

Reconstructing the hidden historical truth behind the story of Jesus' resurrection

Joseph of Arimathea's account of what really happened surrounding Jesus' crucifixion, burial, and resurrection is based on a scholarly (i.e., nonfictional) reconstruction of the hidden historical truth behind the resurrection stories of Jesus found in the four Gospels.

Why, however, do I believe there's truth behind the resurrection stories in the four Gospels? While you may be of the opinion that the four Gospels are fabricated from start to finish, it's scientifically plausible that the Gospels partly describe a historical truth—in short, that Jesus of Nazareth is a historical person. We cannot go into all the historical sources supporting this hypothesis in detail here. I will suffice here to refer to the book "*The Reality Behind the New Testament*" (2019, p. 65) by Professor Willie van Peer, which demonstrates that it is extremely plausible that Jesus is a historical person.

You might wonder why the resurrection stories in the four Gospels themselves can't be true. If you truly believe that Jesus rose from the dead, you'll probably consider the four resurrection stories to be truthful. But if you consider a resurrection from the dead impossible, you'll undoubtedly wonder how people at the time believed Jesus had risen from the dead. And if he hadn't risen from the dead, what did happen? That question naturally points us toward a hidden truth behind the four resurrection stories.

But how can we reconstruct that hidden truth?

Historical, fictional, and hidden story elements

It should be clear that the four Gospels are considered here as a blend of history and fiction. Strictly speaking, three categories of narrative elements can be distinguished. The first category consists of elements that are historically plausible, such as "Jesus was between 20 and 40 years old when he was crucified" or "The crucifixion took place in Jerusalem." We call these the historical elements.

The second category consists of fictional elements (fabrications, distortions), and the third category consists of hidden elements. After all, if there is a hidden truth behind the resurrection stories, there must be hidden narrative elements. Hidden elements are by definition not historically plausible, because if they were, they would belong to the category of historical elements. Someone who rejects hidden elements that emerge from a construction because they are not historically plausible does not understand what the reconstruction of a hidden historical truth entails.

How do we uncover hidden elements? Actual events have a logical sequence; they're like links in a chain. Sometimes a link is missing. This could be because the author didn't consider it important, or because the author wasn't aware of it, or because the link doesn't fit the message of faith and the author therefore deliberately omits it—a deliberate omission. We'll see later how to reconstruct these hidden elements.

Fictional jumps

So there's a constellation of historical facts surrounding the person of Jesus, and some of those facts—Jesus' tomb was empty after the Sabbath, Jesus, or someone resembling him, appeared to the disciples on a mountain in Galilee after the crucifixion—have led to the interpretation that Jesus rose from the dead. Because a resurrection from the dead is scientifically impossible, I call the claim in the four Gospels that Jesus rose from the dead a fictional leap.

Such a major fictional leap (someone has risen from the dead!) usually leads to new fictional leaps. After all, normal people don't rise from the dead. Such a thing is reserved only for supernatural people or gods. In the world of that time, many stories circulated about divine beings rising from the dead—think of Attis , Dionysus, Persephone , and Osiris. So, the moment the fictional leap—Jesus has risen from the dead—is made, it's extremely likely that this fictional leap leads to other, new fictional leaps , such as "Jesus is a divine being," or "Jesus is indeed, as he always said, the Son of God," or "Jesus is God."

Friction

Fictional leaps often cause friction with the existing factual account. Suppose it was actually true that Jesus was arrested and sentenced to crucifixion to his own surprise.

