

The importance of & evidence for... THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD^[1]

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST:

IT'S THE "KEYSTONE" OF CHRISTIANITY -Mt. 16:21; 17:22-23; Jn. 2:18-22; I Cor. 15:14-17

Some testimonies in support of the historicity of Christ & His resurrection from the dead: (Important note: In virtually every case the following intellectually brilliant individuals admit that they began their examination of Jesus Christ & Christianity with an enormous bias *against* its veracity and were moved to an acceptance of its credibility against even their own will!)

- **Frank Morrison** ("*Who Moved the Stone?*"): "In his book that has become a bestseller, *Who Moved the Stone?*, Frank Morrison, a lawyer, 'tells us how he had brought up in a rationalistic environment, and had come to the opinion that the resurrection was nothing but a fairy tale happy ending which spoiled the matchless story of Jesus. Therefore, he planned to write an account of the last tragic days of Jesus, allowing the full horror of the crime and the full heroism of Jesus to shine through. He would, of course, omit any suspicion of the miraculous, and would utterly discount the resurrection. But when he came to study the facts with care, he had to change his mind, and he wrote his book on the other side. His first chapter is significantly called '*The Book that Refused to Be Written,*' and the rest of the volume consists of one of the shrewdest and most attractively written assessments [of the resurrection of Christ] I have every read.'"[2]
- **Gilbert West** ("*Observations on the Resurrection of Christ*") & **(Lord) George Lyttelton** ("*Observations on the Conversion of St. Paul*"): "The eighteenth century was the darkest period religiously in the history of England since the time of the Reformation. It was the age of the great deists, agnostics, rationalists and unbelievers, when 'all men of rank are [were] thought to be infidels.' Like so many of the literary men of his time, George Lyttelton and his friend Gilbert West were led at first to reject the Christian religion. On the Sabbath forenoon before he died, in an interview with Dr. (Samuel) Johnson, Lyttelton said, 'When I first set out in the world I had friends who endeavored to shake my belief in the Christian religion. I saw difficulties which staggered me' ...Dr. Johnson adds, 'He had, in the pride of juvenile confidence, with the help of corrupt conversation, entertained doubts of the truth of Christianity.' His intimacy with Bolingbroke, Chesterfield, Pope and others of the same kind had no doubt influenced him in this direction. Rev. T. T. Biddolph tells us that both Lyttelton and West, 'men of acknowledged talents, had imbibed the principles of infidelity.

[1] The main outline contained here has been adapted from a sermon originally preached by me at Portersville Bible Church, Portersville, Pennsylvania in 1984. I have added much additional documentation over the ensuing years, including the extensive biographical stories on pages 1-4, as well as the material in the Addenda, both of which were added in April, 2011. Far more extensive documentation and information can be found in a number of sources including several books by Josh McDowell including *A Ready Defense* (Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, Tennessee, 1993), pp. 215-240); *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*-Vol. 1 (Here's Life Publishers: San Bernardino, California, 1986 edition), pp. 179-264; *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, Tennessee, 1999), pp. 203-284; & *The Resurrection Factor* (Here's Life Publishers: San Bernardino, California, 1981), pp. 9-113. Another excellent source among many is Nathan Busenitz, *Reasons We Believe* (Crossway: Wheaton, IL, 2008). -Mike Edwards. Originally compiled Feb. 1999, Goroka, Papua New Guinea, revised April 2007 & May 2012, & expanded 2011, St. Vincent, West Indies, revised Madison, Ohio, Jan. 2019. Note: British spelling used throughout.

[2] Josh McDowell, "*The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*" (Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, TN, 1999) [interior quote by Michael Green], p. 216

“...Fully persuaded that the Bible was an imposture, they were determined to expose the cheat. Lord Lyttelton chose the conversion of Paul and Mr. West the resurrection of Christ for the subject of hostile criticism. Both sat down to their respective tasks full of prejudice; but the result of their separate attempts was, that they were both converted by their efforts to overthrow the truth of Christianity. They came together, not as they expected, to exult over an imposture exposed to ridicule, but to lament over their own folly and to felicitate each other on their joint conviction that the Bible was the word of God ... West’s book was the first published. Lyttelton’s work appeared at first anonymously in 1747, when he was thirty-eight years of age.”[3]

