

Christian Apologetics Series:
THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST
Compiled by Dennis McBride

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I. **IS CHRIST’S RESURRECTION REALLY IMPORTANT?**

A. **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION TO JESUS**

Apologetist Clark Pinnock comments: “The resurrection has tremendous significance for Christian apologetics. It had the same importance for Jesus too. For He literally staked His entire reputation as a teacher of truth upon the prediction that He would rise from the grave (Lk 18:31-33). The integrity of both gospel and Savior rests upon the validity of this single event” (*Set Forth Your Case*, Moody Press, 1971, p. 93).

1. *His claims*

Jesus made numerous claims about His divinity and the importance of believing in Him. For example:

Matthew 12:38-40; 16:21; 17:9, 22, 23; 20:18-19; 26:32; 27:63

Mark 8:31-9:1; 9:10, 31; 14:28, 58; 10:32

Luke 9:18-27; 18:31-33

John 2:19-22; 12:34; Chapters 14-16

2. *His appeal to authority*

a. *John 2:12-22*

- The Jews knew that only three individuals had authority over the temple: God, Messiah, and the High Priest. What they didn’t realize was that Jesus was all three.

- When confronted by some Jewish leaders, Jesus appealed to His resurrection as proof of His Messianic authority:

After Jesus cleared the temple, “the Jews . . . said to Him, ‘What sign do You show to us, seeing that You do these things?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews therefore said, ‘It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’

“But He was speaking of the temple of His body. When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken.”

b. ***John 5:1-18***

In this passage Jesus exercises His authority over the Sabbath, then, when again confronted by some Jewish antagonists, appeals to His divine relationship with the Father.

3. ***His appeal to Deity***

a. The Father’s affirmation

If Jesus had not come out of the grave as He said He would, His claims to Deity would have been invalid. As God the Father gave witness at the Christ’s baptism (Matt. 3:17), so He gave witness to Christ’s deity and Sonship through the resurrection.

Rom. 1:3-4 - “[Christ Jesus] was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the spirit of holiness.”

b. His own resurrection power

1) ***John 10:11, 17-18***

Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. . . . For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

2) Apologist W.J. Sparrow-Simpson comments:

“If it be asked how the resurrection of Christ is a proof of his being the Son of God, it may be answered, first, because he rose by his

own power. He had power to lay down his life, and he had power to take it again, John 10:18.

“This is not inconsistent with the fact that he was raised by the power of the Father, because what the Father does the Son does likewise; creation, and all other external works, are ascribed indifferently to the Father, Son and Spirit.

“But in the second place, as Christ had openly declared himself to be the Son of God, his rising from the dead was the seal of God to the truth of that declaration. Had he continued under the power of death, God would thereby have disallowed his claim to be his Son; but as he raised him from the dead, he publicly acknowledged him; saying, ‘Thou art my Son, this day have I declared thee such.’”
(*The Resurrection and Modern Thought*, pp. 287, 288).

4. *The ultimate apologetic*

- a. Jesus presented His own resurrection as the ultimate proof of His divinity.

Matt. 12:38-40 - “Some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’”

- b. God the Father also established the resurrection as the ultimate proof of Christ’s identity, and the basis for divine judgment.

Acts 17:30-31 - “God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

- c. Anyone needing proof of Christ’s deity need only look as His resurrection. If the resurrection isn’t sufficient evidence to bring a person to Christ, then something other than lack of evidence is keeping them in their sin.

- d. Clark Pinnock comments:

“The certainty of the apostles was founded on their experiences in the factual realm. To them Jesus showed himself alive ‘by many infallible proofs’ (Acts 1:3). The term Luke uses [there] is *tekmerion*, which indicates a demonstrable proof. The disciples came to their Easter faith through inescapable empirical evidence available to them, and available to us through their written testimony.

“It is important for us, in an age that calls for evidence to sustain the Christian claim, to answer the call with appropriate historical considerations. For the resurrection stands within the realm of historical factuality, and constitutes excellent motivation for a person to trust Christ as Saviour.” (*Christianity Today*, April 12, 1968, p.11).

5. *The conclusion*

The resurrection was *very* important to Jesus!

B. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION TO GOD THE FATHER

1. *The implications*

The importance of Christ’s resurrection to the Father’s righteousness, justice, mercy, and redemptive plan are evident throughout Scripture. Jesus did only the Father’s will, therefore, what was important to Jesus was important to the Father (and vice versa).

John 5:19-30 - “Jesus . . . answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.

“For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and greater works than these will He show Him, that you may marvel. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.

“For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live.

“For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.

“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.

“I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”

2. *A summary passage*

Acts 17:30-31 - “God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

3. *The conclusion*

The resurrection was *very* important to the Father!

C. **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION TO THE JEWS**

1. *The Passage - Matt. 27:62-66*

“On the next day, which is the one after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, ‘Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, “After three days I am to rise again.” Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, lest the disciples come and steal Him away and say to the people, “He has risen from the dead,” and the last deception will be worse than the first.’

“Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how.’ And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.”

2. *The motive*

The Jews didn’t believe that Jesus would rise from the dead, but they were very concerned that the disciples would rob the grave then claim that something supernatural had occurred. That’s why they had the grave secured.

3. *The conclusion*

Trying to prevent the resurrection was important to the Jews.

D. **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION TO THE FAMILY OF JESUS**

1. *Before the resurrection*

a. Jesus’ brothers were unbelievers.

John 7:2-5 - “Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Tabernacles, was at hand. [Christ’s] brothers therefore said to Him, ‘Depart from here, and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may behold Your works which You are doing. For no one does anything in secret, when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things show Yourself to the world.’ For not even His brothers were believing in Him.”

- b. They thought He was insane.

Mark 3:21, 31 - “When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, ‘He has lost His senses.’ . . . And His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him, and called Him.”

They sought to arrest him and take him away from Capernaum because they thought he was mad.

- c. He was without honor.

Matt. 13:57 - Jesus states that a prophet is not without honor except in his own home town and his own house.

- d. Subsequently:

Jesus went on to die a cursed death on the cross, bringing further “disgrace” to His family.

2. *After the resurrection*

- a. All of Christ’s brothers were present in the Upper Room, awaiting the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14).

- b. James, one of His brothers, became an apostle, head of the Church in Jerusalem, and author of the Epistle of James.

- 1) Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18
- 2) Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12
- 3) Mark 6:3

- c. Jude, another of His brothers, became an apostle and author of the Epistle of Jude.

- d. What caused such a dramatic change in their thinking and devotion to Jesus?

I Cor. 15:7 - “Then [Jesus] appeared to James.” They knew for certain that Christ was alive!

3. *The conclusion*

The resurrection of Jesus was important and life-transforming to the family of Jesus.

E. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION TO THE DISCIPLES

1. *Before the resurrection*

- a. The fearful disciples deserted Jesus in the Garden.
 - 1) *Matt. 26:47-56* - "Then all the disciples left Him and fled."
 - 2) *Mark 14:50* - "They all left Him and fled."
- b. Peter denied Jesus three times (Matt. 26:71-75; Mark 14:69-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:25-27).
- c. Peter and some of the other disciples returned to their former occupation of fishing (John 21:2-3).
- d. A resurrection was the last thing on the minds of the fearful and despondent followers of Jesus (Matt. 27:62-66).

"What thoughts concerning the dead Christ filled the minds of Joseph of Arimathea, of Nicodemus, and of the other disciples of Jesus, as well as of the Apostles and of the pious women? They believed Him to be dead, and they did not expect Him to rise again from the dead--at least, in our accepted sense of it.

"Of this there is abundant evidence from the moment of His death, in the burial spices brought by Nicodemus, in those prepared by the women (both of which were intended as against corruption), in the sorrow of the women at the empty tomb, in their supposition that the body had been removed, in the perplexity and bearing of the Apostles, in the doubts of so many, and indeed in the express statement: 'For as yet they know not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead'" (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962, p. 623).

2. *After the resurrection*

- a. The disciples were gathered in the Upper Room (Acts 1:12-14).
- b. They boldly preached resurrection, even in Jerusalem where it could most easily have been refuted were it not true.

"Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost is wholly and entirely founded on the Resurrection. Not merely is the Resurrection its principal theme, but if that doctrine were removed there would no doctrine left. For the Resurrection is propounded as being (1) the explanation of Jesus' death; (2) prophetically anticipated as the Messianic experience; (3) apostolically witnessed; (4) the cause of the outpouring of the Spirit, and thus accounting for religious phenomena otherwise inexplicable; and (5) certifying the Messianic and Kingly position of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus the whole series of arguments and conclusions depends for stability

entirely upon the Resurrection” (W.J. Sparrow-Simpson, *The Resurrection and Modern Thought*, Zondervan, pp. 287-88).

- c. This one great event permeated and motivated their entire ministry.

“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.

“Their master had recently perished as a malefactor, by the sentence of a public tribunal. His religion sought to overthrow the religions of the whole world. The laws of every country were against the teachings of His disciples. The interests and passions of all the leaders and great men in the world were against them. The fashion of the world was against them.

“Propagating this new faith, even in the most inoffensive and peaceful manner, they could expect nothing but contempt, opposition, revellings, 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.

“The annals of military warfare afford scarcely an example of the like heroic constancy, patience, and unblenching courage. 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; and these motives were pressed upon their attention with the most melancholy and terrific frequency. 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 known 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 testimony of a good conscience, no expectation of honor or esteem among men, 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. Yet their lives do show them to have been men take all others of our race; swayed by the same motives, animated by the same hopes, affected by the same joys, subdued by the same sorrows, agitated

by the same fears, and subject to the same passions, temptations, and infirmities, as ourselves. And their writings show them to have been men of vigorous understandings. If then their testimony was not true, there was no possible motive for its fabrication” (Simon Greenleaf, *An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists*, Baker Book House 1965 reprint of 1847 edition, pp. 28-30).

- d. They were willing to die for their faith--and most of them did.
- e. What brought about such a dramatic change?

Acts 1:1-3 - “The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.”

They knew that Jesus was *alive!*

3. *The conclusion*

The resurrection of Jesus was vitally important to His disciples!

II. IS CHRIST’S RESURRECTION RELEVANT FOR TODAY?

It’s one thing to establish the importance of the resurrection to the people of Jesus’ day, but what difference does that make to people today? Is it really relevant for our lives in the twentieth century?

A. IT IS A FACT, NOT FICTION

- 1. *Religious sentiments are sufficient for many people, but truth is what really matters in issues of eternal consequence. And God’s truth is always relevant.*
- 2. *Christ’s resurrection doesn’t lie within the realm of religious speculation or mythology, but of historical, factual evidence.*
- 3. *Note carefully the historical basis of the gospel, as well as its theological and practical implications:*

I Cor. 15:1-28 - “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some

have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. . . .

“Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.

“For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

“For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, ‘All things are put in subjection,’ it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.”

B. IT ESTABLISHES THE INTEGRITY OF APOSTOLIC PREACHING

Upon this one historical event rests the integrity of all apostolic preaching, because every New Testament writer mentions directly or alludes to the resurrection of Jesus. If the resurrection didn’t occur, they are false witnesses.

1. *I Cor. 15:14ff* - “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain . . . we are found to be misrepresenting God, because we testify of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it be true that the dead are not raised.”
2. *Other examples*
 - *Matt. 28:1-6* = “He is risen.”
 - *Mark 16:1-6* = “He is risen.”
 - *Luke 24:1-6* = “He is risen.”
 - *Acts 1:1-3* = “He presented Himself alive.”
 - *John 20:11-17* = “Jesus appeared to Mary”
 - *Rom. 1:1-4* = “Declared with power to be the Son of God by resurrection from the dead.”
 - *I Cor. 15* = “He that raised up Jesus.”

- *Eph. 1:20* = “He raised Him from the dead.”
- *Phil. 3:10* = “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection.”
- *Col. 2:12* = “God, who raised Him from the dead.”
- *1 Thess. 4:14* = “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again.”
- *2 Tim. 1:10* = “But now is made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death.”
- *Heb. 13:20* = “Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep.”
- *1 Pet. 1:21* = “You who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory.”
- *Rev. 1:18* = “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for ever more, Amen.”

C. IT ESTABLISHES THE INTEGRITY OF BIBLICAL REVELATION

1. *Upon this one event rests the integrity of all biblical revelation.*
2. *George Eldon Ladd comments:*

“Does one’s belief in God depend on a single event--the resurrection of Jesus? Can one not doubt that such a resurrection is possible and yet believe in God who is creator and sustainer of the world? After all, Holy Scripture says that ‘whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him’ (Heb. 11:6).

“However, Paul says that if Jesus is not raised, we are misrepresenting God. As a matter of fact, the entire Bible is misrepresenting God. It is an emphasis of much modern biblical theology that God has revealed himself through his acts in history. It is widely recognized that revelation in history is one of the most distinctive things about biblical religion. . . .

