

The Resurrection of Christ in the Holy Scriptures

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Abstract

The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead stands as one of the pillars of Christian faith, without which this faith loses its essence and deviates from its purpose—human salvation, accomplished by Christ through His death on the cross and His triumph over death by rising again.

The study explores the belief held by Christians that the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is an indisputable truth, beyond doubt or question. Without the Resurrection, Christian faith becomes meaningless and void, as expressed in the Holy Gospel in the First Epistle to the Corinthians: “And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith”.

The research emphasizes that, from a scholarly liberal Christian perspective, the appearances of Jesus are interpreted as visionary experiences that fueled the belief in His glorification and reignited the missionary activities of His followers.

The study further highlights that most Christians commemorate the crucifixion of Christ on Good Friday, celebrating His Resurrection, Ascension, and enthronement at the right hand of the Father on Easter Sunday each year.

The research distinguishes the traditional Old Testament view, which holds that the soul resides eternally in the underworld, from the symbolic belief in spiritual resurrection.

The importance of this study lies in the need to understand the nature of Christ’s Resurrection and address many pivotal questions—chief among them being how Christ rose from the dead.

Keywords: Resurrection, Scripture, Disciple, Sayings, Narratives.

1. Introduction

The Resurrection of Jesus, or Anastasis, is the Christian belief that God raised Jesus after His crucifixion, marking Him as the firstborn from the dead and inaugurating His glorified life as Christ and Lord. The death and resurrection of Jesus are the most pivotal events in Christian theology, serving as the cornerstone of Christian faith, celebrated annually at Easter. His resurrection is regarded as a guarantee that all Christians will be raised at Christ’s Second Coming. In Christian tradition, bodily resurrection entails the restoration of life to a transformed body, animated by the Spirit, as described by Paul and the Gospels. This belief laid the foundation for Christianity. The death and resurrection of Jesus are among the most significant

narratives in the Bible concerning His life. The New Testament recounts that Jesus was crucified on a Friday by the Romans after being handed over by Jewish chief priests to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, under the accusation of inciting rebellion against Caesar. According to Christian doctrine, He rose from the dead on the third day, a Sunday.

Through a liberal Christian scientific lens, the appearances of Jesus are interpreted as visionary experiences that ignited faith in His glorification and revitalized the missionary efforts of His followers.

Most Christians commemorate Christ's crucifixion on Good Friday, followed by the celebration of His resurrection, ascension, and enthronement at the Father's right hand on Easter Sunday. The date of Easter varies between denominations following the Eastern and Western calendars. The Church has observed Sunday as the day to honor Christ's resurrection since the dawn of Christianity, as noted by Saint Jerome in the mid-second century.

My research methodology followed two approaches:

1. The Historical Method: I gathered historical information from primary sources in general history, the Bible, and translated works from both Arabic and foreign origins.

2. The Inductive Method: I analyzed the writings of Christian scholars and theologians referenced in my study, along with specialized works on Christian doctrines, grounding these beliefs in authoritative texts and interpretations, whether authored by Christians or translated by others.

The nature of the research required it to be divided into an introduction, four sections, and a conclusion. The introduction discusses the significance of the topic and the reasons for its selection. The first section examines the Hellenistic-Jewish background, the second explores the concept of resurrection among the Romans and Greeks, the third analyzes the Gospel accounts of Christ's resurrection, and the fourth presents the views of the Church Fathers on the subject. I concluded the research with a summary of the main findings.

First Section: The Hellenistic-Jewish Background

The notion of resurrection is prominently articulated in the Book of Daniel from the 2nd century BCE, though initially limited to the resurrection of the soul alone. Josephus Flavius identifies three main Jewish sects of the 1st century CE: the Sadducees, who believed both soul and body perished at death; the Essenes, who affirmed the immortality of the soul but denied bodily resurrection; and the Pharisees, who held that the soul was eternal and that the body would rise again to house it. Jesus and the early Christians appear to have leaned closer to the Pharisaic outlook.

Steve Mason remarks that for the Pharisees, "the resurrected body is a specially sanctified one," distinct from the previous body—a concept partially mirrored in the writings of Paul, a former Pharisee.

Endschoow highlights that Jewish texts and tomb inscriptions reveal a more intricate picture. For example, when the author of Daniel wrote in the 2nd century BCE that "many of those who sleep

in the dust of the earth shall awake,” he likely envisioned a rebirth as angelic beings, metaphorically depicted as stars in God’s heavens—since stars had long symbolized angels. This interpretation rules out bodily resurrection, given that angels were traditionally regarded as incorporeal.

Other writings oscillate between the Old Testament’s traditional view of the soul residing eternally in the underworld and a more metaphorical belief in the revival of the spirit. Most texts avoided offering a clear definition of resurrection, and bodily resurrection remained a marginal belief. As Lehtipuu notes, “The belief in resurrection was not an established doctrine in Judaism during the Second Temple period.”

