

The Historical Veracity of the Resurrection Narratives

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Need for the Study

The four canonical Gospels have enjoyed a long, diverse and rich heritage of investigation and interpretation. Up until the time period of the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) they were generally considered to be accurate representations of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Major shifts in both scientific and philosophical thinking during the Enlightenment¹ resulted in similar shifts in theological thinking—thinking that began to seriously question the consensus surrounding the Gospels.²

A relatively short time later, "in the middle and late nineteenth century in Europe, as one of the final effects of the Enlightenment, historical-critical scholarship began to be applied in earnest to the Gospel narratives."³ The use of historical-critical methodologies on the Gospels led to questions surrounding the historical accuracy of the Gospels and cast doubt on the veracity of the information they offered about the earthly life of Jesus. There have been continuing attempts on the part of certain scholars, since the efforts of Hermann Samuel Reimarus⁴ and espe-

¹ The Renaissance was marked by a "return to the sources." Johannes Reuchlin initiated the study of Hebrew and eventually the humanist renaissance contributed philological tools for biblical interpretation. Erasmus studied the Scripture as he did any other ancient text, making critical, historical judgments about the text and its meaning. The scientific revolution, promoted by the work of N. Copernicus, J. Kepler and Galileo Galilei resulted in a new locus for the authority of understanding Scripture, namely, reason. Galileo's claim to the heliocentricity of our universe created a tension for the current understanding of Scripture. Isaac de La Peyrere's *Prae Adamiten* is an example of how history grounded in rationalism began to shape what the Bible taught and uncover the tension between historical sources and the Bible's chronology. And, the work of René Descartes (*Discours de la Méthode*) helped establish the criteria of doubt as a universally valid principle, impacting science, philosophy and historiography. The end result was that reason was "made the norm over religion" and a radical literary criticism of the Bible was undertaken, including a concomitant denial of the miraculous in the interpretation of Scripture (e.g. Spinoza; J. B. Witter; J. Astruc; J. J. Griesbach; G. E. Lessing and J. G. Eichhorn). Cf. Gerhard Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 18-28 and Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day*, vol. 2 (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1985), 185, who says that rationalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was "characterized by its interest in the world and by its confidence in the powers of reason."

² Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 3, 4. See also F. F. Bruce, "The History of New Testament Study," in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 21-59, for a nice discussion of the history of New Testament interpretation and the rise of the historical-critical method.

³ Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1995), 9.

⁴ Cf. Charles H. Talbert, ed. "Reimarus: Fragments," in *Lives of Jesus Series*, trans. Ralph S. Fraser (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970). Cf. also Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its*

cially since the work of David Friedrich Strauss (*Das Leben Jesu*),⁵ to reconstruct a historically satisfying picture of the Jesus of history from the canonical Gospels, as well as other available documents.⁶ The "Quest" for the historical Jesus has gone through at least 2 phases in the past and is currently experiencing a third phase (since the early 1980s). For all their efforts though, scholars have not arrived at much of a consensus—indeed very different pictures of the historical Jesus have emerged.⁷ On the other hand, there has been at least one similarity throughout the various quests which appears to owe its origin to the Enlightenment. The "thing" that binds most scholars together is not the picture of Jesus they get, but rather the presupposition of a thoroughgoing rationalism which they share in their pursuit. Such a rationalism precludes the supernatural and the miraculous.⁸ As Pierre Benoit has so clearly said,

Behind all these relatively new methods, new at least in their technical application, we discover one fundamental thesis which is not itself new at all. This is the denial of the supernatural which we are so accustomed to meeting in the works of modern rationalist criticism. It is a thesis which, once stripped of its various masks, literary, historical or sociological analysis, reveals its true identity—it is a philosophical one.⁹

Since the rise of the Jesus quest, and the development of form and redaction criticism in the early and middle parts of this century,¹⁰ scholars have developed criteria by which they endeavor to determine which words and deeds Jesus actually said and did. But these criteria are routinely applied from a naturalistic worldview.

Therefore this study is needed to show that such a rationalistic worldview is indefensible and should be abandoned in favor of a worldview that allows for the supernatural. In keeping with this, the study is needed to demonstrate that the resurrection is an integral part of any reconstruction of the life of the *historical Jesus*. Concerning one of the two vital issues facing the Third Quest (there is also the issue involving continuity and discontinuity between Jesus and Judaism, and Jesus and the church), Neill and Wright frankly say that "the major question here is, of course, that of the resurrection, which as yet has hardly been addressed within the Third Quest, although the tools for

Progress from Reimarus to Wrede (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1968), 13, who says that "before Reimarus no one had attempted to form a historical conception of the life of Jesus."

⁵ David Friedrich Strauss, "The Life of Jesus Critically Examined," in *Lives of Jesus Series*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. George Eliot (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972). *idem.*, *In Defense of My Life of Jesus against the Hegelians*, ed. and trans. Marilyn Chapin Massey (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1983).

⁶ The Jesus Seminar and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, for example, rely heavily upon Thomas and in Fiorenza's case, the book of *Judith* as well. One scholar, John Dominic Crossan, makes much of an Apocryphal book, namely, the *Gospel of Peter*. Mention will be made of Crossan's approach later in the paper. For information on these points see the appropriate sections in Ben Witherington, III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1995).

⁷ See Witherington, *Jesus Quest*. Consult the entire work for recent examples; Colin Brown, "Historical Jesus, Quest of," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 326-341. Cf. also Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 182-205; Stephen Neill, *Jesus through Many Eyes: Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 164-95.

⁸ Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland, eds. "Introduction: The Furor Surrounding Jesus," in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1995), 4, 5.

⁹ Pierre Benoit, *Jesus and the Gospel*, trans. Benet Weatherhead (Bristol: Herder and Herder, 1973), 39. Benoit is referring to the development of tradition criticism (e.g. form criticism), but these constitute in part, methods that are used to reconstruct the life of the historical Jesus and so his comment equally applies to the quest—even today in the nineties.

¹⁰ On form criticism see, Edgar V. McKnight, *What is Form Criticism*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship: New Testament Series, ed. Dan O. Via (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 1-3. On redaction criticism see, Norman Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship: New Testament Series, ed. Dan O. Via (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 1-24.

this next phase of study are now surely to hand."¹¹ So there is a need to evaluate the accounts of the resurrection. In this sense the study is partly a response to the critics who, while closed off to the possibility of the resurrection (due in large measure to their antisupernaturalistic worldview), nonetheless, attempt to refit the Gospel data into some scheme which they assert reflects a genuine picture of the historical Jesus. Finally, one might add that the discussion of this issue is not for academicians only, but also for the general public, as both the popularization of the materials of the Jesus Seminar and recent articles in *Time Magazine* and *Newsweek* make clear.¹²

The Purpose and Scope of the Study

The first goal of this study is to show that a worldview which allows for the miraculous is more reasonable and therefore more defensible philosophically and historically than a worldview which *a priori* rules out the supernatural. On the other hand, just because we permit a supernaturalistic worldview does not mean *de facto* that the Gospels are historically trustworthy. The Gospels claim to be written in a genuine historical setting and therefore can be subjected to certain criteria to determine the reasonableness of their historical assertions. This leads to the primary purpose of the study.

This study ultimately attempts to demonstrate, based on a worldview that permits the supernatural, that the resurrection accounts in the gospels fair extremely well and stand as reliable historical witnesses to such an event when examined on the basis of the criteria of authenticity—the same criteria that are indiscriminately used by scholars to authenticate certain sayings of Jesus and discount others.

Indirectly, then, insofar as the study achieves its primary purpose, it attempts to make a contribution to the Third Quest as a whole by asserting that any reconstruction of the life of Jesus must include in it, his resurrection from the dead.

Overview of the Study

The study will proceed first by arguing for a worldview that at least permits the supernatural. A brief history of the discussion regarding antisupernaturalism in biblical studies will be offered, followed by a critique of this position which has for so long dominated biblical studies. The defense of the supernaturalistic worldview will rest primarily on historical and philosophical considerations. To wrap up the first section, a statement will be offered as to the best worldview a historian can possess in doing historiography.

Second, based upon the worldview argued for in the first part of the paper, the study will apply the criteria of authenticity to the resurrection narratives to see if they indeed are historically credible. We will see that the resurrection accounts fair very well and should be considered historically trustworthy and an integral part of any reconstruction of the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

¹¹ Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1861-1986*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 400. The situation described concerning the lack of comment by Third Questers on Jesus' resurrection, as late as 1986, does not appear to have changed substantially since then.

¹² Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover, eds. *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1993). See also David Van Biema, "The Gospel Truth?" *Time* 8 April 1996, 52-59; Kenneth L. Woodward, "Rethinking the Resurrection," *Newsweek* 8 April 1996, 60-70. For a criticism of these popular ideas about Jesus, see James R. Edwards, "Who Do Scholars Say That I Am?" *Christianity Today* 4 March 1996, 15-20. Edwards rightly recognizes and questions the tremendous bias against the possibility of the supernatural among certain scholars engaged in the third quest.

Chapter 2: Historiography and the Supernatural

Introduction

The Third Quest has produced several different pictures of the historical Jesus which at times seem to involve special pleading and a conscripting of certain evidence to the passing over (including dismissing) of other data vital to the task.¹³ There is indeed a selectivity that is readily apparent in the reductionism,¹⁴ yet the *rationale escapes reason* at times. Nonetheless, there is one *sine qua non* that for most Third Questers remains the anvil on which they manage the evidence as they forge a particular mold into which, they affirm, we ought to pour our understanding of Jesus. As I indicated in the introduction to the paper, this steel thread joining many scholars together, all the while producing different pictures of the historical Jesus, appears to be one aspect of their worldview. They are ant-supernaturalists for the most part, grounded in the rationalistic naturalism arising out of the Enlightenment, followers at this point, of people like René Descartes (1596-1650), David Hume (1711-1776) and the later historicist, Troeltsch (1865-1923) who was influenced in particular by Dilthey.¹⁵ According to Ladd, "The 'historical Jesus' is a hypothesis reconstructed from the Gospels by the use of the historical-critical method *on the basis of naturalistic presuppositions*. Such a Jesus must be altogether and only human—a Jesus without transcendence."¹⁶

This particular worldview is not only devastating to Scriptural testimony,¹⁷ it is also fallacious historiographically speaking and indefensible philosophically. The aim of this section on the one hand, is to demonstrate that such is the case, and on the other, to state and defend the reasonableness of a worldview that allows for the supernatural. This discussion is necessary, before the resurrection accounts are tested historiographically in chapter 3 (i.e. via the criteria of authenticity), since the possibility of denying the resurrection *a priori* still remains.

