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Why Is It Said That Jesus Was the First to Rise from the Dead?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about why it's said that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead if he already raised Lazarus and how to explain how Judaism and Christianity are related to someone who doesn't know much beyond the fact that they're two religions.

- * Why is it said that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead if he already raised Lazarus?
- * How would you explain how Judaism and Christianity are related to someone who doesn't know much beyond the fact that they're two religions?

Transcript

[Music] Welcome to Stand to Reasons? #STRask podcast with Greg Koukl and Amy Hall. Good morning Amy. Good morning Greg.

Alright, you're ready for the first question? Sure. This one comes from Asif Shirazi. How come it said Jesus is the first to rise from the dead? Shouldn't it be Lazarus whom he resurrected? Well, there's a difference between Jesus' resurrection and the other resurrections because actually it wasn't just Lazarus but there are others that Jesus raised and even prophets in the Old Testament, Lycia or Elisha.

I kind of get the two mixed up because their names are so similar and they're back to back, you know? They raised the dead as well, okay? But in those cases they were just resuscitated. They were dead and they were alive and then in a normal physical body they were still mortal and then they died again, okay? What Jesus was was the very first transformation of a human body from mortal to immortality, from perishable to imperishable. Now those are words I got from 1 Corinthians 15 because Paul is talking about the necessity of that transformation since, as he puts it, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Now flesh and blood, that phrase in that circumstance is just referring to normal human

humanity. He's not talking about fleshly people in the carnality sinful sense. He's talking about people who are just mortal and we see this phrase used frequently in other passages.

"Flesh and blood is not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven," Jesus says to Peter. So what Paul is saying is, we are now in mortal bodies, flesh and blood and there is going to be a resurrection that will give us immortal bodies. We are in perishable bodies, flesh and blood and there'll be a resurrection so that we are imperishable.

All that is in 1 Corinthians 15. And so what happened with the others is there was a return of life to their mortal bodies, to their perishable bodies because all of them eventually died. Jesus was the very first one who had a mortal perishable body that died and then was raised to an immortal imperishable body.

And so he is the first fruit so to speak. He is the first one that has been raised in that sense. And that's what we get to look forward to, that what God did with Jesus, and Paul mentions this in a number of different places, what Paul did with Jesus as the first fruits, he will do with us and he will raise our bodies like he raised Jesus.

The immortal will put on immortality, the perishable will put on imperishable when we and we will be like him in that regard. And that's the promise. That's the restoration of the way things.

That's just a restoration, like going back to Adam, we're going to be better than Adam's circumstance. So that's why Jesus' resurrection is referred to as the first or the first fruits, different ways of characterizing it. Because in the unique sense that Jesus was raised, he was the initial as a, not just a type, but an example of what will happen to believers at the end of the age.

Yeah, I think you covered most everything there, Greg. Jesus had already raised a girl, he had already raised a boy, he'd raised a couple of people. The widow son, the telethichomy one, you know, a little girl arise, there are two different Lazarus, right? Now there was one thing, I'm curious what you think about this, because there were at least, well, there was one at least, a person who hasn't died, and that would be either Elijah or Elijah, who I'm not sure was.

Also, the first two ones with Enoch. Yeah, that's odd. So the question is what happened there? So I'm assuming they haven't gone through this, the kind of resurrection Jesus went through, because Jesus is the first.

So what are you? Right, and I'm not exactly sure, I have two thoughts, two options, and of course we can't be dogmatic about it, because it's unclear. When Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 15, he's talking about a generation of people who will be alive when Jesus returns, okay? So normally the way this process works is that we die, and then

there is a resurrection of our bodies in a glorified state. And so for a season, we are in a disembodied state, that's the intermediary state where we are absent from the body is present with the Lord, but we are waiting for and yearning for that time when we will be whole and complete with our bodies, new bodies unified with their soul, okay? Now normally that happens death and then future resurrection, but for those people who are alive when Jesus returns, that in a certain sense they get resurrected, transformed in that way without having died.