Those facts do not fit the interpretation of Jesus as a divine being. After all, God is omnipotent and foreseeing. It cannot be that God is arrested and crucified to his own surprise. If that does happen, God must have foreseen and willed it. At such a moment, friction arises between the fictional interpretation of Jesus (he is divine and foreseeing) and the facts (Jesus was surprised by the arrest). Roughly speaking, there are two ways to resolve this friction: adjust the interpretation—Jesus was not divine—or adjust the facts—Jesus did indeed foresee his arrest. In many cases, we see the factual account adapted to the fictional interpretation. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus predicts his own arrest and crucifixion, three times (three is a sacred number). We now have good reason to believe that these three predictions of the Passion were added to the factual account to make it consistent with the fictional interpretation that Jesus is divine and was seeking his own crucifixion.¹

three predictions of the Passion have been added to the factual account and are therefore fictional, but this isn't a fictional leap like the resurrection from the dead. A resurrection from the dead is scientifically impossible, while predicting your own arrest and crucifixion is scientifically improbable but certainly possible. In such a case, I don't call it a fictional leap, but a fictional addition to the factual account.

It's impossible to determine with 100% certainty that a particular story element is a fictional addition. It's always a matter of suspicion, at least initially.

An example of a historically improbable narrative element is the Sanhedrin's nighttime trial in the High Priest's house, where Jesus is sentenced to death. In *"The Reality Behind the New Testament"* (2019, p. 128), Professor Willie van Peer argues that Jewish law explicitly forbids such a trial to take place at night. Furthermore, according to Van Peer, such a trial should take place in the courtroom, not at the high priest's home. Van Peer presents several further arguments that, in his view, irrefutably demonstrate that this nighttime trial could not have occurred historically. Therefore, this is likely a fictional addition, and our suspicion is reinforced because this addition supports the message of faith (the Jews are guilty of Jesus' death).

We will see later that only a larger, coherent pattern of such suspicions enables us to make sound judgments about fact or fiction.

¹ Theologians later went even further on this path by assuming that Jesus allowed himself to be crucified on purpose because he wanted to redeem humanity from its sins through his self-sacrifice.

Riddles

A significant fictional leap within a factual account (Jesus rose from the dead) can thus lead to a cascade of fictional leaps and fictional additions to the factual account, as well as the removal of facts that don't fit the author's intended message. The resulting collection of facts, fictional additions, distortions, fictional leaps, and removals is therefore anything but a neutral, objective account of events; it has become a message of faith, heavily colored by interpretations and with a factual core.

Because facts have been distorted or omitted, and fabrications have been added, the text usually lacks the internal consistency of a story that has been fabricated from start to finish. After all, someone who fabricates everything from start to finish has complete control and can therefore construct a story without contradictions. The same applies to a factual account recorded without any fictional additions. However, it's completely different with a mixture of facts and fiction intended to support a particular faith message. It's likely that some facts are distorted to support the faith message, or that fabrications are interspersed among the facts, disrupting their internal consistency. This can lead to passages in the text that are puzzling or even downright incomprehensible to us.

The four Gospels are, as is well known, surrounded by many mysteries.

1

The first and most important riddle is, of course, how the authors could have believed Jesus had risen from the dead. There are also several other riddles, nine of which I will discuss here. I've numbered them for convenience.

2

An interesting riddle concerns Palm Sunday: Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt with great fanfare and is cheered by a crowd (Mark 11:1-10). After looking around the temple, he returns to Bethany. The reason given is that it is already late (Mark 11:11). However, it is unlikely that this triumphal procession fizzles out. The later evangelist Matthew apparently also finds the ending in Mark illogical or unsatisfying and has the triumphal procession transition into a spectacular finale, namely the cleansing of the temple, where Jesus drives all sorts of merchants out of the temple (Matthew 21:12). This cleansing of the temple also occurs in Mark, but only the day after the festive entry (Mark 11:15). It is therefore a mystery what exactly is being

celebrated during this festive entry. Why is the crowd cheering Jesus? For what? What was the real finale of this triumphal procession?

