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## THE RESURRECTION

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2 Is the Resurrection of Jesus an historical event or is it a symbolic story; something that I  
3 should take metaphorically. Can I be CHRISTIAN and reject the resurrection as an  
4 'historical event'?

5

6 The key passages you must refer to in this section of work are:

7 Matthew 10:28

8 John 20-21

9 1 Corinthians 15.

10 Philipians 1: 21-24

11 Although you are free to include other references to accounts from the other Gospels.

12

### **THE RESURRECTION AS PRESENTED IN SCRIPTURE.**

14

15 In Mt 10:28. Jesus says 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul;  
16 rather be afraid of God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell. 'It seems then that  
17 Jesus himself held a belief in the afterlife. This would not be surprising since most scholars  
18 agree that Jesus belonged to the Pharisees who expressed belief in a Resurrection of the  
19 dead, unlike the Sadducees who dismissed any idea of bodily Resurrection.

20

21 John's Gospel, which uses a writing style known as a chiasm concerns itself with Peter and  
22 John's gradual acceptance of the Resurrection, the role of Mary Magdalene as prime  
23 witness to the event, the evidence that Jesus' earthly body had undergone some form of  
24 change, the role of Thomas and the giving of the holy Spirit which has great similarities with  
25 the Pentecost story as found in Acts of the Apostles.

26

27 For St Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, the Resurrection of Jesus is an objective fact. Paul believes  
28 this because of his conversion experience on the road to Damascus. Christian believers are  
29 also resurrected. (12-19) Jesus is the new Adam – Adam brought death but Jesus brings  
30 eternal life. There is a Resurrected body for everyone which far exceeds their earthly body.  
31 Paul points out that Resurrection is not the same as resuscitation. Resuscitation brings the  
32 person back to the same life; Resurrection brings the person into an entirely different  
33 existence- into some form of glorified existence. The person is the same- yet different.  
34 15:51 states We will not all die but we will all be changed

35

36 It seems that these accounts accept and proclaim the Resurrection as an actual historical  
37 event. But how is it possible for modern minded people to believe in the Resurrection of a  
38 corpse?

39

40 Task for Homework: - Have you read and annotated in detail the key passages mentioned  
41 above.

42 AO1: With reference to the passages you have studied explain the nature of the Resurrected  
43 body (20)

44

**Commented [GB1]:** 15:51 - reads something like We will not all die but we will all be changed

## 45 RUDOLF BULTMANN (1884- 1976) AND THE RESURRECTION

46

47 The German theologian and scholar Rudolf Bultmann made this exact point. Writing after  
48 the Enlightenment period which saw a move away from an acceptance of revelation in  
49 scripture to a shift in emphasis on reason and empirical evidence, Bultmann said that it was  
50 'impossible to expect modern minded people to believe in the Resurrection of a corpse.'  
51 Bultmann felt that modern readers could not accept the New Testament accounts without  
52 abandoning all modern intellect and knowledge.

53

54 It is important to understand that Bultmann himself was Christian (Lutheran) and in no way  
55 had any desire to prove Christianity false; Rather he sought to make Christianity appropriate  
56 in a time when scientific evidence and research, reason and logic were of paramount  
57 importance. Essentially, he wrote to defend Christianity in the modern world.

58

### 59 THE DEMYTHOLOGISATION OF THE BIBLE

60

61 Bultmann argued that all that was needed for Christian belief was to accept that Jesus lived,  
62 preached and died. There was no need to believe in a physical rising of Jesus from the dead.  
63 In fact, all the supernatural events in the New Testament should be regarded a myth. That  
64 does not mean to say that there is no truth in them, rather that we need to understand the myth  
65 and look beneath it to really comprehend what is being taught in the texts.

66

67 N.B. *A common mistake is thinking that demythologization basically means just*  
68 *removing all the mythology from the Bible, whereas Bultmann wanted us to*  
69 *recognise the mythology and interpret it in a more meaningful way.*

70

### 71 BULTMANN AND MYTH

72 Bultmann defines a myth as 'the report of an event or occurrence in which supernatural,  
73 superhuman powers or persons are at work' and sees them as a way in which people attempt  
74 

- i) to explain the world in which they live and their existence in it
- ii) to explain the divine in human terms.

