

Ascension of jesus
christ theology
religion essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The resurrection and ascension of Jesus has remained a mystery to my belief. There has never been a reoccurrence in my life time and throughout history. People tend to wonder how a man who was really dead and was buried can come back to life. The burials that take place in our communities result in the decomposition of the body. In areas, like Malawi villages, where technology is not advanced burials are immediate. A delay in burial for about two to three days in a village set up without the cooling system makes the body start to decay. Therefore, it is a hard thing to believe that a person came back to life on a third day. The idea is even complicated when it is said that the resurrected person went up to heaven. In secondary school we learn the laws of gravity. If you throw something up it falls back. It is a fact that people do not fly because they have no wings. This paper wishes to establish why Christians believe in the physical resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Establishing the reality of resurrection and ascension of Jesus will strengthen belief and resolve the mystery.

Summary of Grudem's Views

Grudem (2000) asserted that when Jesus came back to life from the dead his body was in physical form. He stated that Jesus' experience was different from that of Lazarus as it is recorded in the book of John. He affirmed that Lazarus' resurrection was subject of physical developments which lead to aging and death. According to him Jesus' resurrection is not subject of biological development, (Grudem, 2000).

Contrary to Harris' views (as cited by Grudem 2000) Grudem (2000) refuted the fact that Jesus' resurrected body had spiritual aspects which enabled him not to observe physical laws. Harris argued that Jesus' spiritual body enabled

him to pass through the wall and perform instant appearances and disappearances. Grudem affirmed that the New Testament does not seem to assert that. He argued that when Jesus resurrected his body was physical because he could eat, prepare breakfast and be seen. He quoted Jesus himself in Luke 24: 39 confirming his physical being by telling his disciples, “see my hands and my feet that it is I myself; handle me and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see I have,” (Grudem, 2000, p. 613).

Grudem (2000) insisted that Jesus could not have deceived the disciples. He stated that if Jesus had wanted to prove that he had a spiritual body he could have clearly demonstrated it to his followers. In line with this, he stated that the disciples could have clearly recorded it to give evidence for his spiritual body. He also argued that when Jesus ascended to heaven the angels confirmed about his physical state by telling those who witnessed his departure that he will come back in the same physical state he went to heaven. He stated that Jesus’ resurrected body set precedence to the kind of state which people would acquire in the next life, (Grudem, 2000).

Grudem (2000) stated that the resurrection empowered the believers of Jesus. He pointed out that Jesus promised his followers the power of the Holy Spirit only after the resurrection. He argued that the believers were given the ability to overcome sin in their lives and effectively serve him. He made reference to Paul’s message that God made us right with him through the resurrection, (2000).

In regard to the ascension of Jesus Grudem (2000) affirmed that it is an indication that he went somewhere to a place. He argued that there should

be a place called heaven where Jesus went in his physical body. He stated that even though we do not see where he went it does not nullify the fact that there is heaven. He said that just as angels are invisible although they are around us so too is heaven. He cites an example of Elisha as recorded in the Old Testament that when God sent him the chariots of soldiers his servant could not see them. He said that our eyes cannot locate heaven but Jesus went up and Elijah too went there. He considers Jesus' ascension vital because it is a sign that we too shall ascend to heaven. He confirmed this with Jesus's promise that there is a lot of place in heaven and we too shall go where he has gone, (Grudem, 2000).

Leading Views

In his book *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence to Jesus*, Strobel (1998) supported the reality of Jesus death and resurrection based on interviews with experts in medicine and history. He established that Jesus really died according to the doctor. The doctor said that Jesus could not have survived the trauma and the harsh treatment. He argued that the high degree of stress that Jesus experienced made his body tender. He added that in this state when he was subjected to severe Roman whipping his body had severe tears and loss of blood. He stated that this disapproved those who claim that the resurrection was just resuscitation. In his interview the historian argued that there was no way the soldiers could have walked free without punishment. He argued that considering the kind of punishment which was in practice for such an office what the high priests and the Roman officials did revealed a foul play. He confirmed it with reliable documentary that Jesus resurrected. He stated that Jesus showed himself too

at different times to many people and the largest group was 5000 people, (Strobel, 1998).

Mcdowell (1981) and Lutzer (1994) supported the historical resurrection of Jesus. They argued that historical evidence like the Dead Sea scrolls and history from historians like Josephus proved that Jesus really resurrected. They said these validate the historical reliability of the New Testament which also has the shortest gap between its copies and the originals. They highlighted the reluctance showed by the high priests and the Roman officials to punish the tomb guards. They said that the guards' action to have supposedly allowed the escape of criminal or robbery of the body was a serious case punishable by death. (Mcdowell, 1981 and Lutzer, 1994).