3

That night, on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus tells his disciples that he will be arrested that night, and this is exactly what happens. Such a prediction could be a fictional addition, but we have good reason to believe it is factual. Why? Upon entering the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus becomes anxious, begs his father to let the cup (presumably a metaphor for trial) pass him by, reproaches his disciples for falling asleep—in short, he doesn't make any prediction in passing, but his behavior is consistent with that of someone who is certain he could be arrested at any moment. If we eliminate the divine explanation—that Jesus has foresight—the mystery arises as to how Jesus could predict that he would be arrested that night. Note that one can generally suspect that they intend to arrest him, but in that case, the prediction is uncertain. The arrest could, so to speak, take place tomorrow, the day after, or a week from now. However, Jesus predicts an arrest that will take place within a few hours, and at an unusual time, too, namely at night.

This raises another mystery. Jesus had no fixed address in Jerusalem. He wandered from place to place. Suppose an informant had informed Jesus that Caiaphas' servants intended to arrest Jesus that very night. That might explain Jesus' prediction, but how could Caiaphas' servants find Jesus? Searching for someone without a fixed address in Jerusalem at night is a rather hopeless undertaking.

That Judas left the Passover meal to betray Jesus, as the Gospel of Mark suggests, still doesn't solve the mystery. Judas could, in principle, offer to bring Caiaphas' servants to Jesus, but it's far from certain that Caiaphas would send his servants that very night. Why couldn't Caiaphas wait until the next day? What's the urgency? And even if Caiaphas ordered an immediate arrest, Judas still doesn't know where Jesus is. After all, Judas left an inn during the Passover meal, but Jesus left the inn shortly after Judas' departure. Nowhere in the Gospel of Mark does Jesus tell Judas that he, Jesus, would go to the Garden of Gethsemane.

In short, how could Jesus be so sure that he would be arrested that night, and how could the people of Caiaphas find Jesus that night?

4

In the Garden of Gethsemane, just before his arrest, the following text is recorded in the Gospel of Mark (14:35-36): “ And he [Jesus] went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. “ Abba , Father,” he prayed, “all things are possible for you; remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” ²

The traditional message of faith gives the impression that Jesus came to this earth with the express purpose of being crucified, because God wanted to redeem humanity from original sin by sacrificing His Son. In the passage cited above, however, Jesus asks God to let the cup, a metaphor for arrest and crucifixion, pass from him. In short, the crucifixion is apparently a threat but not a certain event, and it seems that Jesus believes it is a real possibility that God will pass the crucifixion from him. How can this contradiction be explained?

5

One of the most interesting riddles concerns the following text from the Gospel of Matthew (27:49).³

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “ *Eli, Eli, lama sabaktani ?*” that is, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “He is calling for Elijah!” Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge, put it on a reed, and *offered him a drink*. But the others said, “Let us see whether Elijah will come and save him.” Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

Apparently, some bystanders think Jesus is calling for the prophet Elijah, apparently hoping that Elijah will take him down from the cross. Then one of the bystanders goes to get a sponge soaked in sour wine to offer it to Jesus. The other bystanders then shout at him not to do it, apparently because they want to see if Elijah comes to save Jesus. Now, any reasonable person will wonder what the connection is between the

²Willebrord translation 1975. Catholic Bible Foundation.

³Willebrord translation 1975. Catholic Bible Foundation.

offering of a sponge soaked in sour wine and a possible rescue by Elijah. Could Jesus no longer be saved by Elijah if he had drunk the sour wine? The two events seem completely unrelated.

6

is generally accepted that the ending of the Gospel of Mark (Mark 16:9-20) was not written by Mark himself. ⁴It is, to say the least, remarkable that the most important section of the oldest Gospel, the section describing Jesus' appearances after his crucifixion (the core of belief in the resurrection from the dead), was not written by the author, Mark himself. Furthermore, the section preceding this ending (Mark 16:7) states that Jesus will appear in Galilee, but the remaining section (Mark 16:9-20) makes no mention of an appearance in Galilee. It is therefore quite plausible that the original ending was deleted and (possibly some time later) replaced by another ending. The big question, of course, is: why?

7

In the Gospel of Matthew (27:65-66), we read that Pilate has soldiers stand guard at Jesus' tomb. Soldiers standing guard at a tomb is extremely unusual and quite remarkable. In the older Gospel of Mark, the women who come to Jesus' tomb after the Sabbath do not encounter any soldiers at the tomb. These guards are also not mentioned in the Gospel of Luke. Why do the three Gospels contradict each other on this point?

