THE EMPTY TOMB AND THE RESURRECTION DEBATE: CAN A STARTING POINT BE ESTABLISHED FOR STUDYING THE EASTER EVENTS?

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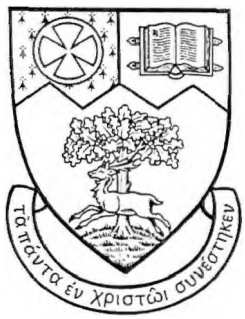

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ABSTRACT

"The Empty Tomb and the Resurrection Debate: Can a Starting Point for Studying the Easter Events Be Established?"

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Scholars Gary Habermas and Michael Licona have created a research approach to study the historicity of Jesus's resurrection called "historical bedrock." This approach seeks to gather highly attested information about the Easter events that are agreed upon by the majority of scholars and then use this information as a starting point in studying the resurrection. A piece of information noticeably missing from the historical bedrock list is the empty tomb.

By using the empty tomb as a case study, this thesis is a critical analysis of Habermas and Licona's historical bedrock approach. In it, I propose that historical bedrock be amended to what I call "baseline information." Baseline information differs from Habermas and Licona's approach in that less emphasis is placed on the role of scholarly consensus and the title does not convey the notion that the data within it is unquestionably historical.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loving parents. Thank you so much for all your care, support, and love. Thank you also for your many hours editing and offering suggestions for this thesis. Thank you most of all for introducing me to the love and grace of Jesus Christ and for modeling what a Spirit filled life looks like. I love you both very much.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: THE EMPTY TOMB AND HISTORICAL BEDROCK

Introduction

Was the tomb of Jesus found empty? This controversial question has been the subject of significant debate among historians, theologians, and philosophers for many years.[1] All four canonical Gospels claim that after Jesus was crucified, on the first day of the week, women followers of Jesus went to his tomb where they discovered it empty (cfMark 16:1–6; Matt 28:1–6; Luke 24:1–3; John 20:1–2). In all accounts, the women were told by a figure they met at the tomb that Jesus had risen from the dead.[2] Despite the claim of the Gospels that the tomb was empty, it remains a disputed component of the resurrection debate that is ongoing between scholars today. Wright, in his monumental study of the resurrection, claims that "The two things which must be regarded as historically secure when we talk about the first Easter are the emptiness of the tomb and the meetings with the risen Jesus."[3] Contrary to Wright's assertion are the words of Funk and the Jesus Seminar, who argue that "The empty tomb was an invention of Mark or some other Christian storyteller before him."[4] These statements stand in open contradiction to each other. Who is correct? Is there anyway to possibly find out?

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[1] See the bibliography for a list of sources from a wide range of scholars who hold differing opinions on the empty tomb.

[2] There are conflicting reports in the Gospels about how many women went to the tomb and the number of angels/men that spoke to them. For an analysis of the relevant passages and the discrepancies in each Gospel, see Wright, *Resurrection*, 616–82.

[3] Wright, *Resurrection*, 686.

[4] Funk et al., *Acts*, 467. See also the words of Lüdemann, who states that the empty tomb "*Has no historical value*" (*What Really Happened*, 55, emphasis original).

Historical Bedrock

There is currently a vast spectrum of opinions and hypotheses surrounding the validity of the early Christian claim that the tomb of Jesus was empty and that he rose from the dead. Because of this, a recent approach by Habermas and Licona sets out to collect "facts" about the Easter events[5] that are so strongly evidenced that they are "virtually indisputable" among biblical scholars.[6] This approach is called "historical bedrock"[7] and the collected information is then used as a starting point in building a hypothesis about what happened to Jesus after the crucifixion.[8] As Licona explains:

> These facts are referred to as "historical bedrock" since any legitimate hypothesis should be built on it. . . . Historical bedrock includes those facts that meet two criteria. First, they are so strongly evidenced that the historian can fairly regard them as historical facts. Second, the majority of contemporary scholars regard them as historical facts.[9]

In the past, Habermas and Licona have developed various lists of "facts" pertaining to the death and resurrection of Jesus. The most recent list appears in Licona's *Resurrection*,

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[5] The words "Easter events" are being used to denote the period between when Jesus was crucified and as the Gospels claim, resurrected. No presuppositions are attached to the phrase that either support or deny the validity of the events.

[6] The purpose of this synopsis on historical bedrock is simply to explain Habermas and Licona's approach. Much of the language they use, such as "facts" and "indisputable," will either be avoided in this thesis or put in quotation marks. Words such as "information" "evidence" and "data" are typically used as replacements. This is due to the difficulty in reaching such a level of confidence regarding historical knowledge. See chapter 2 for more detail.

[7] "Historical bedrock" is Licona's phrase. Habermas calls this method the "Minimal facts approach" (*Risen Jesus*, 26; cf. Habermas and Licona, *Case for the Resurrection*, 44). For consistency, this thesis will use "historical bedrock" when referring to either Habermas or Licona's work. The two phrases carry an identical meaning.

[8] Habermas is the pioneer of this approach, but it has been adapted by Licona. The two have published widely on the resurrection, both collectively and separately. As the main proponents of this method, Habermas and Licona will be frequently referenced in this thesis. Funk, *Honest to Jesus*; and Sanders, *Jesus* have also used similar approaches.

[9] Licona, *Resurrection*, 56. Licona also acknowledges, "Accordingly, appeals to the historical bedrock should not be viewed as an argument that asserts that *x* is a historical fact *because* the majority of historians believe it is; rather, the argument is that the supporting data are so good that they have convinced the majority of historians to believe that *x* is a historical fact (57, n. 107, emphasis original). Over time, the list cited in the historical bedrock approach has shrunken from twelve, to four, to three (see Habermas and Moreland, *Beyond Death*, 115).

where he provides three: (1) Jesus died by crucifixion; (2) Shortly after Jesus's death, the disciples had experiences which they interpreted as meaning that Jesus had been resurrected and had appeared to them; (3) Within a few years of Jesus's death, Paul became a follower of Jesus after having an experience where he believed the risen Jesus appeared to him.[10] Habermas and Licona claim that the most likely hypothesis to explain this information is that Jesus rose from the dead.[11]

A significant factor in the resurrection debate that is missing from this list is the empty tomb. Habermas originally included it, but with an asterisk, claiming, "The empty tomb is not as widely accepted as the other facts in this list."[12] Most recently, the empty tomb is being called a "Second-order fact." This is because the percentage of scholars who accept it as historical do not comprise a sizable majority.[13] This conclusion is derived from a survey done by Habermas of thousands of works on the resurrection that have been written in English, French, or German since 1975. This survey—containing works from scholars of various theological persuasions—shows a 75 per cent avowal of the empty tomb. This percentage is not considered by Habermas or Licona enough to grant it as a scholarly consensus. Subsequently, the empty tomb is no longer being used within the historical bedrock approach as a fundamental piece of evidence to be accounted for when studying the resurrection.

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[10] Licona, *Resurrection*, 302–3.

[11] For example, Licona writes, "I am contending that Jesus's resurrection from the dead is the best historical explanation of the relevant historical bedrock" (*Resurrection*, 610). See also Habermas and Licona, *Case for the Resurrection*; and Habermas, *Risen Jesus*.

[12] Habermas, *Risen Jesus*, 35 n. 34.

[13] See Licona, *Resurrection*, 462. The full bibliography of Habermas's research has never been made available, but a summary can be found in his articles "Resurrection Research," 135–53; and "Mapping," 78–92.

Terminology

Throughout this thesis, terms such as "foundation," "starting point," "data," "information," and "evidence" are frequently used. "Foundation" and "starting point" are synonyms and mean: the bottom layer of information that a hypothesis is built on. "Data," "information," and "evidence" are also synonyms and mean: the material which is being used to form the foundation of a hypothesis. Synonyms are being used to avoid frequent word repetition.

In the following pages, the term "historical bedrock" will only be used to reference Habermas and Licona's research approach. In chapter 6, it is proposed that historical bedrock be amended and called instead "baseline information." This amendment is being proposed for two reasons. First, it does not carry the same connotations of historical bedrock that the data discussed is unquestionably historical. Historical bedrock over emphasizes historical accuracy, when in reality. it is only a hypothesis.[14] Second, as will be discussed. the biggest fault with historical bedrock is the emphasis placed on the role of consensus. The proposed baseline information approach entails arguing why a certain amount of evidence is historically probable and then using this evidence as a starting point to build a hypothesis on. It avoids terminology too closely associated with historical assurance and avoids the issue of how to arrive at a scholarly consensus.

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[14] See Licona, *Resurrection*, 67–94; and Habermas and Licona, *Case for the Resurrection*, 30–3. Habermas and Licona are firm in admitting that they only seek the likelihood of Jesus's resurrection. The implications of their terms, however, makes it sound like the data is a solid fact, when in reality, it is a hypothesis.

Objective

In light of the research approach utilized by Habermas and Licona and resulting from the debate regarding whether Jesus's tomb was found empty, two primary research questions are addressed in this thesis. They are: (1) Is using an approach such as historical bedrock or baseline information an effective way of addressing the resurrection or other debated topics?; (2) Does the case in favour of the empty tomb warrant further consideration as being a piece of baseline information when studying the resurrection? To answer the first primary question, two secondary questions are helpful in the discussion: (1) How important is scholarly consensus when attempting to reach a conclusion regarding a historical matter?; (2) Can a highly attested piece of data outweigh the fact that it does not have scholarly consensus? Answering these secondary questions will play an important role in addressing whether historical bedrock or baseline information are effective ways of studying the resurrection or other debated topics. Once this analysis has been done, an answer regarding the empty tomb's placement within baseline information can be given. This thesis is not meant to challenge the final conclusion of Habermas and Licona's various studies on the resurrection. Instead, it is focused on the approach used to arrive at their conclusion.

By using the empty tomb as a case study, this thesis critically analyzes the historical bedrock approach and makes suggestions for how it can be improved. The question surrounding the empty tomb has been identified as an area of study that deserves further attention in the academic community. Meier, for instance, refrains from discussing the resurrection (and hence the empty tomb) in any great length in his five-volume series on the historical Jesus. As Meier explains, "A treatment of the resurrection

is omitted not because it is denied but simply because the restrictive definition of the historical Jesus I will be using does not allow us to proceed into matters that can be affirmed *only by faith*."[15] Habermas and Licona argue in contrast that reliable information surrounding the Easter events *can* be known through historical methods. Who is correct? Because the historical aspect of this thesis focuses only on the empty tomb and not whether a miracle took place, it is not in opposition to Meier's statement. By studying the empty tomb as an event that needs to be verified through historical means, it differs little from other features of Jesus's life that scholars such as Meier seek to analyze.[16]

The goal of this present work is also to investigate whether there is substantial evidence for the empty tomb to include it within baseline information. This thesis is not arguing for the resurrection of Jesus; nor is it addressing why or why not Jesus's tomb was found empty.[17] If the tomb was found empty, there are still naturalistic causes that could explain it.[18] The argument put forth in this thesis is that the case in favour of the

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[15] Meier, *Roots*, 13, emphasis added. Meier's statement about omitting a discussion on the resurrection reflects the predominant viewpoint seen today in scholarship. In Beilby and Eddy eds., *Historical Jesus*, for example, Price, Crossan, Johnson, Dunn, and Bock engage in debate over the historical life of Jesus. In their allotted page space, the only scholar to make any reference to the resurrection was Bock. Bock agrees with Meier, saying, to study the resurrection "Is to move outside of historical Jesus study" ("Historical Jesus," 278).

[16] See Price, *Christ-Myth*; and Richard Carrier, *Historicity of Jesus* for examples of scholars who question whether Jesus actually existed. Such scholars would surely not accept anything as being a "fact" about Jesus. Having disagreement over the authenticity of a piece of data does not make it false, but especially in regard to ancient history, it is difficult to speak with an assertion that something is undoubtedly true.

[17] Wright notes that the empty tomb is not even used by the Gospel writers as proof of Jesus's resurrection. It is rather a "Puzzle in search of a solution" (*Resurrection*, 628).

[18] See Bostock "Empty Tomb," 201–05; Carnley, *Structure*; and Vermes, *Resurrection.* These scholars acknowledge the empty tomb but deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus. In opposition, Spong argues against the empty tomb, but still acknowledge that some form of spiritual resurrection of Jesus took place (*Resurrection*, 21). For reasons as to why the tomb might have been empty apart from a resurrection, see Stein, "Was the Tomb Really Empty?" 23–9. The most popular theory is that the disciples stole the body.

empty tomb warrants further consideration as being a piece of baseline information, despite it not having unanimous scholarly agreement.

Outline

The topic of this thesis has now been introduced, as well as the primary and secondary questions being addressed. The second chapter focuses on historical reconstruction and whether events from the past can be known. If history is unknowable, then any attempt in determining if the tomb was empty, or of obtaining baseline information, would fail. The third chapter is an explanation of the criteria and method that this thesis will employ to study the evidence for the empty tomb. The fourth chapter is an application of this criteria and method to critically analyze the empty tomb tradition found in the New Testament. The fifth chapter examines an argument against the empty tomb to determine which hypothesis is the strongest when compared to a historical method for studying authenticity. The sixth chapter will analyze the findings and answer the primary and secondary questions listed above. This sixth chapter will also critique the historical bedrock approach and offer suggestions for how it can be improved. A significant focus of this chapter is on the importance of scholarly consensus and how this affects surveys done on ancient history. The seventh chapter concludes the thesis and contains a discussion on the future of resurrection research and the role the empty tomb will play in the debate about what happened to Jesus.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION

Introduction

A common assumption underlying the work of many historical Jesus[1] scholars is that reliable information surrounding the life of Jesus of Nazareth can be adequately uncovered.[2] Whether it is realized or not, much of the work done by such scholars is not as much a part of biblical studies as it is history. The historical bedrock approach, for example, is based on information that is strongly evidenced and thought by many to be historical.[3] For scholars to make such a claim, they must be operating under the belief that history, at least in part, can be verified.[4] In agreement with this belief, Donnelly and Norton argue that historians typically proceed on two assumptions. The first is that "The past has a singular shape and substance of its own, prior to any human attempts to conceptualize or describe it, and that the past is therefore knowable." The second is that "Historians have developed reliable methods for studying and accurately writing about the past."[5] In contrast to this statement are the words of Willitts. When discussing the

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[1] The term "historical Jesus" refers to the Jesus whose life can be reconstructed and discovered through historical research. The "historical Jesus" differs from the "real Jesus" in that historical methods can only reveal a limited amount of what Jesus actually said and did. A complete narrative of Jesus's life, as well as a transcript of his thoughts and words, would give us the "real Jesus." With so much of his actions, and thoughts missing from the New Testament, Meier is correct when he claims, "This quest can reconstruct only fragments of a mosaic, the faint outline of a faded fresco that allows for many interpretations" (*Roots*, 25).

[2] See for example, Sanders, *Jesus*, 1–10; Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, xxxvi–xxxiv; Keener, *Historical Jesus*, xxxii–xxxv; and Wright, *Jesus*, xiii–xiv.

[3] Saying something is "historical" means that the event in question actually happened and that there is supporting evidence to verify it. Nowhere in this thesis is a claim made that something is unquestionably historical. As will be discussed below, using a probability scale is a more preferable option.

[4] It is surprising how few historical Jesus scholars discuss this assumption. Lüdemann in his book *What Really Happened* and Vermes in *Resurrection*, for example, give no acknowledgment as to why they believe they can historically analyze the resurrection. Licona, to his credit, devotes over 100 pages to the topic of history and how scholars reconstruct past events (*Resurrection*, 29–132).

[5] Donnelly and Norton, *Doing History*, 53.

historical Jesus, he claims, "The fact is our knowledge of Jesus is always mediated to us through sources. It seems to me that probity whispers that the quest for 'what actually happened' is not possible, and we should be more attentive to its voice."[6] If Willitts is correct and if the quest of uncovering Jesus's words and actions is not possible, then answering the primary and secondary questions from chapter 1 are not feasible. Before addressing these questions, it is necessary to discuss the discipline of history and whether historians can have reliable knowledge of ancient events. By using the term "history," I agree with Lucey, who defines history as being "The science that searches out, investigates and represents the socially significant activities of [people] in their casual relations as conditioned in time and place."[7] This chapter argues that although history cannot be known with absolute certainty, if various conditions are met, historians can have reasonable belief about what happened in the past.