¹³ Cf. Darrell L. Bock, "The Words of Jesus: Live, Jive, or Memorex" in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 91, 92. See also Donald A. Hagner, "The New Testament, History, and the Historical-Critical Method," in *New Testament Criticism & Interpretation*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 82, who says that "it is clear that especially where the study of the historical Jesus is concerned, scholars—far more than they are generally prone to admit—let their presuppositions largely govern the conclusions to which they come."

¹⁴ By reductionism I mean the tendency to see Jesus as either this kind of person or that, either a cynic, or a sage, either a man of the spirit or a Jewish peasant. See Ben Witherington, III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1995), 185.

¹⁵ R. V. Pierard, "Troeltsch, Ernst" in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 1113.

¹⁶ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 175, 76.

¹⁷ Cf. John MacQuarrie, *Twentieth Century Religious Thought* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1988), 143, as an advocate of the relativistic stance arising out of the "comparative religions" position, says with approval that Troeltsch's principles, when grounded in rationalism, deprive Christianity of certainty in its historical basis, leaves it shorn of its supernatural element and denies it any final or absolute character. This, he claims, renders Christianity a "great service" (154). Such a view is according to philosophical naturalism and as Wilkins and Moreland argue, it *a priori* excludes "large portions of the gospel material" and has other implications as well. The point is, how can it help Christianity if it virtually rewrites the sources? Is it Christianity anymore? See Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland, eds. "Introduction," in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholars Reinvent the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 4.

A Modern Critical Presupposition: The Wedge between History and Theology¹⁸

Pre-Enlightenment Understanding of History and Theology

From the inception of the church to the present day there have been discussions, debates, councils, etc., in the attempt to articulate what the Scripture means by what it says. Marcion, in the second century, provided the church with no little stir as he attempted to jettison the Old Testament and much of the New that was not written by Paul or perhaps Luke. Measures were taken to deal with Marcion and his aberrant views.¹⁹ Several councils convened over the history of the church. The error of Arius and his followers was dealt with at the Council of Nicaea (A. D. 325) and along with the error of Apollinarius, it was further dealt with at the Council of Constantinople (A. D. 381). The Council of Ephesus (A. D. 431) dealt with such things as Nestorianism and the Council of Chalcedon (A. D. 451) dealt with Eutychianism and the hypostatic union.²⁰ Thus the early church, from the fathers through the period of the apologists, to the theologians, debated the things written and what they meant.

The period leading up to the Reformation and including the Reformation, saw battles waged within the church over the nature and means of salvation and the relationship of the church to the Scriptures—the whole question of religious authority was being asked and answered.²¹

In all these discussions, for the most part, the miraculous was a given. There was no widespread commitment to, and buttressing of, the belief that "there is not such a thing as a miracle" or the miraculous. In general, people accepted that God could and did do things, i.e. God "acted" in and through history. But such was to change after the seventeen and eighteen hundreds. As Geisler says, "There is no question that people believed in the supernatural in ancient and medieval times and on through the Reformation. But following the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, it became increasingly difficult for the thinking person to maintain this belief."²²

Post-Enlightenment Understanding of History and Theology

Cicero, a first century B. C. E. Roman philosopher and writer, says in his work *De Divinatione II. 28*: "That which could not have happened never did happen; and that which could have happened is no portent; therefore, in any view, there is no such thing as a portent."²³ E. P. Sanders in his recent book, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, quotes the previous passage from Cicero and maintains his total agreement with the ancient author. He says,

¹⁸ No clearer affirmation of this situation can be found than that which comes from the pen of Norman Perrin, *The Resurrection according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 78, who says that, "none of the gospel writers is concerned to give us what we call historical information; they are evangelists, not historians."

¹⁹ Cf. R. P. C. Hanson, "Biblical Exegesis in the Early Church," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 451 and V. L. Walter, "Arianism" in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 74, 75.

²⁰ Cf. John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982), 27f, 31-37. On the Council of Chalcedon see, Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 236-40.

²¹ See Roland H. Bainton, "The Bible in the Reformation," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade, vol. 3 ((Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 1-37.

²² Norman L. Geisler, *Miracles and Modern Thought*, Christian Free University Curriculum: Philosophy Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 12, 13.

²³ Cicero, *De Divinatione II xxviii*. Loab Classic Library, vol. 20 trans. W. A. Falconer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

The view expressed by Cicero has become dominant in the *modern* world, and I fully share it. Some reports of 'miracles' are fanciful or exaggerated; the 'miracles' that actually happen are things that we cannot yet explain, because of ignorance of the range of natural causes. In Cicero's own day, however, very few accepted this stringent rationalism. The vast majority of people believed in spiritual forces . . . (italics mine).²⁴

Where did the *modern*, scholarly commitment to antsupernaturalism come from? In agreement with Geisler, Sanders correctly observes that it was not widespread in the ancient world, certainly not in Jesus' day or within the Judaism of the first century.²⁵ How does such a view reflect on the possibility of miracles? How does it work itself out in terms of doing historiography? For answers to the first question we will briefly examine the arguments of Benedict de Spinoza and David Hume, both of whom worked within the limits of Voltaire's Deism²⁶ and a Newtonian worldview.²⁷ Hume, in particular, continues to exert an influence over modern scholars.²⁸ As concerns the second question, we will look at Troeltsch's principles, still widely acknowledged today,²⁹ to see how the study of history has been affected by antsupernaturalism.³⁰ We will attempt to show the errors in their arguments and in so doing demonstrate the reasonableness of a worldview which allows for the supernatural. In the end, by dealing with Spinoza, Hume and Troeltsch we hope to lay the groundwork for doing good historiography and prepare ourselves to utilize the criteria of authenticity to examine the resurrection accounts. This is the focus of chapter three.

A Critique of the Arguments of Benedict de Spinoza

Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) in his work *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), argued on the basis of the inviolable laws of nature which proceed from the necessity and perfection of the divine nature, that miracles, as violations of God's nature, are absurd, and as such, point one towards atheism, not belief. According to Spinoza,

²⁴ E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: The Penguin Press, 1993), 143. See also William Lane Craig, "The Problem of Miracles: A Historical and Philosophical Perspective," in *Gospel Perspectives: The Miracles of Jesus*, ed. David Wenham and Craig Blomberg, vol. 6 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 43 who flat-out denies the premises upon which these conclusions rest and who also says that many other scholars are coming to recognize the illegitimacy of such a stance.

²⁵ Though it appears that the Sadducees denied the resurrection, rewards after death, possibly the immortality of the soul and angels (cf. Josephus, *Wars* 2. 164-66; *Ant.* 18. 16, 17; Matt 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27 and Acts 23:8), it is difficult since they believed in the Pentateuch, to ascribe such rationalism to them. Most of what we have in terms of evidence for their beliefs is set in contrast to the Pharisees. As such, it appears that we possess no positive statement of Sadduceean doctrine. Cf. F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1969), 74-76. Cf. also B. D. Chilton, "Judaism," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 403, who says "they are typically portrayed in a negative light as not teaching the resurrection of the dead, but the issue may have been one of emphasis. . . ."

²⁶ Hume eventually attacked Deism in his literary works. See R. P. Raush, "Hume, David" in *Dictionary of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 536.

²⁷ It is anachronistic to say that Spinoza worked within Newton's worldview because Newton wrote his most influential piece concerning the nature of the world, the *Principia*, in 1687. The point is though, their mechanistic view of the world was similar and certainly the thought of Newton has some of its antecedents in those who came before him.

²⁸ Francis J. Beckwith, *David Hume's Argument against Miracles: A Critical Analysis* (New York: University Press of America, 1989), 23. Cf. also, Gary R. Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 29, f. n. 18.

²⁹ Krentz, *Historical-Critical Method*, 55, 57. Krentz says that Troeltsch's principles still "haunt" theology and that all historians acknowledge his second principle of analogy.

³⁰ Since the Gospels purport to be historical, that is, relating events that happened in certain time periods etc. (e. g. cf. Luke 3:1), such a question is valid and necessary.

since miracles are contrary to nature and therefore contrary ultimately to God, one creates doubt by arguing for them. Therefore, Spinoza argued for the *impossibility of the occurrence* of a miracle.³¹ He says,

Nothing, then, comes to pass in nature in contravention to her universal laws, nay, everything agrees with them and follows from them, for whatsoever comes to pass, comes to pass by the will and eternal decree of God; that is, as we have just pointed out, whatever comes to pass, comes to pass according to laws and rules which involve eternal necessity and truth; nature, therefore . . . keeps a fixed and immutable order.³²

Geisler points out that Spinoza's arguments rest on three foundations:

1) Euclidian or deductive rationalism; 2) a Newtonian view of natural law and 3) a certain understanding of the nature of God—pantheistic.³³ The first critique of such a view is straightforward. Insofar as Spinoza's arguments rest on deductive reasoning he is begging the question. He has assumed in the premises what he hopes to defend as the conclusion. He never proved through evidential means that natural laws are immutable nor that miracles are necessarily violations of natural laws—two of his key premises. The argument is formally true, but not valid.³⁴ The Newtonian worldview is seriously questioned today as well. The universe appears to be expanding and getting older which destroys his argument. In other words the laws of nature are not inviolable, but rather caused and therefore contingent—not eternal and absolute, but mutable.³⁵ And if it is true that the universe and natural laws came into existence at a point in time, then we *ipso facto* have a miracle—i.e. the creation *ex nihilo* of the universe.

A Critique of the Arguments of David Hume

David Hume (1711-1776), a Scottish philosopher, produced some of the most powerful arguments against miracles. Geisler says that "most modern thinkers who reject miracles would trace their reasons to those of the famous Scottish skeptic, David Hume. The reason for this is simple: he has provided what many believe to be the most formidable of all the challenges to a supernaturalistic perspective."³⁶ Apparently Strauss felt that Hume's arguments settled the issue once and for all.³⁷

³¹ Cf. William Lane Craig, "The Problem of Miracles: A Historical and Philosophical Perspective," in *Gospel Perspectives: The Miracles of Jesus*, ed. David Wenham and Craig Blomberg, vol. 6 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 16, 17. For further understanding of the context of the whole debate over miracles and the battles between orthodox and deistic theologies see, idem, *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus During the Deist Controversy* (Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 176-316.

