

**Waterman, Mark W.**

***The Empty Tomb Tradition of Mark: Text, History, and Theological Struggles***

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Waterman completed his Ph.D. program at Fuller Theological Seminary in 2005, where Colin Brown was his mentor. This monograph is his published dissertation. The goal of his research was “to clarify the theological role of the Markan empty tomb tradition, as compared with that of the appearance tradition” (2). Moreover, Waterman claims that “if this study is successful, we should be able to test the truth-claim and historicity of the empty tomb” (8). Waterman considered literature written on the subject since 1980 in English and German and claims that, while other scholars focus on the priority of the appearance traditions, his monograph is the first “book length effort in North America to set the empty tomb at center stage in resurrection studies,” with the lone exception of a 1966 Harvard Th.D. dissertation (7).

In chapter 1 Waterman discusses (1) the nonrecognition element in the reports of the empty tomb and the resurrection appearances (appearances) and (2) the appearances in Matthew, Luke, and John. Although understanding that every historian brings his or her horizon to the text, Waterman approaches the text with “Cartesian methodical doubt,” which pauses frequently to ask whether the assertion is actually known, but also with a methodical credulity that defaults to belief rather than skepticism (12–13). Waterman sets out to discover how the disciples came to know and believe that Jesus had been raised. He acknowledges that contemporary scholars almost universally reject the position that the empty tomb alone kindled the belief that Jesus had been raised (15). But are the appearances alone responsible? Waterman answers in the negative (19). The Gospels and especially the Synoptics speak of a certain ambiguity in the appearance reports. In Matthew, some “doubted” when they saw Jesus. In Luke, the Emmaus disciples did not

recognize Jesus, and the group of disciples were “unbelieving” upon seeing him. In John, the disciples did not recognize Jesus, who called to them from the beach. Accordingly, he concludes that “the appearances on their own could not confirm the resurrection of Jesus” (35).

In chapter 2 Waterman discusses the textual variances of Mark’s ending. He identifies three major endings: 16:1–8; 16:1–8 plus the “shorter ending”; and 16:1–20, often referred to as the “longer ending.” He also notes two other forms: the Freer Logion, which is 16:1–20 plus some text inserted between verses 14 and 15 found only in W; and 16:1–8 plus the “shorter ending” plus 9–20. Waterman notes that Mark’s longer ending has “enormous” manuscript support and that the earliest manuscript for the longer ending is very close in time to the earliest manuscript that ends with 16:1–8 (46). The longer ending likewise finds support in many of the ante-Nicene fathers in the second and third centuries. Notwithstanding, the vocabulary and style of 9–20 casts doubt on its authenticity (47). The authenticity of the fourth form (W) “has been rejected by almost all modern critics” (47). Waterman concludes with the majority of scholars that the first form, which ends with 16:1–8, “is the oldest, most authentic *extant* textual evidence at our disposal” (50). However, he brackets the question of whether this was Mark’s intended ending until chapter 3, in which he concludes that it was (83).

In chapter 3 Waterman discusses scholarly positions on the empty tomb in consideration of Markan endings and possible pre-Markan tradition. He divides these positions into four categories: (1) 16:1–8 is Mark’s intended ending/empty tomb is unhistorical; (2) 16:1–8 is Mark’s intended ending/empty tomb is historical; (3) 16:1–8 is not Mark’s intended ending/empty tomb is unhistorical; and (4) 16:1–8 is not Mark’s intended ending/empty tomb is historical. Although advocates of 3 and 4 claim that the original ending was either lost, suppressed, or never completed, Waterman claims, “As far as I can tell, there is no serious concrete proposal of these options in the academic literature” (56). By this, I understand Waterman as claiming that there are none that include detailed positive arguments for how the ending was lost, rather than an absence of arguments that it was lost. Based on his research of the literature since 1980, Waterman states that the number of scholars supporting category 1 has been decreasing since 1980 (82). Category 2 enjoys a “significantly large” majority, and Waterman lists thirty-one scholars in support (67–68, 82, 83, 213–19). He found no one since 1980 who embraced category 3 (75, 83). Although category 4 consists of a minority, “the recent trend of scholarship is surely in the direction of this thesis” (83), and a number of those in this camp “are becoming very influential on this topic” (75). He then gives some space to arguments offered by Grant Osborne, Robert Gundry, Craig A. Evans, Ben Witherington III, N. T. Wright, and Richard Swinburne (75–82).

In chapter 4 Waterman discusses the Markan continuation theory, which sees continuity between Mark's passion and resurrection narratives, in contrast to Markan redaction theory and Markan creation theory. With Dunn, Waterman finds it difficult to draw the line between source and tradition (85). Answering Crossan's arguments against the historicity of the empty tomb, Waterman writes that Crossan only displays his convictions rather than providing arguments. Thus, his creation theory is "an unreasonable and wrongheaded discussion of the tradition *before* Mark" (96). He later adds that "Crossan's complicated reconstruction ... of the Markan text, is untenable, or at least unarguable, because of its intangible basis and presuppositions" (209). Waterman asserts that there is "no consensus on the historicity of the 'Markan community'" (103), and agreement among scholars on the content of a pre-Markan tradition is rare (119). Accordingly, "it is practical to seek the tradition behind the text rather than to run after the imaginative 'original' text" (120). Waterman believes that Perkin's Markan continuation theory is "promising and plausible" because of its "logically consistent theological meaning owing to the continuous events of Jesus' death and resurrection" (209).