8

Matthew's Gospel, when the women arrive at the tomb, an earthquake occurs, and an angel descends from heaven, rolls away the tombstone, and sits on it. These two remarkably remarkable events are not mentioned at all in the older Gospel of Mark. How is that possible, since both Gospels describe the same event (the arrival of the women at the tomb)?

⁴ See, for example, the footnote in the Bible translation of the Catholic Bible Foundation (1981) where this is acknowledged.

9

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus' disciples first see Jesus after the crucifixion in Jerusalem (the city where he is buried), but in the Gospel of Matthew, the disciples first see Jesus after the crucifixion on a mountain in Galilee. Why this contradiction?

10

In the last evangelist, John, a soldier pierces Jesus, who died on the cross, with his spear. The other three evangelists write that Jesus, after uttering his last words, gives up the ghost, or rather, dies. Joseph of Arimathea then removes Jesus' body from the cross and places it in a rock-hewn tomb. Now, assuming John is truthful when he writes that a soldier pierces Jesus on the cross with a spear, isn't it remarkably remarkable that the first three evangelists don't mention this incident, even though it's an exceptionally dramatic and intense event? How can we explain the absence of any mention of it in the first three evangelists?

Method of reconstruction

How can we scientifically reconstruct the hidden true story behind the resurrection accounts? There's no step-by-step method. All we can try is to use our creativity to formulate a hypothesis about the true story, adhering to the following points.

- The narrative elements of the four resurrection stories that are scientifically and historically improbable, yet still support the message of faith, must be bracketed. They are not necessarily false, but they are suspect, and it must be examined whether a hypothesis about the true story can be formulated without these elements.
- the story elements that do not appear in the four gospels (the hidden story elements) but do appear in the hypothetical true story, may not be scientifically improbable.
- the hypothetical true story must be internally consistent and logical.
- the hypothetical true story should enable us to solve all the riddles of the four resurrection stories.

Below is the hypothesis about the true story behind the resurrection stories. The hypothetical true story below contains no scientifically improbable elements, is

internally consistent and logical, and , as we will see later , allows us to solve all the mysteries of the four resurrection stories.

Hypothesis about the historical core of the resurrection story of Jesus

Jesus cherishes the thought that he is the Son of God and that the kingdom of God is near (Mark 1:15; Matthew 16:28⁵). He rides into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt (Mark, chapter 11). In doing so, he fulfills Zechariah's prophecy (9:9) that the Messiah, the King of Peace, would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt. Jesus is convinced that God will join him in all his glory on the temple square, after which God's rule will come over the earth and the righteous will live forever in happiness with God. However, nothing happens (Mark 11:11). Jesus leaves Jerusalem with his followers.

The fiasco plunges Jesus into a spiritual crisis. What should he do? Has he mistaken his divine mission? Is he really the Messiah? He decides to return to Jerusalem (Mark 11:15), where he becomes embroiled in disputes with the Pharisees and Scribes (Mark 12:1-12 and 38-40). He publicly insults the High Priest Caiaphas and the Pharisees and Scribes in general. See the extended tirade against them in the Gospel of Matthew (23:13-36).

On the day before Easter, while Jesus' disciples were preparing the Passover meal and Jesus was preaching alone somewhere in Jerusalem, he was arrested. He was summoned before Pilate and had to apologize to Caiaphas and the Pharisees for publicly insulting them; afterward, he was ordered to leave Jerusalem. When Jesus refused and insulted his opponents even further, they revealed to Pilate that Jesus considered himself the Messiah, a crime the Romans typically punished with death by crucifixion. Jesus faced a choice: confess that he considered himself the Messiah and be condemned to death by crucifixion, or deny everything, which would mean the end of his divine mission. Jesus believed this dilemma to be a test from his divine Father and confessed to Pilate that he considered himself the Messiah.