Historical Truth?

Historians disagree about whether events from history can be adequately reconstructed; however, there is a consensus that absolute certainty is unattainable.[8] As Heath writes, "When seeking to reconstruct the past a historian has only the evidence to interpret, and this evidence can never be incontrovertible."[9] Historians prefer to speak in terms of probability. New discoveries in disciplines such as archeology make it so that historians

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[6] Willitts, "Presuppositions," 105.

[7] Lucey, *History*, 13.

[8] As Munslow writes, "All historians admit that it is never possible to prove the truth of any historical description beyond all possibility" (*New History*, 12).

[9] Heath, *Doing Church History*, 54. This does not mean that historical reconstruction should not be attempted, but rather, that its limitations should be noted.

cannot claim with complete confidence that something is true. A theory is accepted now might be rejected in the future due to the discovery of new evidence.

Regarding the empty tomb, evidence that is yet to be discovered could significantly change the tide of the debate.[10] Because of this, any claim that is made regarding the tomb or the historical Jesus needs to be open to revision pending new archeological discoveries, or insights from textual analysis. When studying the historical Jesus, numerous scholars such as Dunn, Meier, and Wright use scales of probability to weigh the authenticity of certain actions or events relating to the life of Jesus.[11] These scholars have correctly realized that historical certainty is not possible to attain. This thesis will follow in a similar manner. When the empty tomb and its inclusion within baseline information is being discussed, terms such as "not probable," "probable," "fairly probable," and "highly probable" will be used.

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[10] In *Jesus Family Tomb*, Jacobovici and Pellegrino claim to have discovered the tomb of Jesus. If Jacobovici and Pellegrino are correct, the debate surrounding the empty tomb would be solved. The Talpiot Tomb was a tomb found near Jerusalem in 1980 and is thought to contain the bones of roughly thirty-five individuals. Written on two of the ossuaries found in the tomb are the names יהודה בר ישוע (Judah son of Jesus) and ישוע בר יהוסף (Jesus son of Joseph). On the other ossuaries, possible mention is made of a Matthew, two possibly say Mary, and another Joseph. Jacobovici and Pellegrino argue that Jesus married Mary Magdalene, had a child with her named Judah, and that this is their tomb. Chapter 5 is an examination of whether or not Jesus was buried, however, Jacobovici and Pellegrino's argument will not be analysed. Since the discovery of the Talpiot Tomb, the dominating viewpoint is that the tomb does not contain the bones of Jesus. For more detail, see Charlesworth ed., *The Tomb of Jesus*; Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty*; and Magness, "Tomb of Jesus, [2007]." As Magness concludes, the claim that Jesus's tomb has been discovered is "Inconsistent with all of the available information. . . . It is a sensationalistic claim without any scientific basis or support" ("Tomb of Jesus," [2007]).

[11] See Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 103; Meier, *Roots*, 33; and Wright, *Resurrection*, 687, n. 3.

Arguments to the Best Explanation

There are several different methods used by historians when attempting to make a case for what happened in the past; these are called "historical methods." Historical methods are used to "Explore either what happened at a particular time and place or what the characteristics of a phenomenon were like at a particular time and place."[12] As outlined by McCullagh, there are typically three different kinds of historical methods used by scholars. The first is an argument to the best explanation. This is where historians gather data and weigh varying hypotheses to determine which one is strongest and most likely.[13] The second is an argument from statistical inference. With this method historians attempt to use data to calculate the probability of a particular event of theory.[14] The third method is an argument from criteria and analogy. In this method historians look to see where their data fits in with the assertions and truth convictions they have about the world. This is then used to determine what the most likely description of a past event is.[15]

Arguments to the best explanation is the method which will be used in subsequent chapters and is the most effective method to weigh the probability of whether the tomb was empty. By using arguments to the best explanation, it is possible to examine the evidence for and against the empty tomb, weigh the strengths and weaknesses of

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[12] Lange, *Comparative Historical Methods*, 12.

[13] McCullagh, *Justifying*, 15–44. Arguments to the best explanation are the most frequently used among historians. Although an overgeneralization, Murphey claims, "All historical inquiry arises from the attempt to provide explanations of some present phenomena." (*Our Knowledge*, 14).

[14] McCullagh, *Justifying*, 45–73. Recently, philosopher Swineburne attempted to calculate a probability that Jesus rose from the dead. Using a form of statistical inference known as Bayes Theorem, Swineburne determined that there is a 97% chance that Jesus was resurrected (*Resurrection of God*, 214). Licona rightfully refutes Swineburne's usage of statistical inference. Providing God exists, it is impossible to determine the likelihood that God would want to raise Jesus from the dead (*Resurrection*, 114–120).

[15] McCullagh, *Justifying*, 74–90. This is the least used method in studying history. For more information, see Cebik, *Concepts*.

competing hypotheses, and determine which one is the strongest. As Tosh contends, "Formal proof may be beyond" the reach of the historian, so "what matters is the validity of the inferences."[16] It is impossible to know with certainty whether Jesus's tomb was found empty. The best that can be done from a historical perspective is to judge what *possibly* happened based on a critical examination of evidence and an evaluation of various hypotheses.

Historians claim that their descriptions of the past are reasonable by arguing that their theories can be "Rationally inferred from evidence available to them, together with other previously established information about the past."[17] Society today operates under several empirical beliefs that are widely accepted, but ultimately unprovable. These include: The belief that the world exists, that perceptions under the proper conditions provide an accurate representation of reality, that reality is largely structured around the concepts with which we describe it, and that the methods of inference we use are an accurate means of uncovering new truths about reality.[18] If these empirical assumptions are correct, then they apply to what happened in history as well. Rationality and common sense can thus be paired with historical methods to research the past. Investigators and courts of law frequently rely on empirical, circumstantial, and eyewitness evidence to piece together scenarios. Provided there is sufficient evidence to study, historians can do likewise and arrive at reasonable conclusions about the past.

Despite the methods used by historians, there is always a human element to studying history. Even if it is theoretically possible for the past to be known, it is up to

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[16] Tosh, *Pursuit of History*, 154.
[17] McCullagh, *Logic*, 43. See also Munslow, *New History*, 8.
[18] For more detail, see McCullagh, *Justifying*.

the historian to truthfully examine the evidence and arrive at an impartial conclusion. This leads to an important question: Can historians be objective in their work?

Objectivity

It is undeniable that in the field of historical Jesus research, the presuppositions and biases of scholars plays a large part in the outcome of their work. As Schweitzer famously lamented, "There is no historical task which so reveals a man's true self as the writing of a Life of Jesus."[19] Objectivity is a major discussion point which many historians address in their work.[20] Although complete objectivity is not attainable, it is still possible to achieve a reasonable measure of it. As McCullagh maintains, historians can still be "True, fair and moderately comprehensive."[21] This is done through employing historical methods, such as what were listed above, and through the use of rigorous criteria.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, when examining the empty tomb, this thesis will follow a methodology developed by McCullagh to compare competing hypotheses when attempting to find an argument to the best explanation. To critically analyze primary sources for evidence of the empty tomb, historical Jesus criteria will be used. Having a clear method and criteria to study the data will not remove all

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[19] Schweitzer, *Quest*, 4. See also Kofoed, *Text and History*, 110.

[20] See, for example, Bevir "Objectivity," 328–44; Daniels, *Studying History*, 89–93; Heath, *Doing Church History*, 71–5; McCullagh, *Logic*, 31–34; Munslow, *New History*, 80–98.

[21] McCullagh, *Logic*, 3. See also McCullagh, "Bias," 56.

subjectivity, but it will help limit it.[22] It is only after this is completed that a discussion surrounding the empty tomb's placement within baseline information can be done.

Conclusion

This chapter has been an examination of history; what it is, whether it can be known, the methods historians use, and whether objectivity is possible. On the one hand, the objective of this thesis is historical. It is seeking to examine evidence for and against the empty tomb and weigh the arguments for historical plausibility. On the other hand, however, it is not a true historical analysis because it does not answer the "why" question surrounding the empty tomb. As Cantor and Schneider claim, "The business of an historian is to make judgements and to establish causal relationships between facts . . . [historians] must place them in some significant pattern and order and not simply be a reporter."[23] Providing a reason as to why the tomb was found empty is outside of the scope of this thesis. The empty tomb is simply being used as a case study in order to propose an amendment to the historical bedrock approach.

The next chapter is a discussion of the research method and criteria that will be used to analyze the empty tomb. Once these have been explained and the empty tomb examined, a discussion will take place surrounding whether it should be included as a piece of baseline information.

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[22] At the outset of his work, Licona admits his biases and the worldview he follows and believes (*Resurrection*, 130–32).

[23] Cantor and Schneider, *How to Study History*, 19.

CHAPTER 3: CRITERIA AND CONDITIONS

Introduction

In the last chapter it was noted how absolute objectivity is not possible to achieve when studying history. This is especially true in biblical studies where personal bias, presuppositions, and theological beliefs can play a large role in determining the outcome of one's research.[1] This does not imply that historical Jesus research should not continue; it is, however, a reminder to be cognizant of the lack of objectivity. To ensure that historians are honest in their work and do not hide or neglect evidence to induce an outcome more preferable to them, it is essential to employ a clearly outlined criteria. In addition, an evaluation method is needed to weigh evidence and determine the strength of a hypothesis. In this thesis, both historical Jesus criteria and an evaluation method developed by McCullagh are employed. What follows in this chapter is an explanation of the sources used to study the empty tomb, historical Jesus criteria, and McCullagh's evaluation method. This discussion is essential to the overall work because it identifies and explains the tools that will be used in this historical investigation.

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[1] A question that needs to be asked is: How will we know if/when we find the real historical Jesus? Crossan candidly begins his study on the life of Jesus by writing, "*Historical Jesus research* is becoming something of a scholarly bad joke" (*Historical Jesus*, xxvii, emphasis original). Crossan is referring to the numerous portraits of Jesus created by scholars all claiming to have uncovered who the historical Jesus was. To a certain extent, Crossan is right. Recently, numerous works on Jesus have appeared that offer radically different viewpoints on the Jew from Nazareth. Sanders, *Jesus*; Wright, *Jesus*, and Dunn, *Jesus*, have created a portrait of Jesus being an eschatological prophet. Mack, *Myth*; and Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, have written about Jesus being a cynic. Fiorenza, *Jesus*; and Witherington, *Jesus Quest*, have portrayed Jesus as a sage, social reformer, and wisdom prophet. Borg, *Contemporary Scholarship*, paints Jesus as a charismatic healer and holy man. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 5 vols, writes about the Nazarene being a marginal Jew. These various portraits should not *a priori* mean that historical Jesus research is futile. The limitations of what historical research can uncover needs to be recognized, but Jesus was a historical figure and can be studied in a manner similar to Alexander the Great or Caesar Augustus.

Criteria and evaluation are two separate, but equally important aspects of historical research. This thesis is not meant to critique the historical Jesus criteria, or McCullagh's evaluation method; further revision of both may be in order at sometime in the future. Because the ultimate goal is to answer the primary and secondary questions listed in chapter 1, this present work is focused on using the criteria and evaluation method as they are to determine what can be said about the empty tomb.

Terminology

"Criteria" in historical Jesus research refers to a list of rules, regulations, and parameters for how to study sources and collect information that is part of the authentic Jesus tradition.[2] Stating that a teaching or action of Jesus is "authentic" or part of the "Jesus tradition" infers that it dates back to the earliest available stories regarding the Nazarene that were collected and passed down.[3] As Porter explains, "The criteria of authenticity (historical Jesus criteria) have established themselves within New Testament studies as the most widely used means by which material in the Gospels—whether concerning the deeds or words of Jesus—are assessed as authentic. By authentic is meant material that is thought to have originated with Jesus, or comes as close as one can legitimately

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[2] Note the use of "Jesus tradition" in the singular. As will be shown in chapter 4, there were multiple stories about the empty tomb; however, all the available accounts agree on a solidified core. This solidified core is a "Jesus tradition." Stories can be told in different ways with different details and emphases (i.e., "traditions"), but when they all agree on the central point they are part of one tradition.

[3] This does not mean the data is historically accurate. It means, rather, that it is the oldest known information about Jesus (hence the term "authentic") and was not an invention of the Gospel writers or the early church ("inauthentic material"). This entire notion of "authentic" versus "inauthentic" material comes from the presuppositions of historical criticism (discussed below). Although disciplines such as archaeology are becoming more important in the study of early Christianity, when Jesus's life events are scrutinized for historical credibility, the Gospels are the primary mine in which to dig for data (see Charlesworth, "Jesus Research," 439–66).

determine using the means at our critical disposal."[4] This "material" Porter speaks of predates the writing of the canonical Gospels and hence could not have been an invention of the Gospel writers.

"Evaluation method" refers to a way to then assess, weigh, and judge the data to determine the probability of it being historical. Using criteria and an evaluation method are two important steps for making a historical reconstruction as accurate and as honest as possible. Whereas employing criteria asks: How can we know what is part of the authentic Jesus tradition? Did the early church or Gospel writers invent the stories that we find in the New Testament? Employing an evaluation method asks: What is the best theory to explain the available data? Is this theory historically plausible?

The Quest for the Historical Jesus

The search for the historical Jesus first developed in the eighteenth century during the Enlightenment. Scholars devoted to reason and rationale began questioning the Bible's historicity and whether it could be trusted as a reliable source. The periods in which scholars wrote on the historical life of Jesus are divided into three Quests.[5] The First Quest (1778–1906), began with Reimarus and ended with Schweitzer's influential work *Quest.*[6] What followed Schweitzer (1906–1953) is known as the "No Quest" period, where hopes of using historical research methods to study Jesus faltered.[7] In 1953,

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[4] Porter, "Criteria," 695. See also Holmén, "Authenticity Criteria," 43–54.

[5] For a brief overview of the quests, see Beilby and Eddy, "Quest," 9–54.

[6] Unlike those who came before him, Schweitzer was skeptical about the possibility of reconstructing the life of Jesus. He maintained that the available sources leave a "yawning gap" that is near impossible to be filled in (*Quest*, 7).

[7] For more information, see Weaver, *Historical Jesus*.

Kasemann delivered a lecture that sparked a renewed search for the historical Jesus and the period between 1953–1988 became known as the "Second Quest." In 1988, Wright coined the term "Third Quest" to identify a new state of scholarship that continues to actively search for an understanding of what Jesus said and did during his life.[8]

Those searching for the historical Jesus have frequently utilized a historical-critical method to isolate the "Jesus of history" from the "Christ of faith."[9] Throughout the twentieth century, biblical scholarship witnessed fluctuating degrees of confidence in how much information about the Nazarene could be known. In recent decades, a renewed optimism has arisen with the belief that a reasonably accurate portrait of Jesus can be pieced together.

Sources

The sources available to study the empty tomb are generally reduced to the New Testament. In addition, a few extra-canonical sources are also useful in providing contextual and background information to first-century Palestine.

Mention of Jesus appears in two passages in Josephus (*Ant.* 18:63–4; 20:200). The most important of these is the *Testimonium Flavianum* (18:63–4), a highly debated

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[8] See Neill and Wright, *Interpretation*, 379–403. Not every scholar agrees with the parameters and distinctions made by using such terminology. For example, see Porter, *Criteria*. A distinguishing mark of the Third Quest has been the placement of Jesus firmly within his first-century Jewish context. To place him within this context, sources such as the New Testament, Hebrew Bible, Dead Sea Scrolls, Nag Hammadi Scrolls, Apocryphal Gospels, and ancient historians like Josephus and Tacitus are used.