³² Benedict de Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: George Routledge and Sons, n. d.), 83.

³³ Geisler, *Miracles*, 17.

³⁴ Spinoza's argument is deductive and since the conclusion is present in the premises, the argument is formally valid. The problem is that the premises can be challenged as inaccurate. They are, of course, false and therefore his argument is invalid. The strength of deductive reasoning rests on the degree of knowledge one possesses of the classes, etc. about which one is talking. It is better to proceed by way of *inference* or *induction* when talking about the laws of nature or history. The whole foundation of assigning to natural phenomena certain laws, is descriptive, not prescriptive. We simply do not have all the facts.

³⁵ Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1994), 126-28. See also Geisler, *Miracles*, 18.

³⁶ Geisler, *Miracles*, 23. Cf. also, Habermas, *Resurrection*, 28, f. n. 15 and 17, who says that Strauss, Schleiermacher, Paulus, Bruno, Baur, Renan, Pfleiderer, von Harnack, Tillich, Bultmann and J. A. T. Robinson all rejected miracles due to Hume's arguments.

³⁷ Cf. Habermas, *Resurrection*, 29, who cites David Freidrich Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus*, no translator given (Second edition; two volumes; London: Williams and Norgate, 1879), vol. I: 199. Cf. Lane, *Problem of Miracles*, 14, 15 and f. n. 17. Strauss carved out a middle path between Reimarus's idea of conspiracy and Paulus's striving against all odds to manufacture naturalistic explanations no matter how silly they sounded. As Lane makes

In his essay "Of Miracles" in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume argues against the *identification* of miracles. He actually develops his argument in two phases. In the first section he argues in principle and the second section he argues from experience or practice. There is not enough space to elaborate on all the details of his arguments, but the kernel of his argument is as follows³⁸: 1) A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; 2) Firm and unalterable (i.e. uniform) experience has established these laws; 3) A wise man proportions his belief to the evidence and 4) Therefore the proof against miracles is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. Hume's argument can be interpreted so as to preclude miracles *a priori*. We will follow the interpretation of the argument which understands him to say that the wise man will never believe in a miracle because he will never have enough evidence to substantiate such a belief.

In premise #2 Hume assumes a uniform experience against miracles which of course he must postulate *in advance of any evidence* lest the experience or evidence contradict uniform experience. C. S. Lewis has well said,

Now of course we must agree with Hume that if there is absolutely "uniform experience" against miracles, if in other words they have never happened, why then they never have. Unfortunately we know experience against them to be false. And we all know the experience against them to be uniform if we know that all reports of them are false. And we can know all reports to be false only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact, we are arguing in a circle.³⁹

Since Hume's second premise is incorrect, his whole argument is weakened and as far as its ultimate intention, destroyed. But, what *can* be said of Hume's argument from the laws of nature and personal experience is that miracles are rare and therefore witnesses must be questioned to establish the *probability* of the event having happened.⁴⁰

A final critique of Hume's method concerns the vantage point in his argument. The so-called laws of nature seem to operate almost absolutely without interruption. To this most would agree and indeed, Hume makes much of it. But to argue from *within* the laws, as he does with the appeal to universal experience, presupposes certain truths about the laws, namely, eternity and immutability. This he could never prove as one subject to the laws.⁴¹ These presuppositions, however, as demonstrated in the case of Spinoza, cannot be defended today on scientific grounds, much less personal experience. Hume's argument, contrary to what he so proudly thought, has not stood for all time as an "everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion. . . ." ⁴²

clear, Strauss (*Das Leben Jesu*) is guided totally by Hume's antisupernaturalism and his influence can be seen, for example, in Bultmann in modern scholarship.

³⁸ There have been many who have responded to Hume in the early years including Thomas Sherlock, *The Tryal [sic] of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus* (1729), Gottfried Less, *Wahrheit der christlichen Religion* (1758) and William Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (1794). See Lane, *Problem of Miracles*, 22-27. A current response to Hume is Beckwith, *David Hume's Argument against Miracles: A Critical Analysis*, 23, who quotes Colin Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 79, as saying that no work on miracles penned in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century receives greater attention than Hume's slim essay."

³⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (London: Fount/HarperCollins Publishers, 1947), 106.

⁴⁰ One of the definitional aspects of a miracle is that it be rare or at least distinctive from the normal order of things. If it were not, it would not be discernible as a miracle, but only regarded as a natural event with natural causes. Following this analysis it would be subject to study and reduced to a law of nature. Given that a miracle is rare then, but historical, the event insofar as there are witnesses, can be tested for its veracity by examining both internal and external probabilities.

⁴¹ See Habermas, *Resurrection*, 28, f. n. 13. He says, "Hume ignores the possibility that God exists and that He may have set these laws aside temporarily in order to perform a miracle. But no amount of arguing from naturalistic premises inside a system can ever disprove the possibility that God has performed an event in nature from outside of it." I would add that the nature miracles in the Gospels are local in scope and in reality God does not seem to set aside natural laws, he simply overcomes them by His power and according to some intelligible purpose.

⁴² David Hume, *Of Miracles* (La Salle: Open Court, 1985), 25.

Summary

The preceding discussion has shown that miracles, or "God acting in history" was an idea accepted by all before the Enlightenment. After the Enlightenment, however, such was not the case. Indeed, antismiraculism became the signpost around which a great deal of scientific, philosophical and theological inquiry proceeded. The origin of this shift is complex, but two particular writers have wielded significant influence, namely, Spinoza and Hume. Their arguments, though accepted widely in their day, are philosophically indefensible and insofar as they represent the foundation of the post-Enlightenment view of miracles, such a view must be abandoned. It cannot be maintained even as many biblical scholars attempt today.⁴³

The result is that miracles are not logically absurd, nor historically impossible and therefore the wedge between history and theology (i.e. the supernatural) is unfounded. This does not mean that every report of a miracle is as probable as the next. One must critically examine the historical evidence. As concerns the Gospels this is a welcome study. Many principles have been enumerated for doing historiography and critically examining the miracles recorded in the Gospels. In the next section we will briefly state some accepted, sound guidelines for doing historiography before we directly examine the "criteria of authenticity" in chapter 3.

An Evaluation of Troeltsch's Principle of 'Analogy' and the Possibility of Worthwhile Historical Inquiry

The Principle of Analogy

It is not true today to say that all historians are enslaved to the principles of historiography as outlined by Ernst Troeltsch in "On Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology" (1898). Most would agree, however, with his ideas insofar as he demonstrated that historical knowledge is only probable (i.e. the principle of methodological doubt and criticism)⁴⁴ and that the principle of correlation makes sense out of past events, causes, effects, internal probabilities, etc. But, the second of his oft quoted principles, i.e. the principle of analogy, is not so often agreed upon—at least as Troeltsch practiced it from an antismiraculistic perspective.⁴⁵

⁴³ Cf. Geisler, *Miracles*, 35-46. Lane, *Problem of Miracles*, 39f. In our times scholars such as Antony Flew and George Chrystides argue against miracles on the basis that they are not repeatable *in the present*. The arguments have their origin in Hume and rest on the inviolable laws of nature. In short, the best their arguments can muster is the idea that miracles are probably *rare*. Most would agree.

⁴⁴ See Michael Stanford, *The Nature of Historical Knowledge* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 27; Van A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 32-33. The issue of the relation of faith to historical inquiry is extremely complex. What appears on the surface to be fairly straightforward is quite another matter upon exploration as Harvey makes clear. It will not do to make a distinction and drive a wedge between historical knowledge and faith to the point that Bultmann did. In his conception, faith was entirely independent of historical reconstruction *by its very nature*. Yet this is untenable, for faith has an object, namely, God, which requires knowledge of him (not just striving after authentic human existence). This knowledge is mediated through historical events and writings explaining those events. See George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 177, 78 and Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York: Vintage Books, 1953), 124-26; Norman F. Cantor and Richard I. Schneider, *How to Study History* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1967), 178.

⁴⁵ Krentz, *Historical-Critical Method*, 55, says that the principle of correlation is the most devastating for Christianity. This is only true on the *a priori* grounds of a refusal to allow for supernatural intervention. Most other writers I surveyed clearly believed that the principle of analogy is the criteria by which most do away with the notion of miracles. One can observe Troeltsch's principle of analogy anticipated by Hume in his doctrine of "uniform experience." Again, this is a powerful argument, but when all is said and done, the best it can achieve is to demonstrate that miracles are rare and perhaps not a modern phenomena. There is no way, without an unwarranted leap, that such an argument from experience can be universal, or preclude the possibility of a miracle. Such a conclusion is a *non-sequitur*.

The principle of analogy, according to Troeltsch, states that all events in present experience are similar to those in the past, otherwise the study of history would be impossible, since it proceeds by way of comparison of the present with the evidence from the past.⁴⁶ To this principle all would agree except when uniformity is exalted as an absolute. To this few would subscribe. This leads to an *a priori* ruling out of certain kinds of evidence.

The point of view that applies Troeltsch's principles to the historical evidence allowing only for natural causation is known as historicism. As Krentz says, "The historicist view, modeled on the laws of natural science, expresses itself in the exclusion of God as a causative factor and in the denial of the possibility of a miracle."⁴⁷ Now, we have already argued above that such an *a priori* stance against the supernatural is dogmatic in nature, indefensible and indeed an illusion.⁴⁸

There remains then, the objection which claims that allowance for the supernatural may be unavoidable, but it will destroy historical inquiry since it undermines the principle of analogy.⁴⁹ This is only true if miracles occur all the time and have no rational explanation. C. S. Lewis has responded admirably to the historian's problem. The following quotation is lengthy, but important. He says,

But if we admit God, must we admit a miracle? Indeed, indeed, you have no security against it. That is the bargain. Theology says to you in effect, 'Admit God and with him the risk of a *few* miracles, and I in turn will ratify your faith in uniformity as regards the *overwhelming majority* of events.' The philosophy which forbids you to make uniformity absolute is also the philosophy which offers you solid grounds for believing it to be general, to be *almost* absolute. The Being who threatens nature's claim to omnipotence confirms her in her lawful occasions. Give us this ha' porth of tar and we will save the ship. The alternative is really much worse. Try to make nature absolute and you find that her uniformity is not even probable. . . You get the deadlock as in Hume. Theology offers you a working arrangement, which leaves the scientist free to continue his experiments and the Christian to continue his prayers (italics mine, except in the case of the term "almost").⁵⁰

The point that Lewis was trying to make for the historian is that one must allow for miracles but, since they are rare, one's historiography is not in jeopardy. We can still make sense out of the present by examining the past and the present can give us insight into the past. This is true because miracles are *rare* and uniformitarianism is "almost absolute" in our experience.