⁵"Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." See also Van Peer, 2019, p. 98.

Pilate condemns Jesus to death on the cross and has him imprisoned, but Joseph of Arimathea manages to bribe Pilate, who considers Jesus harmless, into offering him the opportunity to escape and leave Jerusalem. Jesus, however, sees his arrest by Pilate as a test from his father, and to face that test, he must therefore remain in his cell. Ultimately, doubt and uncertainty overtake him, and after much deliberation, he flees his cell. But instead of leaving Jerusalem far behind, he goes to his disciples, who are preparing the Passover meal and are unaware that Jesus has been arrested and condemned to death on the cross. Meanwhile, Pilate sends word to Caiaphas that Jesus has escaped from his cell.

During the Passover meal—the Last Supper according to tradition—(Mark 14:18-25), Jesus wonders what he should do. Flee, or stay and risk arrest and being taken back to Pilate? If he flees, he will not accept his Father's test and, in his own perception, has certainly failed. He decides to stay and goes to the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32), sending Judas to Caiaphas ⁶with the message that he, Jesus, is there. Caiaphas may not take action against Jesus. He may well do so. In Jesus' eyes, his Father determines what will happen. So, Jesus, so to speak, places his fate in his Father's hands. Jesus is arrested by Caiaphas' men (Mark 14:43) and taken back to the Romans. They are forced to carry out the sentence pronounced by Pilate the day before (death on the cross).

Jesus sees the crucifixion as a test from his Father that he must endure. Hanging on the cross, he hopes his Father will save him.

The Romans offer a poisoned sponge for a fee to crucified people who have been hanging on the cross for several hours. This causes the crucified to die a relatively quick death. Joseph of Arimathea pays for the sponge and, before the crucifixion, tells Jesus to recite the opening line of Psalm 22, familiar to the Judeans ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") if he wants the sponge. When Jesus is about to give up hope of salvation by his Father and is writhing in pain, he utters

⁶ Presumably, Jesus drew lots to determine which of his disciples would go to Caiaphas to report his whereabouts. During the Passover meal, he said, "One of you will betray me" (Mark 14:18-20), to which everyone asked in astonishment if it was him. Jesus then indicated that it was the one who dipped in the dish with him at the same time during the evening. Coincidentally, Judas dipped in the dish with Jesus at one point, but it could also have been another disciple. The fact that Judas led Caiaphas's servants to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane led to the fictional addition that Judas was the malicious betrayer of Jesus, someone who had planned this from the outset.

the agreed-upon phrase. A soldier hands Jesus the sponge. Jesus, still hoping for salvation, hesitantly sips the poison from the sponge instead of emptying it, as every crucified person does when seeking release from their suffering. Instead of dying, Jesus falls into a coma, but bystanders and Roman soldiers think he is dead. The soldiers remove Jesus' body from the cross and give it to Joseph.

Joseph, who wants to bury Jesus, discovers on his way to the cemetery that Jesus is still alive. The only safe option for Joseph is to take Jesus back to the Romans (after all, Jesus has been sentenced to death) or kill him. Joseph decides to have Jesus nursed and to ensure he disappears from Jerusalem as quickly as possible. To do this, he must devise a ruse to get rid of the two women who accompanied him to bury Jesus. They must not, under any circumstances (that would be far too risky), know that Jesus is still alive. However, the women will never accept that Joseph, without their presence, wraps their beloved Jesus, embalms him, and then buries him in the ground. Fortunately for Joseph, the approaching Sabbath offers a solution, because Judeans are not allowed to work on the Sabbath. Joseph ensures that the procession arrives at the tomb so late that the Sabbath has more or less already begun. Joseph promises the women that he will lay Jesus in the rock tomb and that after the Sabbath, he will be wrapped, embalmed, and buried. The women promise to return to the rock tomb at sunrise after the Sabbath.

