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On the Resurrection Appearances of Jesus

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nor does the empty tomb pericope (surprisingly!) involve any lament. Neither is Ishtar's journey into the underworld to bring back her husband Tammuz from the realm of the dead analogous to the discovery of the empty tomb. In the Osiris myth his wife Isis searches for the pieces of his dismembered body and buries them throughout Egypt (which serves to explain why so many burial sites for Osiris are claimed!); but the empty tomb narrative involves no such search for the body because the place of Jesus' interment is known. Thus, it is long stretch to see such myths as underlying the narratives when much closer at hand are the actual women followers of Jesus, who in accordance with Jewish custom would do precisely what they are portrayed as doing.

11. *The Jewish polemic.* Fales denies that we know what the earliest Jewish polemic was against the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection. All we have is a single, uncorroborated, Christian story which is probably a legend. My point, however, in no way assumes the historicity of Matthew's guard story. Rather what is important is that Matthew is so exercised by an allegation which was "widely spread among the Jews to this day" (Mt 28.15) that he includes a lengthy addition to the Markan empty tomb narrative in order to refute it. I have elsewhere argued on the basis of vocabulary and tradition history that this dispute is, indeed, early.²³ And the tradition shows that even the opponents of the nascent Christian movement recognized that Jesus' body was missing.

In short, we have good reasons for accepting the empty tomb as part of our picture of the historical Jesus, whereas Fales's religionsgeschichtliche alternative lacks credibility.

On the Resurrection Appearances of Jesus

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In this essay I will evaluate Evan Fales's approach to the resurrection appearances of Jesus. His strategy is creative and lively, employing a considerably different approach from that of most contemporary scholars, hence its provocative nature.

²³ See my "The Guard at the Tomb," *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 273-81.

Evan Fales's Strategy

Fales's response to our volume *In Defense of Miracles* is multi-faceted. Besides his philosophical expertise, other interests are manifested throughout his critique. In the chapters that bear on New Testament concerns, especially treatments of the historical Jesus, Fales repeatedly draws from recent anthropological and sociological studies. He asserts that "NT scholars often ignore this information" (30).

Fales's response to my chapter seems to incorporate two chief points challenging my claim that Jesus' disciples saw Him again after His death. (1) There are numerous parallels to Jesus' death and resurrection in ancient near-Eastern (ANE) religions and/or in contemporary settings. Fales is especially interested in the former, citing examples like "Marduk/Tammuz, Osiris, Bacchus, Attis, and Adonis." (2) The "functional role of mystical experiences" is not at all to address the objectivity of the episodes themselves, but to accredit those who have them. Thus, the crucial item is that these experiences are the means by which the recipients are given authority among their peers. The apostle Paul serves as "a most interesting case study" on which to test these last ideas. Fales thinks that this early church leader manifests precisely the sort of quest for authority that helps to explain his emphasis on the resurrection appearances of Jesus. While evaluating mystical experiences, Fales relies heavily on the work of I. M. Lewis. In particular, Lewis differentiates between two different mystical strains. The first, peripheral mysticism, is chiefly manifest among groups of persons (mostly women) who are downtrodden and marginalized by their societies, and who experience possession by a supernatural being. The second, central mysticism, is presumably a more mainline variety. These persons are said to be recruited by the gods and thrust into leadership positions, seemingly against their wills.¹

For Fales, Paul is a combination of both types. The apostle was a central mystic when functioning in his own Jewish culture, but was a peripheral mystic when seen against the backdrop of the dominant Greco-Roman society around him.²

I will respond to each of these two main charges. As in my original chapter, as well as in Fales's reply, I will simply note that I am only able to provide an outlined response here. Many more details may be obtained from my other writings on these subjects.

¹ I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, 2d ed. (London: Routledge, 1989), 25-31. As Lewis states, "religious leaders turn to ecstasy when they seek to strengthen and legitimize their authority" (29). Cf. Steven E. Ozment's angle that "the mystical enterprise . . . can be adopted for the critical purposes of dissent, reform, and even revolution." See Ozment's *Mysticism and Dissent: Religious Ideology and Social Protest in the Sixteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), 8.

