

Chapter 6

The Resurrection of Jesus

Resurrection is a reasonably late idea in Jewish intellectual history. The first mention of it in scripture occurs in Daniel 12: 2-3:

And many sleepers in the earth's dust shall awaken,
some to eternal life, and some to disgrace, to eternal abhorrence.
But the wise will shine with the splendor of the firmament,
and those who direct the many in the way of righteousness
like stars forever and ever.

Recent scholarship insists that this passage is actually addressing the idea of an afterlife and is not metaphorical as are Ezekiel 37 and Hosea 6:2.¹

Recent scholarship, however, also makes it clear that Daniel 12:2-3 is not the first reference in a Jewish text to a specific belief in an afterlife beyond the rudimentary existence of the *nefesh* in Sheol after death attested in the remainder of the Hebrew Bible. The discovery of Aramaic fragments of 1 Enoch among the documents from Qumran has established the pre-Christian, even pre-Maccabean date of much of the book, including those passages most relevant to our study of an afterlife.² George W. E. Nicklesburg³ has held that 1 Enoch 22 provides a model of a partial resurrection such as the one Daniel 12:2-3 describes in that Enoch's vision of the abode of the dead with its three chasms involves a resurrection only of those in the first and second chasms, leaving us to suppose that only some of the dead are raised.⁴ We now are able to view the passage in Daniel as standing on the shoulders of an already existing tradition about the fortunes of the dead. Along with the idea of the resurrection of some seems to be the idea of the continuation of some in the abode of the spirits without resurrection.

At the same time we must emphasize that this kind of speculation about the destiny of spirits, however old it is, has much directly to do with the resurrection of Jesus in Mark. The predictions of the resurrection only claim that Jesus will be raised "after three days." The meaning of that appears to be that Jesus' body will not be in the tomb after this time and that Jesus will once more be a living human being. This reference to "three days," however, shows some interest in the fate of Jesus' spirit after his demise, and we turn now to a discussion of the apparent discrepancy between the predictions of

¹ See -392. John J. Collins, *Daniel* ("Hermeneia"; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 391

² Matthew Black, "The Fragments of the Aramaic Enoch from Qumran," *La littérature juive entre Tanach et Mishna*, W. C. van Unnik, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 15-28. J. T. Milik and Matthew Black, *The Books Of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments Of Qumrân Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

³ George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Resurrection (Early Judaism and Christianity)," *ABD* 5:684-691. See on this topic p. 685.

⁴ These are the souls of sinners who have suffered wrongful death. They will not be raised and their souls will not be destroyed on the Day of Judgment (1 Enoch 22:13). The standard English translation of this text is that of E. Isaac in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 1:5-100.

the three days and the discovery of the empty tomb barely a day and a half after the burial of Jesus.

After Three Days

George M. Landes has shown that the motif of three days and three nights for Jonah's sojourn in the belly of the great fish according to Jonah 2:1 picks up the near eastern belief that it takes this amount of time for the soul to descend to the underworld.⁵ This motif is no less at work in Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34 when Jesus predicts that the Son of Man will be raised:

Mark 8:31 καὶ μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀναστῆναι

Mark 9:31 μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀναστήσεται.

Mark 10:34 καὶ μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀναστήσεται.

The temporal meaning of μετὰ + accusative is well known and not controversial.⁶ Despite attempts to make μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας mean something generic like “a short time later,”⁷ or something else that is more in keeping with the actual amount of time that Mark has pass between Jesus' death and the discovery of the empty tomb, the meaning is specific, thrice stated, and therefore important. It may be, however, that the importance lies in the direction Landes points us rather than in some harmonizing direction suggested by hyper-analysis of the phrase μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας.

The “three days” prediction is chronologically flawed by any standard, but Mark makes no attempt at all to reconcile the discrepancy.⁸ The reason for this must be that the “three days” are more important than the number of days in the tomb preserved in Mark's tradition. The formula μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας, unique to Mark, suggests that the death of Jesus was a real death, not a swoon, not a loss of consciousness. However long Jesus' body was in the tomb, his death was complete and utter.