Jesus is cared for and kept alive by Joseph's servants, but he is in very bad shape due to the crucifixion. When the women arrive at the tomb at sunrise the day after the Sabbath, they naturally find Jesus' body missing. An "angelic" man sits in the tomb and tells the women that Jesus is not in the tomb or its vicinity, that he has risen from the dead and will appear on a mountain in Galilee. The women don't know that this man is Joseph's servant, who is to ensure that all of Jesus' witnesses and friends leave the scene of the disaster, Jerusalem, as quickly as possible.

When Jesus regains consciousness, he is transported to Galilee by Joseph's servants. Joseph himself travels with Jesus' disciples to Galilee and arranges for them to spend the night before Jesus' appearance at a cove beneath a high cliff. On this cliff, Jesus appears at dawn. His disciples cannot see that he is supported by certain aids intended to conceal his very serious condition. No one can

approach or touch Jesus. Jesus speaks a few words, gives the impression that he has risen from the dead, revitalized, and then disappears from view.

We will now see whether all of the riddles mentioned can be explained.

1

How could the authors have thought Jesus had risen from the dead?

Answer: After the crucifixion, Jesus appeared to his disciples on a mountain in Galilee and spoke to them. Jesus was recognized by his appearance and voice. His tomb was empty. His disciples, who believed Jesus had died on the cross, seemed to conclude nothing other than that Jesus had risen from the dead. However, they did not know that Jesus had fallen into a coma on the cross (and had not died).

2

The mystery of Palm Sunday can now be solved. Jesus was convinced that God would join him in all his glory on the temple square, after which God's rule would come over the earth and the righteous would live forever in happiness with God. The crowd cheering him harbored the same hopes and expectations as he did. Yet, nothing happened.

The disappointing ending to the triumphal procession is omitted by Mark (Jesus goes home because it is so late), and Matthew 'solves the problem' by having the triumphal procession flow straight into the cleansing of the temple.

3

That Jesus, after the Passover meal, on his way to the Garden of Gethsemane, suspects he will be arrested that night can be explained simply by the fact that he sent Judas to Caiaphas with the message that he, Jesus, is staying there that night. Jesus still wants to face his Father's test. Caiaphas has been informed by Pilate that Jesus has escaped. If he wants Jesus arrested, he must do so immediately, and he does so.

4

How can Jesus' statement ("Let the cup pass from me") in the garden of Gethsemane be explained? Jesus sent Judas to Caiaphas, but it's possible that Caiaphas didn't

send anyone to arrest Jesus that night. In the latter case, the cup (metaphor for arrest and crucifixion) would pass from Jesus. That Jesus asks his Father to do this is perfectly understandable from a human perspective.

5

The enigmatic sponge scene can be clarified as follows: Bystanders around the cross have noticed that Jesus hopes for salvation. The sentence he utters (“ *Eli, Eli, lema sabaktani ?* ”) is misunderstood and interpreted as a cry for help to Elijah. However, the spoken sentence is coded language. Joseph has agreed with Jesus that he will receive a sponge with fast-acting poison if he utters that sentence. A Roman soldier offers Jesus the sponge. Bystanders shout at the soldier to refrain. They apparently want to see how Jesus reacts as hours pass and rescue eludes him. But the soldier perseveres, Jesus drinks from the sponge, albeit hesitantly because he still hopes for rescue, and thus falls into a coma. To be clear: the bystander in the Gospel of Mark is not a bystander but a Roman soldier. The sour wine is not sour wine but a fast-acting poison.

We might, of course, still wonder why Mark made these fictional twists. The fast-acting poison doesn't fit with the message of faith that Jesus had to die on the cross. If a Roman soldier gives Jesus the sponge (which indeed happened), a reader will likely wonder how it is possible that Jesus dies almost immediately afterward. Is this a way for the Romans to put the crucified out of their suffering? To prevent readers from thinking along those lines, the Roman has been replaced by a bystander. This makes the scene (bystander, sour wine) seem completely innocent and irrelevant, but it also makes it a mystery why the bystanders react as they do.

