



# THE BEREA PAGE

*“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11*

## Resurrection Meaning: In the News

A news story the week before Easter reported that most Americans accept the historicity of Jesus’s resurrection but don’t find it relevant to their lives. Here are links to (1) the article; (2) the research report on which it was based; and (3) an article I wrote (before the above appeared) for the College church (Searcy) bulletin (April 9 issue) which aimed to stress one aspect of the resurrection’s meaning.

- 1) “Americans accept historical reality of the Resurrection of Jesus, but struggle to make it personal” ~ *Washington Times*, 4/6/23; [here](#)
- 2) “Americans Believe in Easter Resurrection But Aren’t Sure Why It Matters,” ~ *Lifeway Research*, 4/5/23; [here](#)
- 3) My article, [“Because He Lives”](#)

*“If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” ~ 1 Cor 15.32b*

## Coming Soon

### *Opening the Scriptures*

A newsletter featuring expositions of biblical texts

Watch your inbox in late April for more details & a sample

## The Canon Story: What’s At Stake?

David Anguish

Last [time](#), I noted that writings from church history, the discovery of extracanonical Christian writings (notably, other gospels), and the inclusion of other books and/or omissions of some of the 27 canonical writings in early manuscripts provide evidence that these statements are true:

- In addition to the 27 canonical books, other early Christian writings were read as Scripture in some ancient churches.
- 20 of the NT writings were generally considered canonical by 130-150 AD, but the other seven (Heb, Jas, 2 Pet, 2-3 John, Jude, and Rev) continued to be debated in the 3rd-4th centuries.
- There are other writings known as “gospels” that were excluded from the canon by the ancient church.
- The 27 writings comprising the NT were first listed together as the canon in 367 AD (4th century), in Athanasius’s *39th Festal Letter*.

I also noted that this evidence has convinced some that we should revise our conclusions about the canon’s development and the nature of the Christian faith. Among their claims are these: (1) determining which books should be included in the canon remained a completely open question centuries after the church began; (2) reasons for including some books and rejecting others were as much political as theological; (3) the emperor Constantine “influenced” the Nicene Council (325 AD) to revise previously held views of a human Jesus and promote his deity; (4) thus, the Council discarded earlier gospels that showed his humanity and established as canonical the four gospels that exalt him as divine.

What happens if claims like these are true? First, our identification of the sources we should use to define the teachings of the Christian faith will change. At the most basic level, the number of books in the canon—“the yardstick by which the church’s belief and practice is to be measured”—will be different. We’ll need to consult more writings to determine what is “authoritative or binding.”<sup>1</sup>

How we define the Christian faith will also change, as proponents of alternate views understand. Consider, for

## Not the Same

“The tendency to translate [makarios] with the word ‘happy’ is a misguided effort to avoid unclear ‘religious’ language and should be resisted. A person who is ‘blessed’ may not be ‘happy’ at all. For our emotional state may and will vary with the circumstances of life. but we can be assured that, whatever those circumstances, if we endure them with faith and commitment to God, we will be recipients of God’s favor.” ~ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 2000), 69-70

## Whose Standard?

“The relativist lets the cat out of the bag when you practice what he preaches, when you *act* toward *him* as if his own philosophy of relativism were true. *He* may *preach* relativism, but he expects *you* to *practice* absolutism.” ~ Peter Kreeft, *Moral Choices: Practical Wisdom for Everyday Moral Decisions* (Servant Books, 1990), 37

## Salt and Light

“Jesus enjoins us to ‘render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s’ (Matthew 22:21). Both realms are thereby opened to the Christian. Both realms are also kept distinct. When the things of God and the things of Caesar are confused with each other, both realms are endangered... If the Church becomes indistinguishable from a particular culture, it loses even its influence on that culture. ~ Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Loving God with All Your Mind: Thinking as a Christian in the Postmodern World*, rev. ed. (Crossway Books, 2013), 71

example, this statement by Elaine Pagels in an op-ed written in 2006, at the time of the publication of the *Gospel of Judas*:

What is clear is that the *Gospel of Judas* has joined the other spectacular discoveries that are exploding the myth of a monolithic Christianity and showing how diverse and fascinating the early Christian movement really was.<sup>2</sup>

In their analysis of Pagels’s essay, Darrell Bock and Daniel Wallace ask,

Does it matter if Jesus and the Christian faith are defined by the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—by the *Gospel of Judas*—or by all of them? Clearly the answer is “Yes.”<sup>3</sup>

The matter is one of credibility. If the alternate story is true, a people who have been called to know, believe, and love the truth (John 8.32; 2 Thess 2.10, 12) cannot rightly continue speaking and acting as if it is not true.

But beyond that, even if we are convinced—as I think we should be—that the evidence does not support the alternate story, our message will fall on deaf ears if we are unwilling to engage those who think its conclusions are true. We cannot afford to dismiss them as a non-issue that is unworthy of our consideration. Doing so leads some to charge that we are doing something akin to what critics allege the ancient church did at Constantine’s behest: ignoring the evidence in the interest of maintaining the status quo, our position, and our power.<sup>4</sup>

We need, then, to be familiar with the story of how the canon was determined and assembled—and why.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The quotations in this paragraph are from Andrew F. Walls, “The Canon of the New Testament,” in Frank E. Gæbelein, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 631. For an example of how this plays out in the real world, see the dialogue in the small group discussion cited in [part 1](#).

<sup>2</sup> Elaine Pagels, “The Gospel Truth,” *New York Times*, April 8, 2006; the article remains online as <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/08/opinion/the-gospel-truth.html>. Retrieved 12/8/20.

<sup>3</sup> Darrell L. Bock & Daniel B. Wallace, *Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture’s Quest to Unseat the Biblical Christ* (Thomas Nelson, 2007), 81.

<sup>4</sup> It is telling that some proponents of alternate views attribute the fact that church people do not know the story of the canon’s development to the failure of church leaders to teach about the matter. While some see this as a matter of neglect, others assign a more sinister motive: an intentional effort to hide the truth. See Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (Anchor Books, 2003), 253-254. Also the title of Bart Ehrman’s book, *Jesus Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (and Why We Don’t Know About Them)* (Harper One, 2009), 189; as cited in Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament: Origin, Collection, Text & Canon*, 2nd ed. (IVP Academic, 2011), 190.

All Scripture quotations not otherwise designated are from the ESV.  
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