The reference also suggests that Mark is not completely innocent of speculation about the movement and whereabouts of Jesus' spirit after his death. The discrepancy between the prediction of resurrection after three days and the fact of the empty tomb less than two days later keeps before the reader the idea of the three-day journey of the soul to the underworld. On this model, Jesus' death was a journey to the underworld, like the

⁵ George M. Landes, “Three Days And Three Nights Motif In Jonah 2:1,” *JBL* 86 (196): 446-450. See also George M. Landes, “The Kerygma of the Book of Jonah: The Contextual Interpretation of the Jonah Psalm,” *Interpretation* 21 (1967): 3-31.

⁶ Bauer, *ad loc.* B1-D §§226. L-S, *ad loc.*

⁷ Hooker, *Mark* 206. C. S. Mann, *Mark* 344, claims that “three” is sometimes a “surrogate” for “several” in “Semitic usage.” Although there is no particular word for “some” in the Hebrew or Aramaic of the first century, that is only because the partative ׀ still accomplishes that function as in the classical forms of those tongues. Much has been made of the equivalency of Mark's μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας and the expression τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ in Matthew 16:21; 17:22; 20:19 and Luke 9:22 (Taylor, *Mark* 378). This equivalency, however, does not imply that μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας does not mean “after three days.”

⁸ Nineham, *Mark* 230.

journey of Gilgamesh, a journey to the realm the Hebrew Bible knows as Sheol⁹ and classical Greek calls the “House of Hades.”¹⁰ This journey is ordinarily a one-way journey for human beings, but in the Hebrew Bible there is a reference to a soul that returned from the underworld (1 Samuel 28:7-20). In this account, the briefly restored Samuel complains to Saul that the king has disturbed him,¹¹ and before returning to the underworld, the prophet warns that Saul and his sons will be with him in Sheol the next day.¹² The underworld from which Samuel has come and to which he will shortly return is one where the prophet has no contact with his former earthly existence and knows nothing about the Israelite distress before the Philistine occupation of the Jezreel Valley and the battle that looms the next day. The complaint about Samuel and the witch disturbing him, uses a verb that can suggest agitation or stirring up of anger. It is alone here in the Hebrew Bible in referring to the stirring up of a dead person, but there is also precedent in Phoenician for such a meaning.¹³ The warning to Saul that he and his sons will soon join Samuel in the underworld is not unlike the statement of David to his courtiers in 2 Samuel 12:23 that there is no point in fasting now that his son with Bathsheba is dead: “And now he is dead. Why should I fast? Will I be able to bring him back? I am on my way to him, but he will not return to me.”

Theodore Lewis has cast doubt upon the belief that Sheol in the Hebrew Bible is the totally lifeless realm described by Fohrer and others and is sympathetic to the idea that the term refers mainly to an abode for the spirits of the wicked.¹⁴ Whatever the terrain or its occupants, however, the reader of Mark was well acquainted with the idea of the soul’s journey after death and would have seized upon the wording of Mark’s predictions as implying that Jesus too undertook such a journey.

Mark is silent about the course of Jesus’ journey and about the events that might have transpired during it.¹⁵ That is a very important point that Wilhelm Bousset explained

⁹ See Theodore J. Lewis, “Dead, Abode of,” *ABD* 2:101-105.

¹⁰ Herbert Jennings Rose, “Hades,” *OCD* 401. As Rose correctly points out, “Hades” is a personal name, not a place name. Georg Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion*, trans. David E. Green (Nashville, New York: Abingdon, 1972), 219-220, objects to the equation of Sheol with the House of Hades because, in his view, Sheol and the shades within Sheol are impotent and totally removed from communion with the world or with God.

¹¹ לָמָּה הִרְגִּיתִּי לְהַעֲלֹת אֹתִי (2 Samuel 28:14). On this narrative see P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel* (*AB* 8; Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 418-419.

¹² 2 Samuel 28:19.

¹³ *HAL ad loc.* Hifil. In the passage cited the complaint is about disturbing the bones of an interred corpse.

¹⁴ Lewis, *ABD* 2:104. He mentions with approval the view of Rosenberg (Diss. Harvard. “The Concept of Biblical Sheol within the Context of ANE Beliefs,” 1980) that Sheol is not named as the place where one sleeps with one’s forebears. Lewis is also of the opinion that necromancy was almost certainly a feature of ancient Hebrew life despite the prohibition in Deuteronomy 18:11. See his *Cults Of The Dead In Ancient Israel And Ugarit* (“Harvard Semitic Monographs”; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

¹⁵ The only development of the idea of Jesus’ descent to the underworld in the New Testament is in 1 Peter 3:19: ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν. The idea in the emerges in the western (Apostles’) Creed gives as *descendit ad inferna*, a concept that has baffled generations of western Christians. The Creed, however, is picking up an important ancient idea though

on the theory that the theme of Jesus' descent into the underworld was a theme that also explained Christ's descent from heaven to earth where he encountered and fought the powers of the underworld in the person of the demons.¹⁶ Bousset's point was that Christians saw the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in terms of an early myth of a redeemer who descends to earth to bring salvation. In some sense, then, the myth has already been played out in Mark's narrative of the ministry of Jesus and needs no repetition in a mythological tale of a descent to the underworld.