[9] See Bock, *Studying*, 153–62. Historical criticism is a research method that studies the Bible as an ordinary, ancient document. Historical criticism typically has three dominant presuppositions. The first is that miracles do not occur. The second is that the Bible is a product of human hands and is not inspired in any way. The third is that perceived errors and discrepancies in the text are an indication of human authorship and that the biblical books are not complimentary in their theology.

passage that most scholars deem inauthentic. The only other passage in Josephus (20:200), gives a brief mention of James, "The brother of Jesus, who was called Christ."[10] Neither passage adds much detail regarding the search for the empty tomb. Josephus's greatest value for this thesis is his description of crucifixion practices and for evidence of whether crucified victims could be buried.

Likewise, historians Tacitus and Suetonius make only passing reference to Jesus while discussing events in the Roman Empire (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15:44; Suetonius, *Claud.* 25:4). As with Josephus, Tacitus and Suetonius's value are in their discussion of crucifixion practices and what happened to a body afterwards.

The Greek philosopher Celsus is a useful source for studying the empty tomb. Celsus wrote a counter-response to Christianity in the second century and sought to disprove the resurrection of Jesus. Celsus's work is important for the next chapter.

Jewish sources are of limited use when studying the emptiness of the tomb. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls sparked intrigue that Jesus was known to the Qumran community.[11] Currently, however, the overwhelming view of scholars is that the Dead Sea Scrolls make no mention of the Nazarene or the New Testament.[12] The most useful Jewish sources to study Jesus's tomb are Trypho and the Mishnah. Trypho's rejection of

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[10] All Josephus translations by Whiston, ed., *Josephus*. Even if the *Testimonium Flavianum* is authentic, it adds few details to the validity of the empty tomb. For more information on the value Josephus brings to historical Jesus studies, see Mason ed., *Josephus*, 9 vols.

[11] The scroll 7Q5 has received the most attention, with some arguing that it belongs to Mark 6:52–4. 7Q5 is a Greek scroll, with only ten letters legible. The only word that can be clearly read is καί (and). A more likely solution is that it is a copy of *1 Enoch*, of which 12 copies were found at Qumran. For more insight, see VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning*, 311–320; and O'Callaghan, "New Testament Papyri," 1–14.

[12] Elledge summarizes the prevailing view of scholars by stating that the only value the Scrolls have for New Testament study is "Found in the ways they have expanded our understanding of the diverse context of religious thought and practices that existed within first-century Judaism" ("Dead Sea Scrolls," 237).

the resurrection is the earliest extra-canonical source that is in opposition to the resurrection (early to mid second-century). The Mishnah is important for providing information regarding Jewish burial practices and giving contextual information useful to the empty tomb discussion.

When studying the empty tomb in the next chapter, outside of Trypho and Celsus, the New Testament will be the primary source analyzed. As Meier concludes, "We are left alone—some would say forlorn—with the Four Gospels, plus scattering tidbits."[13] The information from extra-canonical writers is helpful primarily in ascertaining knowledge about crucifixion and ancient burial practises.[14]

Historical Jesus Criteria

The stories of Jesus were passed down orally for a period of several decades before the written Gospels appeared.[15] When compiling the Gospels, the evangelists employed a certain amount of literary freedom in writing their accounts of Jesus.[16] This was done to tailor one's particular writing to the needs of their Christian community in a specific

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[13] Meier, *Roots*, 140. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is also a useful source which will be used in chapter 4.

[14] For more information about sources, see Kloppenborg, "Sources," 241–90.

[15] Meier provides a helpful list of stages to consider when discussing the composition of the Gospels. As he explains, historical Jesus criteria is used to help "Distinguish what comes from Jesus (Stage I, roughly A.D. 28–30) from what was created by the oral tradition of the early church (Stage II, roughly A.D. 30–70) and what was produced by the editorial work (redaction) of the evangelists (Stage III, roughly A.D. 70–100)" (*Roots*, 167). There is an ongoing debate about the dating, arrangement, and literary relationship between the Gospels; however, for the sake of simplicity, Meier's distinction is a helpful frame of reference. Mark is being assumed as the earliest Gospel, written around 70 CE. Matthew and Luke–Acts, are being assumed as written between 80–90 CE; and John, at approximately 95 CE. It is also being assumed that Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John were the authors of the Gospels bearing their names. Gospel authorship does not impact the findings of this thesis.

[16] See Licona, *Why are there Differences?*, for more detail about the structure of the Gospels and information as to why they differ in certain respects.

geographical and socio-political setting, in addition to their own literary style. Due to the time span between the events and the written records, the theological bias of the Gospel writers towards Jesus being the Messiah, and the discrepancies between the Gospels, historical criticism considers the notion that the Gospels might not truthfully record Jesus's words and actions. The use of historical Jesus criteria is an attempt to overcome this possibility and to try and isolate sayings and actions from the Nazarene that are part of the earliest tradition.

What follows is an explanation of the criteria and how they will be used in this present work to study the empty tomb. Since this thesis is focused on the empty tomb, the criteria listed are the most significant ones for studying actions and events, as opposed to sayings.[17] The historical Jesus criteria listed are common in the field of Jesus research. This is not to say that no improvements are needed or that they are infallible, but rather, until new criteria are developed and tested, they are the best available.

Criterion of Multiple Attestation

The criterion of multiple attestation refers to saying or deeds of Jesus that appear in more than one "Independent literary source (e.g., Mark, Q, Paul, John) and/or in more than one literary form or genre (e.g., parable, dispute story, miracle story, prophecy, aphorism)."[18]

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[17] For more detail on the many criteria, see Meier, *Roots*, 167–95. Meier lists ten: Embarrassment, discontinuity, multiple attestation, coherence, rejection and execution, traces of Aramaic, Palestinian environment, vividness of narration, tendencies of the developing synoptic tradition, and historical presumption. Although most scholars have largely used these ten, recently, some have attempted to introduce new ones. Most noteworthy is Porter's use of the Greek language to authenticate certain sayings of Jesus (see Porter, *Criteria*).

[18] Meier, *Roots*, 174.

The logic of this criterion is that a particular evangelist—such as Mark—could not have invented a story if it also appears in independent sources such as John or Paul. If multiple authors include the same story about Jesus and if these stories do not appear to be copied from another Gospel, then this account must predate the writing of the Gospels and be part of an earlier Jesus tradition. An example of multiple attestation are the sayings of Jesus about the kingdom of God/heaven which appear in all four canonical Gospels.[19] Jesus also teaches about the kingdom of God/heaven, while speaking in parables, prayers, the beatitudes, and miracle stories.[20]

Criterion of Embarrassment

The criterion of embarrassment "Focuses on actions or sayings of Jesus that would have embarrassed or created difficulty for the early church." The church "Would hardly have gone out of its way to create material that only embarrassed its creator or weakened its position in arguments with opposition."[21] It is reasoned that information from the Gospels which might weaken the reader's opinion of a character, such as Jesus or the disciples, is likely part of the authentic tradition that the evangelists were "loath to omit."[22] An example of potential embarrassment is found in Mark 8:22–25, where Jesus prayed twice

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[19] "The kingdom of God" (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ) appears in Matt 21:31, 43; Mark 1:15; 4:11, 26, 30; 9:1, 47; 10:14, 15, 17; 23–25; 12:34; 14:25; 15:43; Luke 6:20; 7:28; 8:1, 10; 9:2, 11, 27, 60, 62; 10:9, 11; 11:20; 13:18, 20, 28–29; 14:15; 16:16; 17:20–21; 18:16–18, 24–25, 29; 19:11; 21:31; 22:16, 18; 23:51; John 3:3; 5. Matthew's similar statement of "The kingdom of Heaven" (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν) appears in 3:2; 4:17; 5:3, 10, 19–20; 7:21; 8:11; 10:7; 11:11-12; 13:11, 24, 31, 33, 44–45, 47, 52; 16:19; 18:1; 3–4, 23; 19:12, 14, 23; 20:1; 22:2; 23:13; 25:1.

[20] McArthur is so persuaded by this criterion's effectiveness that he calls it "The most objective" out of all the others ("Survey," 48). Likewise, see Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 257.

[21] Meier, *Roots*, 168. See also Meier, "Criteria," 123–44; and "Basic Methodology," 291–332.

[22] Calvert, "An Examination" 219.

for a blind man to be healed. This story is only told in Mark and might have been excluded from the other Synoptics because the Gospel writers were reluctant to include an account where Jesus did not heal someone immediately.[23]

Criterion of Discontinuity

The criterion of discontinuity (also called double dissimilarity or originality) centres around the words or actions of Jesus that would have been seen as contrary to Jewish or Christian doctrine during the first-century.[24] The idea is that if the church was looking to invent a story about Jesus, they would not attribute to him words or actions that were contrary to what they taught. Similarly, Jesus was a Jew; it is expected that he would have spoken and behaved like one. If reported words or actions of Jesus are contrary to traditional Jewish beliefs, they are likely to be apart of the authentic Jesus tradition. As possible examples, Meier cites Jesus's prohibition of oaths (cf. Matt 5:34, 37; James 5:12), his rejection of the disciples voluntarily fasting (cf. Mark 2:18–22), and his hatred for divorce (cf. Mark 10:12; Luke 16:18).[25]

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[23] See Webb, "Historical Enterprise," 67. Although a useful criterion, it is rather difficult to determine what was actually embarrassing for the early church and Gospel writers.

[24] See Meier, *Roots*, 171; and Mealand, "Dissimilarity Test," 41–50.

[25] Meier, *Roots*, 172. Although this criterion has the potential to be promising, it is also troublesome. Why should we expect a first-century Jew's teaching to not reflect the customs and beliefs of the time? Similarly, the early church desired their doctrine to be in accordance with Jesus's. Only looking for anomalies in the words and actions of Jesus may be helpful in confirming small amounts of data, but like the criterion of multiple attestation, it cannot be used negatively. See Holmén, "Doubts," 47–80; and Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*.

Criterion of Palestinian Environment

The criterion of Palestinian environment seeks to identify information that is congruent with what is known to be true about Palestine in antiquity. If actions or words of Jesus "Reflect concrete customs, beliefs, judicial procedures, commercial and agricultural practices, or social and political conditions" then they are potentially authentic.[26] While most criteria cannot be used negatively, the criterion of Palestinian environment can be. If something attributed to Jesus differs substantially from what scholars know happened during his era, it can be deemed a later addition.[27]

Summary of Criteria

The criteria discussed are the most important ones for determining what actions and events can be traced back to the earliest traditions about Jesus.[28] If something written about Jesus is embarrassing, multiply attested, different from what Judaism or the early church taught, or similar to what is known about first-century Palestine, there is a higher likelihood of that tradition being authentic. It does not necessarily mean that Jesus actually said or did these things, but rather, that the tradition constitutes the earliest known information being circulated about him. Without the use of cameras or recording devices, these criteria help take the modern historian back as close to the original events as possible.

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[26] Meier, *Roots*, 180.

[27] This criterion is used in chapter 5 instead of chapter 4.

[28] See Evans, *Life of Jesus*, 127–46, for a bibliography of sources about the criteria of authenticity.

As noted above, it is important to avoid applying historical Jesus criteria but fail to evaluate the findings. Criteria can be used to isolate the earliest stories about Jesus, however, more needs to be done to validate whether they are historically plausible. This is a crucial second step that cannot be ignored. The evaluation method being used in the following chapters is McCullagh's six conditions for establishing authenticity. What follows is a description of the conditions and how they will be used.

McCullagh's Conditions

McCullagh is a philosopher of history who has written extensively on the task of historical reconstruction and the method in which historians seek to prove their hypotheses.[29] When determining the validity of a hypothesis, McCullagh has developed six conditions for evaluating its historical authenticity.[30] McCullagh's six conditions are designed to assist in piecing together past events when making an argument to the best explanation. They provide a useful tool for comparing hypotheses regarding whether Jesus's tomb was empty.

In order to be considered plausible, a hypothesis must fit the following conditions: (1) It must have great explanatory scope; (2) It must have great explanatory power; (3) It must be more plausible than other hypotheses; (4) It must be less *ad hoc* than any other

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[29] See McCullagh, "Historical Explanation," 10–16; "Truth," 97–117; "Postmodernism," 8–10; "Bias," 39–66; *Logic*; *Truth*; and *Justifying*. It should be noted that McCullagh is a historian, not a biblical scholar. His evaluation method is being use because it does not make a favourable outcome for the empty tomb any more or less likely.

[30] Donnelly and Norton claim that McCullagh "Is the leading 'realist' or reconstructionist philosopher of history" (*Doing History*, 55). Windschuttle says that McCullagh's work is a "*Tour de force*" and the "Best defense of history by any philosopher and a major contribution to the field" ("Critique," 278). Munslow, furthermore states that he is the "Leading realist philosopher of history" (*New History*, 65).

hypothesis; (5) It must be disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs; (6) It must exceed other incompatible theories and hypotheses, while meeting conditions 1 through 5.[31]

Explanatory Scope

Explanatory scope is fixated on the amount of information that can be accounted for by a hypothesis. To have explanatory scope, a hypothesis must "Imply a greater variety of observation statements" than competing theories.[32] What McCullagh means is that the theory that includes the greatest quantity of evidence has the best explanatory scope. It is also important for a theory with strong explanatory scope to appeal to a wide diversity of evidence (i.e., textual, archaeological, and socio-political). For example, in historical Jesus research, this entails utilizing all pertinent sources and giving adequate attention to each one. If textual evidence is used, but archaeological findings are ignored, the diversity and quantity of the evidence being used is undoubtably going to suffer.

Explanatory Power

Whereas explanatory scope is focused on the quantity of data, explanatory power is focused on the quality. Having explanatory power means that a hypothesis must be more "Probable than any other."[33] Does a hypothesis offer a plausible, or even probable explanation of the available data? If so, it has explanatory power. A hypothesis where

[31] For an example of how McCullagh uses these conditions to evaluate a historical event, see *Justifying*, 21–29.

[32] McCullagh, *Justifying*, 19, 23.

[33] McCullagh, *Justifying*, 19, 23.

historians are forced to bend information or fill in blanks with their imagination does not have adequate explanatory power.[34] An example of poor explanatory scope would be using second century texts like the *Gospel of Thomas* to try and fill in the gaps of Jesus's childhood. Because of the *Gospel of Thomas's* late dating, the quality of this source is poor. As such, any hypothesis using this text would be limited in its historical probability.

Plausibility

Being more plausible than competing hypotheses means that a theory must "Be implied to some degree by a greater variety of accepted truths than any other, and be implied more strongly than any other; and its probable negation must be implied by fewer beliefs, and implied less strongly than any other."[35] This means that a hypothesis must be plausible based on known information and additionally, that it cannot be easily disproved on the basis of known information. For example, in historical Jesus research, a plausible theory might be that when in Jerusalem, Jesus spent time at the temple. Based on the information in the Gospels and the centrality of the temple for Jewish worship, it is very plausible that Jesus would have gone to the temple.

Ad Hoc

Being less *ad hoc* than competing hypotheses means that a theory "Must include fewer new suppositions about the past which are not already implied to some extent by existing

[34] See Wright, *New Testament*, 99–100; and Licona, *Resurrection*, 109–110.
[35] McCullagh, *Justifying*, 19, 23–4.

beliefs."[36] An *ad hoc* theory is undesirable because it moves beyond the scope of available evidence and into the realm of speculation and imagination. An *ad hoc* theory can also include information that is unquestionably wrong. An *ad hoc* theory might be that Jesus preached the kingdom of heaven/God at the Parthenon in Rome. The Parthenon is in Athens, not Rome. This theory is *ad hoc* because the claim being made cannot possibly be correct.

Disconfirmed by Fewer Accepted Beliefs

A strong hypothesis must also be disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs than competing theories. By this, "It must imply fewer observation statements and other statements which are believed to be false."[37] A strong theory must not rely on information about the past which is not known, or highly theoretical. If it does, this theory is relying on skeptical beliefs and it is therefore impossible to know whether they are historical. Like the example for an *ad hoc* hypothesis, a disconfirmed theory might be something that builds on the hypothesis that Jesus preached in Rome. Leaving aside the issue about the Parthenon, there are no reports of Jesus being in Rome or travelling anywhere in Europe; there is also no way to prove whether this happened. The foundation for this theory is weak, therefore everything derived from this theory is weak as well.

