

Miszelle

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The Acts of the Apostles, xvii. 18.

“Some said: He seems to be a preacher of strange divinities because he proclaimed to them Jesus and Anastasis” (Acts xvii. 18). This passage shows clearly how strange the idea of resurrection could be to philosophers of the time. They understood *anastasis* as a goddess; so foreign was the idea of *anastasis* = resurrection to their way of thinking.

This need not surprise us. For the Greek philosophical tradition the real *you* was the soul, and for them the life after death was the immortality of the soul (cf. Plato, *Phaedo*). In this connexion any reference to immortality in the Bible may be taken as an indication of Greek influence (cf. *Sapientia*, I Tim. vi. 16). It is striking how rarely *ἀθανασία*, “immortality”, occurs in the Greek Bible.

In contrast to this for the Biblical Hebrew the real *you* was the body, as we can see in Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones (Ez. xxxvii). If man were to have a life after death, it would be possible only with the resuscitation of his body (Dan. xii. 2). This seems to have been the form of such a belief current among the early Christians.

Thus the resurrection of the body in some form or other was the common belief among New Testament writers. This was the natural way in which they could understand life after death and it is not surprising that they described Jesus’ victory death in these terms.

In these terms we can comprehend the New Testament record. We have early evidence of the appearance of Jesus in ICor. xv. 4f. Jesus was raised on the third day, “he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, then to more than five hundred brethren at once, of whom most continue to this present, but some are dead, then he appeared to James and then to all the apostles and last of all to me”.

It is usually assumed that James is the brother of the Lord, but there is another possibility. He may be John’s brother who was executed by Herod c. A. D. 40 (Acts xii. 2). This has important implications. Except where Paul says otherwise we may assume that those who experienced these appearances were alive when the list was drawn up and are mentioned because they can be questioned. If this is so, and if James is the brother of John, then the list is not later than c. A. D. 40. If this is so, ICor. xv. 3–7 represents an early piece of tradition. We may note that elsewhere where Paul introduces James, the brother of the Lord, he does so explicitly (Gal. i. 19).

This is supported by Mark. It is perhaps a painful discovery to find that the genuine Mark ends at xvi. 8 and that xvi. 9–20, an account of Jesus’ appearances, is an *addendum* probably of the second century, but Mark does not tell only of the empty tomb. (xvi. 1–8). Three times, viii. 31, ix. 31, x. 34, he has Jesus foretell that he will arise after three days. This corresponds to Paul’s report “and that he was risen on the third day according to the Scriptures” (ICor. xv. 4). As far as he goes Mark agrees with ICor. xv.

That they agree in describing Jesus's life after death in terms of resurrection need not surprise us. Resurrection was the one way open to New Testament writers of depicting a life after death. We can however ask what conditions had to be satisfied if the Church was to be convinced that Jesus had overcome death. First, the appearances after death had to be real. Fantasies would not do. Secondly, the Church had to be convinced that it had to deal with one and the same Jesus before and after death.

For the most part the New Testament writers saw these conditions satisfied in terms of resurrection, but ICor. xv shows that Paul was aware of some of the difficulties in this mode of belief, and Acts xvii. 18 reminds us that for some of the men of the first century A.D. it was quite foreign. How the belief resurrection of the body and that in the immortality of the soul were to be reconciled for the Church of that time remained a piece of unfinished business.

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