that most lethal piece of theology, a theology that is actually a crime against divinity. Since periodical drought and infertility or permanent war and conquest were inevitable in that particular land, deuteronomic believers would have to conclude that they were inveterate communal sinners under almost permanent corporate punishment by their God. Hence, therefore, an incessant cry for communal forgiveness. In summary, then, deuteronomic theology was false in its promised blessings and threatened curses but lethal in its personal results and communal effects. It formulated a theology of external punishments rather than internal consequences.

### *2.2 Martyrs here below*

There were, of course, cracks in that deuteronomic facade such as Job, whose sufferings were not punishment for his sins but a test of his holiness (Job 42:7-8), or the Suffering Servant, whose sufferings were not punishment for his sins but vicarious atonement for those of others (Isa 52-53). And, of course, those cracks could eventually generate edifices of their own. There were also many symbolic hopes or hyperbolic prayers that could, when an after-life was finally affirmed, be taken quite literally in reference to resurrection and even to bodily resurrection. For example, in Isa 26:19:

Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise.  
O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy!  
For your dew is a radiant dew,  
and the earth will give birth to those long dead.

But it was a very specific experience at a very specific time and place that brought belief in an after-life and in next-worldly sanctions into Judaism for the first time.

The causative background was, in general, the tension between traditional Judaism and invasive Hellenism and, in particular, the attempt by the Syrian monarch, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, to fuse the Jewish homeland politically, socially, and economically into his hard-pressed empire. In December of 167 B.C.E. he launched a religious persecution in order to destroy the major source of opposition to Jerusalem's becoming a fully functioning Greek city. But by December of 164, the Hasmoneans had defeated the Syrian troops and, across the next hundred years until the Romans finally arrived, they went on to expand Jewish territory in all directions.

For some Jews that was the solution, for some just a different problem, and for others almost an irrelevance. For those others, the martyrs who had died under persecution posed a profound theological challenge that could not be easily solved by military victories or territorial expansions. How could deuteronomic theology explain martyrdom? Where was the justice of God for the tortured and brutalized *bodies* of martyrs? I focus here on *bodily* resurrection as one answer and I see its arrival in the difference between the first and second parts of the book of Daniel and in the difference between 2 Maccabees and 4 Maccabees.

### *2.2.1 Two models for the Maccabean martyrs*

The first half of Daniel (1-6) tells of martyrs-to-be who are saved from death at the last moment. The story of Daniel in the lions' den (Dan 3) or the Three Young Men in the fiery furnace (Dan 6), for example, fits well within a very ancient genre in which a virtuous protagonist is unjustly accused, condemned to death, delivered at the last moment, vindicated publicly before the evil accusers, and restored to full (often royal) favor. You can chart the literary elements of Situation, Accusation, Condemnation, Deliverance, and Restoration from the very ancient Ahikar legend, through

Joseph (Gen 37-42), Esther, and Susanna, on into 3 Maccabees.<sup>5</sup> But in all of those cases, the individual or communal martyr-to-be is saved *before* death and *from* death. Such stories would surely work well for situations of discrimination and non-lethal oppression, but how would they console people in situations of actual and even communally continuing martyrdom?

The second half of Daniel tells a rather different tale of martyrdom and it bespeaks the actual situation which combined those twin types or models for martyrs, the *pre-death* (Dan 1-6) or the *post-death* deliverance (Dan 7-12). The genre is no longer that of court tales but of apocalyptic visions. The situation is no longer one of elegant discrimination but of bloody persecution. Each of those four apocalypses in Dan 7,8,9,10-12 ends with the promised defeat of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in (1) 7:9-14,21,26-27; (2) 8:13-14,35b; (3) 9:27; and (4) 12:1-4. But that last one holds this climactic revelation in 12:1-3 (note my italics)<sup>6</sup>:

At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. *Many* of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, *some* to everlasting life, and *some* to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

First, this certainly refers to a resurrection from the dead and to an after-life. Second, it does not envisage a general resurrection for all but a specific one for the very virtuous and the very evil, for the just and the martyrs to eternal life and for their oppressors and persecutors to everlasting shame. Third, since the author is taking Isa 26:19 literally, it is quite probable that

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5 All of this is completely dependent on Nickelsburg 1972, 48-58. See also Susan Niditch and Robert Doran 1977. For Jesus' passion within that literary framework, see Nickelsburg 1980. And, based on Nickelsburg, see my *The Cross that Spoke* (1988).

6 "The first clear reference to life after death can be defined exactly, with regard to both its date and the specific circumstances that produced it... The date is 168 BCE, or thereabouts.... It is a time of unprecedented, terrible tribulation" (Segal 1997, 97).

*bodily* resurrection is intended.<sup>7</sup> But it is in 2 Maccabees, especially as compared with the same stories in 4 Maccabees, that *bodily* resurrection is emphatically and repeatedly asserted.