6

Why was the original ending of the Gospel of Mark deleted and replaced by another text? We have good reason to believe that the lost, original ending of the Gospel of Mark was accurate, and recounted Jesus' appearance on a mountain in Galilee where no one could approach him. Believers who compared the original ending of Mark and the original ending of Matthew became confused. Why does Jesus come closer in Matthew and not in Mark? Why does Jesus remain at a distance in the oldest Gospel? Why can't those who love him come closer to him? And the simple answer is: because

Jesus and his disciples *could n't* approach each other in Mark, for if they could have, they would have done so.

You can then ask how it is possible that something is suddenly possible in Matthew, the later Gospel, that wasn't possible in the earlier Gospel? That makes Matthew's Gospel suspect to a critical reader. They might think that Matthew rather casually said that Jesus mingled with his disciples, in order to allay believers' doubts about whether it was really Jesus. And not because it *actually happened* . For if it had , Mark would certainly have spoken of it that way.

This problem likely led the early Church Fathers to remove the old ending of the Gospel of Mark and replace it with a new ending that completely omits Jesus' appearance on a mountain in Galilee. But what about other inconsistencies in the four Gospels? Why weren't they redacted? This inconsistency concerns the very heart of the Christian faith (Jesus rose from the dead) and was therefore completely unacceptable.

7

That Pilate had soldiers stand guard at Jesus' tomb is historically extremely unlikely. In the Gospels of Mark and Luke, these soldiers are not mentioned at all. The soldiers at the tomb are therefore very likely a fictional addition intended to rule out the possibility that the disciples removed Jesus' body from the tomb. In short, this addition supports the message of faith that Jesus truly rose from the dead. Mark's account cannot rule out the removal of Jesus' body from the tomb by his disciples and therefore leaves doubts about the resurrection. Matthew dispels these doubts.

8

The angel at the tomb in Matthew's Gospel is a fictional leap, and the earthquake a fictional addition. They support the message of faith that Jesus is divine.

9

That in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus' disciples first saw him again after the crucifixion in Jerusalem (the city where he was buried) is unlikely. Matthew describes Jesus first appearing to his disciples on a mountain in Galilee, and the Gospel of Mark foretells an appearance of Jesus in Galilee. On the other hand, a believer at the time would

have wondered why Jesus didn't first appear to his disciples in Jerusalem after his supposed death on the cross and burial just outside Jerusalem. Why did the disciples have to go all the way to Galilee to see him again? Luke attempts to give the story a logical twist by having Jesus appear in Jerusalem. It is clearly a fictional twist.

10

It's easy to explain why the first three evangelists, unlike John, don't mention Jesus being pierced with a spear after he died on the cross. This event never happened, and Jesus, as has already been demonstrated, did not die on the cross. The explanation for this fictional addition by John is simple. John attempted to prove that Jesus actually died on the cross. With the other three evangelists, one can doubt whether Jesus actually died on the cross. They mention no fact that substantiates Jesus' supposed death on the cross: no Roman soldier feels Jesus' pulse, or places a hand on his neck to confirm that his heart has stopped beating, or plays it safe by cutting Jesus' throat. For the first three evangelists, the evidence for Jesus' resurrection is not conclusive, because even if Jesus were seen after the crucifixion, that doesn't mean he rose from the dead until it has been irrefutably established that he died on the cross. Well, John provides this missing piece of "evidence" for Jesus' death on the cross with the spear scene. To make it even more convincing, John also added a scene where Jesus' disciple Thomas was allowed to place his hand in the spear wound.

Conclusion

The hypothetical true story we've presented, as mentioned, contains no scientifically improbable elements, is internally consistent and logical, and allows us to solve the ten riddles of the four resurrection stories. This doesn't 100% prove that the version of history presented here is true, but as long as there's no other version that meets the aforementioned criteria and can solve all the riddles, this is the most likely version of what really happened. In other words, we accept this version as true until a better version is proposed.