“Throughout the history of Israel, God raised up prophets to interpret what God was doing in history. The deliverance from Egypt was due not to the strength of Israel, nor to the skill and cleverness of Moses; it was an act of God. The overthrow of Israel by Assyria and Judah by Babylon was not simply the clash of nationalisms; it was the judgment of God. God’s most eloquent word was spoken in the historical event of Jesus of Nazareth. ‘In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophet; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son’ (Heb. 1:1-2).

“But if Jesus is not raised, redemptive history ends in the cul-de-sac of a Palestinian grave. Then God is not the living God, nor is he the God of the living as Jesus said (Mk. 12:27). Death is stronger than God; death is stronger than God’s word. God’s acts are proven futile in the face of man’s greatest enemy--death. One may not discount the resurrection, and accept the Bible’s witness to redemptive history” (*I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus*, Eerdmans, 1975, pp. 143,144).

D. IT IS AT THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

1. *The resurrection of Jesus is a central element of the gospel message.*
2. *I Cor. 15:1-8* - “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

“After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.”

E. IT IS AT THE HEART OF MAN’S RESPONSE TO GOD

1. *Salvation is impossible apart from belief in Christ’s resurrection.*
 - a. *Rom. 10:9-10* - “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.”
 - b. Saving faith requires, and is demonstrated by, confessing Jesus as Lord and believing in His resurrection.

2. *Question:*

If we are justified by Christ’s atoning death (Rom. 5:9 - “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him”), why is belief in His resurrection necessary?

Because if we deny Christ’s resurrection, we deny the reality and benefits of:

- a. His continual intercession

Rom. 8:33-34 - “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.”

- b. Our continual access to God

Heb. 7:23-25 - “The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers, because they were prevented by death from continuing but He, on the other hand, because He abides forever, holds His priesthood

permanently. Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

- c. His continual power for living the Christian life - *Eph. 1:18-2:7*
- d. Our victory over death - *1 Cor. 15:54-57*

Therefore, 1 Cor. 15:14 says, “If Christ has not been raised . . . your faith is in vain . . . your faith is futile . . . you are still in your sins . . . those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.”

F. IT IS THE GUARANTEE OF OUR RESURRECTION

1. Christ’s resurrection guarantees that every Christian will be resurrected also.

“The resurrection of Jesus is the seal of our resurrection. The healing of sick people does not warrant us in believing that Christ will heal each of us today, nor did the resurrection of Lazarus guarantee our immortality. It is the resurrection of Christ as first-fruits which alone opens the grave in anticipation--to the believer and into life eternal. Because He arose, we shall arise (cf. Rom. 8:11)” (Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Christian Evidences*, Moody Press, pp. 185-186).

2. Biblical promises:

- a. **Rom. 8:11** - “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.”
- b. **1 Cor. 6:14** - “Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power.”
- c. **2 Cor. 4:14** - “He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.”
- d. **1 Thess. 4:14, 16** - “If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep [died] in Jesus. . . . For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.”
- e. See also *1 Cor. 15:20-26; 50-58*.

G. IT IS THE GUARANTEE OF OUR ETERNAL HOPE AND INHERITANCE

1 Pet. 1:3-5 - “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and

undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

H. IT IS THE MODEL OF OUR RESURRECTED BODY

1. *Christ’s resurrected body is the model for what our resurrected bodies will be like.*

2. *A physical resurrection*

The Bible teaches that the resurrected body of Christ was an actual physical body (John 2:21). Christ’s resurrection was a *physical* resurrection, not spiritual. This is an important point that will be discussed in detail later in this study.

3. *Opposition to Christ’s resurrection*

a. Opponents of orthodox Christian doctrine attempt either to deny or distort Christ’s resurrection, but in doing so they produce a false Jesus and false gospel (Gal. 1:6-7; 2 Cor. 11:4). The eternal implications of such errors are *very* serious.

b. The Jehovah’s Witnesses doctrine of Christ’s spiritual resurrection is an example of denying bodily resurrection by redefining and distorting its *nature*.

1) Their doctrine

- “Our Lord was put to death in flesh, but was made alive in spirit; he was put to death a man, but was raised from the dead a spirit being of the highest order of the divine nature” (*Studies in the Scriptures*, Vol. V. P. 453).
- “It could not be that the man Jesus is the second Adam, the new father of the race instead of Adam; for the Man Jesus is dead, forever dead” (*Ibid.*, Vol. V. P. 454).
- “[Christ] instantly created and assumed such a body of flesh and such clothing as he saw fit for the purpose intended” (*Ibid.*, II p. 127).
- “Our Lord’s human body . . . did not decay or corrupt . . . whether it was dissolved into gases or whether it is still preserved somewhere . . . no one knows” (*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 129).
- “In his resurrection he was no more human. He was raised as a spirit creature” (*The Kingdom Is at Hand*, p. 258).

- “Jehovah God raised him from the dead, not as a human son, but as a mighty immortal spirit son. . . . So the King Christ Jesus was put to death in the flesh, and was resurrected an invisible spirit creature” (*Let God Be True*, p. 43, 122).
- “Therefore, the bodies in which Jesus manifested himself to his disciples after his return to life were not the body in which he was nailed to the tree. They were merely materialized for the occasion, resembling on one or two occasions the body in which he died” (*The Kingdom Is at Hand*, p. 259).
- “The firstborn one from the dead was not raised out of the grave a human creature, but he was raised a spirit” (*Let God Be True*, p. 272).

2) Their conclusion

The resurrected Jesus was not human, but spirit. An invisible spirit creature who could “manufacture” bodies in which to appear. The resurrection was not a bodily resurrection.

3) Their apparent biblical support:

- **John 20:11-18** - Mary didn’t recognize Jesus.
- **Mark 16:9-13** - Jesus appeared in “another form.”
- **1 Cor. 15:45** - “So also it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living soul.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.”
- **John 21:1-14** - “None dare ask, ‘Who are you?’” (implication: they didn’t recognize Jesus because He appeared in another body than the one they had previously known).

4) Refutation of their position:

a) The Greek word translated “body” in John 2:21 and elsewhere is “soma”, which refers to the physical body as distinct from the soul and spirit.

- **John 2:20-21** - “The Jews therefore said, ‘It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’ But He was speaking of the temple of His body [*soma*].”
- **Matt. 10:28** - “And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

- **1 Cor. 5:3** - “I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.”
- **1 Thess. 5:23** - “May the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- **James 2:26** - “Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”

b) The body (*soma*) of Jesus was placed into the tomb.

Matt. 27:58-59 - “This man [Joseph] came to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given over to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb.”

c) Following the resurrection, it was the body (*soma*) of Jesus that was missing.

Luke 24:22-23 - “Some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find His body.”

d) The body (*soma*) of Jesus had risen.

- **John 2:13-22** - Jesus spoke of the temple of His body, which was to arise from the grave.
- **Luke 24:33-39** - Following His resurrection, when the disciples thought they were seeing a spirit as they gazed on Him, Jesus corrected them by pointing out that a spirit didn’t have flesh and bone as He had.
- **Luke 24:42-43** - Jesus joined His disciples for a meal of broiled fish.

e) The physical form of Jesus must have looked different because it had undergone the transformation from mortality to immortality, but it wasn’t a “spirit body” or one other than that which entered the grave.

Example: John 21:1-14

“Another mysterious element is the fact that Jesus was often not recognized at first sight . . . while this may have

been caused by Jesus Himself, as was the case with the disciples at Emmaus (Luke 24:16), it is equally possible that the change which the resurrection had brought about in Jesus' body also played a role.

“Now none of the disciples dared ask him, ‘Who are you?’” (John 21:12). They knew it was the Lord. One may conclude that Jesus' appearance was more or less unusual and made some disciples uncertain of His identity. But for the miraculous catch of fish which had convinced them, His appearance would have led them to ask, ‘Who are you?’

“All these mysterious and miraculous elements, together with the miraculous ascension, show that Jesus' body, though consisting of flesh and bones, was now in a glorified condition and capable of acting independently of the laws of time and space” (*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 5 p. 82).

- f) The Emmaus Road - Luke 24:13-16; 28-31

Jesus prevented their eyes from recognizing Him.

- g) What about 1 Cor. 15:45: “A life-giving spirit”?

“[Christ] still has his human body and will have it forever, which is now ‘the body of his glory,’ - Phil. 3:21. When Paul writes that he became ‘a life-giving spirit’ he does not mean that Christ discarded his body and that he now exists in heaven only as a spirit.

“‘Life-giving spirit’ designates Christ in relation to us: he is the fountain of spiritual life for us. That spiritual life flows, not from his body, although it has become a spiritual body and the body of his glory, to our body; but from the spirit that dwells in his glorious body to our spirit that dwells in our body and thus quickens us spiritually and gives us life (*zoe*)” (R.C.H. Lenski, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, pp. 721-22).

- h) What about Mark 16:9-13 - “Another form”?

This is difficult to determine. We should be careful not to build a doctrine upon this disputed passage.

“The words ‘in another form’ are literally, ‘in a different outward expression or appearance.’ Swete says: ‘The words must be explained as contrasting the Magdalene’s

impression (v. 9) with that received by the two: to her He had seemed to be a gardener (John 20:15), to them He appeared in the light of a fellow traveler.'

“The Greek word ‘form’ is the same as that used in the account of the Transfiguration, but Swete says that there was clearly nothing in the Lord’s appearance to distinguish Him from any other wayfaring man” (Kenneth Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, The Gospel of Mark*, p. 291).

i) Why didn’t Mary recognize Jesus? (John 20:11-18)

Probably for the same reason she was not shocked by the presence of the angels, nor did she address them.

“Though [the angels were] clad in white, and thus conspicuous in the shadowed tomb, Mary, though she sees them, really does not see them. She is neither startled nor does she address them. Only one explanation has been found for this apparent riddle. Mary has so completely given her heart to one thought and to the deep grief it brought that all other impressions fail to register in her mind.

“‘No man is so brave hearted but what he would be terrified if unexpectedly he should behold an angel; and she even a woman. Yet she moves about so that she neither sees nor hears nor inquires about anything; so completely her heart is elsewhere’ (Luther). If the angels had not accosted Mary, she probably would have paid no further attention to them, such was her state of mind. . . .

“‘What made her fail to recognize Jesus when she actually beheld him? The text offers no answer. . . . Jesus’ body is now in a glorified state and is recognized or not recognized as he alone wills. This idea is imported from Luke 24:16. What happened there cannot be applied to all the other appearances of Jesus. In the present instance we should have to include the angels. Mary ‘beholds’ them but does not recognize them as angels, exactly as she ‘beholds’ Jesus and does not recognize him. Was she not to recognize them? We refuse to believe that Jesus did not will the recognition, i.e. that here the cause lay in him. It surely lay in Mary alone” (Lenski, *St. John’s Gospel*, pp. 1350-51).

j) The Bible knows nothing of “spiritual” resurrection because the spirit never dies (in the sense of going out of existence).

- **2 Cor. 5:8** - “We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”
- **Phil. 1:21-24** - “To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; and yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.”

To be spiritually dead is to be separated from God. All unbelievers are dead in that sense (Eph. 2:1).

k) Our bodies will rise also:

Matt. 27:50-53 - “Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.”

l) Our bodies will be like Christ’s body.

- **Phil. 3:20-21** - “Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”
- **1 Cor. 15:39-44** - The resurrected body is “spiritual,” yet physical. That’s a reference to the body after resurrection, not to a resurrected spirit.

III. EXAMINING THE CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE FOR CHRIST’S RESURRECTION: THE PRE-RESURRECTION SCENE

A. THE PARALLEL PASSAGES

1. *Matt. 28:1-11*
2. *Mark 16*
3. *Luke 24*
4. *John 20-21 (Note especially 18:19-20:18)*

B. JESUS WAS DEAD!

The first fact of evidence to note is that Jesus actually died (contrary to some claims, which we will address in the next section of our study).

1. The Scourging

- a. Text: Mark 15:15-20
- b. The scourging that Christ endured didn't kill Him, but it weakened his body and demonstrates the enormous abuse His body suffered at the hands of His accusers.
- c. John Mattingly comments:

“The adjudged criminal was usually first forcefully stripped of his clothes, and then tied to a post or pillar in the tribunal. Then the awful and cruel scourging was administered by the lictory or scourgers. Although the Hebrews limited by their law the number of strokes in a scourging to forty, the Romans set no such limitation; and the victim was at the mercy of his scourgers.’

“The brutal instrument used to scourge the victim was called a flagrum. Of this device Mattingly comments: ‘It can readily be seen that the long, lashing pieces of bone and metal would greatly lacerate human flesh.’

“Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, the church historian of the third century, said (*Epistle of the Church in Smyrna*) concerning the Roman scourging inflicted on those to be executed: ‘The sufferer’s veins were laid bare, and that the very muscles, sinews, and bowels of the victim were open to exposure’” (*The Life of the Lord Jesus Christ*, pp. 21, 73).

2. The Crucifixion

- a. Text: Mark 15:22-27, 29ff
- b. Comments:

“After a sleepless night, in which [Christ] was given no food, endured the mockery of two trials and had his back lacerated with the cruel Roman cat-o’-nine-tails, he was led out to execution by crucifixion. This was an excruciatingly painful death, in which every nerve in the body cried aloud in anguish” (Michael Green, *Man Alive*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1968, p. 32).

“For indeed a death by crucifixion seems to include all that pain and death can have of horrible and ghastly-dizziness, cramp, thirst, starvation, sleeplessness, traumatic fever, tetanus, shame, publicity of shame, long continuance of torment, horror of anticipation, mortification of untended wounds--all intensified just up to the point at which they can be endured at all, but all stopping just short of the point which would give to the sufferer the relief of unconsciousness.

“The unnatural position made every movement painful; the lacerated veins and crushed tendons throbbed with incessant anguish; the wounds, inflamed by exposure, gradually gangrened; the arteries--especially at the head and stomach--became swollen and oppressed with surcharged blood; and while each variety of misery went on gradually increasing, there was added to them the intolerable pang of a burning and raging thirst; and all these physical complications caused an internal excitement and anxiety, which made the prospect of death itself--of death, the unknown enemy, at whose approach man usually shudders most--bear the aspect of a delicious and exquisite release” (Frederick W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ*, Cassell and Co., 1897, p. 440).

3. *The blood and water from His side*

a. Text: John 19:34-35

b. Comments:

“We are told on eyewitness authority that ‘blood and water’ came out of the pierced side of Jesus (John 19:34-35). The eyewitness clearly attached great importance to this. Had Jesus been alive when the spear pierced his side, strong spouts of blood would have emerged with every heart beat. Instead, the observer noticed semi-solid dark red clot seeping out, distinct and separate from the accompanying watery serum.

“This is evidence of massive clotting of the blood in the main arteries, and is exceptionally strong medical proof of death. It is all the more impressive because the evangelist could not possibly have realized its significance to a pathologist. The blood and water from the spear-thrust is proof positive that Jesus was already dead.”

4. *Pilate Requires Proof of Death*

a. Text: Mark 15:39, 44; John 19:32-33

b. Comments:

“It is St. Mark who lays stress upon Pilate’s wonder at hearing that Christ was already dead, and upon his personal questioning of the centurion before he would give leave for the removal of the body from the Cross. The Roman soldiers were not unfamiliar with the evidences of death, or

with the sight of death following upon crucifixion” (E.H. Day, *On the Evidence for the Christian Faith*, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1906, pp. 46-48).

“Four executioners [Roman soldiers] came to examine him, before a friend, Joseph of Arimathea, was allowed to take away the body for burial (John 19:32-33). They knew a dead man when they saw one--and their commanding officer had heard the condemned man’s death cry himself and certified the death to the governor, Pontius Pilate (Mark 15:39, 44)” (Michael Green, *Man Alive*, p. 32).

5. *The preparation of His body for burial*

a. Text: John 19:38-42

b. Comments:

“The remarkable circumstance of wrapping up the dead body in spices by Joseph and Nicodemus, according to the manner of the Jews in burying, is full proof that Jesus was dead, and known to be dead. Had there been any remains of life in him, when taken down from the cross, the pungent nature of the myrrh and aloes, their strong smell, their bitterness, their being wrapped round his body in linens with a roller, and over his head and face with a napkin, as was the Custom of the Jews to bury, must have entirely extinguished them” (Samuel Chandler, *Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, London 1744, pp. 62-63).

6. *The conclusion*

“Jesus was crucified by Roman soldiers, crucified according to the laws of Rome, which the soldiers had to the very last degree faithfully carried out” (Albert Roper, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?*, Zondervan, 1965, p. 33).

C. *THE TOMB AND BURIAL*

1. *Text: Matt. 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-41*

2. *Comments:*

a. From Wilbur Smith

“We know more about the burial of the Lord Jesus than we know of the burial of any single character in all of ancient history. We know infinitely more about His burial than we do the burial of any Old Testament character, of any king of Babylon, Pharaoh of Egypt, any philosopher of Greece, or triumphant Caesar.

“We know who took His body from the cross; we know something of the wrapping of the body in spices, and burial clothes; we know the very tomb

in which this body was placed, the name of the man who owned it: Joseph, of a town known as Arimathea. We know even where this tomb was located, in a garden nigh to the place where He was crucified, outside the city walls.

“We have four records of this burial of our Lord, all of them in amazing agreement, the record of Matthew, a disciple of Christ who was there when Jesus was crucified; the record of Mark, which some say was written within ten years of our Lord’s ascension; the record of Luke, a companion of the apostle Paul, and a great historian; and the record of John, who was the last to leave the cross, and, with Peter, the first of the Twelve on Easter to behold the empty tomb” (*Therefore Stand: Christian Apologetics*, Grand Rapids Baker Book House, 1965, pp. 370-71).

b. From Henry Latham,

“The Lord’s body, we read (St. John 19:38-41), was prepared for the tomb in great haste by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. I suppose it to have been wrapped in three or four lengths of linen cloth, with abundant spices between each fold, and the napkin to have been twirled round the head, with its ends interlaced. When the body was laid in the tomb, the head would have rested upon the raised portion of the ledge at the far end which served for a pillow.

“I now come to the matter of the spices. Neither in St. John’s Gospel, nor in any of the others, is it said that any spices were seen in the tomb. This makes a significant feature in my case. My contention is that the spice lay between the folds of the linen wrappers. That the amount of spice, named by St. John as brought by Nicodemus for the preparation of the body for the tomb, is extremely large, has been commonly noticed: the quantity, however, is of less importance to me than the fact, which seems to be established by the best authorities, that the spices were dry, and would therefore fall to the ground in a heap if the body were placed in an erect position, or the cements were removed. A quantity that weighed a hundred pounds would be conspicuous by its bulk.

“What is here called “aloes” was a fragrant wood pounded or reduced to dust, while the myrrh was an aromatic gum, morsels of which were mixed with the powdered wood. It was also the practice, so we gather, to anoint the body with a semi-liquid unguent such as nard. One effect of this would be to cause the powder immediately about the body to adhere to it, but the great bulk of it would remain dry. The head and hair were also anointed with this unguent. I do not find that the powdered spice was applied to the face or head.

“When, however, our Lord’s body was hurriedly prepared for the tomb, there would be no time for anointing the body or for any elaborate process, because sunset was fast approaching and with it the Sabbath would come. The body would be simply embedded in the powdered spice.

It may have been that the women desired to repair this omission as far as they could, and that what they brought on the Sunday morning was nard, or some costly unguent, in order to complete the anointing. St. John speaks only of myrrh and aloes, but St. Luke says that the women prepared spices and ointments, and in St. Mark we have ‘they brought sweet spices that they might come and anoint him’ (Chapter xvi. I). Possibly they did not intend to disturb the graveclothes, but only to anoint the head and neck with the unguents” (*The Risen Master*, Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1904, pp. 35-37).

D. THE STONE AND SEAL

1. **Text: Matt. 27:60-66; Mark 16:4**

2. **The Stone**

Comments on its size and weight:

a. “The opening to the central chamber [of the tomb] was guarded by a large and heavy disc of rock which could roll along a groove slightly depressed at the centre, in front of the tomb entrance” (Henry W. Holloman, *An Exposition of the Post-Resurrection Appearances of Our Lord*, Unpublished Th.M. Thesis: Dallas Theological Seminary, May 1967, p.38).

b. The stone at the grave of Jesus “was the one silent and infallible witness in the whole episode and there are certain facts about this stone which call for very careful study and investigation. . . .

“Let us begin by considering first its size and probable character . . . no doubt . . . the stone was large and consequently very heavy. This fact is asserted or implied by all the writers who refer to it. St. Mark says it was ‘exceeding great.’ ‘Peter’ says, ‘for the stone was great.’

“Additional testimony on this point is furnished by the reported anxiety of the women as to how they should move it. If the stone had not been of considerable weight, the combined strength of three women should have been capable of moving it. We receive, therefore, a very definite impression that it was at least too weighty for the women to remove unaided. All this has a very definite bearing upon the case” (Frank Morison, *Who Moved the Stone?*, London: Faber and Faber, 1967, p. 147).

c. Concerning the weight of the stone used at the grave of Jesus, T.J. Thorburn (*The Resurrection Narratives and Modern Criticism*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd, 1910, pp. 1, 2) writes:

“A gloss in Codex Bezae (a phrase written in parenthesis, within the text of Mark 16:4 as found in a second century manuscript, Codex Bezae in the

Cambridge Library) adds, ‘And when he was laid there, he [Joseph] put against the tomb a stone which twenty men could not roll away.’

“The significance of Dr. Thorburn’s observation is realized when one considers the rules for transcribing manuscripts. It was the custom that if a copier was emphasizing his own interpretation, he would write his thought in the margin and not include it within the text.

“One might conclude, therefore, that the insert in the text was copied from a text even closer to the time of Christ, perhaps a first century manuscript. The phrase, then, could have been recorded by an eye-witness who was impressed with the enormity of the stone which was rolled against Jesus’ sepulcher.

Gilbert West of Oxford also brings out the importance of this portion of the Bezae Codex on pp. 37-38 of his work, *Observations on the History and Evidences of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.*” Cited in Evidence That Demands a Verdict, p. 216.

3. *The seal*

About the sealing of the tomb we find:

- a. The method of sealing was “probably by a cord stretched across the stone and sealed at each end as in Dan. 6:17 (‘And a stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing might be changed in regard to Daniel’).

“The sealing was done in the presence of the Roman guards who were left in charge to protect this stamp of Roman authority and power. They did their best to prevent theft and the resurrection (Bruce), but they overreached themselves and provided additional witness to the fact of the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus (Plummer)” (A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, New York: R.R. Smith, Inc. 1931, p. 239).

- b. “Considering in like manner the securing of Jesus’ tomb, the Roman seal affixed thereon was ment to prevent any attempted vandalizing of the sepulcher. Anyone trying to move the stone from the tomb’s entrance would have broken the seal and thus incurred the wrath of Roman law” (Josh McDowell, *Evidence*, p. 217).

- c. “The door could not be opened, therefore, without breaking the seal; which was a crime against the authority of the proprietor of the seal. The guard was to prevent the duplicity of the disciples; the seal was to secure against the collusion of the guard. So in Dan. vi, 17: ‘A stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lord’” (D.D. Whedon,

E. THE GUARD AT THE TOMB

1. The text: Matthew 27:62-66

2. The debate

- a. There is debate as to whether it was a Roman Guard or a Jewish Temple Guard that guarded the tomb. The issue revolves around whether Matt. 27:65 is *indicative* or *imperative*:

“Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how.’”

- b. Indicative would give the sense of: “you already have a guard (your own Temple Police), so make the grave as secure as you know how.”
- c. Imperative would give the sense of: “You shall have a guard (the Roman guard which Pilate was giving them upon their request), so take this guard and make the grave as secure as you know how.”
- d. I favor the Roman guard view because following the resurrection, some of the guard went to the Jewish leaders, who bribed them to lie about what happened, then promised to protect them if Pilate heard about the disappearance of the body. Presumably, Jewish Temple Police would have nothing to fear from Pilate, and therefore wouldn’t need protecting, but Roman soldiers would.
- e. Be that as it may, for the purpose of our study we will simply concede that it was either Roman soldiers or Temple Police. In either case the guard serves as strong evidence that Christ’s body wasn’t stolen.

3. The guard unit

- a. If the Guard was a Roman Guard:
- 1) “The punishment for quitting post (for a Roman guard) was death, according to the laws (Dion. Hal, Antiq. Rom. VIII. 79).

“The most famous discourse on the strictness of camp discipline is that of Polybius VI. 37-38, which indicates that the fear of punishments produced faultless attention to duty, especially in the night watches. It carries weight from the prestige of the author, who was describing what he had an opportunity to see with his own eyes. His statements are duplicated in a general way by others” (George Currie, *The Military Discipline of the Romans from the Founding of the City to the Close of the Republic*,

Graduate Council of Indiana University published thesis, 1928, pp. 41-43).

- 2) Concerning the weaponry that a Roman soldier carried with him while on guard duty:

“In his right hand he will carry the famous Roman pike. This is a stout weapon, over 6 feet in length, consisting of a sharp iron head fixed in a wooden shaft, and the soldier may either charge with it as with a bayonet, or he may hurl it like a javelin and then fight at close quarters with his sword.