In chapter 5 Waterman attempts to identify the "historical nuclei of the Markan tradition" in the empty tomb narrative (121). He discusses three areas of interest. First, the archaeological and historical evidence affirms that the traditional site of the empty tomb is authentic. Second, the early tradition of Sunday worship is affirmed by the majority of scholars (135). Having discussed three major texts (1 Cor 16:2; Acts 20:7; Rev. 1:10), he concludes that, although a firm connection cannot be made, there is "no conclusive information to negate some connections between Sunday worship and Jesus' resurrection" (139). His third area of interest is the tradition of witnesses, namely, the women. Although there are no rules in the Torah that women must be excluded as witnesses, the first-century Mediterranean world was decisively androcentric. Moreover, Mark employs a term related to an eyewitness (*theorein*) and notes a sufficient number of witnesses (two or three; Deut 19:15) for the empty tomb. Granted, it is certainly possible that Mark employed these only to lend a ring of authenticity to his fictitious narrative. However, given the truth of the Markan creation theory, why not create male witnesses in order to get more mileage (143)? Mark listed the women only because "they were the sole eyewitnesses to the scene of the empty tomb" (144). Although Waterman admits the absence of any "crucial evidence" in support, he conjectures that a very young Mark witnessed Jesus' crucifixion and/or burial, but not the empty tomb, and that his age prohibited him from acting as a witness (144). He concludes that the three areas of interest just discussed—the site of the empty tomb, the early tradition of Sunday worship, and the women as witnesses to the empty tomb—provide historical credibility to Mark's empty tomb narrative, although they stop short of proving historicity (146).

In chapter 6 Waterman investigates the traditions pertaining to the tomb's location embedded in Mark's empty tomb narrative. It is historically plausible that Jesus was buried by Joseph. The description of the tomb in the resurrection narratives is that of a tomb owned by a person of wealth and/or prestige. Constantine's erection of the church of the Holy Sepulcher and a recent archaeological find indicate that Jesus' tomb was probably venerated by pilgrims.

In his seventh chapter, Waterman completes his comments pertaining to the theological challenges in Mark's empty tomb tradition. Contra Bultmann, "signs and wonders can be demonstrable and can be understood logically and intellectually, but the demonstration is, to be sure, not always accepted by everyone" (173). However, Waterman admits that it is an epistemological issue and provides no defense of his position in this volume. (Granted, he argues for the historicity of the empty tomb, but he does not argue for a supernatural cause for its emptiness.) However, he criticizes simple dismissals of the miraculous by Lüdemann as "a naïve reductionistic view" (178). In answer to Küng that "*the conclusions of natural science have rendered [the empty tomb] suspect,*" he writes, "there is no scholarly conclusion of 'natural science' regarding the empty tomb; in my view, this is an irresponsible and nonsensical comment in the name of science" (193). Instead, "historical criticism" has generated a different conclusion that "not a few, but rather a majority, of contemporary scholars believe that there is some historical kernel in the empty tomb tradition" (192–93). He also maintains that the empty tomb tradition is more firm than the appearance traditions: "While the appearance tradition has a variety of details or sub-traditions in mostly unidentified timeframes and locations, the empty tomb tradition, at least within the four canonical Gospels, enjoys a consistent story line in the specific timeframe, 'early morning on the first day of the week,' and in the specific locality, the City of Jerusalem" (198). Finally, Waterman discusses Petrine tradition behind Mark. At present, the majority of recent scholarship is inclined to trust Papias's testimony about Mark, although it is "roughly plausible" and "still controversial" (201–2). One of the reasons for this confidence is that Sinaiticus and Vaticanus preserve Mark with the difficult ending at 16:8. Petrine tradition, which no one dared omit, explains well this preservation with the three other Gospels. He cites arguments by Dewey and Marcus to the contrary and comments that Marcus's in particular is "doubt for the sake of doubt—unlike the Cartesian methodical doubt" (201).

In the end, Waterman concludes that the resurrection faith of the earliest Christians "cannot be explained solely by the post-Easter appearance stories of the risen Jesus" and that "[i]n view of the Markan continuation tradition, there could be no appearance traditions (in either Galilee or Jerusalem) apart from the empty tomb" (211–12). An appendix provides abstracts on thirty-one scholars since 1980 who maintain that Mark ends with 16:8 and that the empty tomb tradition contains kernels of historical truth.

Waterman has contributed to the present discussion pertaining to the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. His goal of clarifying "the theological role of the Markan empty tomb tradition, as compared with that of the appearance tradition," was accomplished. Moreover, his broad knowledge of scholarly discussions on the empty tomb since 1980 and their positions is confirmed by the recent research of Gary R. Habermas, who arrived at similar conclusions pertaining to trends ("Resurrection Research from 1975 to the Present: What are Critical Scholars Saying?" *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 3 [2005]: 135–53, especially 140–41). Waterman provides welcomed friendly aids throughout, such as a statement of content at the beginning of every chapter and a brief conclusion chapter that summarizes his chapter-by-chapter findings as well as a summary of his conclusions.

The subtitle of this monologue is "Text, History, and Theological Struggles." While the "text" and "theological struggles" components are strong and helpful, the "history" component is somewhat weak. Waterman's historical method is rarely explained or defended. For example, although he is public with his approach of methodical credulity (12–13), he would have done better to have gone further and defend why credulity is preferable to the methodical skepticism he criticizes Lüdemann (178) and Marcus (201) for employing. Moreover, his treatment of alternative hypotheses is limited. Furthermore, his treatment of Paul's pertinent texts, while helpful, fell short and could have benefited from a more rigorous discussion on Paul's view of resurrection.