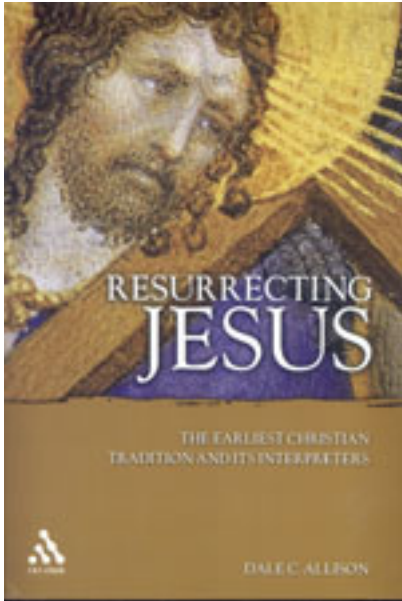


RBL 08/2006



Allison, Dale C.

Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters

New York: T&T Clark, 2005. Pp. xi + 404. Paper. \$34.95.
ISBN 0567029107.

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In this volume Dale C. Allison Jr., Errett M. Grable Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Early Christianity at Pittsburg Theological Seminary, brings together and amplifies some of his more recent work on the contemporary debate about Jesus of Nazareth. Four of the six essays have previously been published, although they appear here with some modification and revision; the rest are published here for the first time.

Following the preface, the first chapter, entitled, “Secularizing Jesus,” offers an explanation of how Jesus has been secularized over the years in the sense that texts concerning Jesus receive little religious interpretation in debate on the historical Jesus. As Allison classifies, “Perhaps we might lump together the books that present Jesus as a liberal social reformer, or those that present him as a forerunner of Christian orthodoxy, or those that reconstruct him as an eschatological Jewish prophet, or those that liken him to a Cynic-like sage, or those that regard him as having been a political revolutionary, and so on” (18). He rejects “the new and improved secular Jesus,” because he strongly believes and accepts the explanation that Jesus himself was a religious personality conveyed to us through the traditions of the Gospel texts. A secular reading of the Gospel texts does not do justice to a religious personality who lived a life in light of the unseen world and who gathered likeminded followers.

Chapter 2, "The Problem of Audience," articulates how the immediate audience of Jesus through history becomes general and universal. Over against the view that holds Jesus' teachings were intended only for his immediate followers, but not for others, Allison maintains that Jesus' teachings had hermeneutical implications for both an immediate and a wider audience. The missionary discourses in the Synoptic Gospels, Matt 10:1–42; Mark 6:6–13; Luke 9:1–6; 10:1–20, are obviously intended for an inner circle of Jesus' disciples, but not for a general public audience, a circumstance, that may lead one to maintain multiple audiences for Jesus' teachings. Allison says, "That Jesus said different things to different people, and that he did not ask anyone to do exactly the same thing, may seem so commonsensical as to be banal" (41). For instance, Matt 5:38–42, 43–44 = Luke 6:27–30 (Q), where Jesus instructs his disciples (the inner circle) to turn the other cheek and to walk the extra mile, seems not to be intended for the general public. However, Allison points out that when the text moves forward through history, "it necessarily loses its first audience and must, if it is to continue its existence, gain new audiences" (45). Allison finds the same movement within the canonical Gospels, particularly in Matthew; when Matthew sets the Sermon on the Mount intended for Jesus' disciples (Matt 5:1–12) but includes the crowds as an additional possible audience toward the close of the sermon, it means the expansion of the audience. Allison maintains that, with regard to Matt 28:16–20, where Jesus tells his disciples to teach all that he has commanded them, it is implicit and beyond doubt that Jesus' teachings in Matt 5–7 are intended for the general public as well. But Allison fails to distinguish between the words of the earthly Jesus from the words of the risen Christ. The difference between the words of Jesus in the bulk of the Gospel of Matthew and those in Matt 28:16–20 is that those in the later context are on the lips of the risen Christ, not the earthly Jesus. Therefore, one could maintain that it is the Evangelist, Matthew, who either created those final words on the lips of the risen Christ or, at least, moved them from the mouth of the earthly Jesus to the mouth of the risen Christ, in either case, "changing the audience" for them. If the original audience of Jesus was expanded and his teachings reinterpreted to include a more general audience, through the composition of the Gospels decades after Jesus' departure, then it would seem to follow, contrary to Allison, that the teachings of Jesus recorded in the Gospels reflect more of the early church's teachings than the teachings of the earthly Jesus. These teachings are, thus, potentially of less historical value for reconstructing the life and teachings of Jesus than they are for reconstructing the teachings of the early church.

Chapter 3, "The Problem of Gehenna," surveys the function of Gehenna and its occupants in the proclamation of Jesus. Taking his cue from Percy Bysshe Shelley, who rejected the notion that Jesus ever believed and taught divine punishment, Allison argues that the Synoptic texts taken from Q (sixteen; e.g., Luke 10:12 = Matt 10:15; Luke 10:14 = Matt

11:24; Luke 10:15 = Matt 11:24; Luke 11:31 = Matt 12:42; Luke 11:32 = Matt 12:41; Luke 12:5 = Matt 10:28; Luke 12:8-9 = Matt 10:32-33; Luke 12:10 = Matt 12:31; Luke 12:46 = Matt 24:50; Luke 12:58-59 = Matt 5:25-26; Luke 13:24 = Matt 7:13-14; Luke 13:25, 27 = Matt 7:22-23; Luke 13:28 = Matt 8:12; Luke 17:27, 30 = Matt 24:38-39; Luke 17:34-35 = Matt 24:40-41; Luke 19:26 = Matt 25:29), from Mark (four; e.g., Mark 9:43, 45, 47-48; 12:40), from Matthew alone (thirteen; e.g., Matt 5:22; 7:19; 12:36-37; 13:42; 13:49-50; 15:13; 22:13; 23:15; 23:33; 24:51; 25:30; 25:41; 24:46), and from Luke alone (five; e.g., Luke 6:25; 12:20; 12:47-48; 16:23-24; 16:28) do talk about divine punishment. Assuming the priority of Mark and Q, Allison argues that the further we move from Mark and Q, through Matthew and Luke, the more references we find to Gehenna and similar concepts. By changing one's research paradigm (from the Two Document to the Two Gospel Hypothesis), for instance, one might conclude that Mark both chose to omit references to Gehenna and had fewer such references also because he had conflated some from Matthew and Luke. On the Two Gospel Hypothesis, Mark's four reference to Gehenna in Mark 9:43, 45, 47-48 would be derived from Matt 18:8-9 and 5:29-30, and Mark would have condensed them into his narrative. Mark's reference to divine punishment in Mark 12:40 seems to be derived almost word for word from Luke 20:47. What Allison says about the number of occurrences of Gehenna and divine punishment in Mark makes sense, although it is a different kind of sense if Mark were dependent on Matthew and Luke. For Allison, Jesus did indeed refer to some sort of hell (e.g., Q 13:28; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 16:19-31). However, although "Q 13:28 = Luke 13:28" has no explicit reference to "a place like Hell," the Matthean parallel does contain a relevant Matthean redactional expression, "the outermost darkness" (Matt 8:12; cf. Matt 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). Therefore, Allison's point would have been better made were Q reconstructed, in this case, to look more like Matthew, because the Lukan form of "Q" lacks any reference to a place like hell, even though it would have, according to the advocates of the Q hypothesis, more likelihood to represent the "Q" text, since it is shorter than the Matthean parallel. The relevant word in Mark 9:43, 45, 47-48 is not "hell" but rather "Gehenna." Similarly, Luke 16:23 uses the word "Hades" rather than "hell." In fact, the word "hell" does not appear anywhere in the Bible, Old or New Testament. Allison's appeal to Q 13:28 as a locus that preserves a more authentic memory of Jesus becomes relevant to his argument that Jesus did refer "a place like Hell" only if Q is reconstructed to look more like Matthew than Luke at Q 13:38. Similarly, Q 10:13-15 = Luke 10:13-15 has its parallels at Matt 11:21-23, where the more Jewish cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum are warned of punishment like that rendered on the more Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon. Allison seems close to saying that Matt 18:8-9, rather than Mark 9:43, 45, 47, preserved a better memory of the words of Jesus, including references to a place like hell. See "Gehenna, the asbestos fire" (Matt 18:8; cf. Mark 9:43, "Gehenna" alone), "Gehenna" alone (Mark 9:45; cf. Matt 18:8), and "Gehenna" alone, a

second time (Mark 9:47; cf. Matt 18:9, “Gehenna of fire,” similar to “Gehenna, the asbestos fire” in Matt 18:8). For Allison, Jesus also taught that those who fail to heed the needs of the least (Matt 25:31–46) will fall under divine punishment. The Matthean redaction, Matt 7:19, also provides some form of Jesus’ teaching on divine judgment. Excursus 1, “Percy Bysshe Shelley and the Historical Jesus,” highlights how Shelley seeks to reconstruct the real Jesus behind the church’s dogma.

Chapter 4, “Apocalyptic, Polemic, Apologetics,” focuses on the question of the eschatological Jesus. In contrast to a Schweitzerian Jesus who miscalculated the end and died in disappointment, Allison apologetically argues that Jesus did teach about eschatological rewards and punishments. Allison says, “If one wants to regard the canonical Gospels as generally accurate icons of Jesus, if in fact one’s theology depends upon them being so, then a Jesus much engaged with eschatology is a foregone conclusion” (118). Allison argues that a multiple record of Jesus’ eschatological teachings in the Synoptic Gospels (e.g., Mark 13; Luke 17:20–37; Matt 10:23) attests to Jesus’ engagement with eschatology. Allison’s argument follows his own proposition that the canonical Gospels are the accurate “icons of Jesus.” However, one might wonder whether the Gospels actually witness to the historical Jesus, given the kerygmatic nature of the Gospel texts. The Jesus who proclaims the imminent end in the Gospels could very well be the product of the early church’s own making.

Chapter 5, “Torah, Urzeit, Endzeit,” examines the polarity of Jesus’ teachings on the Torah. Based on teachings of Jesus in Mark and Q, Allison perceives two images of Jesus: “the Conservative Jesus” and “the Radical Jesus.” The Markan texts such as 9:13, 21–23 and 12:28–32 and the Q texts Matt 5:17–18 = Luke 16:17; Matt 23:23 = Luke 11:42; and Matt 6:9 = Luke 11:2 seem to endorse Jesus’ call to observe the Decalogue. On the other hand, Jesus is also presented as the one who radically opposes the law, not only in Mark and Q (cf. Mark 3:34–35; 7:15; 10:2–12; Matt 8:21–22 = Luke 9:59–60) but also in M and L (Matt 5:21–26, 27–30; Luke 13:10–17). Taking his cue from the Jewish traditions that rhetorically present the sacred texts, Allison argues that Jesus’ radical utterances concerning the law would very well align with Judaism. However, for Allison, Jesus’ authoritative teaching on the law exhibits not only his radical way of discourse but also his demand to make a choice between himself and the laws of Moses: “When he [Jesus] prohibits divorce, he compels hearers to choose between himself and Deuteronomy” (185). Allison seems to assume that Jesus prohibited divorce (166), but it is to be noted that there is no absolute prohibition of divorce anywhere in the Bible, Old or New Testament, but only of remarriage following divorce. The issue in the Bible is not whether divorce is permitted or not but rather on what grounds divorce was permitted (cf. Deut 24:1–4; i.e., what does “she finds no favor in [her husband’s] eyes” mean?). Of the Gospel texts, Mark’s is the furthest of all away from the issues raised between Hillel and Shammai

on this issue because only Mark allows for “separation,” (Mark 10:2–9), if this is not actually the same as “divorce,” on the part of the woman, in accord with Roman but not Jewish law (cf. Deut 24:1–4, where only the man is in view as the initiator of divorce, whereas in Mark 10:12, where Jesus’ words confirm the woman’s right to divorce). The same is true in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark or Paul (cf. 1 Cor 7:10–11, where Paul admits he has no “word of the Lord” on this matter, but that is probably because Mark and/or the traditions upon Mark was dependent here were not yet in existence at the time Paul wrote). According to Allison, even if Jesus subordinated the law to his teaching, he did so as the one who was expected to bring eschatological instruction (cf. Isa 42:1–4; 56:1–8; Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:26–27; 4Q175; 11QMelch 2:15–21; *1 En.* 51:3). Allison concludes that Jesus was neither a conservative nor a liberal, but he was both: “The one label without the other is a misnomer, for while his eschatological convictions turned him into an occasional radical, because the demands of the kingdom sometimes created tension with Torah and tradition, Jesus was also a conservative, a fact that needs no comment other than that he was a pious Jew, and how could a pious Jew not respect Moses?” (195).

Chapter 6, “Resurrecting Jesus,” the longest chapter in the book, addresses systematically the issues concerning the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Allison briefly outlines seven categories of possible explanations of the church’s affirmation of Jesus’ resurrection, such as orthodox belief, misinterpretation, hallucination, deliberate deception, genuine visions, belief in God’s vindication, and rapid disintegration of the body plus visions. Allison convincingly affirms the literal resurrection of Jesus as the basis for his Christian faith in a God who vindicates the sufferer. The resurrection of Jesus reveals the goodness of a God who will wipe away all the sufferings of the people, including death. Allison sets to analyze the texts that talk about Jesus’ resurrection under three headings: (1) formulas and confessions; (2) appearance stories; and (3) the traditions about the empty tomb. The early Christian formulation “God raised Jesus from the dead,” expressed in a variety of ways as attested in Rom 4:24; 6:4; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20; Col 2:12; 1 Thess 1:10; 1 Pet 1:21; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:3–8 (cf. Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34; 16:6), is a primitive way of expressing the visual appearance of the risen Jesus. The appearance of Jesus after his resurrection to many people and on many occasions as attested by Paul (1 Cor 15:5–8; cf. Acts 9:1–19; 22:6–16; 26:12–18) and by the Gospel writers (Mark 16:7; Matt 28:16–20; Luke 24:36–49; John 20:19–23; cf. Mark 16:14–18) offers a viable attestation to Jesus’ resurrection. Allison says, “The apologists for the faith say that the sightings of Jesus must, given the reports, have been objective. One person can hallucinate, but twelve at the same time? And dozens over an extended period of time?” (269). One might wonder whether the Lukan accounts of Paul’s conversion recorded in Acts go back to Paul’s own statements, as Allison holds (263). In his undisputed letters, Paul never explicitly refers to his dramatic conversion

experience, as portrayed in Acts (cf. Gal 1:15–24). The Paul of Acts is not as same as the Paul of the letters. The Paul of Acts is a Lukan invention expressed in the style of legend. Given the legendary character of the descriptions of Paul's conversion (?) in Acts, one might come to the conclusion that the real Paul never saw the physical appearance of the risen Jesus. Even if Paul experienced a vision of the resurrected Jesus, in an event that took place years after Jesus' death, it does not make him a witness to the resurrection of Jesus but to postresurrection appearances, alongside similar experiences recorded in the pre-Pauline creed preserved in 1 Cor 15:3–7. Allison examines several possible explanations of the empty tomb stories as found in the canonical Gospels, as affirmed implicitly, he claims, in 1 Cor 15:3–8, on the basis of the affirmation that Jesus was "buried" prior to his being "seen." He concludes,

The best two arguments against the tradition—the ability of early Christians to create fictions and the existence of numerous legends about missing bodies—while certainly weighty, remain nonetheless hypothetical and suggestive, whereas the best two arguments for the tradition are concrete and evidential: (a) Visions of Jesus, without belief in the empty tomb, would probably have led only to faith in Jesus' vindication and assumption [ascension] to heaven, not to belief in his resurrection from the dead. (b) The discovery of the empty tomb by Mary Magdalene and other women commends itself as likely nonfiction. (332)

It is to be noted that Paul in 1 Cor 15 never explicitly or implicitly refers to the empty tomb story. Paul restates the words of the tradition about Jesus' death and resurrection in accordance with the Scriptures, without mentioning the empty tomb. Therefore, one might conclude that the empty tomb stories were not in existence during the time of Paul. The kerygmatic tradition in 1 Cor 15:3–4 itself is an indication that one could come to believe in the resurrection of Jesus without believing in the empty tomb, just as people believe today in the living presence of their loved ones who have gone to be with the Lord without expressing their belief in an empty cemetery. The tradition concerning the report that Christ appeared to Cephas, the twelve, the five hundred brethren, James, all the apostles, and then to Paul has more to do with the faith experience of the risen Christ than with the literal appearance of the risen Christ. Jesus became risen in the lives of the early disciples and others, and he still comes risen today in the lives of the believing community. It is faith working in the lives of the believers that brings Jesus alive. Therefore, the resurrection of Jesus can be verifiable not through any external reality but only through faith experienced in the lives of the believing community and expressed in the preaching of the word. For Allison, historical-critical knowledge does not lend itself to discern a religious truth. Like those in the Gospel accounts (Matt 28:17; Luke 24:30–31; John 20:11–18) who see the risen Jesus but doubt or do not understand and Paul's companions who do not see the risen Jesus or who do not convert, historical-critical

investigation is mostly confined to ordinary perception and is not helpful in discerning a “spiritual dimension independent of historical reason” (351). This seems to be a final attempt on the part of Allison to invalidate historical-critical investigation, because historical-critical investigation does not yield to what Allison wants to prove: the literal appearance of the risen Jesus. One might note that historical-critical investigation is useful as long as one wants to establish what the historical Jesus really did or said. Historical method cannot discover faith events, such as belief in miracles and belief in the resurrection of Jesus. To use one’s belief in the resurrection of Jesus and then try to prove it as a factual event is to put the cart before the horse. In excursus 2, “Joseph of Arimathea,” Allison attempts to demonstrate the historical existence of Joseph of Arimathea, who made arrangements for Jesus’ burial, against the views of Bishop John Shelby Spong and John Dominic Crossan, who argued that the story of Joseph of Arimathea was invented by the first Christians. Excursus 3, “The Disciples and Bereavement,” addresses the disciples’ experience of the reality of Jesus’ death despite their joy over the resurrection of Jesus.