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[36] McCullagh, *Justifying*, 19, 24.
[37] McCullagh, *Justifying*, 19, 24–5.

Strongest Hypothesis

McCullagh finishes his list by explaining that a strong hypothesis must exceed all competing theories by a large margin so that "There is little chance of an incompatible hypothesis, after further investigation, soon exceeding it in these respects."[38] After examining all potential solutions, the best hypothesis is naturally the strongest one. The hypothesis that outweighs all others based on the conditions above is more likely to be historical.[39]

Utilization of Criteria and Conditions

Neither historical Jesus criteria, nor McCullagh's conditions can be used in isolation from each other. Historical Jesus criteria is essential for examining sources and forming hypotheses. These hypotheses then need to be analyzed to see how historically plausible they are. If a theory composed via historical Jesus research is not rebuffed by the six conditions, or is the strongest hypothesis out of a group, it is potentially historical; or at least, is the best theory that is available at the moment.[40]

It is in assigning weight to each piece of evidence where subjectivity becomes an issue—this is the biggest downfall in both the criteria and conditions. On paper, these criteria and conditions may appear to promote objectivity; however, when evidence is examined and judged, difficulties arise in how to assess it. At this point a historian's

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[38] McCullagh, *Justifying*, 19, 25.

[39] McCullagh notes that he believes plausibility to be the most important criterion, followed by explanatory scope, explanatory power, being less *ad hoc*, and being disconfirmed by fewer beliefs (*Justifying*, 28).

[40] See Donnelly and Norton, *Doing History*, 55.

presuppositions and biases can influence their research. The question for historians is not whether their work has an element of subjectivity to it, but rather, are they aware of it.[41] Nonetheless, for the purpose of this thesis, using the conditions listed in this chapter provides an effective way to evaluate a theory and will be a valuable tool in assessing the historical plausibility of the empty tomb.

Burden of Proof

Brief attention needs to be given to the issue of the burden of proof. The question surrounding burden of proof asks: Is it a critic's role to disprove the historical reliability of an event? Or is it a believer's role to affirm it?[42] Arguments have been presented for both sides. Funk and the Jesus Seminar claim that, "The Gospels are now assumed to be narratives in which the memory of Jesus is embellished by mythical elements that express the church's faith in him. . . . Supposedly historical elements in these narratives must therefore be demonstrated to be so."[43] Contrary to these words is the statement of Kaiser. Similar to the North American judicial system, Kaiser argues that "A text is innocent until proven guilty by known data provided by sources whose truthfulness on those points can be demonstrated."[44]

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[41] Admittedly, this present work comes from the perspective of an Evangelical; one who fully affirms the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus. My reliance on historical method is intended to counter any natural bias I have towards the subject.

[42] See Goetz and Bloomberg, "Burden of Proof," 39–63.

[43] Funk et al., *Five Gospels*, 4–5.

[44] Kaiser, *Old Testament*, 28.

This thesis assumes a middle position, where the burden of proof shifts to anyone making a claim. An argument that is put forward must be backed by evidence and needs to follow a clearly identified criteria and method. Hooker best describes this position by explaining, "It is the duty of every scholar, in considering every saying [or action], to give a reasonable account of all the evidence; for he is not entitled to assume, simply in the absence of contrary evidence, either that a saying [or action] is genuine or that it is not."[45] Hooker is correct in her statement. Nothing about the historical Jesus, and in particular the empty tomb, can simply be assumed. Evidence needs to be provided to support a claim.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a summary of the sources available to study the empty tomb, the historical Jesus criteria, McCullagh's evaluation method, and where the burden of proof lies. Out of the many historical Jesus criteria that have been employed, several have been identified as being the most useful in analyzing the empty tomb. These criteria will be used to trace whether what the primary sources say about the tomb is part of the authentic Jesus tradition. Now that the groundwork for studying the Gospels has been laid, it is possible to proceed to analyzing the empty tomb narratives.

[45] Hooker, "Using the Wrong Tool," 75.

CHAPTER 4: THE EMPTY TOMB TRADITION

Introduction

The historical Jesus criteria and evaluation method for studying the empty tomb have been explained, as well as the manner in which they can now be applied. As previously discussed, historical Jesus criteria is used to isolate authentic Jesus traditions. This criteria by itself should not be used to make a historical judgement, however, to do so, an evaluation method is needed.[1] In this case, McCullagh's six conditions will be used. Through the use of the historical Jesus criteria and sources previously discussed, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the authenticity of the empty tomb tradition. It is argued in this chapter that there is a strong possibility that the empty tomb tradition is authentic.[2]

Gospel Accounts

Observe the empty tomb narratives from the four Gospels in a side-by-side comparison:[3]

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[1] The application of historical Jesus criteria here is similar to Meier's in his series *Marginal Jew*, 5 vols. Although most Jesus scholars use the same criteria, the way they are applied can differ. The usage here falls on the conservative end of the spectrum. This means that the criteria are not being used to make a historical judgement. Instead, they are used conservatively to isolate the authenticity of a tradition.

[2] McCullagh's conditions are employed in the next chapter to compare the empty tomb with a competing theory that Jesus was never buried, or that if he was, the location of his body was unknown.

[3] See Dunn, *Jesus*, 828–29. Underlined words refer to similarities that exist between the four Gospels.

Mark 16:1–8	Matt 28:1–8	Luke 24:1–9, 12	John 20:1–8
When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his	After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great	But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. . . . But Peter got up	Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the

disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.	joy, and ran to tell his disciples.	and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.	linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

The four canonical Gospels differ substantially in telling about Jesus appearing to his followers after the resurrection. The Gospels create what Nolland calls a "tangled pattern" that needs to be sorted through.[4] Assuming Mark originally ended after 16:8, he includes no appearance stories, only an exhortation that Jesus had risen and was travelling to Galilee (16:6–7). Matthew is the only Gospel to include the great commission statement about making disciples of all nations (28:19–20). The episode on the road to Emmaus appears only in Luke (24:13–35). Only John includes Jesus meeting his disciples in a closed room where he appears to Thomas (20:19–31), as well as the reinstatement of Peter (ch. 21).[5]

With these differences in mind, the overall symmetry of the empty tomb narratives is an anomaly. The four passages revolve around a consistent narrative core: Mary Magdalene and other female followers (John only has Mary) go to the tomb during

[4] Nolland, *Luke*, 1180.

[5] For an in-depth commentary on the Passion and resurrection narratives, see Brown, *Death*.

the morning of the first day of the week. She/they find the stone of the tomb rolled away, the tomb empty, and are met by (an) angel(s) who tells her/them that Jesus is not there for he has risen.[6]

The differences in the Gospels are a topic of debate among scholars. In the empty tomb narratives, these differences—although minor—are essential to note and not to be undermined. Although a full treatment of this issue is not possible here, Wright's words are helpful. He argues, "It would be wrong to highlight the small-scale discrepancies between the four canonical narratives as though they constituted evidence that nothing at all actually happened. If anything, the argument should work the other way. If nothing happened, and if someone, years later, invented a story of . . . discovering an empty tomb, we should expect, not four slightly different stories, but one story."[7] Similarly, Dunn notes, "Overall it makes far greater sense to assume that there were various versions of the story of the empty tomb in circulation, retellings of the core tradition with variation of detail and embellishments of emphasis such as we would expect in an oral tradition phase."[8] The peripheral differences are important for showing that each writer did not copy off the other; instead, they reflect four different perspectives on the same story that all converge on a central theme: the empty tomb. The question that now needs to be asked is: Is this tradition authentic?

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[6] The objective of this chapter is to examine the authenticity of the empty tomb tradition, not to discuss the validity of supernatural phenomenon such as angels.

[7] Wright, *Resurrection*, 649. See also Bruce, *New Testament Documents*; and Bloomberg, *Historical Reliability*.

[8] Dunn, *Jesus*, 831.

Application of Criteria

The texts about the empty tomb can now be analyzed using historical Jesus criteria. To reiterate, material meeting the various criteria does not make it historical. Rather, these criteria determine the likelihood of an event or saying being part of the authentic Jesus tradition. The use of the criterion of Palestinian environment is reserved for chapter 5, because it deals primarily with the authenticity of the burial of Jesus and not the empty tomb.

Multiple Attestation: Tomb Being Empty

Using the criterion of multiple attestation, it can be seen how the Gospels and Paul all agree on the core tradition that the tomb of Jesus was empty. These multiple, independent sources indicate that different stories about the tomb were in circulation prior to the Gospels being written.

Empty Tomb in the Gospels

In the Gospels, the differences in language, particularly in reference to the angel(s), are an indication of multiple sources.[9] In Mark, a young man (νεανίσκον)[10] meets the women

[9] Compare Mark 13:13; Matt 10:22; and Luke 21:17 where there is verbatim agreement: "And you will be hated by all because of my name" (καὶ ἔσεσθε μισούμενοι ὑπὸ πάντων διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου). This is a clear example of triple tradition material. For the empty tomb narrative, if Matthew and Luke were copying from Mark, we would expect the language Matthew and Luke used to be more similar to Mark than it is. The best explanation for the differences is that the Synoptic writers all worked from different stories about Jesus.

[10] In Mark and Luke's versions, they likely still had angels in mind. In 2 Macc, for example, angels are described as being young men (δύο...νεανίαι) wearing robes (στολὰς) (3:26; 5:2). See Evans, *Mark*, 536.

at the tomb. In Matthew, there is an angel (ἄγγελος). In Luke, there are two men (ἄνδρες δύο). In John, there are two angels (δύο ἀγγέλους). Apart from the sources used by Mark and John, the designations "M" and "L" are used to refer to the independent informants used by Matthew and Luke.[11] Traditionally, the Synoptic Gospels are counted as one independent source and John as another. The differences in their post crucifixion narratives and in the wording used, suggests that they should be treated here as four separate sources. Even if this is not the case, the Synoptics, John, and Paul combine to form three sources. This more than meets the criterion of multiple attestation.

The empty tomb being multiply attested implies that it cannot have been the creation of one evangelist (i.e., Mark). There were at a minimum, several alternative stories about the empty tomb being spread throughout Palestine. Inclusion in the early tradition makes the empty tomb a story that dates closer to the time of the Easter events than the Gospels. The earliest Gospel is generally assumed to be Mark, written around 70 CE. Jesus was likely crucified in either 30 or 33 CE, leaving at most, forty years before the Gospels were produced.[12] After the Easter events, however, stories about Jesus were passed down verbally.[13] Luke, specifically, mentions that he interviewed eye-witnesses to get first-hand accounts regarding the events of Jesus's life (cf. 1:1–4).[14]

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[11] The hypothetical Q source is not relevant to the empty tomb. There are no examples of double tradition (material included by Matthew and Luke, but not Mark) in the empty tomb narratives.

[12] For more information on the approximate dates of Jesus's ministry and death, see Meier, *Roots*, 372–433; and Brown, *Death*, 2:1350–78. The dates of 30 or 33 CE come from using astronomy to determine when the 14th of Nissan (the day before Passover) fell on a Friday. The Gospels agree that Jesus was crucified on the 14th of Nissan. If the Gospels are correct, the years 30 or 33 CE are likely candidates (*Death*, 1376).

[13] This is known as the "oral tradition." The oral tradition refers to stories about Jesus that were spread via word of mouth.

[14] This does not necessarily mean that the accounts were historically correct, or that they were all congruent with each other. It does mean that there were stories about Jesus being passed around the Near East during the first-century. It is impossible to know how much of Luke's "L" material was straight from

Ehrman argues that the oral tradition about Jesus is similar to the "telephone game" played by children today and is therefore unreliable. The argument is that after a story has been re-told several times, it changes so dramatically that it becomes unrecognizable.[15] Although a valid critique, Ehrman does not acknowledge the significance of the fact that the Gospels rely on different stories which all agree on a solidified core. Although small, individual details vary, the central foundation of the narratives remain the same.[16] If Luke is telling the truth about interviewing eye-witnesses, then he was not receiving information passed through multiple filters. Instead, he went back to the original sources.[17] The empty tomb being multiply attested in the Gospels, even if it were just in two—Mark and John for example—adds more credibility to it being an authentic tradition. At the very least, the tradition of the empty tomb was extant prior to Mark being written in approximately 70 CE.

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eye-witnesses, but according to his introduction, there was at least some. The author of John also claims to have been an eye-witness. Writing about the crucifixion, John writes, "He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth" (19:35).

[15] Ehrman, *New Testament*, 82–95. Much has been written on the oral tradition. The disciplines of form, source, and redaction criticism focus heavily on this and how the theology of the evangelists, or the communities in which the Gospels were written, influenced the Gospels's final form. See Gerhardsson, *Reliability*; Bultmann, *History*; Bauckham, *Jesus*; and Stein, *Studying*.

[16] The language difference (for example, the young man/men/angel/angels), counters the claim that each evangelist received the story from the same source. There do not appear to be any theological, social, or political reasons for why they would alter the number or wording. Calling an angel, a "man" (ἀνδρός) as opposed to an "angel" (ἄγγελος) does not impact the meaning of what was being said. Luke, for example, calls the figures at the tomb "men" (ἄνδρες) (24:4–5 cf. Acts 1:10), but there are other times where he calls these figures "angel(s)" (ἄγγελος) (cf. 1:11, 13, 18–19, 26, 30, 34–35, 38; 2:8–10, 13, 15, 21; 4:10; 9:26; 12:8, 9; 15:10; 16:22; 20:36; 22:43; 24:43; Acts 5:19; 6:15; 7:30, 35, 38, 53; 8:26; 10:3, 7, 22; 11:13; 12:7–11, 15, 23; 23:8–9; 27:23). He uses different terms, but they mean the same thing.

[17] For example, people in Jerusalem during the Easter events who knew what happened. This cuts out Ehrman's "middlemen."

Empty Tomb in Paul: 1 Cor 15

Searching outside the Gospels also reveals an empty tomb tradition that predates the Gospels. In 1 Cor 15, Paul cites an early church creed which discusses the resurrection:

> For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to the all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me (vv. 3–8).

The way Paul introduces this creed, "For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received" (παρέδωκα γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐν πρώτοις, ὃ καὶ παρέλαβον), indicates how he is repeating a statement that he did not create (cf. 1 Cor 11:2, 23). Mark may be the earliest Gospel; however, the letters of Paul are earlier, with 1 Corinthians being penned around 54/5 CE.[18] Most exegetes agree that the creed Paul cites was received during his visit to Jerusalem when he met with Peter and James (cf. Gal 1:18–19).[19] If this is true, it places the date of its composition sometime in the early 30's CE, shortly after the crucifixion.[20] Paul's source for this creed is different from any used in the Gospels. Again, this can be seen through the difference in wording. The Gospels all speak about Jesus being raised "On the first day of the week" (τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων) (cf. Mark 16: 2; Matt 28:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Paul, however, uses a vastly different motif, saying, "On the third day" (τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ) (v. 4).

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[18] See Fee, *First Epistle*, 4–5.

[19] For example, Funk et al., *Acts*, 466; Harrisville, *1 Corinthians*, 251; Fee, *First Epistle*, 717–29; Dunn, *Jesus*, 854–5; and Goulder, "Baseless Fabric," 48. As Funk et al., claims, the creed may have been composed "A few days, or weeks, or months, after Jesus's death" (*Acts*, 466).

[20] This is acknowledged by Lüdemann who uses the creed as a "Point of entry" into studying the resurrection (*What Really Happened*, 10). Lüdemann, although he denies the empty tomb, dates the creed to be no later than 33 CE.