75

76  
77 Bultmann argues that the NT uses mythological terminology of their time, so it is impossible  
78 for modern readers to understand it. They have a common understanding and share a sacred  
79 world view. In expressing that sacred world view they used myths. Aspects such as the  
80 virgin birth and the Resurrection of Jesus are myths. They are attempts to explain the divine  
81 in human terms, but they were never meant to be taken at 'face value.'

82

83 Much of Bultmann's work attempts to look beneath the myth, (de-mythologise.) Bultmann  
84 attempts to reinterpret the NT by changing it mythological nature whilst at the same time  
85 retaining the meaning

86

### 87 BULTMANN AND THE RESURRECTION 'MYTH'

88

89 Although St Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 seems adamant that the Resurrection event was  
90 historical and it seems clear that the early followers believed it to be literally true, Bultmann  
91 argues that the Resurrection was not an historical event. The Resurrection stories are myths  
92 which explain the work of God in human terms. However, it would be ludicrous in modern  
93 scientific times to accept the concept a Resurrection. It would be untenable for modern

**Commented [GB2]:** A common mistake is thinking that demythologization basically means just removing all the mythology from the Bible, whereas Bultmann wanted us to recognise the mythology and interpret it in a more meaningful way.

94 Christians to accept. The Resurrection cannot be proved empirically and is therefore not an  
 95 objective fact and even if it could it does not give any meaning to the crucifixion. Bultmann  
 96 argues that a person DOES NOT need to believe in a physical resurrection of Jesus to have  
 97 faith.

98  
 99 **BULTMANN'S DEMYTHOLOGISED RESURRECTION.**

100 Bultmann's demythologised form of the resurrection is seen as the realisation that the  
 101 crucifixion was not a defeat but a victory. Jesus is not literally God's son but can be  
 102 understood as 'God's son' in the sense that he is the expression of God (the expression of the  
 103 divine.)

104 The crucifixion of Jesus contained the Resurrection within it. The 2 are one event as opposed  
 105 to 2 separate events. When Jesus enters into death, death no longer has power. (The dead  
 106 after all cannot fear death.). This realisation that the cross of Christ was not a defeat but a  
 107 victory. The disciples suddenly realized that when he suffered death Jesus was already the  
 108 'son of God'. His death was the victory for the Lord of life had given himself over to death  
 109 and had thereby conquered it.

110  
 111 Easter then, is about the rising of this faith in the early church, not of the physical rising of  
 112 Jesus. In this then, Bultmann tries to maintain the 'kerygma' (the preaching about Jesus made  
 113 by the early church) whilst rejecting the historical nature of the Resurrection.

114  
 115 Tasks: In your RE notebook answer in detail the following questions. Doing this carefully  
 116 will provide a solid foundation for your revision work.

- 117  
 118 1. Who is Rudolf Bultmann and what is his worldview?  
 119 2. What does to 'demythologise the Bible' mean? And why does Bultmann feel the need  
 120 to demythologise the Bible?  
 121 3. Explain Bultmann's understanding of myth.  
 122 4. Explain Bultmann's demythologised form of the Resurrection.

123  
 124

## 125 N.T. WRIGHT (1948- present) AND THE RESURRECTION.

126  
 127 Nicholas Thomas Wright is an Anglican Bishop and New Testament scholar. He disagrees  
 128 entirely with Bultmann. Although both thinkers are post enlightenment period, Wright does  
 129 not share Bultmann's need to demythologise the Resurrection. Wright also holds a sacred  
 130 worldview. He argues that the Resurrection of Jesus is an historical event. This however is  
 131 not based solely on an acceptance that the Bible is some form of special revelation. Rather,  
 132 Wright argues that if all other possible explanations have been explored and abandoned and  
 133 the only reasonable one left is that something out of the ordinary, something supernatural, did  
 134 in fact happen, then it would be wrong to dismiss it as ridiculous. Here we see Wright  
 135 holding a post-enlightenment, rational world view simultaneously with a sacred world view.