### 2.2.2 *Four interpretations of the Maccabean martyrs*

Very different interpretations of certain Maccabean martyrs are given in 2 Maccabees from around 100 B.C.E. and 4 Maccabees from around 40 C.E.<sup>8</sup> But despite being the same stories, the four accounts give very different interpretations of martyrdom and only one mentions bodily resurrection.

*Eleazer*. The old man Eleazar appears in 2 Mac 6:18-31 and 4 Mac 5:4-7:23. In the former story, his death is justified in the Socratic tradition of the noble death (2 Mac 6:19, 23, 28):

But he, welcoming death with honor rather than life with pollution, went up to the rack of his own accord, spitting out the flesh.... But making a high resolve, worthy of his years and the dignity of his old age and the gray hairs that he had reached with distinction and his excellent life even from childhood, and moreover according to the holy God-given law, he declared himself quickly, telling them to send him to Hades.... and leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws.

But the interpretation of his martyrdom in the latter text is very different, the model is not so much the noble death of Socrates as the vicarious atonement of the Suffering Servant (4 Mac 6:28-29):

Be merciful to your people, and let our punishment suffice for them. Make my blood their purification, and take my life in exchange for theirs.

That is still deuteronomic theology but crossed with vicarious atonement so that Eleazar offers his own innocent death to offset the punishment (the persecution itself?) of others.

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7 “The writer of Daniel has certainly taken the ambiguous prophecy of Isaiah [26:19] in a literal sense, saying that the sleepers in the dust will literally rise” (Segal 1997, 97). Also: “Daniel does not conceive of a general resurrection of all men, but of those particular people whose unjust treatment in this life presents a problem for the writer.... Our writer appears to envision a resurrection of the body. The Isaianic passage on which he draws (26:19) says that the bodies of the dead will rise” (Nickelsburg 1972, 23).

8 For those dates see Nickelsburg 1981, 121 & 226.

*The Mother and Seven Sons.* The second set of stories appears in 2 Mac 7:1-41 and 4 Mac 8:1-17:6. In the latter account, the emphasis is possibly on the immortality of the soul but, more emphatically, on the supreme triumph of reason over emotion in martyrdom (4 Mac 9:8 & 13:5):

For we, through this severe suffering and endurance, shall have the prize of virtue and shall be with God, on whose account we suffer.

How then can one fail to confess the sovereignty of right reason over emotion in those who were not turned back by fiery agonies?

In the former account, however, we find a full and clear assertion of bodily resurrection, emphasized almost to the point of absurdity but therefore all the more unavoidable (2 Mac 7:9-11, 14, 23, 29):

You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws.

When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, and said nobly, "I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again."

One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!

The Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws.

Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God's mercy I may get you back again along with your brothers.

Apart from those comments from the dying brothers and their mother, there is this climactic instance with Razis where the noble military death (like Cato rather than Socrates) is combined with belief in bodily resurrection (2 Mac 14:41-46):

When the troops were about to capture the tower and were forcing the door of the courtyard, they ordered that fire be brought and the doors burned.

Being surrounded, Razis fell upon his own sword, preferring to die nobly rather than to fall into the hands of sinners and suffer outrages unworthy of his noble birth.

But in the heat of the struggle he did not hit exactly, and the crowd was now rushing in through the doors. He courageously ran up on the wall, and bravely threw himself down into the crowd. But as they quickly drew back, a space opened and he fell in the middle of the empty space.

Still alive and aflame with anger, he rose, and though his blood gushed forth and his wounds were severe he ran through the crowd; and standing upon a steep rock, with his blood now completely drained from him, he tore out his entrails, took them in both hands and hurled them at the crowd, calling upon the Lord of life and spirit to give them back to him again. This was the manner of his death.

It is in those final texts from 2 Maccabees, more even than in Daniel 12, that we see, clearly and unambiguously, that bodily resurrection is not about the survival of us but about the justice of God. Immortality of soul will not do, for that comes to all alike. But the martyrs have been publicly degraded and brutalized, *bodily* tortured and murdered for fidelity to God. Somehow, somewhere, sometime, therefore, that same God must arrange a public, visible, *and* bodily vindication (God must overcome, someday). It would not do simply to speak of punishment for the persecutors. There must also be *bodily* restoration for the persecuted.