- **Sir William Ramsey:** “Sir William Ramsay is regarded as one of the greatest archaeologists ever to have lived. He was a student in the German historical school of the mid-19th century. As a result, he believed that the Book of Acts was a product of the mid-second century A.D. He was firmly convinced of this belief. In his research to make a topographical study of Asia Minor, he was compelled to consider the writings of Luke. As a result he was forced to do a complete reversal of his beliefs due to the overwhelming evidence uncovered in his research. He spoke of this:

“I may fairly claim to have entered on this investigation without prejudice in favour of the conclusion which I shall now seek to justify to the reader. On the contrary, I began with a mind unfavourable to it, for the ingenuity and apparent completeness of the Tubingen theory had at one time quite convinced me. It did not then lie in my line of life to investigate the subject minutely; but more recently I found myself brought into contact with the Book of Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth. In fact, beginning with a fixed idea that the work was essentially a second century composition, and never relying on its evidence as trustworthy for first century conditions, I gradually came to find it a useful ally in some obscure and difficult investigations.”[4]

- **Josh McDowell** (a magna cum laude graduate of Talbot Theological Seminary who has spoken on over 700 college and university campuses around the world to over 8 million students and faculty and is the author of more than forty-five books): “Why is it that three simple questions cast an eerie silence across almost any university audience in America? It happens whenever I ask: *‘Who are you? Why in the world are you here? Where are you going?’*

“As a university student, I couldn’t answer those questions... But I wanted to. Like everyone else I wanted meaning in life. I wanted to be happy... More than that I (wanted) to be free... Freedom to me is not going out and doing whatever I wish. Anyone can do that. And lots of people are. Freedom is possessing the power to do what I know I ought to do. By that definition most people aren’t free. They know what they ought to do, but they don’t have the power to do it. They’re in bondage. And as university student, so was I. [So] I started looking for answers. Almost everyone it seems is into some sort of religion, so I took off for church. I went in the morning. I went in the afternoon. I went in

[3] From: “*Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul*” by Lord Lyttelton, Analyzed and Condensed by Rev. J.L. Campbell, D.D., Cambridge, Mass., in “*The Fundamentals – Vol. II*” (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970), pp. 353-354, “reprinted without alteration or abridgment from the original four-volume edition issued by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles in 1917.”

[4] Sir William Ramsay, “*St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen*” (interior quote), cited in McDowell, “*The New Evidence*” op cit., p. 62

the evening. But I must have found the wrong church. I felt worse inside than I did outside.

“Being a practical sort of person, I chuck anything that doesn’t work. So I chucked religion... I began to wonder, could prestige be the answer? Perhaps being a leader, adopting some cause, giving myself to it, and ‘being known’ might do it. At the first university I attended, the student leaders held the purse strings and threw their weight around. So I ran for freshman class president and was elected... But as with everything else I had tried, the glamour wore off... few people in the universities and colleges of this country were ever more sincere than I in trying to find meaning, truth and purpose to life. Try as I might, these goals eluded me.

“It was about this time I noticed a small group of people at the university—eight students and two faculty members. There was something different about their lives. They seemed to know why they believed what they believed. I like to be around people like that. I don’t care if people don’t agree with me. Some of my closest friends are opposed to some things I believe. But I admire a man or woman with conviction... Contrary to most other university students, the people in this small group seemed to know where they were going. These people also didn’t just talk about life. They got involved. They seemed to be riding above the circumstances of university life, when everybody else appeared to be under those circumstances. Then, too, I noticed their happiness. They appeared to possess a constant, inner source of joy. In fact, they were disgustingly happy... And like the average student, when somebody had something I didn’t have, I wanted it... I wanted what I saw, so I decided to make friends with these intriguing people.

“Two weeks later, we were all sitting around a table in the student union: six students and two faculty members. The conversation started to swing to God. Now, if you’re insecure, and a conversation begins to center on God, you tend to put on a big front. On every campus, in every community, in every office, there’s always ‘the big mouth,’ a person who says, ‘*Uh... Christianity, ha ha. That’s for weaklings, it’s not intellectual.*’ ... The conversation began to bother me. Finally I looked over at one of the students, a good-looking woman (I used to think all Christians were ugly). Leaning back in my chair (I didn’t want the others to think I was too interested), I said, ‘Tell me, what changed your life? Why is yours so different from the other students, the leaders on this campus, the professors?’