One final note. Another premise in this argument is the notion that miracles are so *contradictory* to human experience so as to be absurd. This is false and remains the premise among many who deny miracles. If miracles were *contradictory* or absurd, we would not be able to identify them or talk about them at all. A better idea is that they are *contrary* to normal human experience, but not contradictory or absurd, logically speaking.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, 98.

⁴⁷ Krentz, *Historical-Critical Method*, 58.

⁴⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Fern-Seed and Elephants and Other Essays on Christianity*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Fount/HarperCollins Publishers, 1975), 46. Lewis says that "historicism is an illusion and . . . historicists are, at the very best, wasting their time." Cf. also J. H. Hexter, *Doing History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), 140, who says that "intelligent criticism has reduced both positivism and the substantive philosophy of history to methodological absurdity, equally futile and preposterous modes of dealing with the data available to historians, chimeras to which no historian need pay heed, except insofar as he happens to be interested in the history of systematic intellectual error of a sort similar to astrology, heptascopy and phrenology."

⁴⁹ Cf. I. Howard Marshall, "Historical Criticism," in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 129.

⁵⁰ Lewis, *Miracles*, 110.

⁵¹ Cf. Mortimer J. Adler, *Ten Philosophical Mistakes* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987), 77-82.

A Better Approach

The principles that Troeltsch outlined, when practiced from a worldview that allows for the supernatural, are extremely helpful in evaluating the evidence in order to reconstruct the past. His first principle includes the idea that one must apply methodical doubt to the historical evidence. To a certain extent this must be true, lest we simply believe everything we read. Our present experience concerning human nature tells us that such a course—believing everything we read—is not the best direction to in which to head. Historical materials must be tested for their truth value by criteria that expose the internal and external probabilities for the occurrence of certain events, in the ways described by the evidence. This is not the same, however, as the council of despair so often seen among the Third Questers or others who have attempted to reconstruct a picture of the historical Jesus. They approach the issue, in my judgment, with undue skepticism—a hermeneutic of suspicion that clouds their judgment.⁵² That such an *a priori* perspective is damaging to historical inquiry is evident in the fact that one who always doubts the authenticity of the saying or event in question, is scarcely free to examine its meaning. For example, Blomberg has demonstrated that certain miracles become much more reasonable and historically probable if one seeks to understand both their meaning (i.e. how it coheres with Jesus' accepted teaching, on parables for example) and evidential value first, before dismissing them outright.⁵³ Blomberg's work presents secondary, corroboratory arguments which ought to caution scholars when they decide to dismiss one of Jesus' miracles on the basis of its supposed lack of coherence with his teaching elsewhere.

Troeltsch's principle of analogy has been dealt with above. His third principle of correlation is valid as well—when practiced from a perspective that allows for the supernatural. In our case, since the events found in the Gospels repeatedly claim to occur in genuine historical contexts (cf. Luke 3:1), we should look for historical, natural causes and effects without ruling out divine intervention. Let the evidence speak so that it may be weighed.

Summary

The point of this chapter has been to show that a supernatural worldview is reasonable and cannot be ruled out *a priori*. The arguments of Spinoza and Hume were briefly evaluated and shown to be inadequate. Insofar as other modern scholars rest their attack on miracles (or a denial of supernaturalism) on similar grounds, they run into the same historical and philosophical problems. Although antisupernaturalism found its way into the principles enumerated by Troeltsch, with some modifications, one is able to utilize his three principles as a backdrop for understanding the criteria of authenticity. In other words, the very presence of the criteria presuppose methodological doubt, analogy and correlation. In the next chapter we will look at a selection of the criteria and apply them to the resurrection narratives.

Chapter 3: The Criteria of Authenticity and the Resurrection

Introduction

This study began by describing the origin of the rationalism that, while indefensible philosophically and prejudiced historically, still remains as a tenet among many New Testament and biblical scholars. The founders of the Jesus Seminar have denied that miracles are even possible and have therefore prejudiced their historical inquiry by determining at the outset what did and did not happen in history. They argue that,

The contemporary religious controversy, epitomized in the Scopes trial and the continuing clamor of creationism as a viable alternative to the theory of evolution, turns on whether the worldview re-

⁵² Witherington, *The Jesus Quest*, 166.

⁵³ Craig L. Blomberg, "The Miracles as Parables," in *Gospel Perspectives: The Miracles of Jesus*, ed. David Wenham and Craig Blomberg, vol. 6 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 327-360. Blomberg's argument is helpful for those who argue that Jesus' miracles do not cohere with his teaching and are therefore inauthentic. In many cases, according to Blomberg, such scholars reflect a lack of understanding or appreciation for the literary context of Jesus' miracles in the Gospels and as such misinterpret them.

flected in the Bible can be carried forward into this scientific age and retained as an article of faith. Jesus figures prominently in this debate. The Christ of creed and dogma, who had been firmly in place in the Middle Ages, can no longer command the assent of those who have seen the heavens through Galileo's telescope. The old demons are swept from the skies by that remarkable glass. Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo have dismantled the mythological abodes of the gods and Satan, and bequeathed us secular heavens.⁵⁴

Setting aside this unfounded bias, however, does not *automatically* render the biblical account of Jesus' resurrection historically credible. It simply allows for the supernatural, and in that sense, does not *a priori* rule out certain biblical evidence. As Hagner says, "a historical-critical method open to the possibility of the supernatural must nevertheless retain its critical acumen."⁵⁵ The biblical accounts can, therefore, be tested to see if they are indeed reasonable, historically speaking. Does the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ have the greatest explanatory power and scope so as to best encompass all the facts? This is the burden of this chapter, but before attempting to demonstrate the reasonableness of the resurrection historically, we first need to argue that Jesus' resurrection was a literal, bodily resurrection and not a spiritual resurrection or a vision, subjective or objective.

Naturalistic Theories to Account for the Resurrection

There have been many views advanced to spell out the nature of Christ's resurrection body. They include the 1) *political* theory, 2) *swoon* theory, 3) *mythical* theory, 4) *subjective vision* theory, 5) *objective vision* theory and 6) *corporeal* theory. Since the political and swoon theory have so little to commend themselves, we will pass them over and commence our discussion with the mythical theory first.

The mythical view asserts that Jesus' resurrection was a myth created by the early church to maintain and grow the significance of Jesus' teaching and death. The major problem with this view is that Paul's testimony in 1 Corinthians 15:3 demonstrates that this so-called "myth" began early in the church. If it began early in the church, and had no real basis in history *whatsoever*, it is difficult to see how it could have been propagated for any length of time—let alone become the foundation of the church. The presence of eyewitnesses mitigates against such an interpretation. Besides, Jesus was not popular or well-known and the disciples, as portrayed in the Gospel records, appear to be less than able to spawn a movement based upon a myth.⁵⁶

Others have proposed a subjective vision theory in which they claim Jesus appeared to the disciples in dreams. From this, it is thought, the resurrection narratives developed. The problem with this view is that the disciples do not ever understand anything Jesus is supposed to have said about the resurrection during his ministry. It is unlikely, given the disciples lack of spiritual understanding during Jesus' life, that they would all of a sudden postulate a resurrection. Besides, their condition was one of defeat and discouragement and it is therefore difficult to think that they would have, or could have, become such great preachers of the faith on the basis of dreams. Besides there is no evidence that they had any dreams along these lines. And, it is difficult to believe that they would have dreamed of Jesus' personal resurrection when all they really had to go on was the general resurrection at the time of judgment

⁵⁴ Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover, eds. *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1993), 2. Bultmann said the same thing approximately 40 years earlier. See Rudolph Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology" in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (London: SPCK, 1954), 4.

⁵⁵ Donald A. Hagner, "The New Testament, History, and the Historical-Critical Method," in *New Testament Criticism & Interpretation*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 88.

⁵⁶ The disciples scattered while he was alive, it is therefore unreasonable to think that they *could* mount a movement once he were dead. For the demise of the whole mythological approach to the new Testament see, Craig A. Evans, "Life-of-Jesus Research and the Eclipse of Mythology," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993), 3-36.

spoken of in Daniel 12:2 (cf. John 5:28, 29). Based upon the criterion of Palestinian environment and their religious knowledge and heritage, it seems unlikely that they would have dreamed such things.⁵⁷

There is also an objective vision thesis. This proposal claims that the resurrection appearances of Jesus were simply visions given by God to authenticate Jesus' spiritual resurrection. Some attempt to base this interpretation upon the use of *ὄρασις* in 1 Corinthians 15:5 to refer to a vision, not a historical, bodily person.⁵⁸ This appears unlikely, given the context and argument of the passage. First, in 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4 it is the same Jesus who died (i.e. the literal man), who is said to have been buried and then risen. Second, the hope of the believer's resurrection body is the resurrection of Jesus' body. This is clearly the argument of the passage (cf. vv. 12, 15, 20 and esp. v. 21) and rests upon the presupposition of a literal, bodily resurrection, not just a spiritual resurrection (12-22).⁵⁹

The final view in our brief survey is the corporeal view. There are at least two strands of evidence that support this view in spite of the fact that it is vigorously debated. First, the New Testament *assumes* a bodily resurrection (e.g. the Gospel accounts) and argues for it when there is a need to respond to erroneous ideas (cf. Paul's preaching in Acts 17:32).⁶⁰ Second, the empty tomb would tend to support the idea that Jesus was physically resurrected.⁶¹ The fact that Jesus was apparently able to do some amazing things does not negate this, but only affirms that his resurrected body was not simply human, but supra-human.⁶²

From this brief discussion we contend that Jesus' resurrection, spoken of in the Gospels (and indeed the entire New Testament) is a bodily resurrection. The question we turn to now is "Are the traditions in the Gospels historically reliable? "Sure," one might concede, "they speak of a bodily resurrection, but are they historically trustworthy?"