I do not claim that all Jews, then or ever, accepted after-life faith let alone *bodily* resurrection as its only investment.<sup>9</sup> Some could consider ideas of after-life a piece of divine impertinence. Others could speak of Greek

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9 See the study of 1600 Jewish epitaphs across 1000 years by van der Horst (1991). He concludes that, "Many more Jews may have believed in some form of afterlife than seems to be apparent from the epitaphs, but in fact we have no way of knowing. But it cannot be stated on the basis of our evidence that belief in the bodily resurrection ... was an undisputed dogma among Jews in the imperial period. We find a wide variety of attitudes, ranging from nihilism, via the conviction that the immortal soul will dwell among the righteous ones or the stars, to belief in the resurrection of the body" (1991, 126). And again: "the period under consideration (300 BCE – 700 CE) was exactly the period in which Judaism slowly but steadily developed various forms of belief in afterlife. Resurrection of the body was only one of the options, but as the most typically Jewish alternative this option gained the upper hand towards the end of the period. In the New Testament period and a considerable time thereafter, however, this doctrinal monopoly had not yet been achieved. Several notions competed with one another, as is testified not only by the written sources but also by our epitaphs, where we find a variety of notions ranging from nihilism to the eternal dwelling of the immortal soul among the heavenly beings or the resurrection of the body" (1991, 137).

immortality but with Jewish justice appended. As in the Wisdom of Solomon (3:1-4):<sup>10</sup>

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,  
and no torment will ever touch them.  
In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died,  
and their departure was thought to be a disaster,  
and their going from us to be their destruction;  
but they are at peace.  
For though in the sight of others they were punished,  
their hope is full of immortality.

But I emphasize that, for those who first proposed it, what created that after-life interpretation and especially its *bodily* understanding was not a philosophical vision of human destiny but a theological vision of divine character. When and how would the justice of God be vindicated above the battered *bodies* of martyrs?

### 2.3 *Bodily resurrection within apocalyptic hope*

Bodily resurrection was part and parcel of a justified earth, was the final act and grand finale of God's public vindication of murdered martyrs and, by extension, of all persecuted innocents. The general resurrection, of the righteous for vindication and the unrighteous for punishment, was the final eschatological event, the grand finale which established a perfect world, a divine utopia here upon this earth.

*We* can easily imagine a cosmic destruction because, even apart from meteorites doing it to us, we ourselves can now do it atomically, biologically, chemically, or demographically. But, at a time when God alone could do it, believers could not imagine God destroying the earth named as all good at its creation. How could God ever annihilate God's own world, even or especially for a heavenly evacuation? What was awaited and expected was heaven transforming earth not heaven replacing earth. An eschatological world was, therefore, justice and righteousness established

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10 That is also after death, of course, but there is no emphasis on *bodily* resurrection. "Resurrection was the preserve of the disenfranchised classes of people who could not abide foreign domination. By contrast, immortality of the soul was adopted mainly by classes of people who learned Greek culture and benefited from it.... The Wisdom of Solomon uses a Greek notion of immortality in describing the more traditionally Jewish notion of resurrection for martyrs" (Segal 1997, 102-3).

definitively and forever here below upon a divinely perfected earth. And, if or when eschatology was imminent, apocalyptic eschatology meant the destruction not of time and space, earth and world, but of evil and violence, injustice and unrighteousness.<sup>11</sup> Bodily resurrection, therefore, takes place climactically in a divine transformation not a divine destruction of the earth.

But, and it is a very large but, what about the Gentiles in that final consummation? How will God make them just and fit for a perfect world? The question is not xenophobic or chauvinistic but reflects bitter imperial experience.<sup>12</sup> It is not so much about the Irish and the Japanese as about the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. There are across the entire Hebrew *and* Christian scriptures two quite distinct and even opposing solutions to the ultimate problem of imperial injustice, violence, and

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11 “The everlasting Kingdom is apocalyptic, however, not in the sense of a destroyed earth and an evacuation heavenward for the elect, but rather of something like a heaven on earth” (Crossan 1991, 285). That is the same phrase used by Dale C. Allison (1999, 155-56), “But most millenarian movements, whether ancient, medieval, or modern, have expected not the utter destruction and replacement of this world, but rather a revolutionary change.... ‘Heaven on earth,’ we might say”. On this whole subject see the collection of essays in Miller 2001.

12 What follows is very dependent on the work of Paula Fredriksen (1991). Here are the key citations: (1) “What place, if any, do Gentiles have in such a kingdom? We can cluster the material around two poles. At the negative extreme, the nations are destroyed, defeated, or in some way subjected to Israel.... At the positive extreme, the nations participate in Israel’s redemption. The nations will stream to Jerusalem and worship the God of Jacob together with Israel” (1991, 544-545); (2) “When God establishes his Kingdom, then, these two groups will together constitute ‘his people’; Israel, redeemed from exile, and the Gentiles, redeemed from idolatry. Gentiles are saved as Gentiles: they do not, eschatologically, become Jews” (1991, 547); (3) “Eschatological Gentiles ... those who would gain admission to the Kingdom once it was established, would enter as Gentiles. They would worship and eat together with Israel, in Jerusalem, at the Temple. The God they worship, the God of Israel, will have redeemed them from the error of idolatry: he will have saved them—to phrase this in slightly different idiom—graciously, apart from the works of the Law” (1991, 548); (4) “The original apostles would have readily accepted these Gentiles, because such a response was consonant with a prominent (indeed predominant) strain of Jewish apocalyptic expectation with which the earliest movement—also Jewish also apocalyptic—aligned itself” (1991, 553). Secondly, in Fredriksen 1999, “But it is the inclusive tradition anticipating gentile participation in Israel’s final redemption that sounds increasingly in intertestamental writings, in later synagogue prayers, and in rabbinic discussion. And, clearly, this is the tradition shaping the convictions and activities of the earliest Jewish Christians—James, John, Peter, Barnabas, and most especially Paul (see Gal 2)” (1999, 129).