“That young woman must have had a lot of conviction. She looked me straight in the eye and, with a little smile, said two words I never thought I’d hear in a university as part of a solution. ‘*Jesus Christ,*’ she said. ‘Oh, for heaven’s sake, don’t give me that garbage about religion,’ I said. She shot back, ‘*Mister, I didn’t say religion; I said Jesus Christ.*’ ... My new friends challenged me intellectually to examine the claims that Jesus Christ is God’s Son; that taking on human flesh He lived among real men and women and died on the cross for the sins of mankind; that He was buried and He arose three days later and could change a person’s life...

“I thought it was a farce. In fact, I thought most Christians were walking idiots... I thought that if a Christian had a brain cell it would die of loneliness. I didn’t know any better. But these people challenged me over and over. Finally, I accepted (the challenge). But I did it out of pride, to refute them. I didn’t know there were facts. I didn’t know there was evidence a person could evaluate with his mind.

“After much study and research, my mind finally came to the conclusion that Jesus Christ must have been who He claimed to be. In fact, my search to refute Christianity became the background behind my first two books. When I couldn’t refute it, I ended up becoming a Christian...One of the crucial areas of my research to refute Christianity centered around the resurrection. A student at the University of Uruguay said to me: ‘Professor McDowell, why can’t you intellectually refute Christianity?’ ‘For a very simple reason,’ I answered. ‘I am not able to explain away an event in history—the resurrection of Jesus Christ.’ ...The resurrection issue removes the question, ‘Is Christianity valid?’ from the realm of philosophy and forces it to be an issue of history.”[5]

- **Simon Greenleaf:** “Simon Greenleaf (1783-1853) was the famous Royal Professor of Law at Harvard University and succeeded Justice Joseph Story as the Dane Professor of Law in the same university upon Story’s death in 1846. H.W.H. Knott says of this great authority in jurisprudence: ‘To the efforts of Story and Greenleaf is to be ascribed the rise of the Harvard Law School to its eminent position among the legal schools of the United States.’ ...Greenleaf produced a famous work entitled *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence* that ‘is still considered the greatest single authority on evidence in the entire literature of legal procedure.’ In 1846, while still professor of law at Harvard, Greenleaf wrote a volume entitled *An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists by the Rules of Evidence Administered in the Courts of Justice*. In this classic work the author examines the value of the testimony of the apostles to the resurrection of Christ. “The following are this brilliant jurist’s critical observations: ‘The great truths which the apostles declared, were, that Christ had risen from the dead, and that only through repentance from sin, and faith in Him could men hope for salvation. This doctrine they asserted with one voice, everywhere, not only under the greatest discouragements, but in the face of the most appalling errors that can be presented to the mind of man... Propagating this new faith, even in the most inoffensive and peaceful manner, they could expect nothing but contempt, opposition, revilings, bitter persecutions, stripes, imprisonments, torments, and cruel deaths. Yet this faith they zealously did propagate; and all these miseries they endured undismayed, nay, rejoicing. As one after another was put to a miserable death, the survivors only prosecuted their work with increased vigor and resolution... They had every possible motive to review carefully the grounds of their faith, and the evidences of the great facts and truths which they asserted...

“It was therefore impossible that they could have persisted in affirming the truths they have narrated, had not Jesus actually risen from the dead, and had they not know this fact as certainly as they knew any other fact. If it were morally possible for them to have been deceived in this matter, every human motive operated to lead them to discover and avow their error... To have persisted in so gross a falsehood, after it was known to them, was not only to encounter, for life, all the evils which man could inflict from without, but to endure also the pangs of inward and conscious guilt; with no hope of future peace...no hope of happiness in this life, or in the world to come. Such conduct in the apostles would moreover have been utterly irreconcilable with the fact that they possessed the ordinary constitution of our common nature.... If then their testimony was not true, there was no possible motive for its fabrication.”[6]

[5] Josh McDowell, “*The Resurrection Factor*” (Here’s Life Publishers: San Bernardino, CA, 1981), pp. 2-7

[6] Simon Greenleaf, cited in Josh McDowell, “*The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*” (Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, TN, 1999), pp. 217-218

THE RESURRECTION IS THE DIVIDER OF ALL RELIGIONS. Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, are all dead & still in the grave. Only Christ arose! That's why evangelism is so important: There are *NOT* many ways to heaven!