⁵⁷ Cf. William Lane Craig, "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead," in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 162.

⁵⁸ Cf. Peter Carnley, *The Structure of Resurrection Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 223-30, who discusses the various uses of the term in technical, non-technical and religious and secular ways.

⁵⁹ Cf. W. Harold Mare, *I Corinthians*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Geabelein, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 282-84. Paul refers to the resurrection body in 1 Cor. 15:44 as a *σωμα πνευματικόν*, not just a *πνεῦμα*.

⁶⁰ Jewish belief in the resurrection, especially among Pharisees (e.g. Paul) was a belief in bodily resurrection. Most Greeks and certain Jews argued against such an idea. This is probably due to the influence of Hellenization on some Jews. But cf. *Baruch*, 49-51, and Peter Carnley, *The Structure of Resurrection Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 53.

⁶¹ For more detailed argumentation on these issues see, William Lane Craig, "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?" in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, eds. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 153-59.

⁶² George Eldon Ladd, *A New Testament Theology*, rev. ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 358-63. Several facts contribute to the thesis that Jesus' resurrection body was (and still is) a genuine human body, but also possessed powers beyond a normal human body. First, he ate food after the resurrection (Luke 24:42f). Second, the disciples do not seem to question his humanity and indeed he responds to them and is accepted by them as he was before the resurrection (Matt 28:9; John 20:16, 17, 27). Third, Jesus explicitly affirmed himself as having a material body (Luke 24:39). From passages in Luke and John, Ladd develops the idea that Jesus' resurrected body, while it was certainly human, also possessed powers beyond the normal human capabilities, including the power to appear and disappear at will (Luke 24:31, John 20:19, 26). In Acts 1:3 it says that Jesus appeared to the disciples over a period of forty days. The implication seems to be that he appeared and disappeared repeatedly over that time period. The ascension also indicates supernatural powers on the part of Jesus' resurrected body (Acts 1:11) as well as Jesus' appearance to the apostle Paul on the Damascus road (Acts 9).

An Evaluation of Certain 'Criteria of Authenticity'

One of the ways scholars have chosen to test the historical veracity of the sayings and deeds of Jesus is to subject them to certain criteria, i.e. the so-called "criteria of authenticity." Numerous criteria have been suggested including the ways in which one ought to understand and apply them. In particular two things should be noted. First, the application of the criteria does not result in a proof of anything. The intent of the criteria is to judge the *probability* of the authenticity of a certain saying or deed in the life of Jesus. Second, the criteria are to be used together⁶³ and from a perspective that maintains that the accounts are trustworthy until the contrary has been reasonably demonstrated. The "burden of proof" rests upon those who would argue otherwise. Several factors tend to support this standpoint: 1) the presence of eyewitnesses; 2) the existence of a church center in Jerusalem to oversee the guarding and disseminating of the traditions; 3) the generally high view the church had for its traditions (cf. Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 7: 10, 12); 4) the faithfulness of the church in transmitting some of Jesus' more difficult sayings (Mark 9:2, 10:18, 13:32, etc.); 5) the problems of the early church as seen in the epistles are not specifically found in the Gospels, which indicates that the Gospels are not wholesale inventions of the early church in its attempt to deal with its questions, needs, and problems.⁶⁴ With this in mind, let us now turn to an evaluation of the criteria of authenticity.

The Criterion of Dissimilarity

The criterion of dissimilarity affirms that a saying or deed may be regarded as authentic if it cannot be shown to go back to similar phenomena in ancient Judaism or the church. It must be different than the characteristic emphases of Judaism or early Christianity. If it can be shown to agree with or be located in Judaism or the early church then Jesus did not say or do it.

This criterion has some strength in that it can validate a tradition, but it cannot invalidate a saying necessarily. That is, if a saying cannot be located in Judaism or the early church then it is reasonable to conclude that it goes back to the creative mind of Jesus. However, Jesus was a man who lived in the Jewish culture and therefore, it is unfair to rule as inauthentic a saying simply because it can be found in Judaism. There appears to be abundant evidence that Jesus used similar phraseology and thought modes as his contemporaries.⁶⁵ Similarly, it seems reasonable to me that the early church wanted to preserve many of his actual words (1 Cor. 11:23, 24), so just because a saying can be found on the lips of the early church is no automatic guarantee that Jesus did not say it.⁶⁶

⁶³ This of course is presupposed in D. G. A. Calvert's work wherein he understands some to be negative and some to be positive. See D. G. A. Calvert, "An Examination of the Criteria for Distinguishing the Words of Jesus," *New Testament Studies* 18 (1971, 72): 209-18. An example of this would include the "criterion of Dissimilarity" and the "criterion of Divergent Patterns from the Redaction." See Robert H. Stein, "The 'Criteria' for Authenticity," in *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*, ed. R. T. France and David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 247.

⁶⁴ For a more thorough discussion of these facts see, Stein, "Criteria," 225-27. Stein, conscious of the skeptical attitude that many scholars bring to the Gospels on this issue, says that "to assume the inauthenticity of the Gospel materials, unless proven otherwise, appears to be an extreme skepticism unwarranted both in the light of the various arguments listed above [i.e. the arguments of eyewitnesses, faithfulness to traditions, etc.] and a violation of a common courtesy every witness deserves. A witness should be presumed innocent until proven guilty" (227).

⁶⁵ For example: *Abot* 2:1G says that a person, in order to remain free of the clutches of transgression should persist in three things, one of them being "an ear to hear." A similar expression can be found in the teaching of Jesus on several occasions. For example, in Mark 4:9, after (cf. 4:3 also) He had spoken the parable of the sower, he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Both expressions have obvious spiritual connotations. In Luke 16 Jesus tells a parable about the shrewd manager in order to illustrate that "whoever can be trusted with very little, can be trusted with much." The rabbis held to a similar idea. *Abot* 2:1B says that one ought to be meticulous in a small religious duty as in a large one. Notice that both Jesus and the rabbis set this idea in the context of rewards.

⁶⁶ Darrell L. Bock, "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex?" in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, eds. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 90-92.

The Jesus Seminar inconsistently applies this principle, especially as regards Christologically significant texts, i.e. the "Son of Man" sayings.⁶⁷ The principle itself, as McKnight says, may rest upon the belief in the adequacy of our knowledge of ancient Judaism and the early church. This may prove to be wanting in some cases. It seems therefore, given the complexities of the life situation of Jesus, that the burden of proof rests upon those who want to deny a saying or deed as authentic. This criterion is helpful for determining what is unique to Jesus not what is characteristic of him.

The Criterion of Multiple Attestation

According to the principle of multiple attestation, any motif may be regarded as authentic if the words upon which it rests are found in all, or most, of the sources (e.g. in Matt, Mark, Luke and Q) which stand behind the synoptic Gospels. According to McKnight it is to be used after the criteria of *multiple attestation* and *coherence* have been applied.⁶⁸ Bock says, "multiple attestation occurs when a saying appears in multiple sources *or in multiple forms* (italics mine)."⁶⁹ It is used to establish motifs in the teaching of the historical Jesus.

This particular criterion *presupposes* a solution to the synoptic problem and to the degree that that is tentative, so is this dictum. Ladd writing in 1969 was convinced that Markan priority was an "established fact"⁷⁰ but Stein writing just over a decade later says that such has been "refuted" according to some scholars.⁷¹ We must remember that all our conclusions are tentative given this problem. Also, there is nothing that necessitates a tradition being inauthentic simply because it is found in only one source. Other principles such as internal improbability and contradiction with other traditions must take greater precedent in determining this.⁷²

The Criterion of Semitisms

Since Jesus spoke a Galilean dialect of Aramaic, any presence of Aramaic linguistic phenomena argues for the primitiveness of the tradition and the more primitive a tradition is the more likely that it actually came from Jesus himself. (Mk 15:34).

The principle assumes, at least at some level, that the early Christians did not write or speak Aramaic and did not add such activity to the gospel traditions. But isn't this the whole reason for the "criteria"—to determine which sayings and deeds are really of Jesus? Indeed, the implication involved in the whole process is that the early church did add their own material to their presentation of Jesus. The principle has therefore limited usefulness, but when combined with other criteria may help to determine the actual words of Jesus.

This criterion must also take into account: 1) the influence of the LXX upon the writers of the New Testament; 2) that there remains some question as to whether the Greek of the Gospels can be accurately translated back into Aramaic; and 3) the probability that Jesus himself spoke Greek on occasion.⁷³

⁶⁷ Ibid., 91, 92.

⁶⁸ Scot McKnight, *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels*, Guides to New Testament Exegesis, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 60, 61.

⁶⁹ Bock, "Words of Jesus," 92. See also, Stein, "'Criteria' for Authenticity," 233 who applies it to Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of God.

⁷⁰ George Eldon Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 127.

⁷¹ Stein, "Criteria," 231.

⁷² Ibid., 232, f. n. 19.

⁷³ Ibid., 235. Stein says that if a saying can be located in the Aramaic speaking church perhaps it then supports the contention that it goes back to Jesus.

The Criterion of Divergent Traditions

The principle of divergent traditions suggests that when a particular tradition differs somewhat from what appears to be the author's general perspective it may be regarded as authentic. Others have applied this criterion to differing traditions within (Matt. 10 and 28 [evangelism]) or between gospel accounts (Mark 10 and Matt 5 and 19 [divorce]).

This criterion does help to establish difficult sayings such as Mark 13:32, the theology of which does not seem to agree with Mark 1:1, wherein Mark seems to portray a fairly high Christology. But, the principle may require of us knowledge of the early church which we do not really possess and can tend to individualize the NT writers too much. As regards this last point, we must exercise caution before we set about to say that two traditions are in contradiction. Our knowledge of the situation in the early church may really not be adequate to the task.