Now this is what a lot of people refer to as a rapture when you use that language that implies a certain timing also for this project. The New Testament doesn't use that word. It describes that event even in 1 Thessalonians 4 and in 1 Corinthians 15, the kind of rapture passages as the resurrection.

The key point I'm making here is not one of timing. It's just that there is going to be a generation of Christians who will be transformed, whose bodies will be transformed without having died first. So with regards to Enoch and Elijah, it is one possible that for them there was a similar kind of situation, all right, that they were transformed and brought in to heaven in a transformed sense, which means they would have received the same kind of resurrection body that Jesus seems to be the first example of.

So what was unique about Jesus on this way of thinking is that Jesus died and then was resurrected where these guys did die. So that would still leave Jesus on that view, that way of explaining it, would still leave Jesus in a unique position, individual position. I'm not entirely satisfied with that, but I'm just saying that's a possibility.

The other possibility is that they were translated as the text says into heaven to be with God, still in a mortal, some kind of a specialized mortal sense or state. And notice they hadn't died, they just were carried up and they will then also participate in the kind of resurrection that the non-dead Christians will experience at the return of Christ. And so that might be future.

Well, then how are they kind of hanging out with God now? And I don't know, God's certainly capable of maintaining them. It is definitely a unique circumstance. And so we don't really draw any broad theological conclusions on those unique circumstances.

And it's not permanent. They won't stay the way they are forever. And everything else hasn't been changed the way everything else will be changed.

So I don't think it's wrong to say that they could still be with God right now without having the same kind of body Jesus has now. Yeah, or else that here's another, again, this is all speculative, but they were translated, but both Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus at the, at the, uh, transfiguration. Okay.

Well, Moses's body was buried. So this had to be Moses's soul that was manifest there in

a visible form. Okay.

And I don't suspect that Moses didn't have a body, but Elijah did have a body. I imagine they were all manifest there spiritually. So it could be that though, though Elijah was translated, and maybe this is the same thing as, you know, that they were taken from the earth and their bodies were discarded and their spirits were with God and they will receive a resurrected body sometime later.

And I say that simply because, well, here it seems like it was the spirit or soul, if you will, of Moses and Elijah, one who had physically died and one who had not physically died, it is their immaterial selves that are part of this gathering, so to speak, at, uh, at the transfiguration. So what the best we can do is we can look at clear case examples of things in scripture and then try to put those things together and speculate on possibilities, but it's not, I don't think we can know for sure. Okay, Greg, just to close out this question, you had mentioned first Corinthians 15.

And so I just wanted to read this part that talks about the differences between the bodies. Uh, so he's talking about the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable, a perishable body.

It is raised an imperishable body. It is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory.

It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power. It is sown in natural body.

It is raised as spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So also, it is written, the first man, Adam became a living soul.

The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, then the spiritual, the first man is from the earth, earthy. The second man is from heaven as is the earthy.

So also are those who are earthy and as is the heavenly. So also are those who are heavenly just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly. Good.

And the sown bear, presumably, is a metaphor for being buried. Yeah, he says that earlier in the chapter. Yeah.

All right. Thank you. Good.

Let's go to a question from Tracy from Minnesota. How would you explain in simple terms how Judaism and Christianity are related to someone who doesn't know much beyond the fact that they are two religions? Well, in a way, this is kind of easy to answer, because everything that is true about biblical Judaism, properly understood, is true about Christianity. That is, and I developed these ideas in the training that we have at standard

reason called the Bible Fast Forward.

There are eight sessions that are 50 minutes long with a 150 page workbook or you call it like syllabus that goes with a total outline of everything, highly recommended, by the way, for understanding of these kinds of things. But all of these particular things, the Abrahamic covenant, for example, then the, then the Mosaic covenant, and then the new covenant, all of these things are Jewish covenants. They all have ramifications for the nation of Israel.