“On the left arm is a large shield, which may be of various shapes. One common form is curved inward at the sides like a portion of a cylinder some 4 feet in length by 2 1/2 in width: another is six-sided--a diamond pattern, but with the points of the diamond squared away. Sometimes it is oval. In construction it is of wicker-work or wood, covered with leather, and embossed with a blazon in metal-work, one particularly well known being that of a thunderbolt. The shield is not only carried by means of a handle, but may be supported by a belt over the right shoulder.

“In order to be out of the way of the shield, the sword--a thrusting rather than a slashing weapon, approaching 3 feet in length--is hung at the right side by a belt passing over the left shoulder. Though this arrangement may seem awkward to us, it is to be remembered that the sword is not required until the right hand is free of the pike, and that then, before drawing, the weapon can easily be swung around to the left by means of the suspending belt. On the left side the soldier wears a dagger at his girdle” (T.G. Tucker, *Life in the Roman World of Nero and St. Paul*, The Macmillan Co., 1917, pp. 342-44).

- 3) The guard was more than just one man - Matt. 28:11.

“Professor William Smith in *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* gives us some information about the number of men in a Roman ‘guard.’ According to Dr. Smith, the maniple (a subdivision of the Roman legion) consisting of either 120 or 60 men ‘furnished . . . for the tribune to which it was specifically attached . . . two guards . . . of four men each, who kept watch, some in front of the tent and some behind, among the horses.

“‘We may remark in passing, that four was the regular number for a Roman guard . . . of these, one always acted as a sentinel, while the others enjoyed a certain degree of repose, ready, however, to start up at the first alarm’” (Cited in *Evidence*, p. 222).

- b. If the guard was the Temple Guard:

- 1) “At night guards were placed in twenty-four stations about the gates and courts (of the Temple). Of these twenty-one were occupied by Levites alone; the other innermost three jointly by priests and Levites. Each guard consisted of ten men; so that in all two hundred and forty Levites and thirty priests were on duty every night.

“The Temple guards were relieved by day, but not during the night, which the Romans divided into four, but the Jews, properly, into three watches, the fourth being the morning watch” (Alfred Edersheim [Jewish Historian], *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958, pp. 147-149).

- 2) Discipline of the Temple Guard:

“During the night the ‘captain of the Temple’ made his rounds. On his approach the guards had to raise and salute him in a particular manner. Any guard found asleep when on duty was beaten, or his garments were set on fire--a punishment, as we know, actually awarded. Hence the admonition to us who, as is were, are here on Temple guard, ‘Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments’ (Rev. 16:15)” (Alfred Edersheim, pp. 147-149).

“The officer of the Temple Mount used to go round to every watch with lighted torches before him, and if any watch did not stand up and say to him, ‘O officer of the Temple Mount, peace be to thee!’ and it was manifest that he was asleep, he would beat him with his staff, and he had the right to burn his raiment.

“And they would say, ‘What is the noise in the Temple Court?’ ‘The noise of some levite that is being beaten and having his raiment burnt because he went to sleep during his watch.’ (R. Eliezer B. Jacob said: ‘They once found my mother’s brother asleep and burnt his raiment.’” (Herbert Danby (trans.), *The Mishnah*, London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1933, Middoth).

F. THE PRE-RESURRECTION CONCLUSION

Everything humanly possible was done to prevent a resurrection, yet all the precautions taken only serve to establish the validity of the event.

IV. EXAMINING THE CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE FOR CHRIST’S RESURRECTION: THE POST-RESURRECTION SCENE

Following the resurrection, we see these evidences:

A. **THE EMPTY TOMB**

1. ***An indisputable fact***

The fact that the grave was empty was never disputed--either by Christ's friends or enemies. What the Jews needed was an explanation. That's why they bribed the guards to say that the disciples stole the body (Matt. 28:11-15). But their accusation itself takes for granted that the grave was empty.

2. ***A significant fact***

That is significant, especially in light of the fact that the disciples proclaimed resurrection right there in Jerusalem, where it could have been most easily refuted.

“It is a matter of history that the apostles from the very beginning made many converts in Jerusalem, hostile as it was, by proclaiming the glad news that Christ had risen from the grave--and they did it within a short walk from the sepulcher” (J.N.D. Anderson, *Christianity, The Witness of History*, Inter-Varsity Press, pp. 95-96).

“The resurrection Kerygma (proclamation) could have not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact for all concerned” (Paul Althus (*Die Wahrheit des kirchlichen Osterglaubens*, pp. 22-25 f.), cited by Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus-God and Man*, Westminster Press, 1968, p. 100).

B. **THE GRAVECLOTHES**

1. ***The text: John 20:1-10***

2. ***The conclusion***

The grave really wasn't empty! Christ's body was gone, but the graveclothes remained in an undisturbed position (Luke 24:12; John 20:6-7).

3. ***The comments***

- “It is a remarkable fact that the narratives which say that the body of Jesus had gone also tell us that the graveclothes had not gone. It is John who lays particular emphasis on this fact, for he accompanied Peter on that dramatic early morning race to the tomb.

“The account he gives of this incident (20:1-10) bears the unmistakable marks of first-hand experience. He outran Peter, but on arrival at the tomb he did not more than look in, until Peter came and entered it. ‘Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.’

“The question is: What did he see that made him believe? The story suggests that it was not just the absence of the body but the presence of the graveclothes and, in particular, their undisturbed condition. . . .

“John tells us (19:38-42) that while Joseph begged Pilate for the body of Jesus, Nicodemus ‘came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds’ weight.’ Then together ‘they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.’ That is to say, as they wound the linen ‘bandages’ round his body, they sprinkled the powdered spices into the folds.

“Now supposing we had been present in the sepulcher when the resurrection of Jesus actually took place. What should we have seen?. . . We should suddenly have noticed that the body had disappeared . . . the body cloths, under the weight of 100 lbs. of spices, once the support of the body had been removed, would have subsided or collapsed, and would now be lying flat. A gap would have appeared between the body cloths and the head napkin, where his face and neck had been. And the napkin itself, because of the complicated criss-cross pattern of the bandages, might well have retained its concave shape, a crumpled turban, but with no head inside it.

“A careful study of the text of John’s narrative suggests that it is just these three characteristics of the discarded graveclothes which he saw. First, he saw the cloths ‘lying.’ The word is repeated twice, and the first time it is placed in an emphatic position in the Greek sentence. We might translate, ‘He saw, as they are lying (or ‘collapsed’), the linen cloths.’

“Next, the head napkin was ‘not . . . with the linen cloths but . . . in a place by itself.’ This is unlikely to mean that it had been bundled up and tossed into a corner. It lay still on the stone slab, but was separated from the body cloths by a noticeable space.

“Third, this same napkin was ‘not lying . . . but wrapped together.’ This last word has been translated ‘twirled.’ The Authorized Version ‘wrapped together’ and the Revised Standard Version ‘rolled up’ are both unfortunate translations. The word aptly describes the rounded shape which the empty napkin still preserved.

“It is not hard to imagine the sight which greeted the eyes of the apostles when they reached the tomb: the stone slab, the collapsed graveclothes, the shell of the head-cloth and the gap between the two. No wonder they ‘saw and believed.’ A glance at these graveclothes proved the reality, and indicated the nature, of the resurrection. They had been neither touched nor folded nor manipulated by any human being. They were like a discarded chrysalis from which the butterfly has emerged.

“That the state of the graveclothes was intended to be visible, corroborative evidence for the resurrection is further suggested by the fact that Mary

Magdalene (who had returned to the tomb after bringing the news to Peter and John) ‘stooped to look into the tomb; and she saw two angles in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.’

“Whether or not the reader believes in angels, these allusions to the place where Jesus had lain, emphasized by both the position and the words of the angels, at least confirms what the understanding of the evangelists was: the position of the clothes and the absence of the body were concurrent witnesses to his resurrection” (John R.W. Stott, *Basic Christianity*, Inter-Varsity Press, pp. 52-54).

- “There lie the clothes, they are fallen a little together, but are still wrapped fold over fold, and no grain of spice is displaced. The napkin, too, is lying on the low step which serves as a pillow for the head of the corpse; it is twisted into a sort of wig, and is all by itself.

“The very quietude of the scene makes it seem to have something to say. It spoke to those who saw it, and it speaks to me when I conjure it before my mind’s eye, with the morning light from the open doorway streaming in.”

“What is says, I make out to be this:

“All that was Jesus of Nazareth has suffered its change and is gone. We, - grave-clothes, and spices, and napkin, - belong to the earth and remain” (Henry Latham, *The Risen Master*, Deighton, Bell and Co., 1904, p 11).

- There is a strong hint that the clothes were not folded as if Jesus had unwound them and then deposited them in two neat piles on the shelf. The word used to describe the napkin or head cloth does not connote a flat folded square like a table napkin, but a ball of cloth bearing the appearance of being rolled around an object that was no longer there.

“The wrappings were in position where the body had lain, and the head cloth was where the head had been, separated from the others by the distance from armpits to neck. The shape of the body was still apparent in them, but the flesh and bone had disappeared.

“If this hypotheses be correct, and it seems to follow the facts, how was the corpse extricated from the wrappings, since they would not slip over the curves of the body when tightly wound around it? No robbers would ever have rewound the wrappings in their original shape, for there would not have been time to do so. They would have flung the cloths down in disorder and fled with the body. Fear of detection would have made them act as hastily as possible. . .

“The answer to the enigma was that Jesus had risen, passing through the graveclothes, which He left undisturbed as a silent proof that death could not hold Him, nor material bonds restrain Him” (Merrill C. Tenney, *The Reality of the Resurrection*, Moody Press, 1963, p.119).

C. THE POSITION OF THE STONE

1. ***The Greek words used to describe the stone in its relation to the tomb are very significant (cf. Josh McDowell, Evidence That Demands a Verdict, p. 231):***
 - ***Matt. 27:60*** - Uses the Greek word *kulio*, which means “to roll.”
 - ***Mark 16:3-4*** - Uses the same root word (*kulio*) but adds the preposition *ana*, which means “up or upward.” For Mark to have used this verb there must have been a slope or incline at the tomb’s entrance.
 - ***Luke 24:2*** - Luke uses *kulio* also, but adds a different preposition than Mark. Luke uses *apo*, which means “away from, separation” (in the sense of distance). The stone was in such a position that it was described as separated in the sense of distance from the entire sepulcher (the Greek word refers to the whole tomb, not merely the entrance).
 - ***John 20:1*** - John used an entirely different Greek word to describe the stone’s position up a slope away from the tomb (not just the entrance).
2. ***Whoever moved the stone didn’t just roll it back from the entrance to the tomb, but moved it away (uphill) from the entire sepulcher.***

Given the size and weight of the stone, that would be physically impossible for even a group of strong men--especially when the guard unit was there to prevent it.

D. THE BROKEN SEAL

The fact that the seal was broken is very significant in light of the claim that the disciples ‘stole the body.’ Remember, these were the same disciples that ran from Jesus in the Garden, and who were off in hiding for fear of the Roman soldiers at the Cross. These same fearful disciples were suddenly bold enough to take action against the authority of either the Roman government, or the Jewish religious power? Note likely!

E. THE GUARDS

The best story the guards could offer was that while they were sleeping, the disciples stole the body. But who knows what takes place when one is sleeping? It is impossible for a sleeping person to know what is taking place around him.

F. THE POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES

Jesus appeared to more than 500 people. His many appearances must be refuted before one can honestly reject His resurrection.

1 Cor. 15:1-8 - “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you . . . that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and

that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep [died]; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and least of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.”

V. **ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN AWAY CHRIST’S RESURRECTION**

Throughout history various attempts have been made to explain away the evidence and phenomenon surrounding Christ’s resurrection. These are the most popular theories:

A. **THE “THEFT OF THE BODY” THEORY - Matt. 28:11-15**

1. ***The theory stated***

“Somebody stole away the body.”

a. Variation #1

- The disciples (or someone else) stole the body *before* the guard unit was in place.
- “The disciples of Jesus purloined the body of Jesus before it had been buried twenty-four hours, played at the burial-place the comedy of the empty grave, and delayed the public announcement of the resurrection until the fiftieth day, when the decay of the body had become complete” (Eisenmenger, i. pp. 189ff., [Medieval literature].
- This view is weak because it assumes that the guards were inept enough to seal and guard a tomb without first inspecting it to see if what they were there to prevent had already occurred (removal of the body).
- Also, it doesn’t account for the presence of the graveclothes in their undisturbed condition, or the appearances of Jesus following His resurrection.

b. Variation #2

The disciples (or someone else) stole the body *after* the guard unit was in place.

This is the same story the guards told following the resurrection, and was recorded in many of the writings of the early church fathers.

2. ***The theory refuted***

a. What are the options?

“If Jesus, who had been laid in the tomb on Friday, was not there on Sunday, either He was removed or He came forth by His own power. There is no other alternative.

