THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

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1. Resurrection as Kerygma

The earliest evidence for that claim that God raised Jesus from the dead occurs in the Pauline epistles. Such formulaic expressions as 1 Thess 1:9–10, “…how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to await his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who saves us from the wrath to come,” or Rom 1:3–4, “concerning his Son who was from the seed of David according to the flesh, designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of Holiness from the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,” serve as linguistic codes for the gospel. These phrases reflect common Christian speech patterns, not peculiarly Pauline theologoumena.\(^1\) Thess 1:10 reflects a common pattern in Jewish texts. Resurrection belongs to the scenario of divine judgment. Dan 12:1–3 indicates that some circles of “the pious” held such views in the second century BCE.\(^2\)

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1 See Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, AB 32B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 120–122. Malherbe points out that the summary reflects the faith his audience now holds, not necessarily a news capsule of Paul’s preaching. Paul employs this form to focus attention on God as subject of a chronological series of actions (132). For a detailed analysis of tradition and redaction in Rom 1:3–4, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer (*Romans*, AB 33 [New York: Doubleday, 1993], 229–230, 233–237). Fitzmyer points out that the expression *by a spirit of holiness* reflects a phrase common in the Old Testament (e.g., Isa 63:10–11; Ps 51:13) and in Qumran texts (e.g., 1 QS IV, 21; VIII, 16) that is differently translated in the LXX and in Paul’s speech patterns. Therefore, the formula probably originated among Aramaic speaking Palestinian believers (236).

Paul himself prefers bi-partite expressions referring to death on the cross and resurrection since his kerygma highlights the triumph of God’s wisdom and power over the absurdity of the cross (1 Cor 1:18–25; 2:2). He can describe justification as faith in the God “who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom 4:24–25). Such expressions provide important evidence for the historian as well as the theologian. They indicate that the events at the end of Jesus’ life, death on the cross, resurrection and exaltation in anticipation of a role in divine judgment, were central to the earliest kerygma. Jesus’ teaching, whether remembered under the rubric of philosopher-sage or considered the activity of apocalyptic prophet and reformer, did not carry the day of itself. Paul’s own visionary encounter with the risen Son of God was sufficient to transform a violent persecutor into an apostle (Gal 1:13–16). Jesus’ earliest followers in Palestine claimed that one of their own contemporaries was alive with God, not in the intermediate state of the other righteous dead. Since he had died on a cross, Jesus could not be said to have been taken up bodily as another Enoch, Elijah or

3 Fitzmyer, Romans, 230.

4 Fitzmyer points out that while the Greek Fathers saw the resurrection of Jesus as the cause of humanity’s justification, the Latin tradition came to focus solely on the atoning death of Christ. Consequently, the resurrection becomes merely a confirmation of what has been claimed about the death. However, Fitzmyer finds exceptions to this reductivist trend in Augustine (Sermones 236.1; PL 38.1120) and Aquinas (In ep. Ad Romanos 4.3; S.T. III 56.2 ad 4; Fitzmyer, Romans, 389–390).

5 To understand the crucifixion of Jesus, one cannot easily make sense of a “wrong place, wrong time” death due to misguided Roman violence. Jesus’ own ministry engaged existing expectations for God’s coming intervention in human affairs to rescue the faithful ones from domination by evil powers. Jesus probably did self-identify as God’s chosen one, tasked with initiating such a transformation. See the discussion of the contrary theories that produce a Christology free, non-apocalyptic sage in Larry W. Hurtado, Lord, Jesus Christ. Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 53–64, 213–257. Hurtado points out the fallacy in scholarly reconstructions which claim to get back to earlier Christian beliefs of the 30’s and 40’s by dismissing Pauline evidence. They are predicated on an unexamined assumption that Paul got it wrong or infected Christianity with a mythical depiction of Christ antithetical to the life and teaching of Jesus himself (81–93).

6 Hurtado (Lord, 83, 96) points out that these basic Christological views probably reflect the positions Paul had opposed as a persecutor. J. Louis Martyn (Galatians AB 33A [New York: Doubleday, 1997], 162) sees in Gal 3:13 the kind of argument Paul once employed against the emerging Christian movement, “venerating as though he were God’s Messiah a man who had been crucified as a criminal, and who therefore stood under the curse of God’s Law.”