



RESURRECTION 101

Introducing Reasons for Confidence

4 ~ Some Things That Must Be Explained

In the preface to the print edition of a 1985 debate between Gary R. Habermas (theist) and Antony G. N. Flew (atheist) (*Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*), David Beck wrote:

"In the current view, religion is not an issue of knowledge, of what the facts are, but of faith, of what is believed. This notion of the Resurrection as 'existential meaning-making' makes its actual occurrence irrelevant. . . . Thus the factuality of the Resurrection is deserted, even by explicitly Christian theologians. Consequently, the very mention of evidence for Jesus' Resurrection is a startling thought. It challenges not only the received evaluation of history but the very nature of religion" (p. ix).

Beck then said that a real debate could occur between Habermas, a historical evidence expert, and Flew, an expert on the philosophical case that miracles are not possible, because they agreed that:

- The "current view" described above is nonsense; Resurrection has no meaning if there was no event.
- The question of the Resurrection must be settled based on what Flew often called the "best evidence."
- If the Resurrection did occur, materialism (or naturalism) fails; there must be a supernatural reality.

Twelve Events That Must Be Explained

In his first affirmative speech, Habermas said the following:

"At least eleven events are considered to be knowable history by virtually all scholars [critical historians, philosophers, theologians and scripture scholars] and a twelfth event is considered to be knowable history by many scholars" (p. 19).

1. Jesus died due to the rigors of crucifixion.
 - *"And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit"* (Matt 27.50; see Mark 15.37; Luke 23.46; John 19.30-37; 1 Cor 15.3).
2. Jesus was buried.
 - *"Now there was a man named Joseph, from . . . Arimathea . . . [who] went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he . . . laid him in a tomb cut in stone, . . ."* (Luke 23.50, 52-53; see Matt 27.57-60; John 19.38-42; 1 Cor 15.4).
- 3. Jesus' death caused the disciples to despair and lose hope.
 - *"On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, . . ."* (John 20.19a; see Matt 26.56, 58; 27.54-56).
- 4. Although not as frequently recognized, many scholars hold that Jesus was buried in a tomb that was discovered to be empty just a few days later.
 - *"But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus"* (Luke 24.1-3; see John 20.1-2).

- 5. Critical scholars even agree that at this time the disciples had real experiences that they believed were literal appearances of the risen Jesus.
 - “. . . and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. . . . to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15.5-6; see Luke 24.13-35, 36-49; John 20.14-23).
- 6. Because of these experiences, the disciples were transformed from doubters who were afraid to identify themselves with Jesus to bold proclaimers of his death and Resurrection, willing to die for this belief.
 - “Men of Israel, . . . hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did . . . as you yourselves know—this Jesus, . . . you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it” (Acts 2.22-24; see Matt 26.56; John 20.19; Acts 3.14-15; 4.13).
- 7. This message was central in the early church preaching.
 - “God raised him up, . . . [David] foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.... Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2.24, 31-32, 36; see 3.15; 10.19-41; 13.32-34; 17.16-18, 22; see chart in lesson 2).
- 8. And was especially proclaimed in Jerusalem, where Jesus had died shortly before.
 - “And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, ‘We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us’” (Acts 5.27-28; see 2.5, 24-36; 3.1, 11; 4.1-22).
- 9. As a result of this message, the church was born and grew.
 - “So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. . . . And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2.41, 47b; see 4.4; 5.42).
- 10. With Sunday as the primary day of worship.
 - “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come” (1 Cor 16.2; see Acts 20.7).
- 11. James, the brother of Jesus and a skeptic, was converted to the faith when he also believed he saw the resurrected Jesus.
 - “Then he appeared to James, . . .” (1 Cor 15.7; see Mark 6.3; John 7.5; Gal 1.19; Acts 15.6, 13; 21.16).
- 12. A few years later, Paul the persecutor of Christians was also converted by an experience that he, similarly, believed to be an appearance of the risen Jesus.
 - “Last of all, . . . he appeared also to me” (1 Cor 15.8; see Acts 8.1-3; 9.3-6, 21; 21.40-22.11; Gal 1.13-17).

In terms of history, what conclusion best explains this series of events?

Next Time: “He Is Not Here” — What Happened to the Body?

William Lane Craig illustrates the importance of the empty tomb as evidence for the resurrection. A high school friend once said to him, “There ain’t gonna be no Easter this year.” When Craig incredulously asked, “Why not?” his friend replied, “They found the body.”

~ William Lane Craig, “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?” In Michael J. Wilkins & J. P. Moreland, eds., *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus* [Zondervan, 1995], 165.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV