

One of the things that I have found most interesting about doing the blog over these, lo, past five and a half years is that when I decide to write a post on something, I often realize that I need to provide some background that involves something else that, on the surface, may seem unrelated, but that is crucial for understanding the point I want to make. Which leads me to a different topic and then to another, and so on. I suppose that's why I still haven't run out of things to say (yet); I *thought* I'd have nothing to write about after six months. But it hasn't happened yet.

I've been talking about the sects within Judaism because I wanted to make a simple point about how widespread the views of "resurrection" were at the time of Jesus and Paul. This morning it occurred to me that it would be helpful to illustrate the conflict between Sadducees and Pharisees over the issue, as exemplified in a famous passage in Acts 22 where the Apostle Paul manages to split the Sanhedrin by pitting these two groups against each other over whether at the end of time there would be a resurrection or not.

Then I realized that I would have to explain the intriguing and hardly ever noticed (outside of scholarship) point that Paul's message in Acts is largely about Jesus' resurrection, not about his death. That is somewhat odd, given the fact that Paul himself - who does of course say a lot about Jesus' resurrection - locates the key moment of salvation in Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice (without a resurrection, of course, no one would know it was an atoning sacrifice; but the resurrection itself is not what brings salvation for Paul: the death does, as confirmed in the mighty act of God in the resurrection.)

And then I recognized that I should explain how that in fact is what scholars have long said about the book of Acts, that the idea that Jesus' death as a sacrifice for sins is almost completely lacking - unlike in Paul, and in Mark and Matthew, and 1 Peter, etc. What Acts focuses on is not Jesus' death, but his resurrection. Some scholars have accused the author of Acts of underplaying the importance of the crucifixion in order to promote a "theology of glory." What really matters is not Jesus' suffering, but his victory over death. The death of Jesus is just a prelude to what really mattered (for Luke): the resurrection.

At first you might think that's nonsense, but ...

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