The καὶ ὅτι (and that) clauses that are seen in the formula are Paul's systematic summary of what he deems most important: First, that Christ died (v. 3). Second, that he was buried (v. 4). Third, that he was raised (v. 4). Fourth, that he appeared (v. 4–5). As will be explained below, the primary Jewish concept of resurrection during the first-century was bodily. For Paul to speak of Jesus dying, being buried, and then rising, he would be pre-supposing an empty tomb.[21] The early creedal statement cited by Paul can be implicitly added to the multiple attestation from the Gospels as another independent account which implies an empty tomb.[22]

Criterion of Embarrassment: Women at the Tomb

Perhaps the strongest argument in favour of the authenticity of the empty tomb tradition are the multiply attested accounts of women being the first to discover the tomb empty. This fills the criteria of both multiple attestation and embarrassment. For the sake of organization, it is being treated here under the embarrassment criterion.

In first-century Palestine any testimony given by women counted as little in a court of law. Josephus writes, "Let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex" (*Ant.* 4:219).[23] Although no passage in the Hebrew Bible exists declaring that women cannot act as witnesses, Josephus's statement

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[21] See Copan and Tacelli eds., *Jesus'* [sic] *Resurrection*, for a lengthy debate over the usage of 1 Cor 15 to argue in favour of bodily resurrection. Paul might not specifically mention an empty tomb, but it is highly implied. To speak of a resurrection taking place, the body had to be gone.

[22] There is a similar outline in the early sermons cited by Luke in Acts 13 and 15.

[23] In later years, the Mishnah writes that only men can give an "Oath of testimony" (*m. Shebu.* 4:1). Furthermore, the testimony of a woman was seen as being the benchmark for what counted as an inauthentic witness (cf. *m. Rosh Hash.* 1:8; *b. Bab. Kam.* 88).

likely summarizes the common attitude during the first-century. It is doubtful that the earliest transmitters of the oral tradition would enthusiastically include women finding Jesus's empty tomb, even if women could appear as witnesses. As Vermes states, "If the empty tomb story had been manufactured by the primitive Church to demonstrate the reality of the Resurrection of Jesus, one would have expected a uniform and foolproof account attributed to patently reliable witnesses (i.e., men)."[24] Vermes denies the resurrection but accepts the validity of the empty tomb solely on the embarrassing detail that male disciples were not the ones who are said to have discovered it.[25]

Every Gospel agrees that on the first day of the week, Jesus's tomb was found empty by women. For the early Christians, having an empty tomb was a vital apologetic argument that Jesus had risen. The fact that every Gospel has an empty tomb narrative is evidence of this. If the empty tomb was not important, the evangelists could have moved straight into appearance stories. For such a significant piece of evidence, it is unlikely that the Gospels would have had women finding the tomb empty; unless, the writers truly believed this is what happened.

Peter denying Jesus prior to the crucifixion showed that he was in Jerusalem as the Easter events unfolded (cf. Mark 14:66–72; Matt 26:69–75; Luke 22:54–62; John 18:15–27). It is not probable that a story would be invented where women would be given the honour of finding the tomb empty if the possibility existed of giving that

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[24] Vermes, *Resurrection*, 140–1.

[25] Vermes identifies eight different theories that could explain the empty tomb (*Resurrection*, 134–48). At the outset of his investigation, Vermes eliminates the option of the resurrection (chalking this belief up to fundamentalism); and the option that nothing happened. After examining the six remaining theories, Vermes is unsure how to account for the empty tomb. He concludes, "None of the . . . suggested theories stand up to stringent scrutiny" (148).

honour to Peter.[26] Luke recounts that when the women returned from the tomb, the disciples did not believe them for "These words seemed to them an idle tale" (24:11). It was only when Peter investigated for himself that he realized they were telling the truth. Even then Luke gives no indication that Peter believed Jesus had risen. The text simply says that he "Went home, amazed at what had happened" (24:12).[27] As Wright argues, "The point has been repeated over and over in scholarship, but its full impact has not always been felt: women were simply not acceptable as legal witnesses. . . . If they (the evangelists) could have invented stories of fine, upstanding, reliable male witnesses being first at the tomb, they would have done it."[28] Because of the embarrassment this would have caused the early church, the story of women finding the tomb empty makes a strong case for the authenticity of the tradition.

Criterion of Discontinuity: Resurrection Expectations in the First Century

Lastly, the empty tomb meets the criterion of discontinuity. As will be shown, the primary Jewish eschatological beliefs during the first-century were that God would resurrect the righteous at the end of the present era. This belief was shared by the early church, which was primarily Jewish. If the Gospel writers were inventing a story about Jesus being an eschatological prophet, it is probable that they would place him somewhere within this Jewish framework. The empty tomb, however, does not easily fit within this framework. Paul's theology has more to say about the meaning behind the

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[26] See Craig, *Assessing*, 190–1; *Son*, 61; and "Historicity," 39–67.

[27] Cranfield notes how the inclusion of women shows a "High regard for historical truthfulness" ("Resurrection," 170).

[28] Wright, *The Resurrection*, 607–8.

Easter events than the Gospels do. While the Gospels writers were theologians and not just biographers, they say surprisingly little about the implications of the resurrection. If they were inventing a story. it would make sense to attribute monologues to Jesus stating exactly what his resurrection meant. They do not, and the New Testament epistles are trying to work out this very issue. This peculiarity adds greater strength to the authenticity of the tradition.

Jewish Eschatology

Among Jewish texts, there are typically four passages that are cited as referring to resurrection; Dan 12:2; Isa 26:19; Ezek 37:1–14; 2 Macc 7:11.[29] In the Septuagint (LXX), all of these verses use a form of the verb ἀνίστημι (to stand/rise) or ἐγείρω (to rise/awake) which are also frequently used by the New Testament writers.[30] Although no author elaborates on what the resurrection might look like, during the Second Temple Period, the concept of "resurrection" began to gain traction in Jewish culture.[31] Differing opinions exist over what the most common Jewish thought at the time pertaining to resurrection was, but it most likely referred to a physical rising at the end of the present

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[29] Isa 26:19, for example, says, "Your dead shall live (יקומון [ἀναστήσονται, LXX]), their corpses shall rise (הקיצו [ἐγερθήσονται, LXX]). O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead."

[30] For uses of ἀνίστημι, see Mark 5:42; 8:31; 9:9–10, 31; 10:34; 12:23, 25; 16:9; Luke 16:31; 18:33; 24:7, 46; John 11:23; 20:9; Acts 2:24, 32; 10:41; 13:33–34; 17:3, 31; Eph 5:14; 1 Thess 4:14. For uses of ἐγείρω, see Matt 9:25; 10:8; 11:5; 14:2; 16:21; 17:9, 23; 20:19; 26:32; 27:52, 63–64; 28:6–7; Mark 5:41; 6:14, 16; 12:26; 14:28; 16:6, 14; Luke 7:14, 22; 8:54; 9:7, 22; 20:37; 24:6, 34; John 2:22; 5:21; 12:1, 9, 17; 21:14; Acts 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30; 26:8; Rom 4:24–25; 6:4, 9; 7:4; 8:11, 34; 10:9; 1 Cor 15:4, 12–17, 20, 29, 32, 35, 42–44, 52, 2 Cor 1:9; 4:14; 5:15; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20; Col 2:12; 1 Thess 1:10; 2 Tim 2:8; Heb 11:19; 1 Pet 1:21.

[31] Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 18:11–25. The major sects of Judaism during the time of Jesus were the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots. During the intertestamental period, apocalyptic eschatological thought had many Jews expecting God's judgment to be imminent. See Collins, *Scepter*; and *Apocalyptic.*

age[32] where everyone would stand before God and receive judgement.[33] The righteous would be vindicated and the wicked would be condemned. Perrin states how apocalyptic eschatology—of which resurrection is a central component—is a "Child of hope and despair."[34] This refers to the hope the Jews had for the future and the victory they believed their God would win, but also despair over their present circumstances under foreign control.[35]

The Pharisees typically believed, as Daniel notes, that at the end of the age some would receive everlasting life, but others would receive shame and contempt.[36] The Pharisees were in contrast with the Sadducees who denied the resurrection and thought that the soul died along with the body (cf. Matt 22:23; Josephus *Ant.* 18:16). The Hebrew Bible includes several accounts of people being resuscitated back to life (cf. 1 Kgs 17:17–24; 2 Kgs 4:18–37; 13:20–1); however, "resuscitation" is different than "resurrection." "Resurrection," refers to a single eschatological event where all the dead would be raised by God to face judgement.[37] Prior to this eschatological event, those who had been resuscitated were still doomed to die again. Wright uses the terminology of "Life after 'life after death'" to make a distinction that to be resurrected in Jewish thought

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[32] Note: the "present age" does not refer to the "end of time" or the "end of the world." The latter two phrases are indicative of modern apocalyptic language and were unfamiliar to Jews during the Second Temple Period (see Sanders, *Judaism*, 457–94).

[33] Wright, for example, in *Resurrection* devotes 500 pages of his study to arguing that the concept of resurrection in Judaism was both physical and bodily (85–585).

[34] Perrin, "Apocalyptic Christianity," 121.

[35] Wright argues that resurrection was be the "Ultimate vindication of Israel as YHWH's people" (*Paul*, 2:1060).

[36] Perkins, "Resurrection of Jesus," 499–500.

[37] See also Dead Sea Scrolls such as 4Q521, which speak of resurrection; 2:12 reads, "He (either God or the Messiah) will heal the sick, resurrect (יחיה) the dead, and to the Meek announce glad tidings" (translation from Eisenman and Wise, *Dead Sea Scrolls*). Twelve copies of the book of Daniel were found at Qumran, which is a substantial number considering the length of the book. This is likely related to the strong eschatological nature of the Qumran community.

did not simply mean coming back alive; instead, it meant a "*Reversal* or *undoing* or *defeat* of death."[38] In essence, there could not be "*a* resurrection," or "*multiple* resurrections," there could only be "*the* resurrection."

Christian Eschatology

When the early Christians spoke of resurrection, they meant the same thing (cf. 1 Cor 15). The early Christians were still anticipating "*the* resurrection"; an event in the future where the dead would be raised and stand before God in judgement (cf. 1 Thess 4:16; 2 Cor 5:1–4; Rev 20).

In the New Testament, several miracles were preformed to resuscitate the dead (cf. Luke 7:11–17; 8:49–56; John 11:1–44; Acts 9:36–42; 20:7–12). Outside of Jesus, it is assumed that this new chance at life was temporary and that the resuscitated would ultimately die again. Followers of Jesus were still awaiting a final undoing, or defeat of death.[39] There was only one person who the Church believed had risen from the dead and would never die again—Jesus.[40] If the final vindication of the righteous was to take place during the future, there was no need to invent a story saying Jesus's body was missing from the tomb (cf. Rev 19:11–21). It would, in fact, make more sense to say that Jesus would rise at the final resurrection and that he would play some important role in the end

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[38] Wright, *Resurrection*, 201, emphasis original.

[39] See 1 Thess 4:13–18; 2 Cor 5; John 11, where the topic of eschatology and the final vindication of believers is discussed. As Martha mourns the death of her brother Lazarus in John 11, she says to Jesus, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day" (v. 24). This statement reflects the belief in a final, once and for all resurrection in the future.

[40] Heb 9:27 reads, "It is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgement."

of days. There was no concept of a dying and rising messiah in Judaism,[41] so it makes little sense that Jesus's disciples would have claimed that his tomb was empty and that he had overcome death; unless, they had a reason to believe so (i.e., they were confident it was an authentic tradition).[42] The empty tomb tradition meets the criteria of discontinuity because what the disciples believed happened to Jesus differed substantially from their traditional Jewish beliefs.[43] It is not logical from a Jewish or early Christian perspective that the disciples would fiercely proclaim that the Messiah's tomb was empty if they were lying.

Lack of Evidence

Using historical Jesus criteria, the data seems to indicate that the earliest stories about Jesus claimed that his tomb was empty. Moving beyond the criteria for authenticity, more can be said about the empty tomb though. When studying history, it is also important to look for what is not mentioned in the sources. The previous section has examined evidence in favour of the empty tomb tradition. What follows is a brief discussion about the lack of tomb veneration and alternative theories. Based on Jewish practices for commemorating the dead, it would be anticipated that Jesus's tomb would be venerated by the early church; however, no record of this is recorded. There are also no theories

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[41] See Martinez, "Messianic Hope," 159–90. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were first discovered, some thought that 4Q285 gave possible mention to a dying messiah. The ambiguity of the Hebrew makes it possible to be read as either the messiah dying, or the messiah doing the killing. The context of the scroll makes it much more likely that it is the latter option.

[42] Wright, *Resurrection*, 32–84. Their claims also counter the primary Jewish and Greco-Roman thought at the time. Greek philosophy denied the concept of a bodily resurrection, claiming that the flesh is evil (See Epicurus's *Letter to Herodotus).*

[43] Consider Paul, who identified as a Pharisee (cf. Acts 23:6; 26:5; Phil 3:5).

supported by textual evidence that suggest Jesus's body remained in the tomb. This section does not fit within the historical Jesus criteria, but is valuable nonetheless for gaining a more complete picture of what would be expected if the tomb tradition was not authentic.

No Tomb Veneration

A surprising detail that is missing from the New Testament is the veneration of Jesus's tomb. Nowhere in the New Testament is there any indication that the early Christians worshipped or prayed at Jesus's tomb. As Dunn notes, "This is indeed striking, because within contemporary Judaism, as in other religions, the desire to honour the memory of the revered dead by constructing appropriate tombs and (by implication) by veneration of the site is well attested."[44] First Maccabees 13:25–30, for example, is an account of Simon building a monumental tomb to remember his slain family members.[45] Simon built the tomb "High so that it might be seen, with polished stone at the front and back. He also erected seven pyramids, opposite one another, for his father and mother and four brothers" (vv. 27–28). This tomb was more than a burial spot. It was a shrine meant to commemorate his family. In a similar fashion, the importance of Jesus would all but ensure that the evangelists would have mentioned the veneration of his tomb; unless, it did not happen. The tomb was not important to the early Christians because they did not believe Jesus's body was still in it.[46]

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[44] Dunn, *Jesus*, 837.

[45] See also Josephus, *War* 4:531–2; 5:506; *Ant.* 7:392; 13:249.

[46] One can visit Jerusalem today and see the supposed tombs of renowned prophets, as well as the tombs of King Johosephat and Zechariah. Clearly, the remembrance and veneration of tombs held extreme

No Alternative Theories

As mentioned, the Gospels and Paul both drew on stories that either claimed or presupposed an empty tomb. It is striking then that no alternative theories regarding the emptiness of the tomb exist. The earliest recorded objection to the resurrection comes in Matthew, where he describes the guards taking a bribe from the Jewish leaders to say that the disciples had stolen the body (cf. 28:11–15).[47] This rebuttal to the resurrection makes no indication that the emptiness of the tomb was denied. In fact, it implies the opposite. Throughout Acts and the epistles, there is also no indication that opponents of Christianity denied the emptiness of the tomb.

As the first-century church grew, opponents of Christianity continued to question Jesus's resurrection. With the available information, however, there are no reports of the tomb not being empty. During the middle of the second-century, the church father Justin Martyr wrote *Dialogue* with the Jew Trypho. Martyr presents a discussion between the two over the Christian faith. As in Matthew, the major objection raised by Trypho is that the disciples stole the body (*Dia* 108). Trypho made no claim that the tomb still contained Jesus's body.

Several decades later, between 177 and 180 CE, Celsus wrote a counter-response to Christianity and sought to disprove the resurrection. In his book *Contra Celsus*, the church father Origen wrote a lengthy response to Celsus. Celsus's work is now lost, but

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significance to Jews in antiquity. Cf. Gen 35:20; 50:5; Jud 8:32; 16:31; 1 Sam 10:2; 13:6; 2 Sam 2:32; 2 Sam 4:12; 17:23; 21:14; 1 Kgs 13:22; 9:28; 21:26; 23:30; 2 Chr 16:14; 21:20; 24:25; 28:27; 32:33; 35:24; Isa 14:18; 22:16; Matt 23:27, 29. In Matt 23:27–32, Jesus criticized the Pharisees for commemorating the tombs of the prophets but ignoring the important matters of faith and justice.