The Criterion of Primitive Eschatology

If a particular saying evinces a primitive/imminent eschatological outlook, it may be regarded as authentic (so Bultmann). Part of the problem with this criterion is that it understands Jesus to be monolithic in his approach to eschatology. However, there seems to be no *a priori* reason to reject the fact that Jesus shifted his eschatological focus during his ministry, especially in the light of the growing rejection of his person by the Jews. Perhaps this is the case in Matthew.⁷⁴

The Criterion of Palestinian Environment⁷⁵

This criterion affirms that if a saying or deed appears to have a Hellenistic origin, it cannot be from Jesus, but is a later creation of the church. On the other hand, any saying or deed, be it religious, political, social or otherwise, must reflect Palestinian provenance to be considered authentic. The point of this criterion is that a Palestinian origin would lend support to the idea of an early tradition and therefore the greater the likelihood of its historicity. Some have argued against the authenticity of Mark 10:11-12 on this basis, since a wife divorcing her husband is unheard of in Judaism. Yet, as Stein points out, there is a realistic *Sitz im Leben* in Jesus' ministry for just such a saying, namely, the case of Herod and Herodias (Matt. 14:3, 4).⁷⁶ This criterion might play a greater role in the case of customs, religious practices, social phenomena, etc. in the Gospels that are explicitly or implicitly communicating something about Jewish life. We can then compare that with other data we have about such things.

The Criterion of Coherence

There is a lot of material from the earliest strata of Gospel tradition which cannot be verified as authentic using the criterion of dissimilarity, but as it coheres (i.e. substantially agrees with) with material deemed authentic by the criterion of dissimilarity, it may be regarded as authentic.

Insofar as this criterion rests upon the conclusions of the principle of dissimilarity it inherently acquires the strengths and weaknesses of it. It also has the methodological problem of determining what coheres with what, and why.

⁷⁴ This would seem to involve the idea of contingency in the offer of the kingdom. So Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Contingency of the Coming Kingdom," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands, Biblical and Leadership Studies in Honor of Donald K. Campbell*, eds. Charles H. Dyer and Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 222-237.

⁷⁵ One might also refer to aspects of this as the criterion of context and expectation. See Evans, "Life-of-Jesus Research and Mythology," 26-29.

⁷⁶ Stein, "Criteria," 237.

The Criterion of Cause-Effect or Correlation

This criterion simply affirms a sound principle of historiography, namely, that causes postulated to account for the established effects one sees in one's sources must in fact be adequate to account for those effects.

The Criterion of the Tendency of the Developing Tradition

The time period between the events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and the writing of the Gospels, is anywhere from 15-25 years or more in some cases. Thus the traditions about Jesus were passed orally among believers for at least a generation. When those traditions were picked up by the evangelists in their compositions, they altered them slightly in accordance with the truth and their own particular emphases and theology. The criterion of the tendency of the developing tradition seeks to discern what the evangelist as theologian/redactor has added or deleted from the tradition as he received it. This, of course, is in an attempt to "get back" to the original words or deeds of Jesus by understanding the "laws" of transmission of the tradition. When I use this criterion in the paper and suggest that a particular tradition meets this, I mean that the tradition in question has not been altered by the later church in the light of its theological interests and that the "laws" operative in this case are ones of memorization due to the essential nature of the material.

The Criterion of Embarrassment

The criterion of embarrassment brings to light sayings or actions that are in the traditions, but at the same time constitute a possible embarrassment to the church. The baptism of Jesus and Peter's denial of Christ would fall into such a category. Therefore, if a tradition is found, which in all likelihood caused the church a certain degree of embarrassment, it is most likely authentic, since there would have been a tendency to omit it.⁷⁷

Summary

There are several criteria that aid us in reconstructing, from the Gospel materials as well as other early sources, the teachings and deeds of Jesus. We turn now to an application of those criteria to the resurrection narratives, including the material on the death of Jesus, his burial, the empty tomb, the appearances of Jesus to his disciples and the disciples' belief in the resurrection.

The Historical Probability of the Resurrection

No one saw the resurrection of Jesus. All that was seen was the resurrected Jesus. If, then, a resurrection took place, it must be demonstrated with a reasonable degree of certainty, historiographically speaking, that Jesus actually *died* and then was seen at some later time *alive* and in bodily form.⁷⁸ A brief sketch of the Gospel testimony runs something like this: 1) Jesus died; 2) was buried in a sealed and guarded tomb; 3) the tomb was found empty three days later and 4) Jesus was seen alive and the disciples held the belief of his resurrection. From this outline we may test the various incidents according to how well the testimony survives under the criteria of authenticity. This section seeks to analyze these various ideas according to the details of the Gospels and the criteria of authenticity.

The Death of Jesus⁷⁹

Before a resurrection can even be entertained, the death of the individual in question must be reasonably demonstrated—lest we get another "swoon theory." That Jesus did indeed die is unanimously attested by all four

⁷⁷ Evans, "Life-of Jesus Research and Mythology," 24-26. This criterion focuses on what one would expect from a Jewish context, both theologically and culturally.

⁷⁸ There has been great debate over the nature of the resurrection body. It is not my contention here to argue for a precise view, but simply to state that his body was fully material and human, but that it also possessed supra-human powers.

⁷⁹ There have been many suggestions put forward to try and account for the reason Christ suffered capital punishment. We are not concerned here to demonstrate the reason for his death, but only that he did indeed die.

gospels (Matt. 27:50, 58, 59; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30). They all agree that he died by crucifixion, which itself was ordered by Pilate at the request of the people (Matt. 27:20, 26; Mark 15:1, 10, 15; Luke 23:20-25; John 19:13-16) and all the Synoptics converge on the timing of the death (Matthew 27:45, 46; Mark 15:33, 34 and esp. 45; Luke 23:44-46). The early traditions coming out of the church clearly affirm that Jesus died. Peter's preaching in Acts 2:23 and 3:15 clearly affirm that Jesus died by crucifixion.⁸⁰ Paul affirms Jesus' death in 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4; Romans 1:3, 4 and Philippians 2:5-11. Thus the criterion of multiple attestation, coherence, and multiple forms demonstrate with reasonable certainty that Jesus did indeed die by crucifixion. That crucifixion was indeed practiced by the Romans, as indicated in the New Testament, is confirmed by Josephus (*BJ* 4.449). This satisfies the criterion of Palestinian Environment.⁸¹ Concerning the death of Jesus by crucifixion most scholars would agree.⁸²

Jesus' Burial in a Sealed and Guarded Tomb

The earliest tradition we have concerning the actual burial of Jesus Christ is found in 1 Corinthians 15: 3, 4. The expression ἠτάτι . . . ἐὰν ἴσῃ . . . ἐὰν ἴσῃ . . . ἐὰν ἴσῃ . . . in verse 3, 4 and 5 indicates the emphatic nature of each part of the tradition.⁸³ The tradition that Paul received indicated that Jesus had indeed been buried (ἀφθάρτου).⁸⁴ The gospels also confirm this testimony. All three Synoptics, as well as John, indicate that Jesus died and was wrapped in linen and then buried in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea. All three agree that this took place on the day before the Sabbath, i.e. the day of Preparation. Matthew and Mark state that a large rock was rolled in front of the tomb and both Luke and John state that no one had been interred in the tomb before (Matt.27:57-60; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-55; John 19:38-42).

The information supplied by Paul, which appears to be an early tradition in the church, along with the Gospel records, unanimously affirms that Jesus was buried in a tomb after he had died. One may also consult Acts 13:28, 29. Therefore the criterion of multiple attestation argues for the authenticity of the event. That the tradition is early (30-36 A.D.)⁸⁵ negates the possibility of the development of a legend concerning his death and burial—there were still eyewitnesses living. Some of those eyewitnesses were indeed women (Matt 27:61; Mark 15:47 and Luke 23:55)

⁸⁰ There is not space to enter into a discussion of the problem of Luke's speech material and its authenticity. My opinion is that Luke composed his material by abridging the original sermons, etc. so that what is in the text accurately represents what was said and what was meant by it. See Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts*, in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 221-31. I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5. ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 35; idem., *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970).

⁸¹ Cf. the *Testimonium Flavianum* (*Ant.* 18. 63-64). It is a much disputed text, but while I do not feel that all of the text is genuine, it appears that reference to Jesus' crucifixion under Pilate, as having no theological axe to grind necessarily, is probably authentic. See Steven Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 173. See also A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 34, who says, "Pilate sentenced Christ and carried out the sentence Roman fashion, by crucifixion."

⁸² Cf. E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (New York: The Penguin Press, 1993), 274, who agrees with the Gospel witness that Jesus died by crucifixion.

⁸³ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Tradition and Redaction in 1 Cor 15:3-7," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (October 1981), 589. See also Randall C. Webber, "A Note on 1 Corinthians 15:3-5," *JETS* (September 1983), 265-9, on the *Formgeschichte*, *Traditiongeschichte*, origin and *Sitz im Leben*, of the passage.

⁸⁴ Apart from this passage, the term *qavptw* occurs 10 times. Three in Matthew, three in Luke, and four times in Acts 5. It always refers to the physical burial of a dead person.

⁸⁵ Cf. William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, *The International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 485-89. Lane recognizes the primitive character of Marks' passion narrative and also argues that the tradition developed out of the same tradition found in 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4.

who played a role in the early church in which the traditions developed (Acts 1:14; cf. with Luke 8:2, 3; 23:49 and 23:55-24:10).⁸⁶

That the tradition is secure and accurate is further confirmed by the fact that all the Gospel writers mention Joseph of Arimathea and Luke tells us that he was a member of the Sanhedrin (Luke 23:50).⁸⁷ Given the fact that all the writers implicate the religious leaders in Jesus' death,⁸⁸ it seems rather odd that a member of the Sanhedrin should offer to bury Jesus, unless it really happened. Such a unanimously spoken of tradition would probably not survive due the presence of eyewitnesses, unless, of course, it were true.

The tradition of his burial is not surrounded by adornment and embellishing which satisfies the "criterion of the developing tradition or dissimilarity." The writers do not develop the burial of Christ into an apologetic or into a theological treatise of some kind in an attempt to encourage faith on the part of their churches. The later church cannot be read back into the description of Jesus' burial.