Bousset's idea of a pre-Christian redeemer myth is not as popular among biblical scholars as it once was, but we might note that in Mark, and it may not be necessary to invoke that theory to explain the text of Mark. In Mark, Jesus is always on a journey from somewhere to somewhere else and so it may come as no great surprise to learn that the last thing the young man told the women at the tomb is that Jesus' journey had continued beyond the grave, away from Jerusalem, and into the Galilee (Mark 16:7). In other words, the Straightway Gospel has Jesus move "straightway" from a grave in Jerusalem to an undisclosed place in Galilee where his students would see him. Whatever mythological tales we might wish to relate about Jesus' time in the underworld,¹⁷ none would be as interesting as the tremendous message of the young man to the effect that Christ's journey was not complete even with his resurrection. It is complete neither for Jesus nor for his students. Something else was to happen. The story of Jesus was commencing, not ending.

What Is the Resurrection in Mark?

Nothing in the pre-Christian tradition about afterlife, however, included the idea of an individual, solitary resurrection. Even though the saints may have explored the underworld in primeval times, their return to the land of the living was not resurrection in the sense, at least, that Daniel 12 means it. The resurrection in Daniel 12:2 does not include everyone,¹⁸ but Daniel's vision does predict that "many" will rise. Just so, the absence of Jesus from the tomb is not by itself a resurrection. It could be a great miracle, a resuscitation, a return of the hero from the underworld; but it cannot be a resurrection without the "many" who will arise in Daniel's vision.

Matthew solves this problem—if somewhat awkwardly—in Matthew 27:52 with the opening of the tombs and the appearance of "many bodies of the holy ones." Jesus'

within a historical context that made it seem to the believer that Christ descended into a place of everlasting punishment at the time of his death. The journey, however, is to the abode of the dead, all the dead, not just the wicked.

¹⁶ Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville, New York: Abingdon, 1970), 60-68. The work first appeared in 1915.

¹⁷ J. N. D. Kelly has provided an excellent overview of the traditions about Jesus' descent into the underworld. See his *Early Christian Creeds* (2d ed.; London: Longmans, 1960), 378-383. Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, trans. John A. Baker (London: Longman; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 233-263 reviews much of the same evidence, concluding that the tradition of the descent belonged to the earliest stratum of Jewish-Christian tradition about Jesus. The excellent article of Richard Bauckham, "Descent to the Underworld," *ABD* 2:145-159 is a superb review of the myths of a descent to the abode of the dead in Near Eastern, biblical, Greek, Jewish, and early Christian literature.

¹⁸ Nickelsburg, "Resurrection (Early Judaism and Christianity)," *ABD* 5:685.

resurrection is not a single return to life but part of a larger restoration of the dead to life, a solution that shows sensitivity to the issue. When, therefore, the young man declared to the women that Jesus was not there but had risen (Mark 16:5), the language connects the absence of Jesus' body to apocalyptic/eschatological concept and hope of resurrection. While it may be of some religious interest to learn that Jesus invaded the abode of the dead for a time, the real news is that he has been raised from the dead, an assertion that involves more than one person, an assertion that coupled with the command to go to the Galilee to meet the Risen Jesus, now involves the women and the students of Jesus.

No Gospel has a resurrection narrative. Nothing describes the resuscitation of the body—if such is what we are to believe happened—and there is no narration of Jesus' departure from the tomb. The text of Mark as we have it, at any rate, even lacks resurrection appearances.¹⁹ Though the tomb is devoid of the body of Jesus, it is not empty, for a young man clothed in white sits there to tell the women that the crucified Jesus has been raised and has gone into the Galilee (Mark 16:6-7). There is no resuscitation, no revivication of dead flesh, just a messenger and frightened witnesses.

