

Resurrection: An Empty Tomb, Many Appearances

1. Should you care?

Consider the following quotation from Gerd Lüdemann, Professor of History and Literature of Early Christianity at Georg-August-University Göttingen in Germany.

I can no longer relate Easter directly to the Bible and the creed. The resurrection of Jesus is not an historical event, and therefore he will not come again. For me, resurrection has to do with this present life, which is like a small raft afloat on a vast, dark ocean. An icy wind blows, and the people on the raft are united only by the bond of the death that will come to all of them, nor can they expect any compassion from the impersonal universe. But by coming to terms with the reality of such terrors in humility, wisdom and love, I discover the threshold of a new life. From now on I am no longer cowed by the notion that death is a punishment for my sin, nor do I hope for a resurrection. Instead, I accept my perishability, and that gives rise to a new Easter vision. Now impervious to the undertow of panic, I join with all humanity in the daily task of living in the light of love. Together we can make life stronger than death.

This scholar no longer believes in any kind of resurrection, of Jesus or anyone else. How important to *you* is the Christian claim that Jesus rose from the dead? What is at stake if Jesus *didn't* rise?

2. Your Quest: . . .

Using the *Gospels parallels* website [<http://www.utoronto.ca/religion/synopsis/meta-4g.htm>] or several English Bibles, compare Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24 and John 20-21. (You'll need to read each section through completely, rather than simply read straight across the columns on the website.)

2.1. Do you see signs of literary dependence (where it looks like someone borrowed from someone else) in these chapters? (Remember that Mark 16:9-20 was almost certainly not part of the original Gospel of Mark.)

2.2. List the elements that are common to two or more Gospels by completing the following table. Describe the detail or element in the left column and place verse references in the relevant columns at the right.

Shared Elements in Two or More Gospels	Mt	Mk	Lk	Jn

2.3. Read the following texts: Daniel 12:2-3; Mt 17:2; Ac 9:3-5; Rv 1:12-16. What element(s) is/are shared by them all? How do they differ from the descriptions of the risen Jesus in the Gospels? Does this difference strike you as significant? How and why?

2.4. Observe how the Gospels describe the properties of Jesus' body. Make lists of qualities that strike you as (a) physical and (b) trans-physical (unusual, more than physical).

Physical Qualities	Refs.	Trans-physical Qualities	Refs.

2.5. Important for understanding early Christian beliefs in Jesus' resurrection is the combined force of the empty tomb and Jesus' appearances. How might the early Christians have accounted for an empty tomb if they knew nothing of any appearances?

2.6. Similarly, how might the early Christians have accounted for the appearances of Jesus, if they had no reason to believe the tomb was empty?

2.7. Might the early Christians have invented the story about the guards and the bribe (Mt 28:11-15)? Why / why not? Does the stolen body hypothesis imply an empty tomb? If historical, does this story imply that "rise again" (Mt 27:63) was understood *physically*?