“Was He removed? By whom? By friends or by enemies? The latter had set a squad of soldiers to guard Him, therefore they had no intention of causing Him to disappear. Moreover, their prudence could not counsel this. This would have made the way too easy for stories of the resurrection which the disciples might invent. The wisest course was for them to guard Him as a proof. Thus they could reply to every pretension that might arise: ‘Here is the corpse, He is not risen.’

“As for His friends, they had neither the intention nor the power to remove Him” (E. LeCamus, *The Life of Christ*, Vol. III, New York: The Cathedral Library Association, 1908, p. 482).

b. Could the guards really know who took the body?

The Guards could not have known who stole the body even if it had in fact been stolen.

“Either they were asleep or awake; if they were awake, why should they suffer the body to be taken away? If asleep, how could they know that the disciples took it away? How dare they then depose that it was stolen” (Fallows, Samuel (ed.), quoting St. Augustine, *The Popular and Critical Bible Encyclopedia and Scriptural Dictionary*, Vol. III, Chicago: The Howard Severance Co., 1908, p. 1452).

“They gave the soldiers money and told them to explain that the disciples had come at night and stolen the body while they were asleep. That story is so obviously false that Matthew does not even bother to refute it! What judge would listen to you if you said that while you were asleep, your neighbor came into your house and stole your television set? Who knows what goes on while he’s asleep? Testimony like this would be laughed out of any court” (Paul Little, *Know Why You Believe*, Inter-Varsity Press, Ill., pp. 63-64).

c. Did the Disciples really steal the body?

“Let us be fair. We are confronted with an explanation which to reasonable minds cannot and does not explain; a solution which does not solve. When the chief priests induced Pilate to ‘command . . . that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day,’ the factual record justifies the conclusion that the sepulcher was in very truth made ‘sure.’ Reasoning, therefore, from that record, we are inescapably faced with the conclusion that the measures taken to prevent the friends of Jesus from stealing His

body now constitute unimpeachable proof that they could not and did not steal it” (Albert Roper, *Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?*, Zondervan Publishing House 1965, p.34).

“[The disciples stealing Christ’s body] would run totally contrary to all we know of them: their ethical teaching, the quality of their lives, their steadfastness in suffering and persecution. Nor would it begin to explain their dramatic transformation from dejected and dispirited escapists into witnesses whom no opposition could muzzle” (J.N.D. Anderson, *Christianity: The Witness of History*, Tyndale Press, 1970, p. 92).

“Furthermore, we are faced with a psychological and ethical impossibility. Stealing the body of Christ is something totally foreign to the character of the disciples and all that we know of them. It would mean that they were perpetrators of a deliberate lie which was responsible for the misleading and ultimate death of thousands of people. It is inconceivable that, even if a few of the disciples had conspired and pulled off this theft, they would never have told the others” (Paul Little, *Know Why You Believe*, pp. 63-64).

d. Did the Jews take the body?

“If the Jews had issued an official order to have the body moved, why, when the apostles were preaching the resurrection in Jerusalem, didn’t they explain: ‘Wait! We moved the body. Christ didn’t rise from the grave.’

If such a rebuttal failed, why didn’t they explain exactly where His body lay? If this failed, why didn’t they recover the corpse, put it on a cart, and wheel it through the center of Jerusalem? Such an action would have destroyed Christianity--not the cradle, but in the womb!” (Josh McDowell, *Evidence*, p. 256).

e. Did the Romans take the body?

“It would have been to the governor’s advantage to keep the body in its grave. Pilate’s main interest was to keep things peaceful. Moving the body would have caused unwanted agitation to arise from the Jews and the Christians.” (McDowell, *Evidence*, p. 257).

“[Pilate] was upset about this strange teaching [the resurrection of Jesus]. If he had had the body moved, it seems incredible that he wouldn’t have informed the chief priests when they were so upset” (J.N.D. Anderson, *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, Christianity Today, March 29, 1968, p. 6).

f. Conclusion:

“The simple faith of the Christian who believes in the Resurrection is nothing compared to the credulity of the skeptic who will accept the wildest and most improbable romances rather than admit the plain witness of historical certainties. The difficulties of belief may be great; the absurdities of unbelief are greater” (George Hanson, *The Resurrection and the Life*, William Clowes and Sons, 1911, p. 24).

B. “THE DISCIPLES BRIBED THE GUARDS” THEORY

1. The theory stated

The disciples of Jesus bribed the guards to let them take His body.

2. The theory refuted

We know that the Jewish leaders bribed the guards to lie about what happened at the gravesight (Matt. 28:11-15), so we also know they were capable of being bribed.

But what motive or ability did the disciples have for such action? The same arguments against the disciples stealing Christ’s body apply to their inability to bribe the guards (see arguments above).

C. THE “SWOON” THEORY

1. The theory stated

a. The theory goes like this: “Christ never really died on the cross, He simply fainted.”

b. A more detailed explanation:

“Christ was indeed nailed to the cross. He suffered terribly from shock, loss of blood, and pain, and he swooned away; but he didn’t actually die. Medical knowledge was not very great at that time, and the apostles thought he was dead. We are told, are we not, that Pilate was surprised that he was dead already.

“The explanation assertedly is that he was taken down from the cross in a state of swoon by those who wrongly believed him to be dead, and laid in the sepulcher. And the cool restfulness of the sepulcher so far revived him that he was eventually able to issue forth from the grave. His ignorant disciples couldn’t believe that this was a mere resuscitation. They insisted it was a resurrection from the dead” (J.N.D. Anderson, *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 7).

c. Part of the credit for Christ’s recovery is given to the reviving effects of the spices with which He had been embalmed.

2. *The theory refuted*

- a. Earlier in this lesson we established through evidence that Christ was dead.
- b. Just one quote to help underscore the absurdity of this theory:

“Are we to believe that after the rigors and pains of trail, mockery, flogging and crucifixion he could survive thirty-six hours in a stone sepulcher with neither warmth nor food nor medical care?”

“That he could then rally sufficiently to perform the superhuman feat of shifting the boulder which secured the mouth of the tomb, and this without disturbing the Roman guard?”

“That then, weak and sickly and hungry, he could appear to the disciples in such a way as to give them the impression that he had vanquished death?”

“That he could go on to claim that he had died and risen, could send them into all the world and promise to be with them unto the end of time?”

“That he could live somewhere in hiding for forty days, making occasional surprise appearances, and then finally disappear without any explanation?”

“Such credulity is more incredible than Thomas’ unbelief” (John R. Stott, *Basic Christianity*, Inter-Varsity Press, Ill., 1971, pp. 48-49).

D. **THE “HALLUCINATION” THEORY**

1. *The theory stated*

“Christ never really physically appeared to any of his disciples, they only *thought* that they saw him, they hallucinated.”

2. *The theory refuted*

“In order to have an experience like this, one must so intensely want to believe that he projects something that really isn’t there and attaches reality to his imagination.

“For instance, a mother who has lost a son in the war remembers how he used to come home from work every evening at 5:30 o’clock. She sits in her rocking chair every afternoon musing and meditating. Finally, she thinks she sees him come through the door, and has a conversation with him. At this point she has lost contact with reality.

“This is the missing element in the appearances of Jesus to the disciples. They were not expecting Him to appear. They were convinced against their wills that he had risen from the grave” (Paul Little, *Know Why You Believe*, p. 68).

“Any theory of hallucination breaks down on the fact (and if it is invention it is the oddest invention that ever entered the mind of man) that on three separate occasions this hallucination was not immediately recognized as Jesus (Luke 24:13-31; John 20:15; 21:4).

“Even granting that God sent a holy hallucination to teach truths already widely believed without it, and far more easily taught by other methods, and certain to be completely obscured by this, might we not at least hope that He would get the fact of the hallucination right? Is He who made all faces such a bungler that He cannot even work up a recognizable likeness of the Man who was Himself?” (C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, The Macmillan Company, 1947, p. 153).

E. “THE WOMEN WENT TO THE WRONG TOMB” THEORY

1. The theory stated

When the women went to the tomb to complete the job of anointing Christ’s body (Mark 16:1), they were so distraught and confused that they went to the wrong tomb. Seeing the tomb empty, they assumed that Jesus had been resurrected.

2. The theory refuted

- a. Obviously this is a weak and absurd theory, but because some have taught it, we address it here.
- b. It’s refutation is simple:
 - If the *women* went to the wrong tomb, then the *disciples* (John and Peter) also ran to the wrong tomb (John 20:3-8), the *angels* made the same mistake, (Matt. 28:6 ‘Come see the place where the Lord lay’), and Jesus Himself appeared at the wrong tomb (John 20:14-17).
 - The Jews surely would have gone to the *right* tomb and produced the body. The Romans as well (Pilate wanted to keep the peace above all else).
 - Joseph of Arimathea, owner of the tomb, could easily have solved the problem by leading everyone to the right tomb.
 - Holders of this view are still left with the problem of explaining the appearances of Jesus following His resurrection.

F. THE “TELEPATHIC” THEORY

1. The theory stated

“Jesus died on the cross, but was raised from the dead by his Father. In his new state he was no longer clothed by the old material body of his incarnate life, but by some kind of spiritual body such as St. Paul attempts to describe for us.

“Without a body of flesh, Jesus wished to convince his disciples that he was alive and had transcended death, and continue the teaching which Calvary had interrupted. He could not do this merely by impressing their minds with the certainty of his survival. Nobody else would have believed them, and they would not have had enough conviction to continue to believe in the face of opposition.

“Jesus therefore communicated with his disciples--we do not know how, so we call it ‘telepathy’--and caused their minds to project an apparition of his body as they had known it. This would demonstrate to them, in the only way in which they could understand, that it was really he who was teaching them and that he had truly conquered the powers of Death. . . .

“The teaching which Jesus was giving his disciples, and the doctrines which he was implanting in their minds, were projected by them along with the apparitional figure so that they heard the apparition giving them the teaching which Jesus wished them to absorb and reflect upon. . . .

“We disagree with the interpretation which Luke 24:39 shows the disciples put on their experiences. . . . God deliberately caused the disciples to err by believing in a physical Resurrection because that would be less harmful than the otherwise inevitable mistake of thinking of Jesus as a disembodied ghost, one of the shades in Sheol” (Michael Clark, *The Easter Enigma*, London: Faber and Faber, Ltd. 1959, pp. 194-195, 211).

2. *The theory refuted*

- a. This view attacks the integrity of God, implying that he willfully deceived the disciples.
- b. This view attacks the integrity of Scripture, implying that the biblical accounts of Christ’s appearances cannot be taken at face value. If his appearances can’t be trusted as recorded, how then can we trust the accounts of his birth, death, miracles, etc. Where does Mr. Clark find grounds for accepting the incarnation and rejecting the appearances of Jesus? Perhaps the incarnation too was merely telepathic communication between God and man!
- c. This view denies the physical resurrection of Christ, thereby eliminating the possibility of salvation for those who hold it (Rom. 10:9).
- d. Some of the disciples did not recognize their own telepathic projection of Christ.
- e. The body was gone:

“The chief objection to this telepathic theory is the fact of the empty tomb. If Jesus manifested Himself solely by impressions transmitted by telepathy, while His body still reposed in Joseph’s garden, the disciples might have been convinced that His personality had survived, but not that He had risen physically from the dead. On the other hand, if His body did disappear from the tomb, and they professed to have seen Him and to have eaten with Him, telepathy would be insufficient to account for the event” (Merrill C. Tenny, *The Reality of the Resurrection*, Moody Press, p. 191).

G. THE “SPIRITUALISTIC SEANCES” THEORY

1. The theory stated

“The personality of the dead Christ was reproduced through a medium or else manifested itself by ectoplasm [the vaporous, luminous substance believed by spiritualists to emanate from a medium in a trance]” (Tenny, p. 189).

2. The theory refuted

“The varied circumstances of these appearances militates against such a theory. Jesus was manifested under conditions quite different from those of the ordinary seance. He appeared to the disciples at dawn on the shores of Galilee (John 21:4-14); to Mary Magdalene in the morning by the door of the empty tomb (20:11-17); to Cleopas and his companion on the afternoon of the first day of the week (Luke 24:13-16); and to Paul at high noon on the Damascus road (I Cor. 15:8; Acts 26:13).

“In these instances no medium was present, nor did the procedures follow the usual method of conjuring up a spirit. Certainly the resurrection phenomena do not fall within the ordinary category of such apparitions” (Tenny, pp. 189-190).

