

# HE HAS RISEN: THE RESURRECTION NARRATIVES AS A WITNESS OF CORPOREAL REGENERATION

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Jewish antagonism toward the early Christians was both intense and active. Justin Martyr accused the Jews of having chosen “selected men from Jerusalem” whom they sent into all parts of the Mediterranean world to say “that a godless sect, namely the Christians, had appeared and recounting what all who know us not are wont to say against us.”<sup>1</sup> This propagation of slander appears to have been a longstanding tradition persisting from the days of Saul down to the time when Martyr wrote, about AD 160. That Origen made the same reproach suggests the enmity persisted well into the third century.<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, corroborated Martyr’s and Origen’s testimonies. He stated that “we found in the writings of former days that the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem sent round apostles to the Jews everywhere announcing the emergence of a new heresy hostile to God, and that their apostles, armed with written authority, confuted the Christians everywhere.”<sup>3</sup> Because the center of this activity was Jerusalem, all the writings likely reflected conditions before its fall.

The Jewish confutation denigrated the reputation of the Savior.

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From ancient sources, we gain some idea of the character of the propaganda used against Him:

Jesus was born, they said, in a village, the illegitimate child of a peasant woman and soldier named Panthera. The woman was divorced by her husband who was a carpenter, for adultery. Jesus himself emigrated to Egypt, hired himself out as a labourer there, and after picking up some Egyptian magic, returned to his own country and full of conceit because of his powers proclaimed himself God. His so-called miracles were unauthenticated, his prophecies were proved false and in the end he was not helped by the Father, nor could he help himself. His disciples had taken his body and pretended that he had risen again and was Son of God.<sup>4</sup>

This assault struck against the historical witnesses of the Lord's divinity: the conditions of His conception, His miracles and prophecies, and, important for this study, His Resurrection. The latter was the most necessary to discredit and, fortunately for the Lord's detractors, the easiest.

#### **THE DIFFICULTY IN ACCEPTING THE IDEA OF A PHYSICAL RESURRECTION**

The Hellenistic mind-set found the idea of a resurrection strange indeed. Many Greeks or Romans would have had little difficulty believing that a god had sired a son. Their mythology abounded with stories of gods consorting with mortal women and having children by them.<sup>5</sup> Further, the belief in prophecy and portents was widespread.<sup>6</sup> Publications that commonly reported miracles and miracle mongers appeared frequently.<sup>7</sup> Even the idea that a mortal man could become as the gods was not difficult for many to accept.<sup>8</sup> There were even precedents for both men and gods dying and coming back to life.<sup>9</sup> But the idea that a mortal could rise from the dead and enter eternal life with a *physical body* had little precedent. Much of the Hellenistic world denied the reality of any kind of resurrection, let alone a physical one. There were those who believed that mortals had been resuscitated—even brought back from the world of spirits—but these events had occurred only in isolated incidents and merely postponed eventual death.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the Hellenistic cosmology found the belief in any kind of a general resurrection at the end of world history totally foreign.<sup>11</sup>

Accordingly, it is easy to understand the Athenian reaction to Paul when "he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18).

The crowd responded by calling him “a babbler” who set forth “strange gods” (v. 18). Later he gave his “unknown god” sermon (vv. 22–31), to which the people listened intently until he got to resurrection. “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter” (v. 32), but in the end few accepted the witness.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, the idea of a resurrection found no popular response from the Greeks.

Samaritan and Jewish belief, especially the belief of the Sadducees, followed suit. There was biblical precedent for people dying and being resuscitated. Elijah had raised a boy from the dead (see 1 Kings 17:17–23), as had Elisha (see 2 Kings 4:18–37), but most people rejected the notion of a corporeal and eternal resurrection. The Pharisees were the exception to this line of thinking. Basing their interpretation of the Old Testament on the oral tradition handed down by their leaders, they made belief in a literal resurrection a point of doctrine. Indeed, most Pharisees believed that the coming Messiah would hold the key to life and that when He came He would exercise that power.<sup>13</sup> Because of the popularity of this sect, many Jews began to accept the idea of a corporeal resurrection; however, the belief never became universal, and a strong contingent continued to reject it.