[47] See Hagner, *Matthew*, 875–8. Matthew's pericope does not occur in any other Gospel. It is either a unique contribution of the author, or part of the "M" source.

through quotations used by Origen, much can be reconstructed. Celsus claimed that a dead person cannot be immortal (2:16); and that Christians worship a corpse (7:68). Celsus denied any form of resurrection (5:14; 6:29), claiming that it was "Revolting and impossible" (5:14).[48] Nowhere is any rebuttal made against the empty tomb.

Conclusion

Using historical Jesus criteria, it can be seen that strong arguments exist for the authenticity of the empty tomb tradition. Each criterion on its own is not sufficient to make a judgement; when combined, however, they form a strong case. This does not guarantee historicity though. What it shows is that the earliest core tradition about the Easter events included an empty tomb. The empty tomb is multiply attested in independent sources and the traditions are early. The evangelists would probably not have invented an embarrassing account of women finding the empty tomb unless they believed this to be the case. In light of Jewish and early Christian eschatological beliefs, it also seems strange that the evangelists would invent a story about the empty tomb. The tomb—and the resurrection in general—do not fit easily within the traditional Jewish eschatological framework of what was excepted at the time.

What is not said about the tomb of Jesus is also important. There is no record of any veneration occurring at Jesus's tomb, indicating that the early church did not believe his remains were there. Furthermore, the fact that there are no theories which speak of

[48] Translation from Stanton, "Early Objections."

anything other than the tomb being empty is an indicator that there were no prominent alternative traditions.[49]

Despite the arguments in favour of the authenticity of the empty tomb tradition, there is a plausible theory which suggests that Jesus's tomb was not found empty. Chapter 5 is an examination of this theory and how it compares to the hypothesis that the tomb was empty. To determine which has the strongest case for historicity, McCullagh's conditions will be used. Once completed, a discussion can be made regarding the tomb's placement within baseline information and how the historical bedrock approach needs to be amended.

[49] At least that we have record of.

CHAPTER 5: NON-BURIAL THEORY AND COMPARISON

Introduction

As the previous chapter explained, there is a strong likelihood that the empty tomb tradition is authentic. This does not make it historical; rather, it is likely that the early Christians believed it was and that the Gospel writers were not inventing a story. Some scholars disagree with the historicity of the empty tomb and contend it is more likely that Jesus was never buried, or that if he was, the location of his tomb was unknown to his followers.[1] This is a strong objection to the empty tomb hypothesis and deserves consideration. The present chapter is an examination of the non-burial theory, which is the most common hypothesis opposing the empty tomb.[2] Using McCullagh's six conditions for evaluating historical authenticity, the empty tomb tradition will be compared to the non-burial theory to determine which provides a stronger hypothesis. It is argued in this chapter that although the non-burial theory is a strong and plausible hypothesis, the burial and empty tomb theory is a better explanation of the available evidence.

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[1] For simplicity, this objection is being called "the non-burial theory."

[2] Until now, this present work has operated under three presuppositions. The first is that Jesus existed. The second is that he was crucified. The third is that he was buried in a known location. Out of all the controversial issues in historical Jesus study, his existence and crucifixion are the least debated. As identified in the introduction, not every biblical scholar acknowledges that Jesus existed though. Space cannot be allotted to addressing the first two presuppositions, but the reader is encouraged to see Ehrman's, *Did Jesus Exist?* for more detail. This chapter is devoted to examining whether Jesus was properly buried in a known location.

Non-Burial Theory

Recent scholars who advance the non-burial theory are Crossan and Ehrman.[3] This theory proposes that Jesus was not buried and that the Romans left his body on the cross to be eaten by wild dogs and scavenger birds. If Jesus was buried, this theory suggests it was carelessly done in a shallow grave at an unknown location.

Evidence of Non-Burial

There are multiple texts from antiquity which speak of executed victims not being given a proper burial. The Roman historian Suetonius, for example, speaks of the emperor Augustus, who had captured the murderers of Julius Caesar. After sentencing them to death, one of the accused begged for a proper burial. Augustus is said to have replied, "The [carrion] birds will soon settle that question" (*Def. Aug.* 13:1–2 cf. Ezek 39:4).[4] Horace also writes in one of his letters about a slave explaining to his master that he had not wronged him. The master replies, "You shall not therefore feed the carrion crows on the cross" (*Epist.* 1. 16: 46–48).[5] Another example comes from a tombstone of a man who was murdered by his own slave. The inscription says that the murderer was "Hung . . . alive for the wild beasts and birds of prey."[6]

Allowing birds and animals to attack and eat a body would add extra disgrace to a crucified victim and their family. Lack of a proper burial in the ancient world was

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[3] See for example, Crossan, *Jesus*, 123–58; *Historical Jesus*, 391–4; Crossan and Reed, *Excavating*, 244–54; Ehrman, *Jesus*, 225; and *How Jesus Became God*, 129–70.

[4] Translation from "Suetonius," [n.d.].

[5] Translation from "Works of Horace," [n.d.].

[6] Translation from Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 76. See Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 157–8 for more examples.

disgraceful and was considered to have massive ramifications for the afterlife.[7] Tacitus reports how some defeated enemies of emperor Tiberius would rather commit suicide than face trial, "Because people sentenced to death forfeited their property and were forbidden decent burial" (*Ann.* 6:29).[8]

Crucifixion and Non-Burial

Crucifixion was a common form of punishment in the Roman empire for peasants, slaves, or violent criminals.[9] It was called by Josephus a "most miserable" form of death and was meant to inflict maximum pain over a prolonged period (*War* 7:203). Crucifixion involved either nailing or tying a victim to a vertical beam which was placed along a public road. Death could take several days and was usually a result of asphyxiation, water depravation, or heart failure. Prior to being crucified, a victim would be severely whipped, and then forced to carry the horizontal beam of the cross to which they would be attached. Wright summarizes the Roman use of crucifixion by writing, "It was not just a means of liquidating undesirables; it did so with the maximum degradation and humiliation. It said, loud and clear: we are in charge here; you are our property; we can do what we like with you. It insisted, coldly and brutally, on the absolute sovereignty of

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[7] Cf. Josephus, *Aga. Api.* 2:211; Deut 28:25–26; 2 Sam 2:4–5; 1 Kgs 21:23; 2 Kgs 9:33–37; Tob 1:18–20; 2:3–8; 4:3–4; 6:1–5; 14:10–13.

[8] Translation from McCane, *Roll Back*, 64.

[9] See Hengel, *Crucifixion*. The common Jewish method of execution was stoning (cf. Ex 19:12–13; 21:28; Lev 20:27; 24:17; Deut 17:2–5; 22:24; Josh 7:25; 1 Kgs 21; John 8:1–11; Acts 7:54–60.

Rome."[10] The purpose of crucifying criminals was to act as a warning to stop potential revolutions from occurring against Rome.[11]

Josephus provides several examples of the Romans crucifying multitudes of people at once, in response to uprisings against Rome (*Ant.* 17:295; *War* 2:75, 306–8; 5:447–51, 540). Josephus does not specify that the bodies were left on their crosses and not buried, but it is assumed, based on the type of warning Rome wished to send and the amount of work it would take to bury so many people. As McCane explains, by burying a body "Members of a society affirm that someone significant has been lost. When the Romans did not permit the burial of crucifixion victims, they were doing more than merely showing off the power of Rome: they were also declaring that the deaths of these victims were not a loss to Roman society."[12]

The non-burial theory thus hypothesizes that if Jesus was not buried, his body would have remained on the cross with the other criminals to act as a warning to others who wished to provoke an uprising (cf. Matt 27:44; Mark 15:32; Luke 23:39–43; John 19:18).[13] Before long, Jesus's body would have become food for wild animals. If the Romans did by chance bury Jesus, it would have been in a hastily dug shallow grave where "the dogs were waiting."[14] As Crossan claims, "With regard to the body of Jesus,

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[10] Wright, *Jesus*, 543.

[11] See Hengel, *Crucifixion*; and Cook, *Crucifixion*; Josephus, *War* 2:306; 5:519–26; 6:304.

[12] McCane, *Roll Back*, 91.

[13] Crossan, *Jesus*, 154. The warning of a crucified body would have been especially directed towards sects like the Sicarii and Zealot who were known for their radical distaste for the Romans and their desire for a reinstitution of the Davidic monarchy.

[14] Crossan, *Jesus*, 154. Cf. Petronius, *Sat.* 111.

by Easter Sunday morning, those who cared did not know where it was, and those who knew did not care."[15]

Criterion of Palestine Environment: Could Jesus Have Been Buried?

It is important to not only examine the Roman treatment of victims, but also Jewish burial customs. During the first-century, common Jewish burial practices entailed burying a body in a family tomb (sepulcher). The biblical formula found in the Hebrew Bible and Apocryphal books, "He slept/was buried with his fathers," or a close derivative, is frequently seen.[16] Another common practice, specifically between 30 BCE and 70 CE, was to rebury bodies in stone boxes called "ossuaries" once the flesh had decomposed, typically a year after the first burial.[17] This practise likely had to do with Jewish eschatological beliefs regarding resurrection.[18]

Jewish law states that a condemned criminal must be buried on the day he dies to avoid the land accruing a curse from God (cf. Deut 21:23; John 19:31; 11QT 64:7–13). After Jesus's crucifixion, despite the impending Sabbath (and Passover), McDonald writes how "The Jews permitted all necessary steps to be taken for a decent burial on the Sabbath, and the duty of burying the dead took precedence over other laws whenever

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[15] Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 394.

[16] "He slept with his ancestors" (וישכב עם אבתיו) appears in 1 Kgs 2:10; 11:43; 14:31; 15:8, 24; 16:6, 28; 22:50; 2 Kgs 8:24; 9:28; 10:35; 13:9, 13; 14:16; 15:7, 38; 16:20; 21:18; 2 Chr 9:31; 12:16; 14:1; 21:1. The similar statement, "He was buried with his ancestors" (ויקבר עם אבתיו) which sometimes appears alongside "He slept with his ancestors," is found in 1 Kgs 14:31; 15:24; 22:50; 2 Kgs 12:21; 14:20; 15:7,38; 16:20; 2 Chr 21:1; 25:28; Jdt 8:3; 1 Macc 2:70.

[17] See McDonald, "Burial," 447–76; and Evans, *Jesus*, for more in-depth discussions on Jewish burial practices.

[18] See the discussion on Jewish resurrection expectations in chapter 4.

there was a conflict."[19] The Mishnah states that to prepare a body for burial, it needs to be anointed and washed (*m. Shabb.* 23:5). This aligns with both the Synoptics and John's description of the burial preparations. John describes Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus buying spices and cloth to use in the burial preparation (cf. 19:38–42).[20] In a slightly different account, the Synoptics recount Joseph buying cloth and burying Jesus, but then the women prepare spices to use on the body (cf. Mark 15:43–46; 16:1; Luke 23:50—24:1).[21] Concern may be raised here over the difference in narratives, but as Whitacre notes, the spices and aloe used by Joseph and Nicodemus in John were potentially only used to "Offset the smell of decay and help preserve the body until it could be properly attended to after the sabbath."[22] If this is true, then the women in the Synoptics might have been going to finish the job the men had started. This preparing and anointing of Jesus's body was done in preparation for the second burial a year later.[23]

Extra-Canonical Sources and Archaeology

The non-burial theory certainly presents a challenge to the biblical claim that Jesus was buried in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea (cf. Matt 27:57–61; Mark 15:42–47; Luke 23:50–56; John 19:38–42). If Jesus was not buried, or if the location of his tomb was not

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[19] McDonald, "Burial," 466–7. See also Pokorný, "Burial," 536–7.

[20] John even writes how the burial was "According to the custom of the Jews" (19:40).

[21] Matthew is the only Gospel that says nothing about spices. The author only notes that Joseph wrapped Jesus's body in a "Clean linen cloth" and laid it in a tomb (27:59–60).

[22] Whitacre, *John*, 470. For similar conclusions, see Keener, *Gospel of John*, 2:1157–64; Wahlde, *Letters of John*, 2:829–35; and Brown, *Death*, 2:1242–83.

[23] In addition to going to the tomb to anoint the body, the women were also likely going to mourn the loss of Jesus. The Mishnah instructs mourning to be done privately not in public, just as the women were doing (*m. Sanh.* 6:6).

known, it cannot be adequately argued that the tomb was empty on the first day of the week.

Although the Romans often left their victims on the cross to be eaten by wild animals, there were instances where under request, bodies were taken down and permitted burial.[24] In the *Digesta* (a summary of the Roman law prior to Emperor Justinian), the text reads:

> The bodies of those who are condemned to death should not be refused [to] their relatives. . . . At present, the bodies of those who have been punished are only buried when this has been requested and permission granted; and sometimes it is not permitted, especially where persons have been convicted of high treason. . . . The bodies of persons who have been punished should be given to whoever requests them for the purpose of burial (48:24:1–3).[25]

Philo also explains how he knew of crucified people who "Were taken down and given up to their relations, in order to receive the honours of sepulchre, and to enjoy such observances as are due to the dead" (*Flacc.* 10:83–84; cf. Josephus, *Life* 420–421).[26]

It is important to note that mass crucifixions where bodies were left unburied, only took place during times of war and military crisis. The likelihood of the Romans denying the Jews their practice of burying the dead decreased during times of peace, such as when Jesus was crucified.[27] Non-burial might have been a more common way of disposing of a body, but it is also clear that at the request of friends or relatives, bodies could be given for the purpose of burial.

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[24] Josephus and Philo both note how typically, the Romans honoured Jewish customs (cf. Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 2:73; Philo, *Legat.* 300).

[25] Translation from McDonald, "Burial," 455–6.

[26] Translation from "Works of Philo," [1993].

[27] See McDonald, "Burial," 455.

Archaeology also becomes useful in this discussion. In 1968, the bones of a crucified man named Yehohanan were discovered in an ossuary at Giv'at ha-Mivtar, north of Jerusalem.[28] Yehohanan was found with a 7-inch spike driven through his ankles and is thought to have died approximately a decade before Jesus, when the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate still governed Judea and Samaria.[29] To take a victim off the cross, the Romans would have needed to remove all the spikes which attached the victim to the beam. In Yehohanan's case, the spike went through a knot in the wood, causing it to bend and become unmovable. Yehohanan was then buried in a family tomb with the spike still in his ankles. The discovery of Yehohanan is evidence that at least occasionally, the burial of a crucified criminal was permitted.

Crossan calls the burial of Yehohanan an anomaly and argues that since only one example exists of a crucified criminal being buried, it makes it more likely that Jesus was not.[30] The discovery of Yehohanan is certainly remarkable; however, the only reason scholars have this evidence, is because of the knot in the wood that bent the spike. There could be more bodies of crucified victims in tombs already discovered or yet to be found, but it cannot be determined how they died because there is no remaining evidence of the crucifixion. Furthermore, the Romans often used rope instead of nails to attach their victims and this too would prevent archaeologists from determining whether discovered

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[28] See Zias, and Sekeles, "Crucified Man," 22–7. The tomb Yehohanan was buried in and the ossuaries in which his bones were found indicate he came from a wealthy family, who had the means not only to purchase a tomb, but also the political influence to acquire Yehohanan's body for a proper burial.

[29] See Tzaferis, "Crucifixion," 44–53. Like the criminals crucified beside Jesus, the legs of Yehohanan were also broken while on the cross (cf. John 19:31–34). This would have prevented him from hoisting himself up to breath and death would have quickly followed. Tzaferis explains how the breaking of legs was done to hasten death in order to have the body buried before sundown (50–2).

[30] Josephus describes a time during the Jewish war after the destruction of Jerusalem (70 CE), when the Romans crucified so many people that "Room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses wanting for the bodies" (*War* 5:451). If this was the case, Crossan wonders why only one example of a buried crucifixion victim has been found (See *Jesus*, 125).

bodies were crucified. The textual evidence, as well as the archaeological evidence of Yehohanan, makes a case that burying crucified victims was not unheard of during the first-century.