A HARMONY OF THE RESURRECTION EVENTS

(Source: *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus*, G.E. Ladd, Eerdmans, 1975, pp. 91-93)

1. The earthquake and removal of stone occur before dawn.
2. A group of four women come early to the tomb, wondering who will move the stone. As they approach, they are amazed to see that the stone has been rolled away.
3. Mary rushes off to tell Peter and John that the body of Jesus has been stolen (John 20:2).
4. The other women stay in the garden. They enter the tomb and are met by two angels, who tell them to carry word of the resurrection to the disciples. The problem of “a young man” of Mark 16:5, “two men” of Luke 24:4, “angels” of Luke 24:23, is one of the “ordinary” Synoptic divergences of detail.
5. The women rush away from the garden, filled with mingled emotions of fear and joy, speaking to no one about the vision of the angels at the empty tomb (Mark 16:8).
6. Later in the day, Jesus met them (Matthew 28:9 does not say that this meeting occurred in the garden). They had run away from the tomb. Jesus tells them to bear the word to the disciples; they depart to find the disciples, who are not together but scattered (Matt. 26:56).
7. Peter and John, having been informed by Mary, come to the tomb after the women have left. They see the clothes; vague comprehension dawns on John. They rush off to gather the disciples.
8. Mary returns to the tomb after Peter and John have left; they had run to the tomb (John 20:4), leaving Mary behind. She still thinks the body has been stolen. She is weeping outside the tomb, knowing nothing of the experience of the women she had left in the garden. She sees the two angels, then Jesus (John 20:11-17).
9. After the first shock of amazement had worn off, the women find some of the disciples; the disciples cannot believe the fanciful story (Luke 24:11).
10. The disciples have gathered together.
11. Mary arrives and tells her experience (John 20:18).
12. That afternoon, the walk to Emmaus.
13. Sometime that afternoon, Jesus appears to Peter (Luke 24:34).
14. That evening, the disciples are all together in the closed room. They had been scattered, but the testimony of the women, of Peter and John, then of Mary, serves to bring them all together. Thomas was absent.
15. A second appearance to the eleven, including Thomas.

16. Galilee (Matt. 28:16). The appearance by Tiberias (John 21) and to the 500 brethren (I Cor. 15:6).
17. Return to Jerusalem; the final appearance and ascension.

The Gospels agree in certain important points which we may take as being historically credible:

1. Jesus was dead and buried.
2. The disciples were not prepared for his death; they were overcome with confusion.
3. The tomb was found on Easter morning to be empty.
4. The empty tomb was not itself a proof of the resurrection. Mary thought the body had been stolen.
5. The disciples encountered certain experiences which they took to be appearances of Jesus risen from the dead.
6. We must include another important historical fact. Contemporary Judaism had no concept of a dying and rising Messiah.
7. Another historical fact: The disciples proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem, near where Jesus had been buried.

Christian Apologetics Series:
MIRACLES: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE
Dennis McBride

I. WHAT IS A MIRACLE?

- A. We tend to use the term loosely.
- B. Don't confuse miracles with providence.
- C. General theological definitions of a miracle.
- D. **Summary: A miracle is any supernatural act that goes contrary to the observed laws of nature.**

II. WHY DENY MIRACLES?

- A. One's concept of God
- B. The great proposition
- C. God is beyond natural laws
- D. A question of philosophy
- E. Does belief in miracles contradict reason?

III. TYPES OF MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE

- A. Some miracles could have a natural explanation
- B. Other miracles have no natural explanation.

IV. CATEGORIES OF MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE

- A. Power over nature
- B. Power over disease
- C. Power over demons
- D. Power material things
- E. Power over death

V. THE TESTIMONY FOR MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE

- A. Importance of the written record
- B. Reasons for confidence in Christ's miracles

VI. TERMS FOR MIRACLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- A. "Wonder"
- B. "Power"
- C. "Sign"
- D. "Work"
- E. Summary

VII. THE CHRONOLOGY OF BIBLICAL MIRACLES

- A. During the time of Moses and Joshua (1450-1390 B.C.)
- B. During the time of Elijah and Elisha (860-800 B.C.)
- C. During the time of Jesus and His Apostles (A.D. 26-60)

VIII. THE PURPOSE FOR BIBLICAL MIRACLES

- A. Miracles introduced a new era of revelation.
- B. Miracles authenticated the messengers of revelation.
- C. Miracles called the people's attention to new revelation.
- D. Miracles demonstrated the blessings of God.
- F. Summary statement

IX. THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL MIRACLES

- A. Biblical miracles were performed in public.
- B. Biblical miracles were always successful.
- C. Biblical miracles were always immediate.
- D. Biblical miracles had no relapses.
- E. Biblical miracles confirmed God's messengers.

X. THE WORKERS OF MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE

- A. The Triune God
- B. Angels
- C. Humans
- D. Evil agents

XI. THE LIMITATIONS OF MIRACLES

- A. Wrong source
- B. Wrong motives
- C. Wrong response
- D. No faith

XII. DOES GOD STILL DO MIRACLES TODAY?

- A. Many people claim He does
- B. My opinion
- C. Are miracles necessary for today?
- D. Does God promise miracles for everyone?

Christian Apologetics Series:
MIRACLES: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE
 Compiled by Dennis McBride

I. WHAT IS A MIRACLE?

A. WE TEND TO USE THE TERM LOOSELY.

1. *When a student unexpectedly passes a test, we may say “It’s a miracle.”*
2. *If someone wins the California Lottery he may say “It’s a miracle.”*
3. *If someone survives a terrible automobile or airplane crash, we may say “It was a miracle.”*
4. *If someone’s cancer goes into remission we may say “It’s a miracle.”*

B. DON’T CONFUSE MIRACLES WITH PROVIDENCE.

1. *An explanation:*

We should be quick to recognize God’s hand in the events of our lives, and praise Him for his grace, but God’s providential working through the normal ebb and flow of circumstances isn’t, strictly speaking, miraculous.

2. *Example:*

Surviving an airplane crash is providential, but not necessarily miraculous.

C. GENERAL THEOLOGICAL DEFINITIONS OF A MIRACLE

1. *Webster’s Dictionary*

“An event or effect in the physical world deviating from the known laws of nature, or transcending our knowledge of these laws; an extraordinary or abnormal event brought about by super-human agency” (*Webster’s Dictionary*).

2. *C. S. Lewis*

“I use the word *Miracle* to mean an interference with Nature by supernatural power” (C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, The MacMillan Company, p. 10).

3. *Herbert Lockyer*

“It is a work wrought by a divine power for a divine purpose by means beyond the reach of man” (Herbert Lockyer, *All The Miracles of The Bible*, Zondervan, p. 13).

4. *Walter Elwell*

“In understanding miracles it is important to bear in mind that the biblical concept of a miracle is that of an event which runs counter to the observed processes of nature. The word ‘observed’ is particularly important here. . . .

“Christians must not teach that miracles are events which run counter to nature, but rather that they are events which run counter to what is known of nature. Our knowledge of nature is a limited knowledge. Clearly there may be higher laws which remain unknown to man. In any case, miracles are not correctly conceived of as irrational disruptions of the pattern of nature, but as only the known part of that pattern (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter Elwell, Ed., pp. 723-24, emphasis is mine).

D. **SUMMARY**

We see then that the generally accepted definition of a miracle is any supernatural act that goes contrary to the observed laws of nature.

II. **THE REAL REASON FOR DENYING MIRACLES**

A. **ONE’S CONCEPT OF GOD**

“[Questions about miracle] stem from a weak view of God. The real problem is not with miracles . . . but with the whole concept of God. Once we assume the existence of God, there is no problem with miracles, because God is by definition all-powerful. In the absence of such a God, however, the concept of miracles becomes difficult, if not impossible, to entertain.”

B. **THE GREAT PROPOSITION**

Josh McDowell (Evidence that Demands a Verdict, pp. 111ff), gives us an important “If . . . then” proposition.

If God exists, and if God became a man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, then we should expect certain events, characteristics, and miracles to accompany his entrance into humanity.

We would expect him to:

- Have an unusual entrance into life.
- Be without sin.
- Manifest the supernatural in the form of miracles.
- Have an acute sense of difference from other men.
- Speak the greatest words ever spoken.
- Have a lasting and universal influence.
- Satisfy the spiritual hunger in man.
- Exercise power over death.

C. GOD IS BEYOND NATURAL LAWS

1. *God created natural laws (i.e., that things behave in a certain cause-and-effect way almost all the time).*
2. *But He is not limited by them.*
 - a. To say that He is, is to deify natural law.
 - b. To say, “I don’t believe in God because I don’t believe in miracles” is to make natural law supreme.
 - c. In Paul’s words, it is to worship the creature rather than the Creator, and to exchange the glory of the incorruptible God for corruptible creation (Rom. 1:18ff).

D. A QUESTION OF PHILOSOPHY

1. *The question of whether miracles are possible is a philosophical question, not scientific.*
2. *Science can say that miracles are outside the normal, natural, and consistent course of nature. But science cannot deny or forbid miracles because natural laws simply describe what happens.*
3. *The scientist, like anyone else, can merely ask, “Are the records of miracles historically reliable?” That’s the issue! (Paul Little)*

E. DOES BELIEF IN MIRACLES CONTRADICT REASON?

1. *David Hume (1711-1776)*

David Hume was a Scottish philosopher and historian; one of the key philosophers of the Enlightenment. Many have argued that if one wants to argue for the miraculous, one will have to deal with Hume’s arguments because Hume virtually destroyed miracles from a logical perspective (“Essay on Miracles” in his work *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* [1748]).

2. *Summary of Hume’s argument:*

Arguing from his anti-supernatural bias, Hume’s basic thesis was that all of one’s knowledge comes from experience, and since this experience conveys the regularity of nature, the report of a miracle is much more likely to be a false report than an interruption in the uniform course of nature (Elwell, p. 537).

From that premise he argued that (*Christian Apologetics*, Norman Geisler, p. 266):

- a. A miracle by definition is a violation of (or exception to) a law of nature;

- b. But the laws of nature are built upon the highest degree of probability;
- c. Hence, a miracle by definition (as an exception) is based on the lowest degree of probability;
- d. Now the wise man should always base his belief on the highest degree of probability;
- e. Therefore, the wise (critical, thinking) man should never believe in miracles.

3. ***Response to Hume's argument:***

- a. Hume's argument doesn't eliminate the possibility of miracles, it simply says they are highly improbable. With that we agree. However, we disagree with points "d" and "e" of his thesis.
- b. We argue that the wise (critical, thinking) man is the one who judges the truth or falsity of a miracle on the basis of *the available evidence* for its happening.
- c. However great the odds against something happening, it is always possible that it *will* happen anyway.
- d. After all, that's the reasoning evolutionists use: "The odds against the universe happening by chance may be great; but it still could have happened by chance."
- e. Allowing theoretical mathematical probability to outweigh the actual evidence of the present is a very unwise thing to do.
- f. The chances for one person being dealt a perfect hand of bridge are computed at 1 in 635,013,559,600.
 - A wise man ought not allow those mathematical odds against its happening to take precedence over the testimony of four sane, sober, honest, and intelligent eyewitnesses who saw the perfect hand.
 - Likewise, the wise man does not allow antecedent regularity in nature to outweigh consequent evidence for an irregular event.
 - The probability based on the past should never take precedence over the evidence of the present.

4. ***Hume on reliable testimony.***

Hume's second argument against miracles is based on the untrustworthy nature of eyewitnesses. It runs like this (Geisler, pp. 273-73):

- a. No miracle can be established without sufficient evidence in its favor.
- b. Sufficient evidence must include a sufficient number of witnesses, with sufficient education and with unquestioned integrity.
- c. But there never has been sufficient evidence to support the claim that any miraculous event has occurred.
- d. Therefore, no miracle has ever been established.

5. ***Response to Hume's second argument:***

- a. The first premise is true.
- b. The key to the rest of the argument is one's definition of "sufficient."
- c. Clearly God thinks we have sufficient evidence: Acts 17:30-31

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."
- d. Clearly John thought there was sufficient evidence: John 20:30-31.

"Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."
- e. Clearly Paul thought there was sufficient evidence: 1 Cor. 15:1-11.
- f. "But that's begging the question, assuming what you're trying to prove. No, it's simply saying what God said: examine the evidence!"

III. TYPES OF MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE

A. SOME MIRACLES COULD HAVE A NATURAL EXPLANATION

- 1. ***For example, the parting of the Red Sea was caused by winds pushing the sea back into a wall of water.***
 - a. Wind is a natural force, so this event could conceivably have occurred apart from divine intervention.
 - b. The timing of the event, however, shows its miraculous nature.

“That the waters should part just as the Israelites reached the shore, and should close on the Egyptians as they were in hot pursuit, and after every Israelite was safely on dry land, clearly proves the miraculous intervention of God” (Paul Little, *Know Why You Believe*, p. 86).

2. *The same could be said of Jonah’s encounter with a great fish.*

B. OTHER MIRACLES HAVE NO NATURAL EXPLANATION.

1. *The resurrection of Lazarus from the dead.*
2. *The resurrection of Jesus from the dead.*
4. *Christ’s healings:*
 - Blindness
 - Leprosy
5. *Christ’s creative acts:*
 - Water to wine
 - Multiplying fish and bread
6. *Such miracles could be neither psychosomatic nor simply the over zealous responses of gullible, superstitious people.*

IV. CATEGORIES OF MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE

A. POWER OVER NATURE

Jesus walking on the water, stilling the tempest, calming the lake (Matt. 14:22-33).