impurity. They will be exterminated by God or converted to God (not to Judaism). Call those extremes negative and positive, less generous or inclusive, extermination or conversion but, in any case, their great overarching symbols are the final Divine War in which some are obliterated at Mount Megiddo or the final Divine Banquet at which all are feasted on Mount Zion.<sup>13</sup> Those discrete options remain side by side throughout the Bible just as they remain side by side in the human heart (vengeance vs. justice), they are never ultimately reconciled, although, of course, an individual text might attempt it.<sup>14</sup> I accept, however, Fredriksen's argument that the only way a devout Jew like James of Jerusalem could have allowed uncircumcised males into full fellowship was by adopting the Banquet/Conversion rather than the War/Destruction option. Bodily resurrection, accordingly, was fitted, at choice, within one or the other of those twin options.

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13 I emphatically reject the idea that the War/Destruction solution is from the (Christian) Old Testament and the Banquet/Conversion is from the New Testament. Think, for example, of the ecstatic vision in (OT) Isa 2:2-4 = Mic 4:1-3 or 25:6 in comparison with (NT) Rev 14:20, "And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for a distance of about two hundred miles."

14 For example, *Sib.Or.* 2, a full-service Jewish apocalypse "no later than the time of Augustus," describes the justified earth like this: "The earth will belong equally to all, undivided by walls or fences. It will then bear more abundant fruits spontaneously. Lives will be in common and wealth will have no division. For there will be no poor man there, no rich, and no tyrant, no slave. Further, no one will be either great or small anymore. No kings, no leaders. All will be on a par together" (John Collins in *OTP I*, 319-324). But it even goes beyond that radical egalitarianism. What about those evildoers immersed in the river of fire? "Whenever they [the pious ones] ask the imperishable God to save men from the raging fire and deathless gnashing he will grant it, and he will do this. For he will pick them out again from the undying fire and set them elsewhere and send them on account of his own people. To another eternal life with the immortals in the Elysian plain" (*OTP I*, 331-337). The pious ones still do not trust those others completely so God will give them a separate but equally perfect world all to themselves. Still, that is too much for one Christian copyist who annotated with "Plainly false. For the fire which tortures the condemned will never cease. Even I would pray that this be so, though I am marked with very great scars of faults, which have need of very great mercy. But let babbling Origen be ashamed of saying that there is a limit to punishment" (*OTP I*, 353, note c3).

### 3. The Meaning of Jesus' Bodily Resurrection for First-Century Christian Jews

When, against all that background, Christian Jews spoke of Jesus' resurrection, what did they mean to announce and what would others, whether believers or not, have understood them to claim? Three negatives before a positive answer.

*Resurrection is not bodily resuscitation.* By the latter term, I mean people who are saved from death at the last instant, or who are revived even after their hearts have temporarily stopped, or who have come back from death-like coma. Those who spoke of Jesus' resurrection insisted that it was "after three days" or "on the third day."<sup>15</sup> That was when, in Jewish tradition, it was customary to visit the tomb not just for mourning but to make sure the person was definitely dead. That, of course, is why Jesus waited until, "Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days" (John 11:17), until, that is, he was securely and definitely dead. When Christian Jews spoke of Jesus' resurrection after or on the third day, therefore, they were insisting that he had been really and truly dead.

*Resurrection is not post-mortem apparition.* This is an even more important distinction than that preceding one. First, visions or apparitions of the beloved dead, especially of those who died suddenly, tragically, or brutally are a normal part of human experience. Against the background of her own clinical experience as a doctor and a psychiatrist, Stacy Davids said concerning bereavement and grief, that a "review of well-conducted studies of the past three decades shows that about one-half to eighty percent of bereaved people studied feel this intuitive, sometimes overwhelming 'presence' or 'spirit' of the lost person.... These perceptions happen most often in the first few months following the death but sometimes persist more than a year, with significantly more women than men reporting these

