

In this week's Readers Mailbag I address three rather divergent questions, one on ancient tombstone inscriptions that indicate that many people in the ancient world did not believe in an afterlife, one on the Temptation narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and one on the process of having a book edited in preparation for publication. If you have a question you would like me to address, just ask - and I'll add it to the list!

### **QUESTION:**

I'm curious...what sort of "inscriptional evidence" on ancient tombstones would seem to rule out belief in an afterlife?

### **RESPONSE**

This question was asked in response to something I said, that even though in ancient Greek and Roman mythology there are discussions of the afterlife (e.g., in the Odyssey, book 11; Plato's Myth of Er in book 10 of the Republic; and so on), there are reasons for thinking that most (or at least many?) people in antiquity believed that life was the end of the story. And I indicated that this is because of inscriptions that we find on ancient tombstones. This person is wondering: what kind of evidence could that be?

Here is the most interesting. Today we are accustomed to the for-the-deceased abbreviation R.I.P. - Rest in Peace. One of the common abbreviations on ancient Roman tombstones was, in a sense, comparable, but with a very different meaning. It was n.f. f. n.s. n.c. That seven-letter abbreviation stood for the words "non fui, fui, non sum, non curo."

That's witty and rather funny. What the words mean is:

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