Paul’s frustration in trying to teach both Jews and Gentiles about the death and Resurrection of Christ shows in this statement: “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23). Paul’s statement, though centered on the Crucifixion, has direct bearing on the Jewish reaction to the Christian witness of the Resurrection of the Lord.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CRUCIFIXION TO JEWISH ANTAGONISTS

The Jewish rulers deliberately contrived and carefully engineered the Savior’s execution. They could have stoned Him as they later did Stephen and received little more than a slap on the wrist. But stoning would not do. Their purpose was insidious and ingenious—they aspired to both discredit and shame the Lord. Their plan was inspired by a popular interpretation of Deuteronomy 21:22–23: “He that is hanged [upon a tree] is accursed of God” (cf. Galatians 3:13). The Hebrew word *qelalah*, translated “accursed,” denotes something or someone delivered up to divine wrath, or dedicated to destruction.<sup>14</sup> God removed those under this indictment from His favor and protection and delivered them over to the powers of hell.<sup>15</sup>

Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees believed that a crucified person fell under that condemnation. The Jewish rulers desperately needed to discredit the belief in the Lord's divinity and specifically engineered His death so that He appeared to fall under the anathema of God. Thus the manner of the Lord's death was designed to witness that Hades, not paradise, claimed Him. Paul's statement that Jesus' Crucifixion was a stumbling block to the Jews suggests that the message which the Jewish rulers wanted to give rang loud and clear.

The witness of the Resurrection, however, subverted the Sanhedrin's carefully contrived and skillfully developed plot. The Christian proclamation of the Resurrection meant that despite appearances, God never abandoned His Son. For that reason, it is not surprising that the apostolic witness within earliest Christianity held, as an article of faith, a belief in the physical resurrection. By this doctrine, the early Christians refuted the charges of the Jewish authorities. The Lord Himself emphasized this teaching.

#### **THE SAVIOR TAUGHT A CORPOREAL RESURRECTION**

From the outset of His ministry, the Lord made it clear that there would be a resurrection and that it would involve His physical body. Soon after beginning His ministry, Jesus cleared the temple of that which was profane. When challenged by the rulers to show some sign to demonstrate His authority, He declared: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said" (John 2:18–22).

Only after the Savior's death did the disciples come to understand the meaning of His words. During the period in which they traveled with Him, although He introduced the subject a number of times, the disciples pondered and struggled, never comprehending the Resurrection. For instance, during His discourse on the bread of life, He "knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, [therefore] he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (John 6:61–62). If they could not accept His doctrine, they would not be prepared to accept His Resurrection.

In another public discourse, He hinted strongly at the Resurrection:

“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.” At this many cried out: “He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?” (John 10:17–18, 20). His claims sounded at best like those of a deranged mind, at worst like one possessed of a demon.

When He attempted to prepare His closest disciples for His death and Resurrection, they did not comprehend. “He took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.” His statement could not be more straightforward, yet His disciples “understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken” (Luke 18:31–34). Mark’s version helps us understand one of the reasons why the disciples did not comprehend: “He taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him” (Mark 9:30–32). Matthew’s account suggests there was at least limited understanding: “Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry” (Matthew 17:22–23).<sup>16</sup>

On another occasion when the Lord taught about His forthcoming death and Resurrection, Peter grasped part of the message. “From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee” (Matthew 16:21–22). Peter clearly understood that the Lord was to die but totally missed the idea of a resurrection.

All four Gospel narratives agree that before Christ’s Resurrection the disciples did not comprehend the doctrine. They did understand that He would go to Jerusalem and die there, but they do not seem to have understood what would happen beyond that point. With such a stress in the

Gospels on this idea, it seems that there were a number of converts to primitive and early Christianity who were willing to accept Christ as the Messiah but could not accept the doctrine of the Resurrection.

### **THE PHYSICAL RESURRECTION REJECTED BY SOME EARLY CHRISTIANS**

The Apostles continually battled against antiresurrection thinking that kept pushing its way into the Church. Paul asked the Corinthian Saints: "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (1 Corinthians 15:12). A few years later, John warned that "many deceivers are entered into the world who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (2 John 1:7).<sup>17</sup>

Paul found it necessary to cite multiple witnesses of the Resurrection to combat the growing heresy. He stated that the resurrected Lord "was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me" (1 Corinthians 15:5–8).