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15 The first formulation is in Mark 8:31; 9:31; & 10:34, thence relocated into Matt 27:63. The second formulation is in Matt 16:21=Luke 9:22 (rephrased from Mark 8:31); Matt 17:23 (rephrased from Mark 9:31); Matt 20:19=Luke 18:33 (rephrased from Mark 10:34); Luke 24:7 (rephrased and relocated from Mark 10:34?); Luke 13:32; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor 15:4.

events.... The American Psychiatric Association, author of *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV*, considers these phenomena (when ‘one hears the voice of, or transiently sees the image of, the deceased person’) as non-pathological. They are viewed as common characteristics of uncomplicated grief, and not attributable to a mental disorder.... Part of the work of grief entails repeated, monotonous recalling of the events leading up to the death, as the mourner undergoes a restless need to ‘make sense’ of what happened, to make it explicable, and to classify it along with other similar events.... During this process, accurate recording and telling of the dead person’s life is of utmost importance to the bereaved.”<sup>16</sup> Second, altered states of consciousness, such as dreams and visions, are something common to our humanity, something hard-wired into our brains, something as normal as language itself. They were recognized as common possibilities in the early first century and they are still recognized as such in the early twenty-first century. How you explain them and whether you judge them objective, subjective, or interactive, is quite another question. But despite this or that case of deception or chicanery, they do happen. Third, therefore, even if nobody had ever mentioned it in the New Testament, it would have been extraordinary *if there were no apparitions* of Jesus to some of his companions after his death. But, and this is my point, apparitions of Jesus do not constitute resurrection. They constitute apparitions, no more and no less.

*Resurrection is not heavenly exaltation.* It was well within Jewish tradition that a very holy person could be taken up to heaven by God, could escape death, decay, and Sheol, even before anyone ever spoke of bodily resurrection or spiritual immortality. Thus, “Enoch walked with God; then

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16 Stacey Davids 1997, 3-6. Sebastian Junger’s book, *The Perfect Storm* (1997, 213) records the loss of the *Andrea Gail*, a 72-foot steel swordfisher out of Gloucester that disappeared with all aboard off Sable Island east of Nova Scotia, October 28, 1991. “If the men on the *Andrea Gail* had simply died, and their bodies were lying in state somewhere, their loved ones could make their goodbyes and get on with their lives. But they didn’t die, they disappeared off the face of the earth and, strictly speaking, it’s just a matter of faith that these men will never return”. And so, one fisherman’s “mother looks out the bedroom window one day and sees Murph [Dale Murphy] ambling down their street in huge deck boots. Someone else spots him in traffic in downtown Bradenton. From time to time [his ex-wife] Debra dreams that she sees him and runs up and says, ‘Dale, where’ve you been?’ And he won’t answer, and she’ll wake up in a cold sweat, remembering” (1997, 213-214).

he was no more, because God took him” (Gen 5:24); “Enoch pleased the Lord and was taken up, an example of repentance to all generations” (Sir 44:16); “Few have ever been created on earth like Enoch, for he was taken up from the earth” (Sir 49:14); and “By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death; and ‘he was not found, because God had taken him.’ For it was attested before he was taken away that ‘he had pleased God’” (Heb 11:5). Similarly, as Elijah and Elisha walked and talked near the Jordan, “a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kgs 2:11). That is exaltation, assumption, ascension, or apotheosis, but it is not resurrection. It could have been asserted for Jesus as Messiah, Lord, or Son of God and may well be exactly what was asserted in Phil 2:6-11 (unless “under the earth” in 2:10 refers to the Harrowing of Hell).

*Resurrection is general resurrection.* From that second section above along with those three preceding negatives, only one positive answer seems possible. Within first-century Jewish culture, to speak of Jesus’ resurrection claimed *that the general resurrection had begun*. That understanding explains features of Paul’s argumentation in 1 Cor 15. On the one hand, he speaks of Jesus’ resurrection as “the first fruits of those who have died” (15:20), as the start of the resurrection-as-harvest and, of course, from that metaphor one would not expect a long delay but a swift and continuous process to the harvest’s completion. On the other hand, Paul repeatedly and logically argues in both directions: from Jesus’ resurrection to the general resurrection and from the general resurrection to Jesus’ resurrection. As we have just seen, those two events stand or fall together as start and end of a single process. So we have, for example, these reciprocal statements in 1 Corinthians. First, from Jesus’ resurrection to general resurrection: “if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?” (15:12) “ Second, and even more emphasized, from general resurrection to Jesus’ resurrection: “if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised,” (15:13); again: “we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised” (15:15); and again: “if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised” (15:16). Naturally, of course, against his Jewish and Pharisaic understanding of bodily resurrection, there is no possibility that

Jesus was “raised” as a special and personal privilege (divine nepotism or filiotism, as it were).