THE RESURRECTION PROVIDES INDIRECT EVIDENCE FOR THE BIBLE'S INSPIRATION & TRUSTWORTHINESS - Jn. 5:46-47; Mt. 5:17-18; Jn. 16:13; 17:20

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST PROVIDES INDIRECT PROOF OF HEAVEN & HELL.

Hell: Luke 16:19-31. Christ preached on hell more than any other preacher in the Bible. He mentions it approximately 19 of the 23 times it is found in the New Testament!

Heaven: Jn. 14:1-3

IT GUARANTEES A CHRISTIAN'S FUTURE RESURRECTION - II Cor. 4:14

THE SCENE AND SETTING OF THE CRUCIFIXION.

1. **PRE-CRUCIFIXION AGONY.**
 1. Beard ripped out & thorns crushed on head.
 2. Scourging. The Roman "*Cat-o-Nine Tails*" had bits of glass, metal, stone, etc., tied to the ends of the leather strips. Both deep bruising as well as surface cuts would occur.
2. **CRUCIFIXION DESCRIPTION.** (See material in *The New Evidence*, pp. 221-225)
3. **CHRIST WAS DEFINITELY DEAD!**
 1. His heart was ruptured ("*blood & 'water' flowed out*").
 2. Roman soldiers were experts at killing and didn't make mistakes in that regard.
4. **THE TOMB & BURIAL.**
 1. It was hewn out of stone – i.e. a cave.
 2. The "*Shroud of Turin.*" This is a fake and was rejected by scholars even before radioactive dating tests were performed on it. cf. II Kings 18:1-4
5. **THE STONE.** We're told that it would require 20 men to roll away i.e. uphill from the tomb. (cf. Codex Bezae)
6. **THE SEAL** - Mt. 27:66. It stood for the authority of the Roman Empire. Consequently there would be no collusion by the guards.
7. **THE GUARDS** - Mt. 27:62-66.
 1. Undoubtedly a Roman Cohort, not temple guards. It was a 16 man guard unit, 4 men would be on duty at a time.
 2. For a guard to sleep was punished by death! cf. Acts 12:19
 3. Even Temple guards wouldn't have slept! Their clothes would be burned off! – Rev. 16:15

2. THE EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION:

1. THE EMPTY TOMB.

1. The Gospels talk of the empty tomb, but the rest of the New Testament only of the resurrection. Reason: **The empty tomb was a foregone conclusion!** (see quotes & material in "The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict," Josh McDowell, pp. 250-251)
2. The bribe attempt establishes the fact that the tomb was empty. Mt. 28:1-15
3. The tomb wasn't venerated since there was no one there.
4. The grave clothes. "*rolled up*" is an unfortunate translation. "*twirled*" is good. Jews buried people with strips of cloth that were intertwined. It would have been well nigh impossible to remove a body and then refashion the grave clothes as they had been.
5. **A New Institution came into being: The Church** (29-32 A.D.)
6. **A New Day of Worship was instituted: Sunday.** That in itself was earth shattering, in the face of Jewish culture & tradition!
7. **New Ordinances were instituted:**
 1. *The Lord's Supper* (Communion) - Acts 2:46. A time of joy?!
 2. *Baptism.*

2. THE POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES. They occurred 10 times.

1. **The Evidence** (see quotes and material in "*The New Evidence*", pp. 272-279)
2. **The Excuse:** Hallucinations (visions, appearances). This is invalid for the following reasons:
 1. Only certain types of people get them (typically, high strung, nervous, imaginative type people). But few if any could be classified thus!
 2. They are highly individualistic & subjective. But in this case we have from 2-500 having them!
 3. They are usually restricted to certain locations & places. But Christ's appearances occurred all over, inside & outside!
 4. The individuals having them must *WANT* to see them. But Christ's followers clearly did not. They had given up!
 5. They usually occur over a long period of time with regularity, usually to a point of crisis, or fade out. But these occurred for 40 days then ended at the time of Christ's ascension.