The apostolic Fathers, writing at the close of the first century, fought the same tendency. Ignatius bore forceful testimony to both the Smyrnaeans and the Trallians that Christ rose with a real body. "I know," he cried, "that Christ had a body after the resurrection, and I believe that he still has."<sup>18</sup> But such doctrine was not popular. Many of the second-century converts to Christianity were Hellenists, and more especially Platonists. They could not imagine a God contaminated by association with the flesh. Origen was one of the most vocal of these. He completely rejected the idea that Christ could have risen with a corporeal body. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, he insisted, live without bodies. "That being the case, bodies will be dispensed with in eternity, there being no need for them. . . . To be subject to Christ is to be subject to God, and to be subject to God is to have no need of a body."<sup>19</sup> Jerome, who wrote a century and a half later, reported that the debate was still raging.<sup>20</sup>

By the time of Augustine, the doctrine had become a major point of contention within the Christian community. "There is no article of the Christian faith," he wrote, "which has encountered such contradiction as that of the resurrection." Further, "Nothing has been attacked with the same pertinacious, contentious contradiction, in the Christian faith, as the resurrection of the flesh. On the immortality of the soul many Gentile

philosophers have disputed at great length, and in many books they have left it written that the soul is immortal: when they come to the resurrection of the flesh, they doubt not indeed, but they most openly deny it, declaring it to be absolutely impossible that this earthly flesh can ascend to Heaven."<sup>21</sup>

Greek philosophy, especially Neoplatonism, was the main contributor to the rejection of this belief so central to the apostolic witness. Many of the Greek philosophers had a deep and abiding distrust of things of the flesh, and that distrust has continued into modern Christianity.

### **MANY MODERN CHRISTIANS REJECT THE IDEA OF A CORPOREAL RESURRECTION**

To this day a large number of Christians reject the doctrine of the physical resurrection.<sup>22</sup> For example, a popular college text used in many introductory New Testament classes in the United States proclaims: "We need to keep in mind that the empty tomb was an ambiguous witness to the resurrection. It attests the absence of the body, but not necessarily the reality or presence of the risen Jesus."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the reports of His appearance are more important in establishing the reality of a physical resurrection.

[These] traditions present a varied picture insofar as they portray the mode of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus ate with the disciples—they could see and touch the marks of the nails; but he could go through closed doors and vanish from their sight. It is a misnomer to speak of the 'physical' resurrection. Paul claimed that the appearance to him was of the same nature as the appearances to Peter, the twelve, and so on (see Acts 9:1–9; 22:4–11; 26:9–18), but how could that be a physical appearance? Indeed, in the same chapter of 1 Corinthians, he describes the resurrected body as a spiritual, not a physical, body and says that flesh and blood (that is, the physical body) cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:50; cf. 15:35–58).<sup>24</sup>

The authors completely ignore the statement in Luke, "Handle me and see; for a spirit hath not *flesh and bones*, as ye see me have" (24:39; emphasis added), nor do they discuss what Paul meant when he stated that the resurrected body was "spiritual."

### THE SPIRITUAL BODY

Paul used the word *pneumatikos* for “spiritual” in 1 Corinthians 15:44, 46. As a rule, the term was used in reference to items revealed from heaven, such as the Mosaic law (see Romans 7:14); gifts of the Spirit (see Romans 1:11); and general blessings from God (see Ephesians 1:3). Its use connects strongly with physical things. In such cases, it referred to the inner life of man. He who was filled with the Spirit of God (the spiritual man, or *pneumatikos anthropos*) could understand the things of God, while the natural man (*psuchikos anthropos*) could not (see 1 Corinthians 2:14–15). Thus Paul contrasted the spiritual member of the Church with the uninspired person of the world. The point is that the term *spiritual* does not preclude either physical or mortal association. Paul, however, made a distinction between the resurrected and the natural, or mortal, body. He taught that the resurrected body possessed the divine spirit (*pneuma*), having given up the mortal soul (*psuchē*). But his words in no way suggest an absence of physical matter associated with the resurrected body. In fact, Paul’s use of *spiritual* strongly parallels Alma’s statement, “I say unto you that this mortal body is raised to an immortal body, that is from death, even from the first death unto life, that they can die no more; their spirits uniting with their bodies, never to be divided; thus the whole becoming spiritual and immortal, that they can no more see corruption” (Alma 11:45).