Anyone who has been involved in the historical study of Jesus, however, knows well the difficulties in articulating the historical value of the sources in question. Allison’s study is not immune. First, we might question whether the Gospel writers seek to present a historically reliable Jesus. The Gospel texts are not historical resources, but faith documents that attempt to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. Allison argues for the presentation of Jesus as both a conservative and a radical one by the Gospel writers, which goes back to the historical Jesus who taught and acted that way. Apart from the Gospel texts, we do not have any evidence to prove that the historical Jesus interpreted the Torah, both conservatively and radically, in light of his own eschatological expectation. Allison does not address whether Jesus was consciously aware of his role as an eschatological teacher. What Allison simply claims is that the two opposing images of Jesus, both a conservative and a radical image, found in the Gospel texts may well be reflective of the historical Jesus. One might wonder whether the Gospel writers themselves or the early church created such images and superimposed them on the historical Jesus, who would have never acted either way. To equate the historical Jesus with the Jesus of the Gospels cannot simply be assumed. The portrayal of Jesus in the Gospels stems less from the historical personality of Jesus than from an image of him, given a mythical interpretation in the traditions of the early church.

Second, Allison’s assumption of Markan priority and the existence and priority of Q in reconstructing the words of Jesus does not sit well with his own reconstruction of the historical Jesus. For example, Allison finds less reference to hell in Mark and more in Matthew: “So it seems fairly clear, at least for those of us who suppose that Matthew followed Mark, that the further we get from Jesus, the more hell there is” (67). If Allison

thinks that Mark retained the closest memory of Jesus, one might wonder why Mark has less reference to Gehenna in the teachings of Jesus. On the other hand, if we have more references to Gehenna in Matthew, one might conclude that the further we move from the memory of Jesus, the less we know about Jesus' teachings on Gehenna. This observation works very well, not on the Two Document Hypothesis, but on the Two Gospel Hypothesis. In this regard, we can compare the findings of Allison's work with the more persuasive approach taken by David B. Peabody and his colleagues on the research team (*One Gospel from Two: Mark's Use of Matthew and Luke: A Demonstration by the Research Team of the International Institute for Gospel Studies* [Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2002]). Whether or not one agrees with the position, Peabody's presentation offers a richer analysis of the Gospel texts by showing how Mark could have produced a Gospel derived from Matthew and Luke. In this work one could discover how Mark is far removed from the memory of Jesus and his Jewish life, and thereby one might be convinced to conclude that Matthew's Gospel preserves the closest memory of Jesus and his practice of his time. At least Allison could have drawn attention to the Two Gospel Hypothesis and left it to his reader to decide how his reconstruction of the Gospel sources would have made sense on the Two Gospel Hypothesis.

Finally, Allison's reconstruction of the historical events, such as the resurrection appearances of Jesus and the empty tomb stories, while possible, is by no means certain. The sources, such as the Gospel texts, the Acts of the Apostles, and Paul's letters, that Allison uses to argue for the literal appearance of Jesus after the resurrection and the historicity of the empty tomb stories are complex, multilayered works. While Allison has successfully peeled back the rhetorical husk of the resurrection and the empty tomb stories, other layers remain that obscure our vision of the historical kernel that would have given rise to those stories of faith. The stories that Allison deems historically authentic, such as, the risen Jesus' appearance to many, the empty tomb story, and the story of Joseph of Arimathea, may actually be the product of other literary or rhetorical agendas devised to meet the early church's growing faith in Jesus. The idea of resurrection itself is a religious rhetorical way of expressing faith in life after death. To make this idea intelligible in a religious way, stories of faith were created to resurrect Jesus from the dead. Nowhere does Allison address how the nonbelieving Jews could have viewed the stories of Jesus' resurrection if it were historically authentic, nor does he allude to the Adonis myth or the Osiris myth or the Mithras myth, which also express belief in the resurrection from the dead. Perhaps the Hellenistic mythical stories could have provided a kernel from which the early church developed the story of Jesus' resurrection in order to validate their faith. For all the ingenuity of the author, the main thesis of the book to establish the historical legitimacy of Jesus through the Gospel texts remains unconvincing.

These criticisms reflect obstacles in investigating the historical Jesus and should not prevent us from acknowledging the usefulness of the book dealing with a difficult matter. Allison's study of *Resurrecting Jesus* enriches our knowledge of the early Christian tradition about Jesus and promotes our understanding of the debate in search of the relationship between the historical Jesus and the Jesus of the Gospels.