B. POWER OVER DISEASE

Jesus healing the servant of a Centurion who lived in Capernaum (Matt. 8:5-13).

C. POWER OVER DEMONS

Jesus casting out an unclean spirit (Mark 5:1-19).

D. POWER OVER MATERIAL THINGS

Jesus multiplying five loaves and two fishes to feed five thousand men, besides the women and children (Matt. 14:13-21).

E. POWER OVER DEATH

Jesus raising Lazarus (John 11:1-44).

V. **THE TESTIMONY FOR MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE**

A. **IMPORTANCE OF THE WRITTEN RECORD**

1. *The written record of Christ's miracles is crucial evidence to their actually having happened.*

“If miracles are capable of sensory perception, they can be made matters of testimony. If they are adequately testified to, then the recorded testimony has the same validity for evidence as the experience of beholding the event. . . . If the raising of Lazarus was actually witnessed by John and recorded faithfully by him when still in soundness of faculties and memory, for purposes of evidence it is the same as if we were there and saw it” (Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Christian Evidences*, pp. 140-41).

2. *Our legal system is based on such evidence.*

B. **REASONS FOR CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST'S MIRACLES (RAMM):**

1. *Many were performed in public.* (Even Jesus' enemies never denied His miracles, instead, they questioned the source of His power.)
2. *Some were performed before unbelievers.* (Skeptics were present who could have refuted them.)
3. *His miracles were performed over a period of time and involved a great variety of powers.* (Power over nature [stilling of storm], disease [healing blind man], demons [casting them out], creation [water to wine], etc.)
4. *Many simply can't be attributed to psychosomatic causes or inaccurate diagnosis (Lazarus).*
5. *Claims of miracles in pagan religions do not discount the miracles of Jesus.*
 - a. Christ's miracles proved His identity, and were often believed against the observer's will.
 - b. Pagan “miracles” are believed because the religious system is believed.
 - c. Christ's miracles established His religion; pagan religion establishes their miracles.

The difference is expressed by C.S. Lewis: “All the essentials of Hinduism would, I think, remain unimpaired if you subtracted the miraculous, and the same is almost true of Muhammadanism, but you cannot do that with Christianity. It is precisely the story of a great miracle. A naturalistic Christianity leaves out all that is specifically Christian” (*Miracles*).

VI. TERMS FOR MIRACLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

These words are not different miracles, but merely point to different aspects of the same miracle, or miracles seen from different points of view.

A. “WONDER” (TERAS)

1. *Records the impressions of the observers of the miracle.*
2. *Indicates the state of mind produced on the eyewitnesses by the sight of miracles: astonishment, awe, wonder, amazement.* The very first result of the performance of a miracle is the getting of the attention, the awakening of the thought of those present.
3. *This is the most frequent word used to convey a reaction to miracles (Mark 2:12; 4:41; 6:51; 7:37).*
4. *It is never used by itself in reference to a miracle, but is always used with another word (with semeion [“sign”] in John 4:48; Acts 14:3; Rom. 15:19; Matt. 24:24; Heb. 2:4).*

The reason it is not used alone is because this is the word the heathen used to describe the work of God. It is coupled with another word to convey the thought that biblical miracles were to be held on a higher level than the current heathen concept would convey.

B. “POWER” (DUNAMIS)

1. *This word looks at the power behind the miracle, the power that works miracles.*
2. *Miracles are “powers” in that they manifest the mighty power of God, which was inherent in Christ Himself (Acts 8:10).*
3. *This word points to new and higher forces working in this lower world of ours (Heb. 6:5).*
4. *This word is never used by John, but is the favorite word for miracles in the other gospels (Matt. = 12 times; Mark = 10 times, Luke = 15 times).*
5. *The plural “powers” is the same word that is translated “wonderful works” (Matt. 7:22); “mighty works” (Matt. 11:20; Mark 6:14; Luke 10:13); and “miracles” (Acts 2:22; 19:11; I Cor. 12:10 - 28; Gal. 3:5).*
6. *This word is always used when referring to fighting Satan and his kingdom because miracles are always a revelation of the power of God.*
7. *With regard to the Spiritual gift of miracles:*

(Source: John MacArthur, *The Charismatics, A Doctrinal Perspective*, pp. 132-33)

- a. The Greek word translated “miracles” in English is *dunamis*, which literally means “power.” (From which we also get our English word, “dynamite.”)
- b. This word is found some 120 times in the New Testament (the verb form another 100 times). It is the word used for the gift of miracles in 1 Corinthians 12:10.

“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another *the effecting of miracles*, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues” (I Cor. 12:7-10).

- c. Note: “Miracles” are different from “healing” in the biblical context.
- d. *Dunamis* is the same word translated “power” throughout the gospels. It is really the gift of “powers.”
 - What does that mean? Jesus provided the clearest pattern for understanding it.
 - *Dunamis* or “power” appears as the point at which Jesus defeated Satan again and again in their daily duels. All through His life and ministry, Jesus encountered Satan and defeated him by His *dunamis*, His power (Luke 4:13-14, 36; 6:17-18).
- e. Constantly we find Jesus casting out demons by His “power” (see Matt. 8,9,12; Mark 5,6,7; Luke 9). In every case Jesus’ gift of power was used to combat Satan’s kingdom.
- f. The gift of “powers” as it should be called, then, is clearly the ability to cast out demons. This is what the apostles did (Acts 13:10; 19:12) and what Philip did (Acts 8:6-7) in the era in which the gospel of the kingdom was initially proclaimed.

C. “SIGNS” (*SEMEION*)

1. ***This word points to the purpose behind the miracle.*** It is a reference to the significance of miracles as being seals by which God authenticated the miracle-worker himself.
2. ***Signs are valuable not so much for what they are as for what they indicate of the grace and power of the doer (Acts 14:3; Heb. 2:4).***

3. *This is the highest concept of a miracle, but does not have to refer to a miracle itself. Signs were given to Saul, Eli, Gideon, and others which were not “miracles” (1 Sam. 10:1-9; Judges 7:9-15; Luke 2:12).*
4. *Sign designates a proof or evidence furnished by one set of facts to the reality and genuineness of another (2 Cor. 12:12).*
5. *Semeion is used 27 times in the synoptics (Matt., Mark, & Luke), but never refers to the miracles of Jesus.*

 Matt. 12:38, 39; 16:1, 3-4; 24:3, 24, 30; 26:48
 Mark 8:11, 12; 13:4, 22; 16:17, 20
 Luke 2:12, 34; 11:16, 29-30; 21:7, 11, 25
6. *John uses “sign” 17 times in his Gospel and in each case it refers exclusively to miracles performed by Jesus, and shows Him to be the very God of the universe.*
 - a. This marks a major distinction of John’s gospel.
 - b. The eight miracles therein recorded point to those aspects of Jesus’ ministry in which He demonstrated His transcendent control over the factors of life with which man is unable to cope.
 - c. His superiority over these factors are called signs because they prove His deity.
7. *For those open to truth, the signs become valid guides into faith (John 2:11); for those set against the truth (remaining in unbelief - cf. 12:37) signs will never bring them to faith. They will only confirm their unbelief.*

D. “WORK” (ERGON)

1. *This word looks at the miracle from Christ’s standpoint.*
2. *This is the only word for miracle which comes from Christ Himself describing His miracles.*
3. *It means a deed, accomplishment.*
 - a. While men viewed the actions of Christ as miracles, Christ referred to them as works (John 10:25).
 - b. What men regarded as miracles Christ regarded simply as works requiring no more exertion at His hands than that which was common or ordinary with Him as God.
 - c. John, by using this word, was proving that Jesus is God.

- d. John used this word 18 times in his Gospel.

E. SUMMARY

1. *The three terms (wonder, power, & sign) occur together three times: Acts 2:22; 2 Cor. 12:12; 2 Thess. 2:9). In each case they appear in different order.*
2. *The concepts they represent can be seen in the account of the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2:1-12:*
 - a. *Wonder* - Those who beheld it were all amazed - v. 12
 - b. *Power* - The man, at Christ's word, arose, took up his bed, and went out before them all - v. 11
 - c. *Sign* - It gave them a token that one greater than men was among them - v. 12

VII. THE CHRONOLOGY OF BIBLICAL MIRACLES

Supernatural acts of God have been displayed only during specific periods of history, and for specific purposes.

Note: We refer here to miracles as performed through human agency, which excludes miracles such as creation, the flood, and Jonah.

A. DURING THE TIME OF MOSES AND JOSHUA (1450-1390 B.C.)

B. DURING THE TIME OF ELIJAH AND ELISHA (860-800 B.C.)

C. DURING THE TIME OF JESUS AND HIS APOSTLES (A.D. 26-60)

1. *Each of these periods lasted less than one hundred years, but within each period miracles occurred on a frequent basis.*
2. *God can interject Himself into the stream of history supernatural anytime He wishes.* But it seems that He chose to limit Himself essentially to these three periods (MacArthur, *The Charismatics*, p. 74).

VIII. THE PURPOSE FOR BIBLICAL MIRACLES

A. MIRACLES INTRODUCED A NEW ERA OF REVELATION.

1. *Miracles are proper proofs of a divine revelation.*

They provide evidence that the Bible is in fact God's inspired Word. Apart from miracles we have no other evidence of the supernatural working on man's behalf in time of crises.

2. *Examples from the three eras noted above:*

- a. Moses & Joshua - God introduced the Law (Ten Commandments), the new nation of Israel, the tabernacle, sacrifices, and the priesthood. Miracles during this era confirmed that God was speaking.
- b. Elijah & Elisha - During this era came the revival of the prophetic office. Again God confirmed his prophets with miracles.
- c. Christ & the Apostles - (A.D. 33 - 96)
 - 1) Christ
 - a) Miracles were insignia of His deity (Matt. 11:4-6; John 2:11; 11:14; Acts 2:20; 10:38).
 - b) All of His miracles were in accord with His miraculous origin, sinless nature, and moral perfection.
 - 2) The Apostles

God gave the entire New Testament during this time period. Miracles again confirmed His word.

B. MIRACLES AUTHENTICATED THE MESSENGERS OF REVELATION.

1. *Moses* - Ex. 3-13
2. *Elijah* - 1 Kings 17:23-24
3. *Jesus* - John 3:1-2; 10:24-25; Acts 2:22
4. *The Apostles* - Acts 14:3; 2 Cor. 12:11-12; Heb. 2:3-4

C. MIRACLES CALLED THE ATTENTION OF THOSE LISTENING TO HEAR THE NEW REVELATION.

1. *Moses (Ex. 7)* - Miracles were aimed at calling the attention of two groups of people to the truth of Moses' words - the Israelites and the Egyptians. Moses got the attention of both groups.
2. *Elijah & Elisha* - (1 Kings 18) - In this example Elijah convinced both the prophets of Baal and the Israelites that he was a true prophet of the living God.
3. *New Testament times* - Miracles were designed to convince both believers and non-believers that the Word of God was true (John 20:31; Acts 5:12-14).

D. MIRACLES DEMONSTRATED THE BLESSINGS OF GOD.

They symbolized the spiritual blessings that God is able and willing to bestow upon our needy hearts. The majority of the miracles of Jesus were acts of mercy towards those in need. Therein is the merciful character of God displayed.

E. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Miracles do not appear on the pages of Scripture vagrantly, here, there, and elsewhere indifferently, without assignable reason. They belong to revelation periods, and appear only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers, declaring His gracious purposes (Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, Banner of Truth Trust, pp. 25-26).

IX. THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL MIRACLES

Biblical miracles always had the following characteristics. Therefore, supposed miracles today, if really performed by the power of God, should stand the test of biblical comparison.

(Source, Norman Geisler, *Signs and Wonders*, pp. 28-32. See also appendix 2, pp. 149-55)

A. BIBLICAL MIRACLES WERE PERFORMED IN PUBLIC.

They could be verified or refuted on the spot.

B. BIBLICAL MIRACLES WERE ALWAYS SUCCESSFUL.

1. ***“God always accomplished what He intended to accomplish.*** If He desired to heal someone, they were completely healed. There are no exceptions. Jesus never failed.”

2. ***Apparent exceptions:***

- ***Unbelief in Nazareth*** (Mark 6:4-5) - “He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them” (v. 5).

The text does not say, nor imply, that Jesus attempted to do miracles and failed. In fact, he did perform some miracles.

The point of the passage is that Jesus didn’t do many miracles there because of their lack of faith (Matt. 13:58). Jesus refused to force Himself upon those who had rejected Him.