### ALL THINGS WERE DONE “ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES”

The writers of the Gospels strove to remove the anathema of the cross by bearing witness of the Resurrection. They made the Old Testament their ally, demonstrating that the Savior had died and had risen again “according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4).<sup>25</sup> They taught that definite historical events would transpire to fulfill Old Testament prophecy before the coming end (see Matthew 24; Luke 21:22; 22:37; 24:25–27, 32). They stressed that these events were according to God’s bidding; He designed the whole operation and set all things in order (see Luke 21:18; cf. 12:7). The Father had determined that the Son of man would be betrayed and suffer for all (see Luke 22:22) and then triumph through the Resurrection. Of the Gospel writers, Luke especially emphasized the latter point. He quoted the Savior, saying, “*It is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day*” (Luke 24:46; emphasis added). Luke underscored the divine hand directing all things with the Lord’s question, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his



glory?" followed by the answer, "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:26–27). On another occasion after the Resurrection, "he said unto them [His disciples], These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:44–45).

Further, not only did the prophesied events have to occur, but they also had to be witnessed, especially by the Apostles, who were then to bear testimony of their reality (see Luke 21:12–13; Mark 13:9–10). They were to share that witness only after all had been fulfilled: "Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead" (Matthew 17:9). After the Resurrection, He proclaimed, "Ye are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:48). Therefore, the Gospel writers carefully noted that the Apostles and others constantly accompanied the Savior during the final hours before His death, at the Crucifixion, and at His subsequent appearances (see Mark 14:17; Luke 22:14; see also Acts 1:21–26). At the Crucifixion "all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things" (Luke 23:49). Here we see the emphasis of the Gospel writers on eyewitness reports of the Crucifixion. The same is also true of His interment and postresurrection appearances.

### **WITNESSES TO THE INTERMENT OF THE LORD**

Each Gospel writer stressed that the Savior truly died. Matthew noted that three women were present with Joseph of Arimathaea when the Lord was buried. These same witnesses carefully wrapped the body in preparation for burial and placed it in the tomb. Joseph then personally rolled a large rock over the opening, and some of the women lingered for a long time (see Matthew 27:56–61).

The next day a delegation of Jewish rulers asked Pilate for permission to set a guard around the tomb, "saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.

So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch" (Matthew 27:63–66). This passage clearly indicates that these men remembered well and correctly interpreted the prophecies of the Lord concerning His Resurrection.<sup>26</sup> Matthew's account shows us two things: first, no one could have tampered with the body nor removed it; second, the Lord did not somehow resuscitate and escape from the tomb on His own.

The accounts of both Mark and Luke parallel Matthew's version, even to the point of identifying Joseph's rolling a large stone across the entrance to the tomb after the women had witnessed "where he [the Lord] was laid" (see Mark 15:47; Luke 23:50–56).

John's account varies somewhat. He noted that before the Savior was taken from the cross, a soldier speared Jesus in the side to assure His death. Joseph procured the body from Pilate and then, with the help of Nicodemus, wound the body in spiced linen and placed it in a sepulchre "nigh at hand" (John 19:42). John did not mention the presence of any women nor Joseph's rolling a stone over the entrance to the tomb. Nonetheless, John satisfied the divine mandate for more than one witness by identifying Nicodemus as a member of the party.

Taken together, the Gospels leave no doubt that the Savior actually died and was buried. The thrust of the spear, the wrapping of the body, the sealing of the tomb, the presence of more than one person at the time of and after the burial—all attest to the actual death of the Lord.

### **THE EMPTY TOMB**

Only two specific details connected with the Resurrection are common to all four Gospel narratives: the tomb was empty, and Mary Magdalene was either the first or among the first to see it. According to Matthew, Mary and a woman he calls "the other Mary" came to the tomb near dawn. Before their arrival, an angel had descended in glory, frightened the guards into a state of immobility, and rolled back the stone. The angel remained until the women arrived to assure them that "he is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you" (Matthew 28:1–7).