In my view the resurrection is an invitation in Mark, an invitation to the same reckless faith that has characterized the entire Gospel. The fear of the women, even their refusal to speak to anyone, is not disqualifying. After all, it was the women, not the disciples, who were faithful to Jesus at his crucifixion and who with Joseph took the risks of burying their Master. The young man specifically singles out Peter for special mention (εἶπατε τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ τῷ Πέτρῳ, Mark 16:7). Peter, who denied Jesus, whose name has not been mentioned as an actor in any of the subsequent drama, is mentioned here specifically by name. His faithlessness did not disqualify him from finding the risen Christ in the Galilee and the faithlessness of the disciples who all vowed their loyalty to Jesus and yet just as quickly deserted him, they too are invited to the new place of revelation. Where reckless engagement with Jesus, audacious faith, was lacking, Jesus was still able to heal a few sick people, calm the sea, and multiply loaves and fish. Faithlessness was never the besetting sin of the Gospel, just the sad truth of his followers' condition. They, the disciples and Peter, the disciples and Peter and the women, will see Jesus in the Galilee because he has gone there as the next leg of the Son of Man's audacious journey of healing and redemption. This ministry will continue to call forth faith from women and men whose ordinary tendency is to be timid and fearful.

Mark is also alone in having Jesus predict that he will “stand up again” in the present active (Mark 8:31) and in the future middle (Mark 9:31 and 10:34). There can be no doubt in these predictions that the action is that of Jesus. Mark's choice of the active/middle of ἀνίστημι may indeed be a stylistic choice,²⁰ but the stylistic choice of the active idea “stand up” instead of the passive expression most common in the New Testament, “be raised.”²¹ This stylistic choice, if such it be, has the virtue of emphasizing the surprising and forceful nature of Jesus' assertion that he will “stand up” from death.

¹⁹ We shall discuss the ending of Mark below.

²⁰ France, *Mark* 336.

²¹ Note, however, that the white-clothed figure in the tomb announces to the women that Jesus ἠγέρθη in Mark 16:6.

What, indeed, does Mark think the young man in Mark 16:6 means when he says that the crucified Jesus ἠγέρθη? The three predictions of Jesus' death used the verb ἀνίστημι, exactly the verb used in the LXX of Daniel 12:2:

καὶ πολλοὶ τῶν καθευδόντων ἐν τῷ πλάτει τῆς γῆς
ἀναστήσονται, οἱ μὲν εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον, οἱ δὲ εἰς
ὄνειδισμόν, οἱ δὲ εἰς διασποράν καὶ αἰσχύνην αἰώνιον.

Nevertheless, the apocalyptic/eschatological meaning of the passive ἐγείρω has been well established in Mark 6: 14, 16; 12:26; 14:28.²² The last passage uses the infinitive formation μετὰ τὸ ἐγερθῆναί με προάξω ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν to voice Jesus' prediction that he would precede his students into the Galilee after his resurrection. The declaration of the young man in the tomb echoes that prediction with the instruction in Mark 16:7 that the women should inform the disciples that προάγει ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν· ἐκεῖ αὐτὸν ὄψεσθε, καθὼς εἶπεν ὑμῖν. Although Lohmeyer,²³ Lightfoot²⁴ and, later, Marxsen,²⁵ made popular the idea that verse 7 refers to the second coming of Jesus, the *parousia*, contemporary scholars have disagreed.²⁶ The binding of Mark 16:7 to Mark 14:28 is simply too tight to allow for this interpretation. Further, as Hooker correctly notes, the use of the verb προάγω is not accidental, reminding us strongly of the same verb in Mark 10:32 referring to Jesus' going before or leading his students to Jerusalem.²⁷ The language is too familiar, too connected with the previous narrative, to be relegated to a secondary place. The editor's hand is here, making this connection, not leading us away from it.

What is most familiar, of course, is the relationship that προάγω posits between Jesus and his sometimes faithless students. He still leads them. The journey continues. The resurrection is not an end point but a restoration of the company of master and students on their way to the next dangerous undertaking.

The implication, however, is that this restoration of relationship will be on a new basis, governed by the reality of the resurrection.

The Problem of Mark's Ending

The first scholar to claim that Mark's Gospel actually ended with verse 8 was Julius Wellhausen in 1903.²⁸ The attractiveness of this idea is in the abrupt, shuddering stop that the words ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ would lend the whole piece. We finish reading the Gospel with the reminder that the women left the tomb not in exultation but in fear

²² See Gnllka, *Markus* 2:342n25.