² For Fales's treatment here, see "Can Science Explain Mysticism?" *Religious Studies* 35 (1999), 213-14.

Ancient Parallels to Jesus' Resurrection

Fales seems to think that resurrection stories in the ancient mystery religions, in particular (and/or contemporary reports), somehow explain the early Christian teaching of Jesus' resurrection. Reliance on the development of myths and/or legends in the ancient world was a popular thesis late last century, especially in the *Religionsgeschichte* school of thought. But such hypotheses have been dismissed today by the vast majority of critical researchers. As we will see, there are strong reasons for this.

With Fales, though, it is exceedingly difficult to decipher exactly why he introduced the ANE religions. In what direction should we take these stories? Does he think that they are rivals to the historicity of Jesus' resurrection? If so, in what sense? Are they explanations of how these New Testament accounts arose? Of how they function? To show how quickly myth can arise? To find areas of commonality? To point out the non-historical genre? All of the above? In the case of any contemporary rivals to Jesus' resurrection, Fales is even more elusive.³ He needs to more carefully detail his intentions, especially since this is one of his central theses.

Granted, Fales is limited in what he can say. Still, he mentions the ANE scenario many times throughout his critique, yet without detailing the specific sense in which these myths supposedly rival/refute/explain/parallel the resurrection accounts. While it is difficult to know exactly, I will offer a number of general comments.

First, the philosophical differences between the ANE religions and Christianity are immense. The former chiefly began as celebrations of the seasonal changes. Heroic stories arose, patterned after the dying vegetation in the Fall and its "rising" in the Spring. At their foundations, these systems eschew linear philosophies of history in favor of cyclical, seasonal patterns.

Second, the gods and goddesses, like Dumuzi and Inanna, Tammuz and Ishtar, Isis and Osiris, were not even historical persons—they never lived. In perhaps the best known account of Isis and Osiris, Plutarch even cautions that one ought not believe that any of these tales happened like they are reported. Later he states that, "We must not treat legend as if it were history."⁴ These differences are in such stark contrast to the historical nature of

³ Because Fales barely mentions contemporary cases, without specific details, I will simply respond that I have investigated the subject elsewhere: Gary R. Habermas, "Resurrection Claims in Non-Christian Religions," *Religious Studies* 25 (1989), 167-77.

⁴ See Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris* (Loeb Classical Library ed.), 11 and 58, respectively. Myths can still include real historical events, either generally or specifically. Cf. Levi Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. 2, trans. Monique Layton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 268.

Judeo-Christian beliefs that it is exceptionally difficult to make comparisons.⁵ Certainly one cannot casually refer to the ANE religions and begin making assertions regarding their relation to historical religions. From the outset, we find grave difficulties with these sorts of comparisons, from both philosophical as well as historical perspectives.

Third, and perhaps even more damaging, the tale of Isis and Osiris seems to be the only known case among the mystery religions where there exists both clear and early evidence that a dead god was said to be resuscitated, which is dated prior to the middle or late second century AD. As far as is known, the other "resurrection" stories actually *postdate* the Christian message. On occasion, the mystery religions were even inspired by Christian teachings.⁶

Fourth, the case of Isis and Osiris, the best known and most influential ANE scenario, provides little grounds for influencing Christianity. The similarities are few, while often being diametrically opposed to the Christian gospel. Although the story varies so widely that it is virtually impossible to put a single sequence together, Isis rescues Osiris (her husband, brother, or son!) after he is cut up into fourteen pieces and floated down the Nile River! She finds all of the pieces except one and resuscitates him by any of several methods, including beating her wings over his body. In the ancient world, the crux of the story is Osiris' death and the mourning afterwards, not any resuscitation. Further, either Isis or Horus, their son, rather than Osiris, is the real hero. This myth is another of the vegetation gods with a non-linear, non-historical pattern of thought.⁷

Moreover, Osiris does not remain on earth after Isis performs her magic; he either descends to the underworld or is called the sun.⁸ Even critical scholar Helmut Koester firmly states, "it is never said that [Osiris] rose."⁹ For reasons like these, it would be exceptionally difficult to substantiate any charge of inspiring the New Testament teachings of Jesus' death¹⁰ and resurrection.

⁵ For the details here, see Bruce M. Metzger, "Methodology in the Study of the Mystery Religions and Early Christianity," in his *Historical and Literary Studies: Pagan, Jewish, and Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), chapter 1, esp. 13, 23.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 11, 20-22; Edwin Yamauchi, "Life, Death and the Afterlife in the Ancient Near East" in Richard L. Longenecker, ed., *Life in the Face of Death* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 21-50. Günter Wagner, *Das Religionsgeschichtliche Problem von Römer 6, 1-11* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1962). Cf. S. H. Hooke, *Middle Eastern Mythology* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1963), 20-22, 40.

⁷ For these and many other details, see R. E. Witt, *Isis in the Greco-Roman World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), 17-18, 27, 36-40, 45, 162, 194; Hooke, *Middle Eastern Mythology*, 19-23, 39-41, 65-70.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 68; Metzger, "Mystery Religions and Early Christianity," 20.

⁹ Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Vol. 1: *History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1982), 190; cf. also 193.

¹⁰ Martin Hengel maintains that, "the Christian message fundamentally broke apart the customary conceptions of atonement in the ancient world and did so at many points." For several

Other problems abound with Fales's suggested mythical thesis. Fifth, proponents celebrate barely possible similarities (along with some amazingly farfetched comparisons) between Christianity and the mystery religions. But the great *differences* between all of these tales and the New Testament are frequently ignored. Otto Pfliegerer, a proponent of the *Religionsgeschichte* school, even acknowledges the accuracy of this concern.¹¹

Sixth, scholars realize that these legends exercised very little influence in first century Palestine. Historian Michael Grant notes this major problem for the mythical thesis: "Judaism was a milieu to which doctrines of the deaths and rebirths of mythical gods seems so entirely foreign that the emergence of such a fabrication from its midst is very hard to credit."¹² The issue here is Fales's cross-cultural comparisons to the first century Jewish milieu without empirical data.

In my chapter to which Fales is responding, I detailed several other serious problems with the legend theory. The Christian proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection was both early and based on eyewitness reports, chiefly that of Paul in 1 Cor 15:3ff. Adequate account must be made regarding the testimonies of those who claimed to actually see Jesus alive after his death.¹³ The New Testament language is that of sight.¹⁴ Gerd Lüdemann, an atheistic New Testament scholar, asserts: "*ophthe* is a verb of seeing and Paul must have expected the Corinthians to understand the term historically" Paul is speaking of "his own active sensual perception"¹⁵

Fales wants us to think that Paul's testimony makes little difference. But the vast majority of critical researchers reject his approach. As Wolfhart Pannenberg asserts regarding the early, eyewitness evidence for Jesus' resurrection appearances: "Under such circumstances, it is an idle venture to make parallels in the history of religions responsible for the *emergence* of the primitive Christian message about Jesus' resurrection."¹⁶ Even Otto Pfliegerer, an advocate of the ANE thesis a century ago, agrees that myths

examples, see Hengel's *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1981), 31-32.

¹¹ Otto Pfliegerer, *The Early Christian Conception of Christ: Its Significance and Value in the History of Religion* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1905), 153-54, 159. For many other examples of differences, see Metzger, 12-23.

¹² Michael Grant, *Jesus: An Historian's Review of the Gospels* (New York: Scribner's, 1977, 1992), 199. Cf. Hooke, *Middle Eastern Mythology*, 174.

¹³ Gary R. Habermas, "The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus," in *In Defense of Miracles*, 262-70.

¹⁴ Details are provided by Gerald O'Collins, *Interpreting the Resurrection: Examining the Major Problems in the Stories of Jesus' Resurrection* (New York: Paulist, 1988), 12-19.

¹⁵ Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1994), 37, 50, respectively.

¹⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. Lewis Wilkins and Duane Priebe (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1968), 91 (Pannenberg's emphasis).

cannot be the direct cause of the early resurrection teaching, which is "not to be derived from this nature-myth, because it has its most direct source in the historical fact of the death of Jesus, and the following visions seen by His disciples."¹⁷

In sum, to prove that New Testament writers were substantially inspired by the mystery religions is fruitless, according to most scholars.¹⁸ The ANE approach just will not do, and for many weighty reasons. Oxford University scholar N. T. Wright states forcefully that finding parallels between Christianity and "the mystery religions is an attempt to turn the clock back in a way now forbidden by the most massive and learned studies on the subject." This is why the mystery religion approaches "have failed, as virtually all Pauline scholars now recognize."¹⁹

Paul: Authority Seeker or Resurrection Witness?

Fales's second major charge is that the purpose of mystical experiences is to accredit a claim to authority. Therefore, Paul's resurrection appearance was not about the objectivity of his experience, but served to justify the apostle's claim to speak for God. Pinpointing our chief difference here, Fales states: "What Paul absolutely needed . . . was to legitimate a claim of independent authority. . . . Habermas would say Paul got the authority because he had the vision. I would suggest that he had the vision because he needed the authority" (32).

Providing some details, Fales notes that, among the Jewish people, "Paul apparently was, initially, an up-and-coming young politico." But among the Romans, he was "a member of a subjugated and marginalized group." To the church, he was "an outsider . . . a former enemy" (32). This explains Fales's view that Paul was both a peripheral and a central mystic.

It seems that, in addressing Paul's situation, Fales has forced his anthropological hypothesis concerning the function of mystical experiences to fit the data at all costs. But Paul's particular case just cannot be explained in this manner. Even on Fales's own reconstruction, he has failed to make his case. There are many reasons why this is so.

First, Fales's thesis presents an extremely insufficient *social* justification for Paul to legitimate his authority as a Christian. If Paul desired to upgrade his marginalized Jewish status, he should have moved toward the predominant Roman establishment instead of to fledgling Christianity,

¹⁷ Pfliegerer, *The Early Christian Conception of Christ*, 157-58; cf. 77-78.

¹⁸ Metzger, "Mystery Religions and Early Christianity," 4-24. See also the sources in notes 10-19, each of which disagrees with Fales in one or more key areas.

¹⁹ N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 173, 172, respectively.

which was politically, socially, and economically inferior to both. Paul's Roman citizenship would have helped facilitate his move, too. Further, in the First Century, Jews had a status that generally allowed them freedom to worship on their own terms. However, Jews distanced themselves from Christians, occasionally pointing them out to Roman authorities as the newcomers with the strange doctrine. So, in Fales's terms, such a move only led Paul to greater subjugation! And Paul certainly knew this, for he was the one leading the charge! Certainly, the apostle did not thereby move beyond his peripheral status; he actually traded an honored position for a more inferior one! This was not the smartest social move he could have made.

Second, judging Paul by Fales's proposal vastly underestimates the depth and the "Jewishness" of the apostle's *theology*. He was a zealous Pharisee, a "Hebrew of Hebrews" who had devoted his life to studying the Old Testament Law, enacting his beliefs by persecuting the church (Phil. 3:1-6). Theology and purity were his primary concerns, not making a move to a blasphemous sect, for any reason! But for Fales, Paul's primary concern was to position himself authoritatively in the Christian community. This fails to accord with what we know concerning Paul and his theological situation.

Third, and most crucially, given these Jewish convictions and Christianity's heretical beliefs, Paul had no *motivation* to convert to Christianity, either. Without such a catalyst, Paul's desire to move from "an up-and-coming young politico" in Judaism to "an aspiring leader" of the Christian church is groundless. Fales gets the cart way out in front of the horse here. His scenario provides no impetus for Paul to need a vision to gain the authority. Moreover, Paul proved on several occasions that he was more than willing to die for his faith (2 Cor. 11:23-29; Phil. 1:21-23). Later, he died as a martyr (Clement 3:13-15). These are just a few pointers to the fact that, as he explains, Paul's conversion relies on a real experience of the risen Jesus (1 Cor. 9:1; 5:8).

Fourth, there are *textual* indications from Paul's list of resurrection appearances in 1 Cor. 15:3-8 that the authority motif was not his chief intention. Fales postulates that Paul ordered the appearances to signify "the relative authority of the apostles," particularly Peter and James (33). But on this thesis, we have already seen that it is very difficult to explain Paul's specific language.²⁰ Additionally, the listing of others to whom Jesus appeared is also problematic.

Fales responds that the appearance to the 500 followers "is, obviously, chaff" (34). But he entirely misses the point that, whether or not anyone

²⁰ See Gerald O'Collins and Gerd Ludemann above on Paul's language of literal sight.

would care to check it out, Paul is making a claim about those who saw Jesus—a claim that does not further his own authority. Paul is clearly asserting the historicity of Jesus' appearances, not positioning himself. Here is another marker indicating that Fales's presuppositions are getting in the way of his historical research, especially when he admits that he "cannot prove" his authority thesis here (33). Jesus Seminar scholar John Kloppenborg thinks that Paul was interested in aligning himself with the other apostles. "[H]owever, this is clearly a secondary issue," while Paul's primary motive was "to support the argument concerning the reality of the resurrection."²¹

Fifth, Fales hypothesizes all of this about Paul *without any specific historical justification* for doing so. He admits that empirical subjects are not his forte.²² Critics can do all of the guesswork they want, but their attempts are mere conjecture unless they are linked to the early data. But we have no evidential indications that Paul's conversion was due to anything other than what he claimed: a life-changing appearance of the resurrected Jesus.

So Fales has failed to provide any demonstration of the authority thesis crafted after the manner of I. M. Lewis, and applied to the apostle Paul's conversion. He admits elsewhere that no alternative theory has yet been able to provide "conclusive evidence" either for Lewis's own approach or for "any other naturalistic account of mystical experiences," the category in which he places Paul's resurrection appearance.²³ He has challenged the views of many critical Pauline scholars, but without proving his case.

Thus, the case for the early, eyewitness testimony for Jesus' resurrection appearances sketched in my chapter, and detailed elsewhere, still stands. It is supported by other data besides, like that for the empty tomb. It is obvious why Fales objects to Bill Craig's thesis, too. He must reject this evidence at all costs, for it also plays havoc with his authority thesis.

Additional Considerations

I would like to address a few other issues pursued by Fales. He heartily approves applying naturalistic hypotheses to Christianity's supernatural claims (12, 17, 20, 26, 34). Yet in describing the state of critical scholarship, he repeatedly misjudges the current scene, and widely so. For example, he decries my emphasis on addressing hallucination theses, calling this

²¹ John Kloppenborg, "An Analysis of the Pre-Pauline Formula in 1 Cor 15:3b-5 in Light of Some Recent Literature," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978), 359n45. Interestingly, Kloppenborg also uses Paul's comment about the appearance to the 500 to make his point, since it "has nothing to do with the idea of legitimation of apostolic authority" (360n45).

²² Fales, "Can Science Explain Mysticism?" 216.

²³ Evan Fales, "Scientific Explanations of Mystical Experiences," *Religious Studies* 32 (1996), 311, cf. 303.

methodology “much too naive” (34). Then he rather self-assuredly chastises me and the “fundamental apologetes” who are “unaware of naturalistic explanations outside [their] narrow ambit But it is surely time for this community to expand its horizons” (34).

Apparently Fales has not spent much time researching these issues. I am currently cataloging approximately 1,100 critical sources on the resurrection published during the last 25 years and the results are intriguing. Naturalistic theses regarding Jesus’ resurrection were most popular during the Nineteenth Century. They have been comparatively unpopular, even among critics, during the Twentieth. But the last two decades have witnessed a small resurgence of these alternative theses. Of the most recent naturalistic efforts among philosophers and theologians, hallucinations are *by far* the most popular approach.²⁴

In contrast, Fales’s ANE suggestions have largely been rejected during most of this century though not, as he suggests, for lack of research. As I mentioned, the *Religionsgeschichte* school pursued it at great length, but the vast majority of critical scholars have judged that it cannot account for the New Testament data.

True, popularity is not the test for research. But Fales chose to make an issue of the direction taken by evangelical apologists and our responses to a narrow group of our “pet” alternative theses. But as it turns out, he is the one who is unaware of what critics are saying. His seeming belligerence along the way, especially in his last paragraph, simply heightens his error. Fales apparently thinks that the mass hallucination theory is fairly useless, but, of course, apologists need to respond especially to the most current challenges.

On a related note, Fales asserts that reported “visions of divine figures are a commonplace phenomenon” (18). Yet, he fails to thoroughly distinguish the many varieties of such reports, either phenomenologically or historically. Arguably the majority of these are not even meant to be taken literally, as in the mystery myths. Later, followers of Isis and other mystery figures pursued visions while in states of incubation, reporting that they saw these gods in their dreams.²⁵ As Fales says, many other accounts serve the

²⁴ For some examples, this is Lüdemann’s view, above; also Michael Goulder, “The Baseless Fabric of a Vision” in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Oxford: OneWorld, 1996); Jack Kent, *The Psychological Origins of the Resurrection Myth* (London: Open Gate, 1999).

²⁵ Incubation involved some rather severe forms of bodily deprivation and isolation, both known experimentally to be practices that stimulate hallucinations and mystical experiences, in addition to their own claims that these visions were manifested in dreams. Further, it is thought that overzealous priests even impersonated some of the gods. See Witt, *Isis in the Greco-Roman World*, 22, 54, 153, 158-64, 189-92, 195-96; Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Vol. 1, 189-91.

purpose of increasing the authority of individuals, while some are simply faked.²⁶ Still others do not survive the results of historical criticism.²⁷

But Fales also speaks as if the New Testament reports of Jesus’ resurrection appearances were perhaps claims to something akin to ethereal visions of light. We can only briefly note here that some of the most recent studies indicate that even Paul’s notion is that of *bodily* appearances of Jesus. Though changed, Jesus’ body occupied space and time.²⁸ This direction further distances Jesus’ appearances from these “visions of divine figures.”²⁹

Fales repeatedly mentions New Testament discrepancies as a chief reason for disregarding the resurrection’s facticity. But as I pointed out in my chapter in *In Defense of Miracles* (and everywhere else I present a case for the resurrection), my methodology is always to argue from facts that the vast majority of both believers and unbelievers share as historical.³⁰ It is crucial to understand that, among other things, this method bypasses the disputed portions in favor of the best attested data. This is where we find the strongest evidence for the resurrection.

In attempting to explain the nature of mystical experiences, Fales discusses the ground-breaking neuro-physiological research of Wilder Penfield that reproduced certain mystical sensations in his patients.³¹ What Fales neglected to report is that these very experiments, which he seems to think

²⁶ Fales states repeatedly that his approach is taken for granted in anthropology. I do not doubt that reported visions might frequently serve an authoritarian purpose. But such a rule cannot be *uniformly assumed*. Such a conclusion should only be drawn on a case by case basis when warranted by the empirical data. For instance, Fales recommends and relies quite heavily on Rowan Williams’s “excellent biography” *Teresa of Avila* (Harrisburg: Morehouse, 1991), apparently thinking that William’s presentation has affinities to Lewis’s thesis (Evan Fales, “Scientific Explanations of Mystical Experiences, Part I: The Case of St Teresa,” *Religious Studies* 32 [1996], 152-53). Yet Fales seems unaware that Williams does not treat Jesus’ resurrection appearances in the same manner. See Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982), 104-119.

²⁷ See the details in Habermas, “Resurrection Claims in Non-Christian Religions,” above.

²⁸ For some examples, see N.T. Wright, “Early Traditions and the Origin of Christianity,” *Sewanee Theological Review* 41:2 (1998); Stephen T. Davis, “Seeing’ the Risen Jesus” and William P. Alston, “Biblical Criticism and the Resurrection,” both in *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). For an older but still authoritative and well-reasoned treatise, see Robert H. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology with Emphasis on Paul’s Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), esp. Chap. 13 on Paul’s treatment of Jesus’ resurrection body.

²⁹ Another such contrast is Teresa of Avila’s view that mystical reports of “physical experiences are the most suspect of all,” and are the most likely to be faked (Williams, *Teresa*, 131, cf. 135). Her mystical images, then, were in contrast to Jesus’ fleshly, historical incarnation (133-35).

³⁰ Habermas, “The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus,” 262-63, 274-75.

³¹ Fales, “Can Science Explain Mysticism?” 222-23.

contribute to a worthy natural explanation of mystical experiences, convinced Penfield himself to change his monistic metaphysics to dualism, hinting strongly at the belief in life after death!³²

In the same context, Fales also mentions the subject of near-death experiences, apparently as another means of providing a natural explanation of mystical experiences.³³ But here he does not report the voluminous body of scientific literature that argues at length, among other things, that literally dozens of NDEs are unexplained by natural means. Some of these accounts provide incredible corroboration of details during extended times (sometimes even hours!) without measurable heart and/or brain activity.³⁴ Along with Jesus' resurrection, here is another challenge to naturalism on the topic of life after death.

Other subjects could be mentioned, due to Fales's far-ranging comments.³⁵ But these will have to suffice for this discussion.

Conclusion

Evan Fales and I disagree concerning quite a number of items regarding the New Testament proclamation of the historical Jesus and his resurrection from the dead. However, this does not nullify the fact that his essay is fresh, creative, and thoughtful, bringing his background to bear on the subject of miracles.

³² Wilder Penfield, *The Mystery of the Mind* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), esp. 76-90.

³³ Fales, "Can Science Explain Mysticism?" 223.

³⁴ For just a sampling, see Michael Sabom, *Recollections of Death: A Medical Perspective* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982); Michael Sabom, *Light and Death* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998); Ian Stevenson and Bruce Greyson, "Near-Death Experiences: Relevance to the Question of Survival After Death," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 242 (July 20, 1979): 265-267; Melvin Morse, "Near Death Experiences and Death-Related Visions in Children: Implications for the Clinician," *Current Problems in Pediatrics* 24 (February, 1994): 55-83; Gary R. Habermas and J.P. Moreland, *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidence for Immortality* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998), esp. Chaps. 7-9; Gary R. Habermas, "Near Death Experiences and the Evidence—A Review Essay," *Christian Scholar's Review* 26 (Fall 1996): 78-85.

³⁵ For instance, he tells Geivett: "There is no non-Christian evidence that Jesus was a figure of any significance in first-century Judea . . ." (19). Space does not permit a discussion of the more than one dozen secular references to several dozen aspects of Jesus' life and early Christianity. These are recorded within 100-150 years or so by several ancient historians, a Roman governor, and two Roman Caesars, among others. The resurrection is even mentioned more than once. This is an incredible number of reports for an individual in the ancient world. Although generally brief, it is difficult to understand why there was such widespread knowledge of Jesus if he were not much more prominent than Fales indicates here. See

Fales begins his essay with a plea for "some modesty," while warning the reader that his comments will still "sometimes verge on harshness" (7-8). A few examples of the latter are evident throughout his article. This reaches an apex in the last condescending paragraph just before his conclusion (34), aimed at myself and "fundamentalist apologetes." Perhaps some of this is due to the importance of his subject.

Strangely enough, Fales seems to be most sure of himself in areas where multiple strands of empirical data convincingly oppose his thesis. Some instances are Fales's assertions concerning the ANE parallels to Jesus' resurrection, his rejection of the early and eyewitness testimony for the appearances especially as supplied by Paul, Fales's insistence that Paul had a vision because he needed authority in the early church, and his denunciation of hallucination theses as a figment of the apologist's own thinking. Incredibly, he complains that Moreland needs to support his claims with arguments (14), when empirical evidence is the very thing that Fales so frequently does not provide in his response to Jesus' appearances! I think that Fales is mistaken in virtually every major argument that he makes. I have attempted to give some of my reasons for this conclusion.

F.F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974); Edwin Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament: What is the Evidence?" in *Jesus Under Fire*, ed. Michael Wilkins and J.P. Moreland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995); R.T. France, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986); Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), esp. Chap. 9. I also wish I had the space to discuss many other issues. Among these are Fales's charge that "no serious Bible scholar would agree" with the consistency of the Gospels (21), his suggestion that the New Testament is inconsistent regarding every aspect of Jesus' passion "save only that Jesus was killed" (19), his denial of virtually every critically-acclaimed historical fact surrounding the events after the crucifixion (27), or his charge that Paul regularly disagreed with other apostolic leaders (32). In such examples, Fales prefers sweeping generalizations and brief denunciations instead of careful discussion of his claims, all of which are grave misreadings of the data. It is true that he, likewise, has insufficient space. But, after all, he chose to bring them up in the first place!