136  
 137 N.T. Wright states:

138 *'the best historical explanation is the one that inevitable raises all kinds of*  
 139 *theological questions: the tomb was indeed empty and Jesus was indeed seen alive,*  
 140 *because he has truly risen from the dead!'*

141

142 In his book 'The Resurrection of the Son of God' Wright firstly considers Greek and Jewish  
143 belief about life after death and Resurrection. These would have been major influences on  
144 the NT writers. If Bultmann is correct, then surely there will be some common myth shared  
145 by NT writers. However, when one explores this it becomes common there is no common  
146 myth at all.

147 In Greek thought there is no evidence of belief in the afterlife and certainly no evidence of a  
148 physical after life or bodily resurrection. Plato held out the possibility of an afterlife for the  
149 soul but not of a physical resurrection and Homer – the poet – spoke about Hades – the place  
150 of the dead. None of this points to any common idea of a physical resurrection.

151  
152 Jewish thought was even more diverse. The Sadducees denied the possibility of Resurrection  
153 – the Pharisees insisted on it Sheol was the place of the dead, perhaps where the soul waited  
154 for judgement. The prophet Isaiah spoke about Resurrection for a whole nation and as  
155 something that will happen to all people at same time. Many believed in a physical  
156 resurrection but disagreed about the manner and time. (Evidence in Ezekiel 27 and Daniel  
157 12). All in all, there is very little shared myth. This seems to be a real blow to Bultmann's  
158 idea.

159  
160 Wright then goes on to point out that Early Christian belief about life after death and  
161 Resurrection were coherent despite the great diversity in the above influences. The reason  
162 for this is because they were proclaiming what was actually true, what actually happened.  
163 This seems to be the most reasonable explanation for a coherent account amongst all plethora  
164 of beliefs.

165  
166 In his conclusions Wright points out that all other possible explanations simply do not cut it.  
167 Some have argued that Jesus did not die on the cross; he fainted, slipped into a coma – and  
168 wrapped up in grave clothes regains consciousness and exits the tomb. The likelihood of the  
169 Romans not finishing the job seems absurd. They knew how to kill. Furthermore, the  
170 Gospels record that the soldiers pierced Jesus' side and 'blood and water came forth.' Jesus  
171 had indeed died on the cross. Some also suggest that the disciples stole the body but this is  
172 also illogical. The disciples feared for their own lives and hid. The tomb was guarded. What  
173 purpose would them have in stealing a body and proclaiming a resurrection. Remember that  
174 all but John are eventually executed for their belief in Jesus. The idea that the disciples  
175 simply hallucinated is also suspect. Group hallucinations have been reported but never has  
176 there been a report of people hallucinating the same subject matter in different times and in  
177 different places. Finally, the idea that the resurrection experience was some ghostly  
178 apparition also lacks credibility since according to John's Gospel Thomas touches Jesus.  
179 When we have examined all the other alternatives and found them unlikely or suspect we are  
180 left with only ONE solution- the Resurrection of Jesus was an historical event.

181  
182 Wright points out that we must be careful not to dismiss automatically the idea of the  
183 supernatural. Just because we have been through the ENLIGHTENMENT period does not  
184 mean we *always and every time* must conclude there is nothing supernatural at work.  
185 In the absence of any other supporting evidence – we have to conclude that it happened.

186  
187  
188 TASKS: Complete these tasks in your RE notebook. Being diligent about these will provide a  
189 useful resource for exam prep and will be helpful in essay writing.

190  
191 **NT WRIGHT:**

- 192 1. Who is N.T.Wright and what is his world view?
- 193 2. What does Wright believe about the resurrection of Jesus. In your answer refer to a
- 194 key quote from his book. What is the name of his book?
- 195 3. Explain how Wright deals with Bultmann's argument that the Resurrection is
- 196 mythological. Why does Wright refer to both Greek and Jewish mythological thought
- 197 to make his point?
- 198 4. Explain alternative solutions for a physical Resurrection of Jesus. How does Wright
- 199 counter argue these ideas?
- 200 5. What does Wright conclude about the Resurrection and what warning does he give
- 201 about concluding that supernatural events are never possible?
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