I doubt if we can hear today, after two thousand years of Christianity, the stunning originality of that claim. We might think that what is stunningly original is claims of empty tomb and risen visions and that is why I accepted those secondary claims in this paper (*dato non concessio*, once again) in order to force more sharply the question of that primary claim. It is clear now, I hope, that those secondary claims are not enough in themselves to justify resurrection as distinct from exaltation. To the extent that one takes any or all of them as historical (especially risen apparitions, for example, as normal components of profound grief for a sudden, brutal, and terrible death) they may have been helpful or even instrumental for that primary assertion. But what caused it, what made it almost inevitable, was a continuity between their experienced reality of Jesus’ own claim that one could *already* enter the kingdom of God, could *already* have the kingdom of God come upon one by lives lived like his own.

I emphasize immediately that this originality is not what separated Christianity from Judaism but it is a profoundly creative move within the possibilities of Jewish theology about the general bodily resurrection.<sup>17</sup> That general resurrection was supposed to be, as it were, the grand finale, the final act of the apocalyptic drama. One would have imagined a moment, an instant, or, as *Sibylline Oracles* 2:226 put it, “bodies of humans, made solid in heavenly manner, breathing and set in motion, will be raised on a single day.” But now a claim was being made that instead of instant or moment there would be period or process. There would be a beginning, a time presumably short (they were wrong on that score), and then the end. And, it was claimed, that beginning of the end-of-the-end had already happened.

First, I repeat from above, that apocalyptic consummation was about the final justification and ultimate divinization of this earth. Second, if you announced that event’s imminence, people could only believe or disbelieve. Since it was future, it was beyond proof or disproof. Even if you announced that there would be terrible disasters when that event began and that these were patently now happening (with examples), that was still beyond proof or

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17 Similarly, for example, the claim of Qumran Judaism that there would be a single coming of two Messiahs or the claim of Christian Judaism that there would be two comings of a single Messiah are both equally creative and profoundly original moves within general Jewish messianic expectation.

disproof. Third, if, however, you announced that God's new creation, God's justified world was *already* present, you would be asked immediately to show where that newness could be seen.<sup>18</sup> Fourth, then, and recalling the first section of this paper, how could Paul possibly indicate the present evidence for God's already-begun justification to ordinary open-minded and even pious pagans? Like this, maybe?

Imagine Paul explaining Jesus' resurrection to a polite pagan colleague as they worked together in a leather or canvas shop? Or, even better, to the woman who owned the shop? What could possibly convince them that a new creation was all around them, not just imminent but already present, not just coming soon but already started? What would have been at stake for them in such a conversation? What would move them, if movement were at all possible, from "how very nice for Jesus" to "I believe"? This? The God of all creation to whom this world belongs is a God of distribute justice and not just of absolute power. That God has begun the climactic justification of the world by raising Jesus from the dead and thereby negating the official, legal, and public power of imperial Rome. But where and how, Paul, is that at work? What could Paul answer? Something like this? There is a small group of us who meet for prayer in that sardine-shop at the corner before it opens each day. And once a week we meet there to share half of all we made from the preceding week's work. We call that meal the Lord's Supper because we believe that all creation belongs to the Lord and that we must share the Lord's food equally among us. We share what is not our own and that is the Lord's type of meal, the Lord's style of supper. So, I invite you. Come and see if God is not already making a more perfect world right under your very noses. And, by the way, we have small groups like the one here in every city of the Roman Empire. It is not just how many we are but how everywhere we are. And whenever one of you turns from Caesar, who crucified Jesus, to God who raised Jesus, you participate in this justification of the world. It is a choice between the divine Caesar and the divine Jesus. Come to the sardine-seller's shop the day after tomorrow to see and decide

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18 Think, for example, of this analogy. The assertion of some Christians that the Rapture, in which God's holy ones will be snatched from this earth before hell is loosed upon it at the end, is not capable of empirical evidence because it is a future event. But if some of those Christians claimed it had *already* started, they would have to show some empty houses and some missing people.

for yourself. Come and see how we live, and then you can choose to join us or to depart in peace.

One final point. Christian Jews, accepting their eschatological situation and especially its imminent apocalyptic consummation, could easily have concluded that prayer and purity, hope and holiness, patience and expectation were what was required of them by a God who would bring in the Gentiles without any further cooperation or human participation on their part. It was, therefore, another and especially creative step for those before Paul and for Paul himself to go out and seek them, to collaborate with God in Gentile salvation. Where did their tradition suggest such an apocalyptic scenario? James of Jerusalem, for example, might have accepted them into full fellowship as uncircumcised males but would he have gone out to look for them, persuade them, convert them? If the assertion that God had begun the general resurrection with Jesus was a first stunningly original step in earliest Christian Judaism, the assertion that God expected active participation in Gentile conversion was the second equally stunning one.