Interestingly enough, Mcdowell (1981) in agreement with Grudem, reported that Jesus' resurrection was physical not spiritual. He refuted the claim that Jesus' body decayed and came back to life a spiritual being. He argued that Jesus physically appeared before many people both hostile and friendly. He affirmed that these could have refuted the reports as they were written while most of them were still alive. He stated that both hostile and supporting community validated the accuracy of the New Testament report, (Mcdowell, 1981).

Alternative Views

Hemel (1975) and Kaufman (1968) argued that Jesus did not resurrect but the disciples had visions and hallucinations. Hemel stated that the disciples experienced the aftermaths of the dilemma of losing Jesus. He argued that they resolved the dilemma by the imagination of a ghost so they

hallucinated due to their memories of Jesus. While Kaufman argued that the disciples experienced public visions about Jesus in his Jesus came back to life in a spiritual body. They both argued that the resurrection was the explanation of the believers' experiences not the reality of events, (Hemel, 1975 and Kaufman, 1968).

Harris (1990) partially agreed with them as he argued that Jesus rose into a spiritual body that could materialize for some time to be seen. He stated that Jesus' body did not observe the physical barriers like walls for a building. He concluded that the fact that Jesus could be found standing instantly amidst the people it indicated that he was a spirit (Harris, 1990).

Crossam (as recorded by Boyd, 1984) asserted that as Jesus was killed like a criminal he was buried in a shallow mass grave according to the custom of the day. He argued that wild dogs usually ate the bodies so Jesus' body was also eaten. He stated that Jesus' followers had no idea where he was buried and what came of his body. He concluded that since Jesus was their hero they decided to portray a victorious end of his life by inventing characters like Joseph of Arimathea and the resurrection, (Boyd, 1984).

Personal Views

Jesus really resurrected into a physical body as verified by scriptures. I agree with the views of physical resurrection because of the reliability of scripture. The scripture recorded Jesus himself in Luke 24: 39 saying " see my hands and my feet that it is I myself; handle me and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see I have." Therefore, if Jesus himself confirmed his

physical resurrection and the scripture recorded it then it is historically validated that he had physical resurrection.

The fact that Jesus appeared to a large number of people verifies his physical body. I disagree with Humel (1975) and Kaufman (1968) who argue that the followers of Jesus either saw visions or hallucinated respectively. It is difficult to believe if visions or hallucinations can be experienced by a group at the same time about the same thing. This is impossible. Spiritual experiences are personal. As a result there was no way for instance, the 11 disciples or the 5000 people could see the vision or hallucinate about Jesus at the same time.

The gospels recorded that the ascension took place in the presence of his disciples and other people. In line with this, it can be argued that Jesus was physically present with them on the day of the ascension. Acts 1: 11 recorded the two angels' message to those who witnessed the ascension. They said that Jesus will come back from heaven the way he has gone.

I agree with Strobel (1998) who is a journalist by profession. His interview with the medical personnel revealed how impossible it was for Jesus to fake his death as some claim. The spear through his heart could definitely finish him if he had faked it or just fainted. Strobel gives us a scientific explanation of the reality about the death of Jesus. For those who rely on history he also verified Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension based on the historical events. Therefore, even if one does not believe in the Bible he can base his trust on the evidence of the medical and historical information available.

These experts help us to clear the doubt whether Jesus died and resurrected or he just fainted and was resuscitated.

It has to be noted that the community in which Jesus lived not everyone agreed or supported him. There were other people who wanted his down fall. These people could have really tried to refute the substantial claims made by his followers. The silence of the then hostile community reveals the validity of the claims of the believers.

In support of McDowell's (1981) and Lutzer's (1994) suspicion I agree with them. If a very serious crime is committed no one is willing to cover it unless there is some benefit in doing so. Therefore, it puzzles me too to hear that in such a serious and sensitive mistake made by the guards the high priests who were the interested party never reacted. The Roman officials too decided to overlook their laws. It is surprising that somebody would chose to cover up an enemy. This clearly shows that Jesus was raised. They could not disprove it by producing a body. I understand that they could afford to fabricate a lie.

Conclusion

The resurrection of Jesus is the essence of the Christian faith while ascension gives us hope. If there would have been no resurrection there would have been no basis for Christianity. In line with this those who are hostile to Christianity will always try to find something to fault Christianity. Opposition will always be there but a Christian should have a reason for his or her belief. If someone tells you that Jesus' body was rotten or eaten by wild dogs there should be an explanation to your stand. As our teacher Professor Stauffcher

always say that we should have a reason why we believe what we believe so that we can answer when critics confront us. Ascension gives us hope for the promised heaven. In John 14: 1-4 Jesus said that there are many rooms in heaven. He tells us that if there was no place he would not have bothered to tell us. Therefore, ascension gives us hope that one day we will also ascend to heaven and be with Jesus and the Father.