The "criterion of Palestinian environment" is satisfied in that the tomb in which Jesus was laid meets with archaeological discoveries, and the fact that Jesus, accused as a criminal, was buried in a *new* tomb coheres with the Jews not wanting to pollute other family members interred there.⁸⁹ Also, it was Preparation day (Mark 15:42), the day before Passover, and Jesus' body would not have been allowed to remain on the cross until the next day, lest the corpse defile the land (cf. Numbers 9:6-10). Therefore, the fact that Joseph was allowed to bury him is reasonable.⁹⁰ And since he died around the sixth hour (Mark 15:33-37), Joseph probably had time to accomplish the burial before nightfall and the beginning of the Sabbath.⁹¹

There has never been another conflicting tradition about the fact of Jesus' burial. Therefore, it seems reasonable, based upon this and the foregoing discussion, to assert that the burial of Jesus Christ, as outlined in the New Testament, is a true and accurate account of what actually happened. Crossan argues that it was the custom for the guards who crucified Jesus to bury the deceased. They stayed at the site to protect it from people who would try and help release the crucified (cf. Josephus, *Life* 421) and therefore to ensure the victim did indeed suffer a slow and agonizing death. He says that the people would have fled, thus "nobody knew what happened to the body of Jesus."⁹² This, he asserts, "presented early Christianity with an intolerable problem, one that is very clear across the texts of 70 *Burial of Jesus* [1/2]."⁹³ Crossan maintains that an analysis of the Synoptics, John, and the so-called *Cross-Gospel*

⁸⁶ Longenecker, *Acts*, 260, 61.

⁸⁷ Luke uses the term *bouleuth*" which Marshall understands to refer to a member of the Sanhedrin; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 879.

⁸⁸ Cf. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 273, 74, argues that Pilate is portrayed as a weakling so that the blame is to be laid totally at the feet of the Jewish religious leaders. Thus we have in the Gospels traces of anti-Semitism in the Christians' attempt to separate themselves from the Jews and bolster goodwill between themselves and Rome. This argument tends to pass over the fact that Pilate was not a weak person, either in Josephus (*BJ* 2.174, 177) or in the Gospels (cf. Luke 13:1). Also, it appears to be doubtful that portraying one of Rome's leaders as weak would indeed grant one the friendship one desires. The crowd was stirred up by the chief priests and Pilate was threatened by a possible riot (Mark 15:11, 13, 14). He could have everyone killed as insubordinate but it was politically expedient to have Jesus killed and maintain the peace. Thus he was not weak in the sense Sanders says. Cf. Lane, *Mark*, 556, f. n. 34.

⁸⁹ Joel B. Green, "Burial of Jesus," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 89.

⁹⁰ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, The Expositors Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 584, says that Pilate gave Jesus' body to Joseph because Pilate thought he was not really guilty of high treason (27:58).

⁹¹ Cf. Lane, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead*, 148.

⁹² John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1991), 394.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 393.

(from the *Gospel of Peter*) reveals a developing, fabricated tradition, as an attempt on the part of the early church to bring the tradition from a burial by an enemy (i.e. Joseph) to a regal embalming in John's Gospel.

Crossan's analysis is doubtful for several reasons. First, he totally disregards the fact that the tradition has women as witnesses to the burial, women who were later, a part of the early church. Second, his reconstruction based upon a so-called *Cross-Gospel* is wanting for it is doubtful that the *Cross-Gospel* represents another distinct tradition—as Crossan would affirm. It is simply not a tenet upon which to build a convincing argument.⁹⁴ Third, his dismissal of Joseph as historical is probably not accurate for reasons suggested above. Fourth, the extreme skepticism with which he treats the sources, combined with the freedom he exerts to recreate the situation is irresponsible and unwarranted. The tradition does appear to develop, but not in the fanciful ways he suggests.⁹⁵

The Tomb Found Empty

According to the overwhelming evidence in the Gospels and other early traditions (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:3, 4), Jesus of Nazareth did die by crucifixion and was buried in a guarded and sealed tomb. On the third day after all that took place, the tomb was found empty—according to the Gospels. Some have contended, however, that

the account of the empty tomb is a late tradition created by the early Church to help explain the resurrection appearances. . . The account of the empty tomb is therefore seen as completely secondary, an apologetic legend, unknown to Paul and of no significance in the apostolic preaching.⁹⁶

We turn now to see if indeed the criticism are just or whether the account of the empty tomb is reasonable.

That the tomb was indeed found empty is secured by several facts. First, it is clear that the apostle Paul believed that the tomb was empty. The fact of the empty tomb stands behind the third element of the tradition he had received, according to 1 Corinthians 15:4. The statement, "he was raised," implies that the tomb was found empty, just as the fact that "he was buried" implies the burial traditions included in the Gospels. Since this was a tradition Paul received, perhaps from Ananias (Acts 9:9, 10), from other disciples in Damascus (9:19b) or from Peter (Galatians 1:18),⁹⁷ it is likely a very early tradition—and Paul believed it. It would be incomprehensible for Paul to so boldly preach the *bodily* resurrection of Jesus, if he did not believe in the empty tomb.⁹⁸

Second, the same criteria that were used to substantiate the burial of Jesus, figure in confirming the historical reliability of the empty tomb. The empty tomb tradition is found in Mark (16:1-8), Matthew (28:1-10), Luke (24:1-6) and John (20:1-2). Thus there is multiple attestation for the tradition of the empty tomb. And the tradition is found in three of the Gospel strata (i.e. Mark, "M" and John).

⁹⁴ See R. J. Bauckham, "Gospels (Apocryphal)," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 287-88.

⁹⁵ For a more restrained view of the development of the burial tradition in early Christianity see, Green, *Burial of Jesus*, 90, 91. Cf. also Richard N. Osterling, "Jesus Christ, Plain and Simple," *Time* 10 January 1994, 32-33, for Crossan's wild speculation that Jesus was buried in a shallow grave and the body later eaten by dogs. Ben Witherington, III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1995), 75, says that "once again Crossan insists on subscribing to opinions that only a distinct minority of scholars would agree with . . ."

⁹⁶ Robert H. Stein, "Was the Tomb Really Empty?" *JETS* 20 (March 1977), 24, 25.

⁹⁷ The pre-Markan passion story, perhaps foundational to the tradition of 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4, contains the account of the empty tomb (Mark 16:1-8) and therefore it is most reasonably historical since the passion story can be dated during the High Priesthood of Caiaphas (A. D. 18-36). See Craig, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead*, 150. But, cf. also Raymond Brown, *The Virginal Conception and the Bodily Resurrection* (Toronto: Paulist Press, 1973), 117, who suggests that the empty tomb tradition may have grown up apart from the burial story.

⁹⁸ We have argued above for the *bodily* resurrection of Jesus as opposed to a spiritual resurrection.

Third, the empty tomb narrative in Mark, Matthew, Luke and John is not *overlaid* with theology for apologetic purposes.⁹⁹ This makes it dissimilar to the preaching of the early church and therefore unlikely that the early church invented it.

Fourth, the Synoptics all maintain that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James were there. John only mentions Mary Magdalene, Mark adds the mention of Salome (16:1) and Luke mentions "Joanna and the others with them" as well (24:10). There is no contradiction in the tradition and no need to postulate a conflict as to who saw the empty tomb. Each writer included the women he wanted and knew of, but no writer explicitly denies the assertions of another. The fact that women were witnesses to the empty tomb while the disciples were hiding in fear speaks volumes for its authenticity. If such a tradition were false, it would be difficult to conceive how it would be propagated for any length of time (cf. the criterion of embarrassment).

Matthew records the presence of one angel outside the tomb sitting on the rock (28:2). Mark mentions a young man dressed in a white robe in the tomb and John mentions no angels at all. The fact that Luke speaks of two men (24:4) dressed in clothes that shone like lightening references the fact they are angels (also cf. v. 23) and links us up with the transfiguration in 9:28ff. But, there may be a basic apologetic here for the resurrection in the light of Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15 and the fact that Luke describes them as "men." It is, however, not developed. The fact that there are two angels in Luke and only one in Mark and Matthew, is not a contradiction for it is not entirely out of character for an evangelist to focus on only one individual when others were present—as in the case of the blind man at Jericho (Mark 10:46, Luke 18:35 and Matt. 20:30). Since there is no basic contradiction in the accounts there is no need to postulate other competing traditions.¹⁰⁰

Fifth, all the Gospel writers use the expression "first day of the week." This is significant for early preaching referred to his resurrection as being on the "third day" (1 Cor. 15:3, 4). This indicates that the tradition goes back very early in the church and is therefore to be regarded as authentic. This, of course lends support to the whole tradition of the empty tomb. There are also other Semitic influences on the tradition including Matthew mentioning the "angel of the Lord" (28:2), the phrase ἄγγελος κυρίου . . . ἕλθων (Matt. 28:5) and Luke's "bowed their faces to the ground" (24:5).¹⁰¹

Sixth, Craig also adds that the investigation of the tomb by Peter and John is probably historical.¹⁰² This is true because both John's own testimony (20:3) and tradition independent of John (Luke 24:12, 24) indicate as much. The fact that the Gospels do not record the disciples fleeing to Galilee (cf. Jesus command to meet the disciples in Galilee implying that they were still in Jerusalem; Mark 16:7) suggests that they probably visited the tomb site due to the testimony of the women (Luke 24:9-12). It is reasonable they would have wanted to see what was going on with the body of Jesus, though they were not anticipating a resurrection as both Peter's puzzlement (Luke 24:12) and the explicit statement of John (20:9) make clear.

Seventh, there is also the consideration by some that if Jesus' body were really left in a tomb, he should have been venerated by his followers and his tomb enshrined. But there is no evidence that a tomb exists and that he was worshipped as such. Personally, I do not find this thesis probable. It is at best a corroboratory argument for the empty tomb, and may be difficult to support since Jesus was not really considered by Israel as a whole to be a prophet or man of God (an underlying premise in the argument). He had very few followers at the time of his death which makes this unlikely.¹⁰³

Eighth, from the perspective of the Jewish leaders, in the development of their attack on the apostles, they did not deny that the tomb was empty (Matt. 28:15). Besides, the religious leaders could have put an end to the whole mess, if they could have produced a body. No such evidence was ever presented according to our sources.

⁹⁹ Cf. Carson, *Matthew*, 588, who says "what is stunningly clear is the restrained sobriety of these accounts as compared with the later apocryphal Gospels (e.g. the *Gospel of Peter*, 9:35-11:44).

¹⁰⁰ So Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 279.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Stein, "Was the Tomb Really Empty?" 25.

¹⁰² Craig, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead*, 151.

¹⁰³ Cf. Craig, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead*, 152.