#### **4. Two Major Options for Understanding Bodily Resurrection**

These two options interact with one another. The first one concerns the distinction between Jesus' resurrection as personal and individual, as something that happened to Jesus and Jesus alone, or as communal and structural, as something that happened to Jesus as the leader of them that sleep (what eventually was called the "Descent into Hades" or the "Harrowing of Hell"). The second one concerns the distinction between literal and metaphorical language in talking of Jesus' bodily resurrection and/or the general bodily resurrection.

##### *4.1 Jesus' resurrection as personal or communal?*

Paul's description of the resurrected Jesus in 1 Cor 15:20 as "the first fruits of those who have died (*literally*: who have slept, τῶν κεκοιμημένων)" does not, strictly speaking, tell us whether he is imagining Jesus rising alone or at the head of all other Jewish martyrs or even of all the Jewish just.<sup>19</sup> But I cannot find any text in Paul that indicates knowledge of or concern with a *corporate* resurrection where Jesus' own rising causes and/or leads the

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<sup>19</sup> The general background is given in Attridge 1990.

rising of earlier saints. Instead, I find this very clear statement in 1 Thess 4:14-17:

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died (τοὺς κοιμηθέντας). For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died (τοὺς κοιμηθέντας). For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.

Jesus rose alone but soon all Christians, whether living or lately dead (martyred?), will join him in resurrection. Corporate resurrection, yes, but for future Christians not past Jews.

Paul's phrase, "who have slept," is the same one used in the hymnic fragment found in Matt 27:51b-53: "The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep (τῶν κεκοιμημένων) were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many."<sup>20</sup> Once again, and strictly speaking, that does not mention the Descent into Hell but it is hard to explain its contextual content unless Matthew or pre-Matthew meant to include other holy ones within and along with Jesus' resurrection.<sup>21</sup> It is not simply a case of rocks split or even tombs opened on Friday but of those phenomena so that risen people could appear after Jesus'

20 There is a very complete discussion in Brown 1994, 895-96, 1118-33, 1137-40. He concludes that (1) the earth/rocks and tomb/bodies of 27:51b-52a are a pre-Matthean poetic and apocalyptic quatrain; and that (2) the exiting/raising/entering/appearing of 27:53a are a Matthean addition. Others scholars consider that a traditional unit lies behind all of 27:51b-53 even if Matthew has redacted it awkwardly into his Markan framework (1994, 1138, note 102).

21 Brown says that "in Matt's account which shows imaginatively how Jesus' resurrection broke the power of death, there is nothing to suggest that the author himself knew about the descent into hell/Hades" (1994, 1129) but, of course, "ordinary people familiar with OT thought could understand that the death on the cross had introduced the day of the Lord with all its aspects, negative (divine wrath, judgment) and positive (conquest of death, resurrection to eternal life)" (1994, 1137). It seems to me, however, that in this context, the earth/rocks, opening/raising, entering/appearing in 27:51-53 indicate a *corporate* resurrection with or without the presence and before or after the creation of any explicit Descent into Hell.

resurrection on Sunday.<sup>22</sup> One could, of course, imagine a corporate resurrection without envisaging a Descent into Hell with the latter but a visualization of the former divine process.

Such “speculation” about a corporate resurrection in that latter sense “must have begun early, for it seems to have been presupposed in a series of (admittedly) obscure NT passages” often as hymns or from hymnic sources.<sup>23</sup> The usual examples are 1 Pet 3:18-19; 4:6; Eph 4:8-10. And to those I would add the thinking behind and even in Matt 27:51b-53.

In the *Gospel of Peter* 10:41-42 there is a much clearer visualization of the Harrowing of Hell with Jesus leading out those “who have slept” as a great cruciform procession (or, as a talking cross, if one prefers):<sup>24</sup>

And they were hearing a voice from the heavens saying. “Have you made proclamation to the fallen-asleep (τοῖς κοιμωμένοις)?” And an obeisance was heard from the cross: “Yes.”

That dialogue attempts, as did Matthew in 27:51b-53, to fit the Descent into Hell or the Harrowing of Hell into a sequence of historical events. But, as noted above, that phenomenon is more usually alluded to in the poetry of hymns rather than described in the prose of normalcy. Here is a vision of that corporate resurrection, with the risen Jesus speaking, in the *Odes of Solomon* 42:11-20.<sup>25</sup>

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22 For Matthew’s “many,” recall the “many” of Dan 12:2 (πολλοὶ τῶν καθευδόντων) . That is a different verb for “sleep” (καθεύδω) than in 1 Cor 15:20 and 1 Thess 4:14-17 (κοιμάω) but does not mean anything significant. Paul, for example, uses *καθεύδω* rather than *κοιμάω* in 1 Thess 5:10.

23 Brown 1994, 1127.

24 The translation is from Brown 1994, 1320. “Made proclamation” is, of course, a much better term than the standard “preached.” Jesus did not preach a sermon in prison but proclaimed a deliverance from prison.