As noted, all four Gospels state that Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for Jesus's body so that he could bury it. This is multiply attested in the Synoptics, as well as in John. Could Joseph be an invented fictional character? It is possible, but appears unlikely. If a story about burial was being created, it would make more sense to have Jesus's disciples, or someone from his family ask for the body. Both groups were in Jerusalem at the time and witnessed the events at the cross. The logical continuation of the story would be to have either of them ask for the body of Jesus. Similarly, it would be embarrassing for the early church to have a member of the Jewish high council be responsible for burying the Messiah (cf. Luke 23:50) when Jesus's closest followers cowered behind closed doors (cf. John 20:19). The burial of Jesus was still, in a sense, shameful. He was not buried in his family's tomb, nor was he returned to Nazareth. As such, it would also be embarrassing for the early church not to be able to say, "He slept with his ancestors."[31] An invented story likely would have amended these issues.

The record of Jesus's burial is consistent with first-century funeral practices among Jews in Palestine. What the criterion of Palestine environment does is affirm that the burial narrative was not fabricated at a later date by authors who have no knowledge of burial in first-century Palestine. Without simply trusting the Gospels as fact, it is impossible to say whether Jesus was properly buried. The evidence suggests that it was

[31] See McCane, "Where No One Had Yet Been Laid," 431–52.

conceivable though. If the stories regarding Jesus's burial were grossly different from what is known about that time, there would be cause for concern. This is not the case though.

Summary

Under certain conditions, burying a crucified victim was possible. Sources such as Suetonius and Horace speak of victims being left for scavenger animals, but there are other texts such as the *Digesta,* Josephus, and Philo which say that this was not always the case. When the context surrounding the Easter events are taken into consideration, as well as various independent accounts given in the New Testament, Jesus being buried after his death is not unreasonable. This cannot be deemed historically certain, but as Perkins states, "Burial appears just as credible as exposure and non-burial."[32]

Other objections to the empty tomb exist, such as it being a Marcan creation, or that Jesus's tomb has actually been found. The reason why the discussion in this chapter has revolved around Jesus's burial is that every other theory rests primarily on whether Jesus was buried. If Jesus was not buried, or if his followers had no knowledge of where he was buried, the empty tomb becomes impossible to verify and it leads to alternative theories about how the story came to be (such as it being a Marcan invention).

Until now, the empty tomb has been examined in terms of the tradition's authenticity. The core hypothesis contained within this tradition (that the tomb was

[32] Perkins, "Resurrection," 2416.

empty) can now be compared with the non-burial theory to determine which one offers the most historic probability.

Examination

As discussed in chapter 2, arguments to the best explanation are one of the most effective ways in evaluating hypotheses and determining which is strongest. Having a strong hypothesis does not guarantee historicity. The best a historian can do is to situate an event on a probability scale and be willing to continually re-evaluate their theory in light of new evidence. Hypotheses cannot simply be presented, however. They also need to go through a verification process and be compared against competing theories. When verification and comparison does not take place, the full picture of an event is not taken into consideration—only a piece is viewed.

How then does the empty tomb and non-burial theory compare against McCullagh's six conditions?[33] To judge each of these conditions, a scale of: very weak, weak, somewhat strong, strong, and very strong will be used to access each theory with each of the conditions.[34]

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[33] See chapter 2 and McCullagh, *Justifying*, 19.

[34] As discussed in chapter 2, a purely objective study of history is impossible. There is always an element of subjectivity, but throughout this thesis, certain criteria have been used to study the sources as honestly as possible. Weighing the value of each theory is a subjective exercise. Because there are no alternative options, however, it is necessary. The value of the discussion that took place in chapter 4 and earlier in chapter 5 is that each theory can be compared against the six conditions based on the evidence that has been presented for them.

Explanatory Scope

The empty tomb theory has a strong explanatory scope. As shown in chapter 4, the arguments in favour of the empty tomb tradition fulfill the major historical Jesus criteria. The empty tomb is multiply attested, and the sources were in circulation shortly after the events. The Gospels all agree the tomb was found empty by women, creating the possibility of embarrassment and that the claim would not be accepted. The Gospel accounts of Jesus's burial align with what archaeology has discovered about first-century Palestine. The narrative flows smoothly but reveals a drastic shift in Jewish and Christian resurrection expectations. To write in this manner, the Gospel writers must have sincerely believed something remarkable had happened. The lack of any tomb veneration, and the fact that there are no early hypotheses which argue against the empty tomb, is further evidence it was empty. The burying of victims is also supported by texts outside of the Bible. This large quantity of data makes the explanatory scope of the empty tomb theory strong.

The non-burial theory has a somewhat strong explanatory scope. In terms of the quantity of data available for analysis, this theory must rely on a select number of texts and discount the New Testament. A theory's explanatory scope centers around the amount of data and diversity that can be accounted for by a hypothesis. Proponents of the non-burial theory must ignore the New Testament and instead trust that what authors throughout the Roman Empire said about crucifixion had an equal application in

Palestine. This is possible, but the limiting of sources impacts the strength of the non-burial theory.[35]

Explanatory Power

The explanatory power of the empty tomb theory is somewhat strong. The explanatory power of a theory focuses on the quality of the available data and not the quantity. There is no doubt that the Gospels were written for the specific purpose of convincing the reader that Jesus was the Messiah (cf. John 20:31). This, however, does not *a priori* render them unreliable. Extra-biblical sources also indicate that crucified victims were sometimes allowed to be buried. Based on the available texts and archaeological evidence, the burial and empty tomb of Jesus are both plausible. In contrast to this possibility, there are also texts that speak of crucified victims not being buried. There is no reason to doubt the quality of these sources. In fact, non-burial appears to have been a common practice. The Gospels are biased, which limits their quality; however, extra-canonical sources also confirm that burying a victim was possible. Because of the dichotomy between the biased Gospels and the extra canonical texts which speak against burial, the highest rating that can be given for the explanatory power of the empty tomb hypothesis is somewhat strong.

The explanatory power of the non-burial theory is also somewhat strong. More often than not, it appears as if crucified victims were left on the cross or buried in shallow

[35] For either theory to have received a rating of "very strong," they would both need to make use of all the sources and archaeological evidence that has been examined. Although neither did this, the burial theory is stronger in the quantity of data that supports its hypothesis.

graves to be eaten. For Jesus to have been buried, an exception had to be made. There is no reason to question to reliability of the extra-canonical sources speaking against burial, which makes them high in quality. There are also extra-canonical sources and archaeological evidence that says victims could be buried though (some of it coming from within first-century Palestine). There is no reason to doubt the quality of this evidence either. Neither the empty tomb theory, nor the non-burial theory is stronger in terms of the quality of their sources. Both have strengths and weaknesses.[36]

Plausibility

The plausibility of the empty tomb is very strong. The tradition isolated through historical Jesus research presents a plausible case that women followers discovered the tomb empty. This does not explain why the tomb was empty, but just that it was. The emptiness of the tomb is further verified by the fact that no competing hypotheses from antiquity exist. From what is known about Jewish burial practices, there is little reason to doubt the plausibility of the empty tomb theory when the evidence for and against it is examined.

The plausibility of the non-burial theory is strong. If the New Testament did not exist and if it were a matter of comparing extra-canonical sources against each other, the

[36] Having non-Christian sources which speak of the burial of Jesus would make the empty tomb's explanatory scope very strong. Likewise, having Christian sources which speak of Jesus not being buried would make the non-burial theory's explanatory scope very strong. Ehrman is correct by writing, a historian desires sources that "Are not biased toward the subject matter, so that they have not skewed their accounts to serve their own purposes" (*Jesus*, 86).

non-burial theory would potentially be the strongest hypothesis.[37] It is not debated that the Romans left crucified victims on their cross, or that they occasionally buried them in shallow graves. The question is whether or not this happened to Jesus. The mitigating factors involved in Jesus's case (i.e., the Roman tendency to honor Jewish customs, the law that victims needed to be buried before sunset, the peaceful political situation during the 30's CE, and the sources which speak of burial being allowed), make the plausibility of the burial and empty tomb more likely, even though the plausibility of the non-burial theory is strong.

Ad Hoc

The empty tomb theory is not *ad hoc*. The degree to which it is not *ad hoc* is strong. There are no new suppositions which need to be introduced to make the theory work. Because this thesis is not arguing that God raised Jesus from the dead, or that God was responsible for opening the tomb, the scope of the available evidence does not drift into what might be deemed *ad hoc*.[38] Little speculation is taking place, since chapters 4 and 5 examined the Gospels and other relevant sources and found a compelling argument for the authenticity of the burial and empty tomb tradition. That tradition arose close to the time of the Easter events and is said to have come from eye-witnesses. The hypothesis

[37] Historical Jesus research is unique to the field of history in that the New Testament needs to be used to verify information within the New Testament. Does this entail that any argument produced through New Testament textual analysis is bound to be circular? Essentially, yes. Because so little is written about Jesus outside of the New Testament, if historical Jesus research is to continue, using the New Testament is essential. The purpose of historical Jesus criteria is to strengthen the weaknesses of a circular argument. Again, this present work is not affirming or criticizing the usefulness of the current criteria. The purpose is to use what is available to see what can be said about the empty tomb.

[38] Nor does it address issues that are typically relegated to the realms of theology or philosophy (i.e., the plausibility of miracles).

that Jesus was buried and that his tomb was found empty does not stretch beyond the realm of plausibility.

The degree to which the non-burial theory is *ad hoc* is somewhat strong. There is a strong case to be made in saying that birds or animals scavenged the body of Jesus. By ignoring the Gospels, however, proponents of the non-burial theory are forced to make a hypothetical reconstruction of the Easter events, based only on what is known from other parts of the Roman Empire. Even then, the theory would still be questionable. Tacitus, Josephus, the *Digesta,* along with the archaeological discovery of Yehohanan, give evidence that a proper burial for a crucified victim was at least possible. Yehohanan in particular, is evidence of crucified victims being buried in Palestine during the reign of Pilate.[39]

Disconfirmed by Fewer Accepted Beliefs

Neither the empty tomb or the non-burial theory is disconfirmed by accepted beliefs. The degree to which they both pass this criterion is very strong. To make either hypothesis work, few details about Ancient Near Eastern customs need to be guessed or imagined. The issue is not the sources, but rather, what to make of them and how to fit the Easter events within them. Based on what scholars believe they know about the past, either theory is possible. There is evidence that crucified victims were given proper burials—

[39] Although the burial hypothesis is plausible and not *ad hoc*, because not burying victims was common, the burial hypothesis cannot be scored very strong. The non-burial theory is weakened by ignoring multiple, independent sources (some of which claims to be from eye-witnesses) and choosing instead to reconstruct a hypothetical scenario based on information from outside Palestine.

making the empty tomb possible. There is also evidence to suggest that criminals were left on crosses or buried in shallow graves—making the non-burial theory possible.

Stronger Hypothesis

When comparing the empty tomb hypothesis with the non-burial theory, the empty tomb is the stronger hypothesis. This theory is being deemed "fairly probable." The empty tomb theory uses a higher quantity of sources than its competition, it is plausible and not *ad hoc*, and it is not disconfirmed by what is known about antiquity. This does not mean that the Gospels should not be read with a critical eye. It does, however, mean that they must be at least considered and discussed. If no information can be mined from the Gospels, historical Jesus research has no place in the future of academia. The non-burial theory is still strong and further research into its possibility is warranted. Its lack of supporting evidence from first-century Palestine makes it difficult to place ahead of the burial hypothesis though.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that a messianic movement arose in first-century Palestine claiming that a crucified Jew named Jesus had risen from the dead and that he was the Messiah. If Jesus was crucified publicly and buried in Jerusalem, his tomb's location would have been known. To eliminate any chance of this messianic movement spreading, officials could have gone to the tomb and produced the body. The fact that there is no record of this and that the ensuing movement quickly spread across the Roman Empire, is a further

indication that Jesus's body did not remain in the tomb. This does not explain why the body was missing, just that it is fairly probable that it was. As Grant concludes, "The evidence is firm and plausible enough to necessitate the conclusion that the tomb was indeed found empty."[40]

The case-study revolving around the empty tomb is now finished. In light of the probability scale presented in chapter 2, the empty tomb is fairly probable. This in no way guarantees historicity, but the available evidence makes it the strongest hypothesis for now. The stage is now set to evaluate Habermas and Licona's research approach. The questions proposed in the introduction can be answered based on the discussion that has taken place throughout this work.

[40] Grant, *Jesus*, 176.

CHAPTER 6: BASELINE INFORMATION

Introduction

The primary groundwork for this thesis has been laid. The empty tomb has been discussed in detail and the findings can now be analysed. The purpose of this present work has not been to solely weigh arguments for and against the empty tomb, but rather, to ask and answer the two primary questions noted in chapter 1: (1) Is using an approach such as historical bedrock or baseline information an effective way of addressing the resurrection or other highly debated topics?; (2) Does the case in favour of the empty tomb warrant further consideration as being a piece of baseline information when studying the resurrection? To answer the first primary question, there are two secondary questions essential to this discussion: (1) How important is scholarly consensus when attempting to reach a conclusion regarding a historical matter?; (2) Can a highly attested piece of data outweigh the fact that it does not have scholarly consensus?[1] These questions can now be addressed and answered.

[1] Although equally important, more attention is placed on primary question 1. This sets up the answer to primary question 2.

Primary Question 1: Using an Approach Such as Historical Bedrock or Baseline Information

Historical Bedrock

Historical bedrock is a useful approach because it allows one's attention to focus entirely on generally accepted data in the sphere of biblical studies. When discussing their approach, Habermas and Licona write, "We present our case using the 'lowest common denominator' of agreed-upon facts. This keeps attention on the central issue, instead of side tracking into matters that are irrelevant. This way we can present a strong argument that is both supportable and compelling."[2] The resurrection of Jesus is highly debated and because of its theological significances often evokes strong emotion from those involved in the discussion. Using historical bedrock focuses the debate on the central issue and prevents getting sidetracked into topics of secondary importance.[3]

The historical bedrock approach is also a useful approach because it only examines evidence that is highly attested and avoids anything that might be labelled controversial. Relying on evidence that lacks proof is not an effective way to substantiate a hypothesis. To propose a theory of merit, the hypothesis must be built on a foundation of compelling arguments and logic. When poor arguments are used, it has a greater chance of weakening the case being made and calls into question the authenticity of every

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[2] Habermas and Licona, *Case for the Resurrection*, 44.

[3] Failure to remain focused on the central issue can be observed when Lüdemann argues that the resurrection could not have occurred because he believes the Gospels are anti-Semitic. Even if the Gospels were anti-Semitic, it has little bearing on the historicity of an event (see Copan and Tecelli, eds., *Jesus'* [sic] *Resurrection*, 42).

other piece of evidence.[4] It is safer for scholars to rely on fewer, highly attested data points to build an argument, as opposed to building a questionable foundation built on uncertain arguments.

Lastly, the historical bedrock approach shows the importance of creating a strong starting point to work from when building a hypothesis. If the foundation is weak, every hypothesis derived from it will be weak as well. Arguing for a list of evidence that will then be used to derive a hypothesis, is a clear and concise way to layout a theory. Once various evidence has been presented, it can be combined together to form a hypothesis. For example, Habermas and Licona argue that: (1) Jesus died by crucifixion; (2) That the disciples had authentic appearances of him after his death; (3) That Paul became a Christian after a dramatic conversion experience. This is their foundation and it is built on three independent pieces of evidence. The hypothesis that they derive from this foundation contends that the best explanation of the evidence is that Jesus rose from the dead. If there is a weakness to any of the three foundational pieces of data, then it not only raises questions about the authenticity of that particular piece of data, but also any hypothesis that follows. One may assert that this is what typically happens in a debate anyways; however, the bedrock approach strongly articulates and places emphasis on the notion of having a strong foundation.