²³ Ernst Lohmeyer, *Galiläa und Jerusalem* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1936).

²⁴ R. H. Lightfoot, *Locality and Doctrine in the Gospels* (London: Houghton and Stroughton, 1938) and *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950).

²⁵ Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist*. See especially pp. 75-95.

²⁶ E. g. France, *Mark* 681; Hooker, *Mark* 386; etc.

²⁷ Hooker, *Mark* 385-386.

²⁸ Julius Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Marci* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1903), 137.

and disobeyed the instruction to inform the disciples. As W. L. Knox correctly surmised, an ending of this sort would be amount to an ancient writer crafting an ending that would better suit a piece of modern literature than an ancient Gospel. Morna Hooker would be completely right to say that Mark 16:7 seems to promise a resurrection appearance in the Galilee²⁹ if the saying did not point backwards to Mark 14:28 as much as it pointed forward to the reunion of Jesus with his students in the Galilee. If the Gospel did not end with Mark 16:8, then it would be completely reasonable to believe that Mark fulfilled that promise as, indeed, Matthew's adaptation of Mark's account does in 28:16-20. The question as to whether the Gospel of Mark did end with Mark 16:8 is too large to discuss here, but there is widespread agreement that neither the Shorter Ending of Mark nor the Longer Ending (verses 9-20) can claim Marcan authorship.

What is important, however, is the fact that we can at least imagine Mark 16:8 as the ending of the Gospel. Perhaps it was not. Nevertheless, we can see in this verse that the same ironic response to the power of Jesus is at work in the women who leave the tomb as we found for Peter and the disciples. Committed as they were to him, they still could not contain their fright and fled the tomb with no thought of telling anyone of the strange event they had witnessed.

What, indeed, had they witnessed? They had found an open tomb that no longer contained the corpse they had laid in it on the previous Friday. They found in it a young man dressed in festive white who told them that their dead teacher had arisen and was going to meet his students in the Galilee somewhere. We should not wonder that they were frightened and did not follow the instructions of the young man. There is no way to know that he is telling the truth, no way to surmise that his interpretation of the absence of Jesus' body is accurate. He is not an angel,³⁰ even though the reader may be encouraged to believe that he is.³¹ This literary effect is achieved, as France correctly notes, principally through the use of language that describes the women's surprise and fear at seeing him, and the white clothing that is reminiscent of Jesus' own white clothing at the Transfiguration.³² With all of that said, however, Mark does not identify the young man as an angel and is satisfied to leave him in the shadows of ambiguity, unlike Matthew 28:2. The women can see for themselves that Jesus' body is missing, but the young man cannot tell them what that absence means for them. We need not worry at their hasty retreat. We have experienced far more insidious betrayals of Jesus than the honest fright of these devoted women, and the Gospel is crystal clear in its claim that the perfidy of Peter and his associates is no final barrier to their discipleship.

The short chapter as we have it suggests that the disciples and the women will once more have to act with reckless courage to seek out their master in the Galilee. If

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 386.

³⁰ *Contra* Nineham, *Mark* 444 and Schweizer, *Mark* 372. Both provide instances of angels appearing as young men in 2 Maccabees 3:26, 33; Josephus, *Antiquities* 5.277. Schweizer admits that the description of this "angel" in Mark 16:5 comes "with great reserve," a reserve, we might note, that is so great there is no mention of the fellow being an angel at all.

³¹ Johnson, *Mark* 264.

³² France, *Mark* 679.

there was additional material, then it almost certainly included one or more appearances of Jesus to these women and men in the Galilee.³³ If verse 8 were the end, we should still imagine that the same restless and reckless faith that had led the students of Jesus and the women to Jesus would do so again.

If there was more to the Gospel of Mark than we have, then we are the poorer for not having it; but verse 8 is sufficient to remind us that the principal issue in Mark is whether human beings like the women at the tomb can leap beyond their most reasonable objections and doubts to touch Jesus' cloak or to call out for an end to blindness or to bring their friend to the teacher by way of the roof so as to beg, plead, hope for and expect the healing, restorative, forgiving power of Jesus. Faith is not for Mark the question as to what others are saying about the Son of Man but who the disciples say Jesus is. Despite their faithlessness, despite their fear, despite their doubts, the disciples may still say "Yes!"

³³ Hooker, *Mark* 386.