3. THE SKEPTICS' BANKRUPT OPTIONS:

1. **THE "SWOON" THEORY.** This theory proposes that Christ didn't actually die, but merely "*swooned*" i.e. passed out. Supposedly, once He was placed in the cool tomb with the aloes plastered against Him he revived, worked his way out of about 50 kilograms of gluey grave clothes, moved a two ton stone away from the entrance of the tomb (uphill, no less), overpowered the entire sixteen man Roman guard unit (each of whom was trained to defend 6 square feet of ground against an entire invading army!) and then staggered into the upper room and convinced his followers that he had conquered death. Advocates of this theory usually maintain that Jesus then either hid for the rest of his life or moved to India or another location.
2. **REFUTATION:** Just the description of this theory demonstrates the absurdity of it & taxes our credulity. But let's briefly refute it:

1. This theory is a fairly recent invention, and was never heard of or propounded until about two centuries ago. If there was any credibility to it, surely it would have circulated in the early centuries of the Christian era.
2. It's absurd on the face of it. A sober consideration of what advocates are requiring us to believe makes it totally unbelievable. For instance three experts certified his death. Blood & water flowing out of his side indicates a ruptured heart. To think he could have moved a two ton stone uphill, then overpowered the Roman guard unit, walked 7 miles in his greatly weakened condition, etc., is beyond rational belief!
3. Is it really credible to believe that Christ hid for the rest of his life?
4. This theory smears the character of Christ, making Him a liar.
5. Even the famous atheist David Strauss dismissed this theory as ridiculous!

C. **THE "THEFT" THEORY.** The body was stolen by someone - Mt. 28:11-15

D. **REFUTATION:**

Stolen by the disciples:

- (1) But they weren't even expecting it!
- (2) How did they do it and leave the clothes neat & "hollowed out?"
- (3) The soldiers' testimony makes no sense ("*While we were asleep those guys stole the body.*" If the soldiers were asleep they wouldn't have seen or known who stole the body!).
- (4) The soldiers wouldn't have slept since that meant automatic death!
- (5) The apostles all died a martyr's death, with only one exception! Fact: People may sometimes die for something that is false, but which they think is true. But virtually NO ONE dies for something that not only is false, but which they **KNOW to be false!**

Stolen by Christ's enemies:

- (6) This makes no sense at all.
- (7) If Christ's enemies had stolen Christ's body they could have simply brought it out & showed it around! Doing so would have killed Christianity once and for all!
- (8) Rome wouldn't have stolen it, since they didn't want it and it only created a political problem. If they did have it, they would have produced it to squelch the whole problem.

E. **THE "WRONG TOMB" THEORY.** Supposedly everyone got confused and went to the wrong tomb. Consequently they thought that the body had risen, when actually they were looking in the wrong place (sic)!

F. **REFUTATION:**

2. The women knew where the body was (cf. Mt. 27:61; Mk. 15:47)
3. You mean Peter & John went to the wrong tomb too?
4. You mean the angel missed it as well? Mt. 28:6
5. Did the Jewish rulers (Sanhedrin) go to the wrong place too?
6. Did the soldiers go to the wrong tomb too?
7. You mean Joseph of Arimathea (who built and owned the tomb) went to the wrong tomb as well? Please keep in mind that this was not a public cemetery or burial ground, but a private one!

4. **CONCLUSION.** The facts are clear for anyone with an open mind: Jesus Christ literally, physically, rose from the dead! It is one of the most well attested facts of history. If you deny it, then to be consistent you must deny the existence of virtually everyone in history! **The question of the hour is this: What is your response to the fact of the resurrection?** You will probably have one of three reactions, just as the skeptics in the intellectual center of Athens did in Paul's day (Acts. 17:32-34):

1. *Some mocked.*
2. *Some procrastinated* (put it off).
3. *Some believed!*

If you're standing on a wharf when a boat is about to depart for a destination you can do one of several things:

- 1) Make fun of the condition and quality of the boat and refuse to get on,
- 2) You can say, "*I'll get on it another time*", or,
- 3) You can get on board and let it carry you to your desired destination.

In like manner, in regard to the resurrection of Christ:

- 1) You can mock and reject the resurrection of Christ,
- 2) You can procrastinate and put off making a decision to put your faith in Christ, saying, "*I'll think about it and decide later*", or,
- 3) You can repent and believe on Christ.

The decision you make will determine your destiny for all eternity!