Despite the benefits of using the historical bedrock approach, there are also drawbacks associated with it. Outside of apologetics, it does not appear as if this

[4] Failure to adhere to this can be seen when Craig appeals to extraordinarily controversial evidence, such as the Shroud of Turin, to argue that Jesus rose from the dead. The controversy surrounding the authenticity of the Shroud makes it puzzling to see how the case in favour of the resurrection is enhanced (see *Son Rises*, 64–7).

approach can be used effectively to study the resurrection or other controversial issues. It cannot be expected that other scholars will use a research approach that limits their arguments. The limiting of evidence is done by Habermas and Licona to make their apologetic work as uncontroversial as possible to scholars who do not share their theological beliefs. This is an effective debating technique that serves an apologetic purpose well. It is doubtful, however, that other participants in a debate would readily agree to follow suit—to do so would mean forfeiting arguments that could be used to make their opposing case. A scholar arguing against the resurrection would likely not agree to refrain from employing an argument simply because the consensus does not agree—nor should they have to. If they believe the evidence is compelling, they should be free to present why.

Secondary Question 1: The Importance of Scholarly Consensus

Although scholarly consensus is important, it should not be the deciding factor on what can and cannot be used in a debate—this is the biggest drawback to the historical bedrock approach. The most apparent problem with using consensus as a criterion is the rapidly changing nature of scholarship.[5] This is problematic because the survival of the historical bedrock approach is entirely dependent on the scholarly trends in biblical studies. If scholarly trends erode the bedrock foundation, the approach would lose its applicability—there would simply not be enough information to use effectively. It is noteworthy that the research from Habermas's survey is from 1975 to the present.[6] This

[5] Which is neither positive nor negative.

[6] See Habermas, "Resurrection Research," 135–53; and "Mapping," 78–92.

period roughly corresponds to the beginning of the third quest for the historical Jesus, where, typically, scholars have been more sympathetic to the Gospels than during the mid twentieth century Bultmann Period.[7] Based on his research, Habermas concludes that 75% of scholars grant the empty tomb as historical.[8] Although a majority, this is not considered enough to include it as a piece of bedrock. The empty tomb passes the first criterion: to be highly evidenced, but fails the second: to be granted by nearly every scholar who studies the resurrection.

Calling data within the historical bedrock approach "facts" is misleading, since half of what makes up the criteria is contingent on others attesting to it.[9] Although the historical bedrock approach is "Not to be confused with a 'consensus' approach in which a fact is identified because a strong majority of scholars grant it," this does not take away from the reality that consensus still has the final say in what is admissible as evidence.[10] Relying on the harmony of a continually changing discipline to determine what is a "fact" will not produce a solid bedrock from which to work. There is nothing wrong with shifting back and forth over the validity of a piece of evidence in light of new arguments, the problem is that in the historical bedrock approach, the weight of an argument does not necessarily impact what evidence a scholar can deem as historical. In an area of study as emotionally charged as the resurrection, presuppositions and religious worldviews play a large role as well.

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[7] Habermas defends this approach by writing, "While surveys, of course, do not mean that any particular position is correct, that this is the contemporary theological state provides at least some clues as to where scholars think the data points" ("Evidential Apologetics," 282).

[8] Habermas, "Resurrection Research," 141. No indication is given for what minimum percentage is needed to include a piece of evidence within the list.

[9] This is why the word "fact" has been placed in quotation marks throughout this thesis and its usage has largely been reduced to the bedrock context in which Habermas and Licona use it.

[10] Licona, *Resurrection*, 279, emphasis original.

Baseline Information

If the historical bedrock approach is going to become applicable outside of apologetics, an amendment is needed. The baseline information approach is being suggested as a solution because it removes the dependency on consensus and focuses attention on the attestation of an argument. The concept of baseline information is similar to historical bedrock but has significant differences. Using the baseline information approach entails arguing for why certain data is highly attested and then using this information as a starting point to build a hypothesis upon. The reason why the empty tomb was left off the bedrock list is because it does not have a consensus; the arguments in favour of it were never in question. Chapters 4 and 5 have reaffirmed this and an amendment to the bedrock approach is being suggested so that the empty tomb can be included as evidence when discussing the resurrection.

The proposed baseline information is preferable to historical bedrock because it removes the dependence of consensus. Although it is still important to know the opinion of other scholars, in the baseline information approach, the percentage of those who accept a piece of data as historically probable does not impact whether or not it can be used in a hypothesis. The emphasis is purely on the strength of the argument. It also affirms the importance of creating a starting point for a debate, but the arguments it uses are solely focused on their attestation.

Although I believe using the baseline information method makes necessary amendments to historical bedrock, there are potential problems as well. Baseline information takes data that is highly attested and uses it as a central focus when studying a debated topic. There will perpetually be subjectivity in deciding what evidence counts

as being highly attested.[11] In an area of debate such as the resurrection, one's theological beliefs can greatly hinder their ability to truthfully examine the strengths of their own arguments.

How can scholars of diverse theological beliefs agree on a foundation of evidence? The simple answer is that they likely cannot. One foundation will naturally differ from another. These problems are indicative of the nature of historical research. There will never be an objective formula that can be used to study history. Criteria and methods can be employed, but they will always be challenged and will always have a degree of subjectivity to them. The best a historian can do is adhere to their identified method as closely as possible and re-evaluate their theory based on counter arguments, or the discovery of new evidence.

Secondary Question 2: Attestation and Consensus

Under the historical bedrock approach, attestation can never outweigh consensus. By using their definition, Habermas and Licona are correct to exclude the empty tomb from their list. Based on their criteria, the lack of scholarly consensus does not and cannot allow it to be used. With the bedrock approach, consensus will always have the final say. Until a future trend changes the percentage of scholars who acknowledge the empty tomb, it cannot be presented as a piece of evidence. In a reverse fashion, if a large number of scholars accept something as historical, this in no way guarantees that it is. Every historical hypothesis needs to be argued for and evaluated. Using an analogy of a

[11] It is noteworthy that Habermas and Licona never explain what makes something highly attested.

house, historical Jesus criteria and McCullagh's methods are the basement below the surface. Baseline information is the concrete foundation at ground level. Once these are in place, debate over the resurrection and other controversial aspects of Jesus's life can occur—this is the house being built.

With the baseline information approach, a highly attested piece of information *can* outweigh the reality that it does not have scholarly consensus. Using the baseline information approach ensures that a scholar's attention is placed where it matters the most—on the strength of the argument. To use the baseline information approach to disprove the resurrection, for example, one must argue for a certain number of foundational pieces of evidence (i.e., that the tomb was not empty, that the disciples did not actually receive visions of Jesus, that Paul's conversion was not as a result of a vision, and that the New Testament is unreliable). They are not limited by whether their evidence is agreed upon by the vast majority of scholars.[12] If someone were to use these particular four points as their foundation, after it has been laid, a hypothesis about why Jesus did not rise from the dead can then be proposed and put through a verification process to determine its strength. This was done earlier for the empty tomb but can also be done on a larger scale for the resurrection in general. If someone was arguing in favour of the resurrection, Craig's use of the Shroud of Turin would still be inadmissible as evidence under the baseline information approach; not because of the lack of scholarly consensus, but because of the lack of solid arguments in favour of its authenticity.[13]

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[12] It should be asked why scholars disagree with a set of findings though. If their reasoning is sound, then this could be an indication that a piece of evidence is not as highly attested as once thought.

[13] See Craig, *Son Rises*, 63–7.

The concept of limiting one's focus to highly attested evidence is attractive and worthwhile. It retains the primary intention of historical bedrock but modifies it to reduce the emphasis placed on consensus. What one debater views as a highly attested piece of evidence, another may disagree. Does this mean that something like the empty tomb cannot be used in the debate? Historical bedrock says yes, while baseline information says no.

Primary Question 2: The Empty Tomb Within Baseline Information

According to this study, the empty tomb is well attested and should be a piece of evidence within baseline information. It should not matter that it does not have the overwhelming support of the scholarly world. Based on the evidence presented and the verification process used, the tomb being empty is, as of now, the most likely scenario for what happened to Jesus's body after the crucifixion. As such, it ought to be an integral part of any debate regarding the resurrection. This does not necessarily imply that Jesus rose; but rather, that the empty tomb is a reasonable explanation of the evidence and ought to be accounted for. Scholars such as Crossan and Ehrman are free to argue against the resurrection; however, they must give more serious consideration to why the tomb was found empty. Although it is also possible that Jesus was left on the cross to be eaten or buried in a shallow grave, as I demonstrated in the present work, the stronger hypothesis is that women followers of Jesus actually did find his tomb empty three days after the crucifixion.

Habermas and Licona are brilliant scholars whose research into the resurrection is invaluable. Any serious student of the topic cannot avoid engaging with their work. The quality and comprehensive nature of Habermas and Licona's research is what made a review of the historical bedrock approach necessary. Their approach is replete with benefits and provides a simple way to address the highly controversial Easter story.

Using the historical bedrock approach outside of apologetics may never have been Habermas and Licona's intention. Their goal was, and remains, to present compelling reasons for why Jesus rose from the dead. They believe that by using their historical bedrock data, they can present a strong case for why the resurrection is factual. The drawback of historical bedrock is not the objective of the approach, but rather, how it is achieved. For the reasons listed, it is difficult to see how it could be successfully applied to other controversial topics, since the same drawbacks will perpetually remain. This chapter has attempted to amend the historical bedrock approach and provide a terminological change in order to keep its strengths and improve on its weaknesses. The desire of proposing baseline information is to have an approach that is applicable to other areas of study and disciples—especially outside of the field of apologetics.

CHAPTER 7: THE FUTURE OF RESURRECTION RESEARCH

Introduction

Discussion regarding whether or not Jesus rose from the dead is referred to by Allison as the "Prize puzzle of New Testament research."[1] Some scholars believe that historians can and should attempt to research the resurrection, even though the philosophical discussion of miracles will undoubtedly be a factor.[2] Others, claim that any talk of the resurrection must be relegated to the confines of a church or religious establishment and answering questions about miracles are not within the capabilities of a historian.[3] The purpose of this thesis was not to argue that a miracle took place, or that Jesus rose from the dead. Rather, the purpose was to address and answer the two primary questions proposed in the introductory chapter, along with the two secondary questions. These all concerned the significance of the empty tomb within the wider resurrection debate, as well as the use of approaches such as historical bedrock and baseline information. Just as the actions and words of Jesus are studied through historical Jesus criteria, the emptiness of the tomb can also be studied using the same criteria.

Summary of Chapters

Subsequent to introducing the topic in chapter 1, it was argued in chapter 2 that studying history and reaching an admissible conclusion about the past is possible; however,

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[1] Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 200. See the numerous debates published on the "Veritas Forum," [n.d.]; and "Reasonable Faith," [2018].

[2] See Licona, *Resurrection*, 198; and Meyer, *Aims*, 102.

[3] See Meier, *Mentor*, 970; and *Roots*, 13.

guaranteed knowledge of historical events is not attainable. Probability must be used to weigh the historical validity of a hypothesis and this hypothesis must continually be open to revision. In chapter 3, historical Jesus criteria and McCullagh's conditions were outlined, as too were their usefulness in forming and evaluating a hypothesis. By using historical Jesus criteria to analyze the empty tomb and by comparing it against the non-burial theory, it was argued in chapters 4 and 5 that the tomb being empty is fairly probable. As is necessary, this claim is made with the understanding that a new discovery could alter this hypothesis. Chapter 6 presented a discussion on the primary and secondary questions and explained why using a research approach such as baseline information is preferable to historical bedrock.

Summary of Argument

Throughout this thesis, my contribution to the field of biblical studies has been to argue that the tomb of Jesus being empty is the best explanation of the available data. As such, it deserves to be taken seriously by scholars debating the historicity of the resurrection. If the historical bedrock approach, as popularized by Habermas and Licona is to be used, the empty tomb cannot be considered in the resurrection discussion. Although highly attested, it does not have the consensus needed to grant its status as a piece of evidence; this is problematic. Putting too much weight on the role of consensus can turn controversial issues into popularity contests and a suitable examination of the historical evidence may be lost.

To amend the historical bedrock approach, a new set of criteria and a new title were proposed. The baseline information approach necessitates arguing why a certain amount of evidence (not "facts") is historically probable. This evidence is then used as a foundation to build a hypothesis on. As in historical bedrock, the importance of creating a starting point from which to work is affirmed, but only after the evidence being used has been sufficiently explained. The baseline information approach is applicable beyond apologetics. It encourages historians to be honest in their research and discourages the use of evidence that is mired in controversy—unless one is prepared to argue for why that piece of evidence is highly probable. It also stops the possibility of consensus overruling highly attested evidence.

Questions for Further Study

Should research on the resurrection from a historical perspective continue? This is a difficult question to answer and there are undoubtedly various answers that can be given. I am of the persuasion that yes, it should. As seen throughout the New Testament, the early church grounded its message in the belief that Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead.[4] The resurrection is without question the foundational belief of Christianity, with Paul admitting that if it did not happen, "Then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain" (1 Cor 15:14). The three historical Jesus quests have shown the passion, emotion, and controversy that arises out of the endeavors to study the Jew

[4] Cf. Acts 2:14–41; 4:2, 10; 5:29–32; 10:39–43; 13:13–41; 17:2–3; 25:19; 26:8; Rom 1:4; 4:24; 6:4, 9; 7:4; 8:11; 10:9; 14:9; 1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 1:9; 4:14; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20; Col 2:12; 1 Thess 1:10; 2 Tim 2:8; 1 Pet 1:3, 21; Rev 1:5, 18. See especially Rom 10:9. Paul writes, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that *God raised him from the dead*, you will be saved" (emphasis added).

from Nazareth using historical methods. They have also shown the vastly different portraits of Jesus that can emerge from different people using similar criteria. The legitimacy of the church and the faith of countless people depend on whether or not it happened. Resurrection research should thus be an important part of biblical studies.[5]

When debating, there are questions surrounding what needs to be argued for and what can be assumed. Should making assumptions be allowed in a debate? If Habermas were to debate Price over the historicity of the resurrection, for example, it would not matter what evidence on the resurrection Habermas presented, because Price does not assume that Jesus even existed. How are two debaters, who are so far at odds from one another, find common ground? This is a question that needs further attention in the biblical studies community.

In terms of the resurrection debate as a whole, further questions related to the dating of the Gospels, their literary relationship, the oral tradition, the role of archaeology, the use of extra canonical sources, and other methodological issues need to be addressed. Speaking as a Christian, Panennberg expresses that "Only at his (Jesus's) return will debate concerning the reality of the Easter event be at an end and will that reality definitively and publicly come into force."[6] This may be so, but it should not stop the intrepid scholar from attempting to shoot the metaphorical arrow at the sun.[7] Wright wisely argues, "We must take the historical questions and challenges on board; we cannot retreat into a private world of 'faith' which history cannot touch. . . . The forward

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[5] See Peters, "Future of the Resurrection," 149–69; and O'Collins, *What Are They Saying?*
[6] Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:627.
[7] See Wright, *Resurrection*, 3–31, 736–8.

direction may not be comfortable; either for scholarship or the church. Forward directions seldom are."[8]

As the Third Quest to find the historical Jesus continues, only time will tell where the discussion will go. Perhaps a Fourth Quest will overtake the current one, and another one after that. Trends in biblical research will vary and new discoveries will force the revision of hypotheses. An outpouring of humility is needed to admit when a hypothesis has died. Paul writes in Ephesians of a "mystery" which was "hidden for ages in God" (3:9). To Paul, this mystery about God and the grace he offers has been revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Will the debate over the mystery of the resurrection soon come to an end? No! Differing worldviews and theological beliefs will continue to impact the outcome of one's research on the topic. One may very well make that accusation against my own work, which admittedly is coming from a Christian perspective. I hope my reliance on historical methods have offset any natural bias I may have towards the subject matter.

It will be fascinating to see what new literature is produced on the subject and how the next generation of scholars choose to pick up this important mantle. Wherever resurrection research goes, the empty tomb ought to be an integral part of the discussion. Using baseline information to create a starting point from which to work may not solve the debate, but hopefully, it will relegate unsubstantial arguments. By approaching the subject with integrity, honesty, humility, and an openness to learn, perhaps the proverb,

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[8] Wright, *Jesus*, 122.

"Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another" may be fulfilled (Prov 27:17).

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