The Gospel of Mark adds additional information to the narrative. He identified the other Mary as the mother of James and stated that another

woman, Salome, came with them. Finding the tomb open, the women entered and there saw “a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.” He reassured them, saying, “Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you” (Mark 16:5–7).<sup>27</sup>

Luke’s account noted that three women—Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Joanna—probably the same as Salome—along with others came to the tomb early Sunday morning to finish the burial procedures. Finding the tomb open, they went inside, “and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments.” This frightened the women, but the angels quickly reassured them with the words “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again” (Luke 24:3–7). These women then reported what they had seen and heard to the Apostles (Luke 24:1–10).

John’s account differs the most. He said that Mary came alone to the sepulchre while it was yet dark. Having found the stone rolled away, she quickly ran to find Peter and John (see John 20:1–2). John mentioned neither any other women nor an angelic visitation. He focused on Mary’s experience. Joseph Smith’s translation of John 20:1 indicates that the angels were present when Mary arrived; however, she apparently did not converse with them nor recognize their angelic nature, suggesting that she arrived some moments before the other women and left too early to hear the divine witness.

At any rate, her report brought an immediate response from Peter and John. Both ran to the sepulchre. John outran Peter but stooped outside the tomb and saw the grave clothes lying therein. Peter, on the other hand, did not pause at the opening but ran into the tomb. John then followed and “saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home” (John 20:8–10).

With the exception of John, the disciples reacted with bewilderment to the empty tomb. According to Luke, Peter, after viewing the tomb, “departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass” (Luke

24:12). Even the witness of the women, who arrived soon after, did not alleviate the disciples' perplexity, for "their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not" (Luke 24:11).

Though differing somewhat in detail, each Gospel narrative insists that the physical body of the Lord was missing from the tomb. The message of the empty sepulchre is clear: the physical body of Jesus played an actual part in the Resurrection. Each account stands as an independent witness with its own details; all agree that the tomb was empty of Christ's physical body.

### **THE LORD'S APPEARANCE TO MARY MAGDALENE AND THE OTHER WOMEN**

Not only were women the first to know of the Resurrection but they were also the first to see the risen Lord. Mary of Magdala was the first to see the Savior (see Mark 16:9–10; John 20:1). Drawn back to the tomb, the troubled Mary stood outside for a time weeping. After a few moments, she looked into the tomb and there saw divine beings, likely the same angels who had testified to the other women. Mary did not recognize them as celestial. When they inquired why she wept, she expressed her fears and left before they could respond. Within moments, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to her. Initially, she did not recognize Him, but when He spoke her name, "she turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20:16–17).

This account does not directly witness a corporeal resurrection; Mary was forbidden to embrace the Lord, "for," said He, "I am not yet ascended to my Father" (v. 17). Why she was not allowed to touch Him is not clear, but that there was no physical contact between them is certain.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the Savior's explanation intimates that the injunction was temporary.

Shortly thereafter, He appeared to the other women who were on their way to see the disciples, "saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me" (Matthew 28:9–10). The scriptures do not explain why these women were permitted to touch the Lord whereas Mary had been forbidden. The word "held" correctly translates the Greek *krateo*, showing that they did not

merely touch His feet but actually held fast to them.<sup>29</sup> Most important, they could see and feel and hold something. The testimony of the women rested on a double foundation: divine testimony and tactile witness. They saw and heard from angels that the Lord had risen, and then they actually saw the Lord and held His feet in worship.

Even in light of these sure testimonies, the male disciples refused to believe the women. Mary's personal witness, probably given not long after the other women's story, fared no better: "And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not" (Mark 16:11). The writer of each Gospel affirms that the women's combined testimony did not convince the men. Throughout that Sunday morning, the men were downhearted and frightened. They didn't know what to believe. Thus their eventual conversion to the reality of the Resurrection makes their witness more credible.