25 (1) Between 1985 to 1991 I argued that: (i) the fragmentary *Gospel of Peter* is a second-century text which deliberately harmonized *both* the canonical passion-resurrection stories *and* another non-canonical passion-resurrection narrative which I termed the *Cross Gospel* for easy reference; (ii) the *Cross Gospel* was earlier than and the major source for the entire canonical tradition; (iii) the passion narrative, from *Cross Gospel* to John, was not derived from history remembered but from prophecy historicized. For the development of those proposals see Crossan 1985, 123-181 [1992, 85-127]; 1988; 1991, 354-394; 1995, 223. (2) Those second and third proposals were strongly opposed by the late Raymond E. Brown 1987, 321-343; also 1994, 1317-1349. But his position on that first proposal is much more ambiguous and I focus here only on that one. In it I suggested a consecutive

“I was not rejected although I was considered to be so,  
and I did not perish although they thought it of me.

Sheol saw me and was shattered  
and Death ejected me and many with me ....

And those who had died ran toward me;  
and cried out and said, “Son of God, have pity on us ....

And open for us the door  
by which we may go forth to you,  
for we perceive that our death does not approach you.

May we also be saved with you,  
because you are our Savior.”

Then I heard their voice,  
and placed their faith in my heart,

And I placed my name upon their head,  
because they are free and they are mine.

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and independent three-act drama of juridical execution, guarded burial, and visible resurrection in that *Cross Gospel*. Brown actually agrees that there is such a consecutive and independent source within the *Gospel of Peter* but it is only a two-act drama of guarded burial and visible resurrection: “*GPet* ... had a source besides Matt, namely, a more developed account of the guard at the tomb. (That point is also supported by the consecutiveness of the story in *GPet*.) The supplying of the centurion's name, the seven seals, the stone rolling off by itself, the account of the resurrection with the gigantic figures, the talking cross, the confession of Jesus as God's Son by the Jewish authorities, and their fear of their own people—all those elements could plausibly have been in the more developed form of the story known to the author of *GPet* and absent from the form known to Matt” (1994, 1307). (3) My response was and is that such a two-act drama could never have existed without some initial act which (i) detailed a juridical execution and which also (ii) explained why the tomb needed to be guarded. I find it most economical to locate that required first act exactly where it is, before those other two in the *Gospel of Peter* itself. See Crossan 1998, 481-525. (4) Until, therefore, somebody can show me verse by verse how either redaction and/or recall could get from one, some, or all of our canonical gospels to what now appears in the *Gospel of Peter* (that is, in my proposed *Cross Gospel* sections), I maintain my position.

The translation is by James H. Charlesworth (*OTP II*, 771). See also Aune 1982, 435-460.

There is something extremely sad about that beautiful hymn. As Christianity slowly lost its Judaism, it would not care much about dead Jews however just or however martyred. It could forget that Jesus was not the first or last Jews to die on a Roman cross. But, if what was said above in the second part of this paper is correct, a *corporate* and not just a *personal* resurrection would be presumed as the start of the general resurrection which was, I repeat, about the justice of God and not about the survival of us.

#### 4.2 *Bodily resurrection as literal or metaphorical?*

Is all of that faith in resurrection, be it of Jesus' bodily resurrection and/or the general bodily resurrection, literal or metaphorical? It is not easy to answer that for ancients who went before us since it is equally difficult to do so for moderns with whom we live and maybe even for ourselves to ourselves. My guess (and it is little more than that) is that a rather similar spectrum from the most literal to the most metaphorical existed then as now. Would Paul have expected an empty tomb to exist somewhere? Or would a spiritual body and a new creation make such a question absurd? While he would surely have agreed with Luke that the risen Lord was not simply a ghost, would he have imagined him eating and drinking to prove his reality?

I suggest three conclusions in answer to those as ongoing questions to be probed both historically and theologically. First, in the history of Judaism and Christianity, as I see it, faith has often or maybe even always been right on the *what* and *that* but wrong on the *how* and *when* of its content. Second, I give the same spectrum from 100% literal to 100% metaphorical on matters of faith to the ancients as to the moderns. But, and I emphasize this point, the metaphorical is always metaphorical *of something* beyond itself. If, for example, the resurrection of Jesus is taken metaphorically, it announces God's justification of the world and that is something literal, actual, historical, something real or else just empty talk. Third, Paul says in 1 Cor 15:14 that, "if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain." True, of course. But, then, so is its reversal. If our faith has been in vain (that is, if it is not visibly and publicly making the world more divinely just), then Christian proclamation has been in vain (that is, if it not about making the world more divinely just), Christ has not been raised (that is, as the *start* of the general

resurrection and apocalyptic consummation). Exalted, maybe (as in Psalm 2), but certainly not raised.

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