Second Section: Resurrection in Roman and Greek Thought

The Greeks believed that a worthy individual could rise as a god, a notion popularized across the Middle East by the successors of Alexander the Great, who disseminated coins bearing his image—a privilege previously reserved for deities. The Roman emperors embraced this idea, and within the framework of Roman imperial deification, the earthly body of a recently deceased emperor was replaced by a new divine form upon his ascent to the heavens. Deified individuals remained recognizable to those who encountered them, as in the case of Romulus, who appeared to witnesses after his death. However, as Plutarch (circa 46–120 CE) explained, “Something within humans comes from the gods and returns to them after death, but only when it is entirely separated from the body, pure, incorporeal, and undefiled”.

Third Section: Gospel Accounts

According to the New Testament, “God raised Him from the dead,” and Jesus ascended to heaven to sit at the “right hand of God.” He will return to fulfill the remainder of the Messianic prophecy, including the resurrection of the dead, Judgment Day, and the establishment of God’s Kingdom.

The New Testament offers no direct description of the moment of resurrection itself. Instead, it presents two categories of eyewitness testimony: appearances of Jesus to various individuals and accounts of the discovery of the empty tomb.

First: Paul and the Early Christians

One of the letters Paul sent to an early Greek church, specifically the First Epistle to the Corinthians, contains one of the earliest Christian creeds that refers to the appearance of Jesus after His death and expresses the belief that He was raised from the dead. The letter states, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, 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 to one untimely born, He appeared to me”. In the Church of Jerusalem, from which Paul derived this doctrine, the phrase “died for our sins” likely serves as a justification for Jesus’ death, as part of God’s overarching plan, as indicated in the Scriptures. This notion took on a deeper significance in Paul’s view, as it provided “the basis for the salvation of sinful Gentiles outside the Law”.

The phrase “died for our sins” is drawn from Isaiah, specifically from Isaiah 53:4-11, and the Books of Maccabees, chapters four and six.

The phrase “raised on the third day” is derived from Hosea: “Come, let us return to the Lord; for He has torn us, and He will heal us; He has struck us down, and He will bind us up. After two days, He will revive us; on the third day, He will raise us up, that we may live before Him”.

In his letter to the church members in Corinth, Paul asserts that Jesus appeared to him in the same manner He had to the earlier witnesses. In 2 Corinthians, Paul describes “a man in Christ [likely referring to himself]...caught up to the third heaven.” While the language is ambiguous, it is reasonable to infer that he saw Jesus crowned at the right hand of God. It is widely acknowledged that this doctrine predates Paul; scholars argue that Paul alluded to a prior formal tradition regarding the resurrection, conveyed in a rabbinic style, which he received and transmitted to the church in Corinth. Gazafremesh writes that the creed is “a tradition he inherited from those who preceded him in the faith concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus”. The fundamental origins of this creed likely reside within the apostolic community in Jerusalem, gaining official status and being passed down within a few years of the resurrection. Hans Grass argues for its origins in Damascus, and according to Paul Barnett, this formulation of the creed and others constitute “the early core tradition that Paul ‘received’ in Damascus from Ananias around AD 34” following his conversion to Christianity.

Second Section: The Gospels and Acts

All four Gospels contain passages in which Jesus is depicted as prophesying His forthcoming resurrection, with hints present in the Gospels of Mark and John, among others. They include three post-mortem appearances after His crucifixion (which do not appear in the original shorter ending of Mark). The moment of resurrection itself is not described in any of the Gospels.

Jesus is referred to as the “firstborn of the dead” (prototokos), the first to rise from the dead, thus attaining a “special status as the firstborn and heir”. His resurrection is also a guarantee that all Christian dead will be resurrected at Christ’s second coming.

After the resurrection, Jesus is portrayed as proclaiming “eternal salvation” through His disciples. The apostles are then called to the Great Commission, as mentioned in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, where the disciples receive the charge to teach the world the gospel of the victorious Savior and the presence of God in the world through the Spirit. According to these verses, Jesus declares, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” and “In His name [Christ], repentance and forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” “Whosoever sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whosoever sins you retain are retained”.

On the third day, according to Matthew’s unique account, the Romans secured the tomb at the request of the Jewish council, fearing that the disciples would steal the body. On the third day—Sunday—a group of women, the same ones who stood beneath the cross of Jesus except for His mother Mary, visited the tomb only to find it empty, while the guards assigned to guard it lay

“as if dead.” An angel then appeared to inform the women that Christ was alive and had risen from the dead

This is the account from the Synoptic Gospels, which differ in the number of women and angels but align in their general outlines. In John’s Gospel, only Mary Magdalene is mentioned among the women; upon finding the body missing, she returned to inform Peter and John, who came to the tomb, discovered the burial cloths, and then returned to the city. Mary Magdalene remained at the tomb weeping, where she encountered two angels, followed by the appearance of Jesus Himself. Thus, He became the first to appear after His resurrection, appearing on the first day of His resurrection, according to Christian beliefs, to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus, who recognized Him at the breaking of bread