- ***The Demon-possessed Boy*** (Matt. 17:14-21) - The disciples apparently failed in their efforts to deliver him.

This is an example, not of a failed miracle, but of the disciple’s failure to faithfully exercise the power that Jesus had already given them.

Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith, then immediately healed the boy.

- *The Sickness of Epaphroditus* (Phil. 2:25-27) - Epaphroditus was sick and almost died.

The text says nothing of a failed miracle.

Perhaps Paul didn't have the gift of miracles by that time in His life. Later he told Timothy to take medicine for his ailment (1 Tim. 5:23), and left Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20).

C. BIBLICAL MIRACLES WERE ALWAYS IMMEDIATE.

“There is not instances of gradual improvement over a few days. Jesus commanded the invalid to; Arise, take up your pallet and walk,’ and ‘immediately the man became well’ (John 5:8).”

D. BIBLICAL MIRACLES HAD NO RELAPSES.

1. When God heals, it is permanent.

“Neither the Bible nor extra-biblical history record a relapse of anyone whom Jesus healed. This is yet another characteristic of the fingerprint of God. Not only were God's biblical miracles always successful and immediate, but when God healed someone, it was permanent. . . . Of course, eventually they all died as do all other humans (Rom. 5:12). Only the final resurrection will ‘cure’ this malady (John 5:5).”

2. Apparent exception:

The resurrection of Lazarus from the dead (John 11).

“The fact that Lazarus was only restored to his mortal life cannot be considered a relapse. Lazarus was never given an immortal body and then returned to a mortal one. Rather, he was restored to his prior mortal body, which eventually was going to die anyway.

“Since, unlike the resurrection of Christ, Lazarus's restoration to life was not a cure from eventual death, it was expected that he would eventually die. When he did die, it was not a relapse of the miracle of his raising any more than all the other miracles of healing can be called failures because the persons healed all eventually died.

“The miracle of Lazarus's raising was just as perfect and permanent as any other healing; it lasted his whole lifetime.”

E. BIBLICAL MIRACLES CONFIRMED GOD'S MESSENGER.

1. Moses (Exodus 3 & 4).

2. *Jesus* (John 3:2; 10:36-38; Acts 2:22).
3. *The Apostles* (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4)

X. THE WORKERS OF MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE

A. THE TRIUNE GOD

Each person of the Trinity exercised miraculous power.

1. *God the Father* - Ex. 8:19; Acts 15:12; 19:11, etc.
2. *The Holy Spirit* - Gen. 1:2; 6:3; Acts 5:3-4, etc.
3. *Jesus* - Matt. 10:1; 28:18; John 10:17; 11:25; Col. 2:10, etc.
 - a. Types of miracles performed by Jesus:
 - 1) Healings - Including ultimate healing which is resurrection.
 - 2) Casting out of demons (Which could overlap with healing due to the fact that much biblical sickness was demon caused).
 - 3) Miracles of nature (Water to wine, loaves and fishes, etc.)
 - b. The purpose of His miracles:

As previously stated, the miracles of Jesus were to support the fact that He was speaking the Word of God, to serve as evidence of His true identity as God incarnate, and to display his mercy towards men in need.

B. ANGELS

Angels were created by God and exist to carry out His will and work (Matt. 28:1-3; Acts 5:17-24; 12:6-10; Rev. 7:1)

C. HUMANS

Human agents could not act directly. They could only perform miracles as power was delegated to them by God. Those who performed miracles had to disclaim any inherent power of their own (Acts 3:12), and had to possess faith in god's power to perform what was impossible from the human standpoint (Matt. 17:20; 21:21; Acts 3:16).

D. EVIL AGENTS

In some mysterious way the Devil and those under his control have had, and are having, power to counterfeit God's miraculous power:

1. *Demons* - Rev. 16:14
2. *False Christs and False Prophets* - Matt. 24:24; Rev. 13:13,19
3. *Egyptian Magicians* - Ex. 7:11, 22; 8:7
4. *The Witch of Endor* - 1 Sam. 28:7-14
5. *Simon Magus* - Acts 8:9-11
6. *The Antichrist* - 2 Thess. 2:9
7. *Satan himself* - 2 Thess. 2:9
8. *The result of such activity will be to deceive the ungodly* - 2 Thess. 2:10-12; Rev. 13:14; 19:20

Please note: The mere exercise of super-natural power is insufficient to validate an agent as God-energized. The teaching and lifestyle must be consistent with Scripture (Deut. 13:1-3; 18:20-22; 1 John 4:1ff).

XI. THE LIMITATIONS OF MIRACLES

A. WRONG SOURCE

They do not necessarily have God as their source. Satan can counterfeit miracles and deceive those lacking spiritual discernment (Matt. 24:23,24).

B. WRONG MOTIVES

Even the miracles of Jesus produced wrong motives in the hearts of some who sought self gain (John. 6:2,15/ cf. 6:26).

C. WRONG RESPONSE

Such wrong response caused Jesus personal inconvenience (Mark 1:45), and distress of spirit (John. 6:26-27).

D. NO FAITH

His miracles did not produce belief (faith) in all who witnessed them (Luke 11:15; 16:31).

XII. DOES GOD STILL DO MIRACLES TODAY?

A. MANY PEOPLE CLAIM HE DOES:

1. *Jesus On A Tortilla: Making Of Miracle?*

From Bob Greene's column in The Chicago Tribune, 7/11/78.

Religious notes:

It was a hot New Mexico morning. Mrs. Maria Rubio was making burritos for her husband's lunch. The husband, Eduardo, was still in bed.

Mrs. Rubio was working with the tortillas, rolling them around the ingredients. She had rolled two of the tortillas into burritos, and was preparing to roll the third, when she looked down at the tortilla. She gasped and spoke aloud.

"It is Jesus Christ!" she said.

She was referring to a pattern on the tortilla, made by a series of skillet burns. She was convinced that the skillet burns formed a picture of Jesus. She determined that this was a miracle.

She ran to her daughter, Rosie. Rosie looked at the tortilla and said, "It is Jesus."

Mrs. Rubio took the tortilla to her sister, Margarita Porras. Mrs. Porras said, "I think it's Jesus, too."

She took the tortilla to the bedroom. Her husband examined the tortilla and said, "It's Jesus, all right."

Mrs. Rubio called a family friend, Mike Salmon.

"She was crying," Salmon recalls. "She said that there was the image of Jesus on her tortilla, and she thought that perhaps God was punishing her. I had her sister get on the phone, and her sister said, 'I have seen it, and it looks like Jesus.'"

By now the group knew they would have to do something. They decided to have the tortilla blessed.

Carrying the tortilla very carefully, they walked to the Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, across the street from the Rubios' home. The Rubios live in the small New Mexico town of Lake Arthur, 200 miles south of Albuquerque. When they got to the church, they found that the pastor was not there; he serves three churches in the area, and alternates among them.

So, still guarding the tortilla, they got into the Rubios' 1968 Chevrolet and drove the 17 miles to the city of Dexter. There, at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, was the Rev. Joyle Finnigan.

Mrs. Rubio explained about the image of Jesus appearing in the tortilla. Father Finnigan examined it. "I think this is just a coincidence," he said.

"It is not a coincidence," Mrs. Rubio said. "I have been rolling burritos for 21 years, and this is the first time the face of Jesus ever appeared in a tortilla."

So, reluctantly, Father Finnigan blessed the tortilla. He warned Mrs. Rubio that if she tried to save it, it would undoubtedly get moldy, even if she kept it in the refrigerator.

But Mrs. Rubio had different plans for the tortilla. She drove back to her home, and placed it in a plastic frame, covered with glass. Beneath the tortilla she placed a mass of cotton, giving the appearance that Jesus was floating on a cloud. She build a small shrine to the tortilla, placing it on a table and erecting a makeshift chapel around it.

"This is a miracle," she announced to her friends. "It is meant to change my life." She resigned her job as a maid, and said that she would be tending to the tortilla full-time. Her husband kept his job as a farm worker.

Soon the word spread about the tortilla with the face of Jesus. People began to come to Mrs. Rubio's front door. She let them in and led them to the tortilla shrine.

According to witnesses, many of the visitors dropped to their knees as soon as they saw the tortilla. Some prayed aloud. Many cried, the tears streaming down their cheeks.

Local newspapers heard about the tortilla, and sent reporters and photographers to take a look. More and more people came to the Rubio house, and became convinced that it was, indeed, the image of Jesus in the tortilla. (In fairness, it must be mentioned that reporter Ken Walston of the Albuquerque Journal said, "It looks more like [former heavyweight boxing champion] Leon Spinks to me.")

Mrs. Rubio put a sign on the outside of her green stucco house, inviting anyone who wished to see the tortilla to come in, free of charge. The tortilla shrine rapidly became a phenomenon.

Mrs. Rubio purchased guest books, and so far more than 8,000 persons have signed the registers.

"They have come from New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, Colorado, California, New York--everywhere." she said.

The visitors began to light candles in front of the tortilla, and place flowers around it. They placed photographs of members of their families who were ill in front of the tortilla and left the photos there, hoping for a healing power.

“The tortilla has not become moldy,” Mrs. Rubio said. “It is just like on the day I first saw the image of Jesus on it.

“I used to be an impatient woman. I used to have troubles. Since this miracle happened, I am no longer impatient. I do not know why this has happened to me, but God has come into my life through this tortilla.

“I see happiness come into the faces of the people who visit the tortilla. That is enough for me.”

So still the visitors come, and every night Mrs. Rubio kneels down and prays in front of the tortilla. Some people have offered to buy it from her, but she has refused.

“It is my own miracle,” she said. “I will keep the tortilla forever.”

2. ***“The Pizza Jesus of Depford Township”***

“In 1980, in Depford, New Jersey, Bud Ward, the town’s fire department photographer, was driving with his wife when he accidentally took a wrong turn. Noticing flames in an abandoned chicken coop behind the Naples Pizzeria, he pulled into the parking lot and began taking pictures.

“When the slides came back from K-Mart, Ward’s nine-year-old daughter noticed what seemed to be an image of Christ in one of the photographs. Word of this discovery spread, and soon people from all over New Jersey were talking about the Pizza Jesus of Depford township.

“Several people knelt and prayed under the image projected from the slide, and others asked that the image be projected onto their chests. Hundreds believed it was a true miracle” (Joe Diemer, “Jesus’ Image Seen in Fire,” *The Gloucester County Times* [December 23, 1980], A1.)

3. ***“The Soybean Jesus”***

“In August of 1986, in Fostoria, Ohio, the image of Jesus seemed to appear each night in the shadows and rust marks on the side of a soybean-oil storage tank. Hawkers sold thousands of ‘I saw the vision’ T-shirts and coffee mugs to those who came to see the ‘miracle’” (Gregory Jaynes, “In Ohio: A Vision West of Town,” *Time* [September 29, 1986], 8-14).

4. ***“The Jesus of the Freezer”***

“In 1987, Arlene Gardner, of Estill Springs, Tennessee, noticed that when her neighbors turned on their porch light, the image of a face appeared in the glow reflecting off her freezer. She believed it was the face of Jesus, although several observers said it looked more like Willie Nelson.

“Arlene and her husband were so convinced it was a true miracle that they quit their church when the pastor expressed skepticism” (“Maybe It’s Not the Freezer of Turin, but Arlene Gardner Says She Sees Jesus on Her G.E.” *People* [June 29, 1987], 80).

B. MY OPINION

1. *The “miracles” cited above are of one particular type, but many other kinds of miracles are claimed today--from automobiles and washing machines being “healed” to people being resurrected from the dead.*
2. *I believe God can and perhaps does perform miracles today, as they suit His sovereign purposes.*
3. *However, I do not believe He performs them through specific appointed individuals who possess a “gift of miracles” (for details, see our study of Spiritual Gifts; specifically, the sign gifts, which were confined to the apostolic era).*

C. ARE MIRACLES NECESSARY FOR TODAY?

1. *I believe they are not necessary for today.* When Scripture was complete, God’s revelation was complete, and the primary purpose for miracles was accomplished.
2. *Nowhere in Scripture are believers instructed or commanded to seek miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit.*
3. *In all the New Testament epistles, there are only five commands related to the believer and the Holy Spirit:*
 - “Walk by the Spirit” - Gal. 5:25
 - “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” - Eph. 4:30
 - “Be filled with the Spirit” - Eph. 5:18
 - “Do not quench the Spirit” - 1 Thess. 5:19
 - “[Pray] in the Spirit” - Jude 20

D. DOES GOD PROMISE MIRACLES FOR EVERYONE?

1. *This is a common claim today (“God wants you to have your own special miracle”).* But such a claim has no basis in biblical fact.
2. *In fact, people who pursue miraculous signs are in danger of satanic deception, which is so subtle and powerful that, if possible, he would deceive even the elect (Matt. 24:24).*