2011 ADDENDA

(Explanatory Note: Historian, theologian & scholar Norman T. Wright of Oxford in 2003 wrote a book titled "*The Resurrection of the Son of God.*" In it he presented some new arguments for the resurrection of Christ which former atheist Antony Flew has described as "*absolutely fresh...absolutely wonderful, absolutely radical, and very powerful.*"[7] Wright summarized some of the main points in an appendix to Flew's book in which Flew explained why he left atheism and now believes there is a God! I found Wright's evidences compelling and worth adding to the arguments and evidences I compiled above. I am including excerpts from them here, to further bolster the evidence for the veracity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. I hope you find them helpful. -mwe)

ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

A TOTALLY NEW VIEW CONCERNING RESURRECTION BEGAN TO BE PROPOUNDED BY THE EARLY CHURCH:

Wright observes regarding ancient views and beliefs regarding life after death that, "**there's a huge range of beliefs about life after death, but 'resurrection' doesn't feature in the Greco-Roman world.** In fact, Pliny, Aeschylus, Homer, Cicero, and all sorts of early writers say, '*Of course, we know resurrection doesn't happen.*'"

[7] Antony Flew, "*There is a God – How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*" (HarperCollins Publishers: New York, NY, 2007), p. 203.

“Now at the same time, the Jews had developed quite a specific theology about resurrection: that God’s people would be bodily raised from the dead at the end of time. The time element is very important, because most Christians in the Western world use the word *resurrection* as a vague word to mean ‘life after death,’ which it never did in the ancient world. It was always a very specific term for what I call life *after* life after death. In other words, first you die, you are dead and not bodily alive, and then you are ‘resurrected,’ which means you begin a new bodily life, a new life *after* whatever ‘life after death’ may consist of.

“We can track the way in which *resurrection* belief occurs in Judaism. Resurrection is a two-stage sequence: right after you die you’re immediately in this holding pattern or waiting state; and then you have this entirely new life called *resurrection*. . . . And within Judaism itself there are additional variations. The Pharisees believed in resurrection, and this seems to have been the majority belief in Palestinian Judaism at the time of Jesus. The Sadducees didn’t believe in life after death at all, certainly not resurrection. And people like Philo and perhaps the Essenes (though that’s controversial) believed in a single-stage disembodied immortality, in which, after death, you simply go wherever you are going and stay there, rather than experiencing a subsequent resurrection.

“Now, this is all the more interesting because, in all the societies that have been studied in this respect, beliefs about life after death are very conservative. [In other words] faced with death, people tend to lurch back to beliefs and practices they know, to where they came from, to how their tradition, their family, their village, and so on, has always done burial customs. **So it is truly remarkable that all the early Christians known to us, right through till the late second century** when the Gnostics^[8] start to use the word *resurrection* in quite a different sense (but we’ll leave that aside)—**all the early Christians known to us for the first four or five generations believed in a future bodily resurrection, even though most of them came from the pagan world, where this was regarded as complete and utter rubbish.**”^[9]

Wright adds, “A modern myth circulating at the moment says that it’s only we who have contemporary post-Enlightenment science who have discovered that dead people don’t rise. **Those people back then, poor things, were unenlightened, so they believed in all these crazy miracles. But that is simply false.** A lovely quote by C.S. Lewis relates to this. He is talking about the virginal conception of Jesus and says that the reason Joseph was worried about Mary’s pregnancy was not because he didn’t know where babies come from, but because he did. It’s the same with the resurrection of Jesus. **People in the ancient world were incredulous when faced with the Christian claim, because they knew perfectly well that when people die they stay dead.**”

“And what we then find—and this to me is utterly fascinating—is that **we can track, in early Christianity, several modifications in the classic Jewish belief about resurrection.**

“First, instead of resurrection being something that was simply going to happen to all God’s people at the end, the early Christians said it had happened to one person in advance. Now, no first-century Jew, as far as we know, believed there would be one person raised ahead of everybody else. So **that’s a radical innovation, but they all believed that.** [which is something that must be accounted for –*mwe*]

“Second, they believed that resurrection would involve the transformation of the physical body. Those Jews who believed in resurrection seem to have gone in one of two directions. [a] some said it

[8] Gnosticism was an ancient heresy that began developing around the end of the first century and came into full bloom in the second century. The NT books of Colossians & I John were specifically written to refute this error. –*mwe*.