From the preceding evidence it is clear that the tradition of the empty tomb passes the historiographical tests of: 1) multiple attestation; 2) dissimilarity; 3) tendencies of the developing tradition; 4) semitisms and 5) embarrassment. Therefore, a belief in the empty tomb is reasonable historically speaking. It bears all the marks of being early, and not a later creation of the church. It is to be regarded as authentic.

Jesus' Appearances and the Disciples' Belief in His Resurrection

Sanders is incorrect to affirm that "the resurrection is not, strictly speaking, part of the story of the historical Jesus, but rather belongs to the aftermath of his life."¹⁰⁴ Such a statement goes back to an unfounded wedge between history and theology. The Gospels record actual physical appearances of Jesus and therefore the sources in which those affirmations are found can be tested historiographically. According to Craig there are essentially four lines of evidence one can adduce in support of the historical reliability of the resurrection appearances: 1) The apostle Paul's testimony; 2) the genuine character of particular resurrection appearances, 3) the evidence for the general trustworthiness of the Gospel accounts and 4) the fact that the appearances were of Jesus' resurrected body. Since we have already discussed #3 and #4 (see the preliminary discussion to the criteria of authenticity for #3), we will concentrate on the #1 and #2. We will discuss #1 under the heading of "Paul's Testimony in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8" and #2 under the heading "The Historical Veracity of Certain Resurrection Appearances, and Other Phenomena."

Paul's Testimony in 1 Corinthians 15: 3-8

It is generally believed that the earlier a tradition is, the more likely it is to be authentic. This, of course, is a major idea behind the criteria of authenticity and form criticism. It is already been argued that the tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4 developed very early in the church. We maintain that the "witnesses" of 15: 5-8 are a part of that early tradition.¹⁰⁵ There was not enough time to develop a legend in this regard, for the tradition here can probably be dated before A. D. 40 and some argue before A. D. 37.¹⁰⁶ Since Jesus appeared then, to Peter, the Twelve, to 500 brothers, to James, other apostles and finally to Paul himself this is unlikely to be a fabrication. Peter, the Twelve and James were original leaders in the church (cf. Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council) and had early contact with Paul (perhaps A. D. 36-39; Gal. 1:18). He also appeared to over 500 other Christian men whom Paul says were still living. The Corinthians could have checked it out, and yet there is no reference in our sources to the Corinthians, after Paul sent his letter, denying the resurrection.

The Historical Veracity of Certain Resurrection Appearances, and Other Phenomena

The fact James was doubtful of Jesus' identity during his life (Mark 3:21; John 7:1-5) and that he later became a pillar and apostle in the church (Acts 15; Gal. 1:19) requires a sufficient cause. A myth about a resurrection, or dreams about such a thing for that matter, cannot honestly lead to such a change of heart. The last James saw of his brother, was his death on a cross. The only reasonable explanation is that Christ did indeed rise from the dead and appear to him, just as tradition says (1 Cor. 15:7).

If it is difficult to see how James came to faith in his own brother as Messiah, it is even harder to account for Saul, the Pharisee and as Luke says, the one who was going about trying to destroy the church of God and wipe out for ever the name of Jesus from under heaven (cf. Acts 8:1; 9:1). Did Paul suddenly feel remorse for his actions? Probably not. This might lead him to desist from his attacks on the church, but it cannot account for his faith in Jesus as Messiah (Rom. 10:9, 10). Did he just realize from his background that Jesus fits the Messianic bill, so to speak? This is unlikely, since the bodily resurrection of an isolated individual is not found in the Judaism of Paul's day. There was only the general resurrection of all people at the end (criterion of Palestinian environment [context and

¹⁰⁴ Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 276.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. the use of *kaiV oŕti* in 1 Corinthians 15:5 thus linking the account of Jesus' resurrection with the witnesses who saw him. The entire tradition then, including the resurrection and the witnesses, is that which Paul received and passed on to the Corinthians.

¹⁰⁶ See Stein, "Was the Tomb Really Empty?" 27.

expectation]).¹⁰⁷ And, the concept of a dying and rising Messiah was probably foreign to Paul. There is simply no natural cause adequate to explain how a Pharisee of Paul's standing and zeal (cf. Phil. 3:2-6) could so reverse his direction in life, abandon his understanding of the Law, and proclaim Jesus, not only as Israel's resurrected Messiah, but also the Savior of all men, Jew and Gentile alike (Phil. 3:20; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21). He even goes so far as to teach Jewish/Gentile equality in God's plan (Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6). Not only this, but Paul suffered greatly as a result of his faith in Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-29) and as tradition would have it, ended up dying for that conviction.¹⁰⁸ This is only reasonably accounted for on the basis of his seeing the resurrected Jesus as outlined in Acts 9. All natural explanations crumble under the weight of the evidence.

Both Matthew and Mark, as well as John, affirm that Jesus' first appearance was to the women, including Mary Magdalene out of whom Mark says, Jesus cast several demons (Matt. 28:8-10; Mark 16:9-14; John 20:18). In first century Judaism, since the claim of women witnesses would not carry much weight, it is likely, given the criterion of embarrassment that this tradition is true. It does nothing to help their cause in promoting Jesus as risen from the dead. The fact that Paul leaves the women out in his list of witnesses confirms this interpretation (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

The emergence and growth of the church in Jerusalem and around the known world at that time is difficult to explain on the basis of naturalistic causes. Fear of the religious and political authorities (cf. Acts 4:3, 21; 5:33, 40) would have squelched the movement, as in the case of the Theudas and "the Galilean" (Acts 5:36, 37).

One must consider how the early church treated sin as well. They did not tolerate it, as can be seen in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). This is not exactly the way a movement goes about the process of attracting followers. There was belief in Jesus' resurrection and only such a belief would cause sane people to become a part of the church. In this connection, as a corroboratory piece of evidence, we ought to consider Paul's ethics which he enjoined on the churches in the name of the risen Lord. It is an incredibly demanding ethic and not very easy to live out (Rom. 6:12, 13; 2 Cor. 10:5; Gal. 5:16-26; Eph. 3:5; 4:29). It is difficult to believe that people would submit to this without a sufficient reason. The resurrection of Christ provides the *a priori* reason to move toward a lifestyle like Paul outlines in his letters and also offers the hope required to fulfill that ethic. This must not be diminished given what we know about human nature and its propensity to all kinds of social evil.

For these reasons it is difficult to accept Sanders' view that the resurrection of Jesus is simply something Jesus' followers believed to be true (though it was not), due to some experience (but not Jesus' bodily resurrection) they had. He says that they believed it, lived for it and died for it.¹⁰⁹ This kind of rationale simply denies the early nature of the tradition, the testimony of manifold witnesses (including women), and suggests a cause that according to the principles of correlation one finds to be inept as far as producing the results affirmed by the book of Acts. Behind this reconstruction lies the commitment he so clearly enumerated on page 143 of his book. He completely denies the miraculous.

Crossan says that the resurrection was "the continuing presence in a continuing community of the past Jesus in a radically new and transcendental [sic] mode of present and future existence. But, how to *express* that phenomena?"¹¹⁰ Crossan argues that the first Christians picked up the language of resurrection in order to accommodate their idea of Jesus' continuing presence, but they knew that it was not literally true. This interpretation fails for a number of reasons. First, the earliest tradition (i.e. 1 Cor. 15:3, 4) links up the resurrection of Christ with the resurrection of believers. This cannot be interpreted as "continuing presence." Second, as stated above, there is no real antecedent in Judaism to give the apostles the idea of a resurrection of a single individual and then claim that as such he is the Messiah. This would not have been believed by so many Jews (cf. Acts 2:41) unless it actually did happen.

¹⁰⁷ Craig, "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead," 162.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. F. F. Bruce, "Paul in Acts and Letters," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 687.

¹⁰⁹ Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 276-81. Sanders is to be commended for many things in his reconstruction of the life of Jesus including his focus on the Gospel materials and his placing of Jesus in a Palestinian milieu. But, he nonetheless stops short of really reconstructing a satisfactory cause to the historical effect of the belief of the disciples in Jesus' resurrection and the beginning of the church.

¹¹⁰ Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 404.

They did not expect such a Messiah. It is very difficult to believe that they could have invented the whole story—while eyewitnesses were still living. Third, if Crossan is correct, Paul's discussion about the resurrection body (1 Cor. 15:35) is a total fabrication, misleading and therefore essentially a lie. Fourth, it is very difficult to explain the early, widespread belief in Jesus' resurrection, if indeed it were not true. Fifth, such a reconstruction is simply inadequate to account for James' and Paul's conversion and the emergence of the church.¹¹¹

Summary

This chapter began with a statement and brief description of the criteria of authenticity. Then, from a worldview that allows for the supernatural, we tested the various traditions in the Gospels to see if they qualify as historically reliable witnesses to the resurrection. We demonstrated that Jesus did in fact die by crucifixion and then was buried in a sealed and guarded tomb. Then we showed that the tradition surrounding the empty tomb was reliable. Finally, we demonstrated that the resurrection narratives and early traditions are credible witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. The result is that the tomb was found empty because Jesus did indeed rise bodily from the grave. Although Sanders and Crossan suggest alternative theories, this is the best answer to account for the traditions and the subsequent history of the church.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The study noted that many scholars recognize that there have been two previous quests for the historical Jesus and that we are presently in the third. The one common commitment among many scholars presently engaged in the pursuit of the historical Jesus, a presupposition about history that goes back to the Enlightenment and thinkers like David Hume and Benedict de Spinoza, is an *a priori* denial of the supernatural. This they bring wholeheartedly to the study of the Gospel materials. We pointed out in the second chapter that such a commitment is unfounded and in reality, an illusion. In so doing we opened the door for an analysis of the Gospel materials relating to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus from a worldview which allows for the supernatural.

We looked at the narrative material surrounding the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and found that after analysis on the basis of several of the criteria of authenticity, the traditions should be regarded as accurate accounts of what actually happened in history. The traditions are indeed very old and attested in all the Gospels and different layers of the Gospel strata. The presence of eyewitnesses, the radical changes in people's lives (e.g. James and Paul) and the emergence of the church in Jerusalem despite opposition, are only accounted for on the basis of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Any other cause, like those suggested by Sanders and Crossan, cannot cohere with the data of the Gospels and lacks sufficient power to account for the effects outlined in Scripture.

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¹¹¹ Cf. Craig, "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead," 174, f. n. 46.

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