### **THE LORD'S APPEARANCES TO HIS DISCIPLES**

The first of Jesus' many postcrucifixion appearances to the early Brethren occurred Sunday afternoon. The Lord met Cleopas and an unnamed disciple walking to Emmaus but did not disclose His identity. He asked them why they were troubled, and the disciples recounted the startling events of the day, especially the empty tomb and the witness of the women, concluding with an admission of their own perplexity. "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken," exclaimed the yet unrecognized Lord. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25–27; see also 3 Nephi 23:9–14). The hearts of both disciples burned for joy as He spoke to them. Arriving at Emmaus a little before sundown, they constrained the Lord to "abide with us." He agreed and "went in to tarry with them" (Luke 24:29). Graciously, the Lord blessed and began to serve the food. As He did so, the disciples recognized Him. But before their astonished minds could formulate a question, He vanished.

The Lord may not have eaten before disappearing, although He did handle the food, for "he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them" (Luke 24:30). The disciples knew that He was substantial, real, and alive.

The two disciples quickly returned to Jerusalem and found where the

other disciples were gathered. Their story met with the same skepticism; however, as that of the sisters' earlier, "neither believed they them" (Mark 16:13). While these two witnesses were yet trying to persuade their brethren, the Lord appeared to the assembled company. This initially caused panic, but Jesus reassured them: "Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them" (Luke 24:38–43).

Jesus' eating appears to have been a critical factor in convincing the disciples of the reality of the physical resurrection. Although they felt the nail prints in His hands and His feet, "they yet believed not for joy" (Luke 24:41). Only when the Savior requested something to eat did they fully believe. Perhaps they then remembered His statement from the Last Supper: "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:15–16). The act of eating fully demonstrated that the Passover was fulfilled in Christ; moreover, He had overcome all things, including physical death.

After they believed, the Lord began to teach them "that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:45–48). This passage reveals the Apostles' purpose: to be personal witnesses to all of the Lord's ministry and teachings, and most significantly, to the corporeal resurrection.

Here John's narrative teaches an important lesson. He explained that the Apostle Thomas was absent from the initial appearance. Although Thomas received ample testimony from the others, he still refused to believe. He reacted in the same way as the others had when they had heard the witness of the women and the two disciples from Emmaus. Nothing short of tangible proof would suffice. As Thomas said, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25).

A week later all the disciples, including Thomas, were together. Once again the Lord appeared. "Reach hither thy finger," He commanded Thomas, "and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing" (v. 27). Thomas's reaction was immediate and sincere; he simply exclaimed: "My Lord and my God" (v. 28). Because of Thomas, we now have additional evidence of the Lord's physical resurrection.

One other lesson may be learned from this narrative. The Lord said: "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (v. 29). The Lord's words suggest that henceforth others would be required to believe in the Resurrection based on the testimony of the disciples, not through tangible proofs. John alone among the disciples realized the significance of the empty tomb. He had not seen the Lord, yet he believed. Jesus asked the others to follow his example.

## CONCLUSION

Each Gospel writer suggested that the early disciples found it most difficult to accept the reality of the Resurrection. However, they also showed that through irrefutable proofs the disciples came to know the truth. Those proofs came primarily through a demonstration of the physical reality of the risen Lord. The disciples were commanded to bear witness of that reality. That is the context of the testimony of John: "That which was from the beginning, which *we have heard*, which *we have seen* with our eyes, which *we have looked upon*, and *our hands have handled*, of the Word of life" (1 John 1:1; emphasis added). Those who deny the literal resurrection do so not by misinterpreting this testimony but by rejecting it.

## NOTES

1. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 17.1, in *Patrologia Graeca*, 6:512–13 (hereafter cited as *P.G.*); cf. 47.4; 96.1–3; 108.2; 117.3; W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1965), 192.
2. *Contra Celsum*, 6.27; cf. 4.32; Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 192.
3. Eusebius, *In Isaiah*, 18.1 in *P.G.* 24:213A; Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 192.
4. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 192–93. For primary text see Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.27, 29, 32, 41, and Justin Martyr, *Dialogue*, 108.2. For the same tactic being used at the end of the second century in Carthage, see Tertullian, *Apology*, 21.22.