[9] Norman T. Wright in “Appendix B – The Self Revelation of God in Human History: A Dialogue on Jesus with N.T. Wright” from the book “There is a God – How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind” by Antony Flew (HarperCollins Publishers: New York, NY, 2007), pp. 196-198

would produce a physical body exactly like this one all over again, and [b] others said it would be a luminous body, one shining like a star. **The early Christians didn't say either of those things. They talked about a new sort of physicality**—this is very clear in Paul, but not only in Paul—a new type of *embodiedness* that is definitely bodily in the sense of being solid and substantial, but seems to have been transformed so that it is now not susceptible to pain or suffering or death. And this is quite new. **That picture of resurrection is not in Judaism.**

“Third, of course, **they believed that the Messiah himself had been raised from the dead**, which no Second Temple Jew believed because, according to Second Temple Judaism, the Messiah was never going to be killed. **So that was novel.**”^[10]

“Fourth, they used the idea of ‘resurrection’ in quite new ways. In Judaism, the idea had been used as a metaphor for ‘return from exile,’ as we find in Ezekiel 37. But **within early Christianity—and I mean very early Christianity, for example, Paul—we find it being used in connection with baptism, holiness, and various other aspects of Christian living that were not in mind within Judaism** and its use of ‘resurrection.’ This again shows quite a radical innovation, a mutation from its form in the Jewish viewpoint.

“Fifth, we find that for the earliest Christians ‘resurrection’ comes to be thought of as something to which God’s people contribute...

“Sixth, we find that in early Christianity ‘resurrection’ has moved from being one doctrine among many others—important, but not that important—which is where it is in Judaism, **to become the center of everything**. Take it away from Paul, say, or I Peter, Revelation, or the great second-century fathers, and you will destroy their whole framework. **We have to conclude that something must have happened to bring ‘resurrection’ in from the periphery to the center, to the focal point.**

“Seventh...we find that in early Christianity there is virtually no spectrum of belief about what happens after death. In Judaism there were several different viewpoints, and in the pagan world there were a great many, but **in early Christianity there was only one: resurrection itself.**

“Granted how conservative most people are in their views about life after death, **this is truly remarkable. It really does look as though the earliest Christians had good reason to rethink even this most personal and important point of belief.** And when we look at the spectrum of early Christianity, we see that **the early Christians disagreed about quite a lot of things, but they are remarkable unanimous in their view not only of resurrection as their belief, but of how resurrection plays out and how it works.**”

“All this forces us as historians to ask a very simple question: Why did all the early Christians known to us, from the earliest times for which we have evidence, have this very new, but remarkably unanimous, view of resurrection? That is a genuinely interesting historical question in its own right. Of course, all the early Christians known to us would say, ‘We have this view of resurrection because of what we believe about Jesus.’”^[11]

REFUTING THE ARGUMENT THAT THE GOSPELS WEREN'T WRITTEN UNTIL 20-30 YEARS AFTER CHRIST, THUS INVALIDATING THEIR TESTIMONY:

“Now, if the idea that Jesus had been raised from the dead only started to crop up after twenty or thirty years of Christianity, as many skeptical scholars have supposed, you would find lots of

[10] Wright, pp. 198-199

[11] *ibid.*, pp. 198-199

strands of early Christianity in which there wasn't much place for resurrection—or if you did find resurrection, it might have a different shape from the very specific one it has in early Christianity. **Therefore, the wide extent and unanimity of early Christian belief in resurrection force us to say that something definite happened, way back early on, that has shaped and colored the whole early Christian movement.**^[12]

“At this point we have to say, ‘All right then, what about the Gospel narratives?’ What about Matthew 28, that short narrative in Mark 16 and the longer one in Luke 24, and the much longer one in John 20-21? ...those were written down much later...they could have been written as early as the 50s of the first century; some would say even earlier. They could have been written as late as the 70s or 80s...But for my argument at the moment this doesn't matter at all.

“**The point is this:** The Gospel resurrection narratives (and the related material at the start of Acts) have certain key features, common to all four of them, demonstrating historically that, though they were written down later, they go back in a way that has not been altered very much at all...**to very early oral tradition.** This is, obviously, of huge importance.”^[13]

[12] *ibid.*, pp. 200-202

[13] *ibid.*, p. 202