In the evening, He appeared to the disciples gathered without Thomas, and then eight days later, He appeared again with Thomas present. Thomas had refused to believe unless he could place his finger in the marks of the nails—as stated in the Gospel of John—at which point Jesus said to him, “Put your finger here and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” To which Thomas exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus replied, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”

He also appeared to three of His disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. According to the New Testament account, Jesus made many other appearances that were not recorded, “proving to them that He was alive by many convincing proofs, and speaking about the kingdom of God” Following this, He ascended to Galilee according to Matthew and Mark and to the Mount of Olives as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, where His final words were, “You will receive power from on high when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” He was then taken up from their sight in a cloud

Fourth Section: The Words of the Church Fathers on Resurrection

Let us present ourselves to Him who offered Himself for us:

It is the Passover of the Lord; it is the Passover! Let us repeat it for the glory of the Trinity—the Passover, considering us, the feast of feasts, the celebration of celebrations, as the sun eclipses the stars, so this feast eclipses not only human festivals but also the feasts of the Lord Christ Himself. Yesterday, the Lamb was sacrificed, and the doors were marked with His blood, and Egypt mourned its firstborn; we, however, were saved by the precious blood. Yesterday, I was crucified with Christ, and today, I am glorified with Him. Yesterday, I was dead with Him, and today, I am alive with Him. Yesterday, I was buried with Him, and today, I rise with Him. Therefore, let us offer not only gifts to Him who suffered for us and rose, but also ourselves, for they are the most precious and nearest gifts to God—the image of God within us: let us reflect the light worthy of it, considering our value, and honoring our prototype.

Thus, let us comprehend that mystery and why Christ died: let us imitate Christ because He conformed to us. Let us become gods with Him because He became human for our sake. He

embraced that which is lesser in goodness to grant us that which is better. Let our flesh plead that we may be enriched by His poverty. He took the form of a servant to free us from bondage. He condescended to elevate us. He accepted temptation to aid us in victory. He was despised to glorify us, and He died to save us. He ascended to heaven to lift up those dwelling in sin. Let each of us offer all that we possess to Him who gave Himself as a ransom for us. If we understand the mystery of the Passover, we can do no better than to present ourselves to Christ, offering ourselves as sacrifices just as He offered Himself as a sacrifice for us.

—Saint Gregory of Nazianzus

His forthcoming resurrection.

B) The Pascha of Christ:

The Pascha of Christ has made us new people. We were born as children of humans, but today we are born as children of God. Yesterday, death reigned due to sin; today, justice prevails thanks to life. One man opened for us the gate of death long ago, and Christ today has restored life to us. Yesterday, we took death from life; today, life has obliterated death. Yesterday, we were cast out of Paradise by disobedience; today, faith in the resurrection of Christ brings us back to it. Christ has offered us the fruit of life to enjoy as we desire, and once more the fountain of Paradise flows, its waters distributed by the four rivers of the Gospels, to refresh the face of the Church.

—Saint Gregory of Nyssa

C) Christ has risen from the dead; arise you with Him:

Christ has returned and is established in His place; so, return with Him. Christ has been freed from the bonds of the grave; so, be free from the bonds of sin. The gates of hell have been opened, and death is dissolved. The old Adam departs, and the new one returns to us. If any person is in Christ, he is a new creation; so, be renewed yourselves. The Pascha is the Pascha of the Lord. This is the feast of feasts and the season of seasons; it transcends all feasts and gatherings, its superiority over all other feasts is like the sun's over the stars. Today we celebrate the resurrection itself, which is no longer a hope and expectation, but a living reality and a constant cause of joy in our triumph over death. It has encompassed the entire world. When Christ ascended to the heavens, ascend with Him and be with the angels. Help to lift the gates to welcome Him who is coming from suffering with warmth. And respond to the questioners: "Who is this King of glory?" Answer, "The Lord, strong and mighty." O you who arise, if we have rightly reached the desired goal and have become accepted in the heavenly abodes, we shall offer to You, with a firm resolve, acceptable sacrifices upon Your holy altar. O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to You belongs all glory, honor, and power, forever and ever. Amen.

—Saint Gregory the Theologian

2. Conclusion

After this blessed journey, it is essential to pause for reflection and recollection of what this research has accomplished and the conclusions it has reached. We can state:

1. The resurrection of Jesus, or Anastasis, is the Christian faith that God raised Jesus after His crucifixion.
2. The death and resurrection of Jesus are the two most significant events in Christian theology and the foundation of the Christian faith.
3. The concept of resurrection is clearly presented in the Book of Daniel from the second century BCE.
4. The Greeks believed that a worthy human could rise as a god.
5. One of the letters Paul sent to an early Greek church, specifically the First Epistle to the Corinthians, contains one of the earliest formulations of Christian faith.
6. All four Gospels contain passages depicting Jesus as prophesying His forthcoming resurrection.

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