- For Panthera as the name of a soldier from Sidon in Phoenicia in the beginning of the first century after Christ, see A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient Near East*, trans. L. R. M. Strachan, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978), 73–74 and fig. 8.
5. For examples from the Hellenistic culture, see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.589–94; 5.301–519.
  6. See, for the Romans, Cicero, *De Divinationa*, 1.1–38; 2.64, 70; Tacitus, *Histories*, 1.3, 18, 86; 4.81; for the Jews, Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 6.285–95.
  7. For healings, see Tacitus, *Histories*, 4.81; Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, “Vespasian,” 7; Dio Cassius, 65.271.
  8. See, for example, Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 14.800–828.
  9. Among the orientals were a number of dying and rising savior-gods: Tammuz, Bel-Marduk, Adonis, Sandan-Heracles, Attis, Osiris, the Cretan Zeus, and Dionysus, for example. But these were never really mortal and thus had no bearing on the New Testament witness.
  10. A number of Greek authors (for example, Homer, *Iliad*, 24.551; Herodotus, 3.62; Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1360f) simply state that resurrection is impossible. Others accepted the idea but only as an isolated miracle (for example, Plato, *Symposium*, 179c; Lucian, *De Saltatione*, 45).
  11. Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), s.v. *anastasis*; hereafter cited as *TDNT*.
  12. Apparently Paul had a little success. Luke notes that “certain men clave unto him,” as well as a woman (Acts 17:34).
  13. The Sadducees and Samaritans, in many instances, rejected the idea while the Pharisees accepted it (see Matthew 22:23; 6–8). For discussion, see *TDNT*, s.v. *egeiro*.
  14. The LXX uses *katara*, “to curse,” to translate *qelalah*. A closely related concept comes from the Greek word *anathema* and carries the idea of being separated or cut off from God. Out of this grew the idea that to be crucified was to be anathematized, or damned from the presence of God (see *TDNT*, s.v. *anathemi* and *ara*).
  15. In a real way, this aptly described the condition of the Savior both in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross. He descended below all things, suffering the pains of damnation for all (see D&C 19:17–19; 88:6).
  16. Other accounts (see Matthew 20:17–19; Mark 10:32–34) mention this teaching but do not give the disciples’ reaction.
  17. This phrase may have been used to offset a docetic heresy entertained by some early Christians. According to this view, the Savior only appeared to have a physical body and to suffer on the cross. Such a view disallows a corporeal resurrection.
  18. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, 3, in *P.G.*, 5:709; cf. *Epistle to the Trallians*, 9; in *P.G.*, 5:681.



19. Origen, *Peri Archon*, 2.6.2, in *P.G.*, 11:210.
20. Origen, *Peri Archon*, 2. 3, in *P.G.*, 11:188–91.
21. Augustine, *On the Psalms*, Psalm 89.32, in *Patrologia Latina*, 37:1134.
22. For examples, see R. H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1980); P. Perkins, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1948); G. O'Collins, *Jesus Risen: An Historical, Fundamental, and Systematic Examination of Christ's Resurrection* (New York: Paulists Press, 1987).
23. Robert A. Spivey, and D. Moody Smith, *Anatomy of the New Testament: A Guide to Its Structure and Meaning* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 239.
24. Spivey and Smith, *Anatomy of the New Testament*, 239.
25. There are a number of scriptures the Lord could have used; for example, Job 19:25; Ezekiel 37:12; Hosea 13:14; Isaiah 25:8; 26:19; 53:12.
26. At the beginning of His ministry, the Savior stated to the Jewish leaders, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19; see also Mark 14:58). It would be remarkable but not impossible that they remembered this statement. Certainly the conditions under which the Lord uttered it were of a singular and noteworthy nature.
27. Joseph Smith Translation, Mark 16:3–6, corrects these verses, noting that there were two angels present and that the women entered the sepulchre and saw that it was empty before they departed.
28. The Greek verb *hupto* carries the idea of clinging, embracing, and holding—often for the purpose of reassurance and affection. The object of such an embrace is often friendship, even intimacy.
29. The Greek word *krateo* used by Matthew stands in contrast to the word *hupto* used by John noted in footnote 28. The word *krateo* means to hold, seize, grasp, and restrain. The shared meaning element is to take hold and keep hold of something or someone.