All right. The Abrahamic covenant, God's rescue plan for the world, Genesis chapter 1, chapter 12, verses 1 and 3. And it was going to be through this nation he would create. Now, part of creating the nation is to provide a land and a people and a structure for the nation.

And the land, of course, is Canaan. The people are the multitude that developed principally while they were in Egypt. And then the structure is the Mosaic covenant.

This is how the people are structured, not just religiously, but also civically or governmentally. There's a lot of that that's involved with. So now we have this, we have this structure.

Okay, now the structure, the religious aspects of it created problems because people did not do what they were supposed to do. And as you've mentioned before, that law was never really able to give the kind of life necessary. And the book of Hebrews explains that there has been a change which was predicted by Jeremiah, chapter 31, 31.

I will give you a new covenant, a lot like the old covenant which you broke, the one I gave you at Sinai. So this is all Jewish. There's a new covenant coming.

The law will be written on their hearts. Ezekiel talks about it as well. It entails the end of the sacrificial system because there's complete personal and permanent personal forgiveness of sins.

Okay, that's all part of the Jewish thing. It turns out that we learn in the New Testament that Gentiles have been kind of grafted in to that new covenant. We get the benefits of the new covenant, which is the giving of the Spirit as well, that was originating with Jews and was for Jews.

But now Christians, I mean, sorry, Gentiles also can participate. Book of Acts has many references to this and actually, and even Jews, Jesus makes references to his love for the Gentiles and it got Jesus and Paul in a lot of trouble with the Jews because they're very, very, you know, in some ways understandable, reserved about Gentiles being part of God's plan, even though this is what God promised through Abraham. Okay, so we have all of these things that are the Jewish, Jewish plan, God working, except for now as a Gentile, I get to be, I get to be grafted in and included in the new covenant of

forgiveness and relationship with God and the giving of the Holy Spirit.

And so as I explained this to many people know who Dennis Prager is, well, I used to be part of a radio program that he was on in Los Angeles before he became a national figure. And in the 80s and my comment to him then is there's every and, of course, my conviction that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Now that is a difference.

That's a difference because characteristically the Jewish nation do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, but the early Christians were all Jews. And what I said to Dennis is I said, everything about my spiritual convictions is Jewish. We got a Jewish Old Testament.

We got Jewish promises and from the, you know, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, we got a new covenant. We got a Jewish Messiah. I said the only thing that's not Jewish about my views is this goi referring to myself in goi means Gentile, so which everybody laughed at.

But this is really true. So the real distinction it is between New Testament, I'm sorry, between Christians nowadays and principally this is the big difference between Christians nowadays and the Jews of the first century was that we believe Jesus is the Messiah, the promised Messiah. They didn't and they still don't.

However, since the first century Judaism has changed quite a bit. So now there are all kinds of differences. They don't do temple sacrifices anymore, not after 70 AD.

The temple was destroyed. So now they have other kinds of rituals. And then you have Jews that are atheists.

You have Jews that are moderately observant of the things that they were told to observe in the law. You have Jews that are very observant, how acidic. And then you have Jews that believe Jesus is the Messiah.

So nowadays you do have variations and it just depends on which group of Jews you're talking about. Although it's pretty well understood that Jews in general don't think Jesus is a Messiah. It's interesting that at least according to some, if you believe Jesus is the Messiah, you can't be a Jew.

But you can be an atheist and still be a Jew. That's a little odd. There's a distinction between the ethnicity and religious convictions.

This is why you can be an atheist and a Jew ethnically. But in any event, if you're just talking about biblical Judaism, everything that a properly informed Christian believes is something that's grounded in the Hebrew scriptures. So we believe the Hebrew scriptures and we also believe that there's a Messiah for everybody.

And Gentiles are included, which is really hinted at in the very first big covenant with the Jews, the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12, 1 through 3. So on the one hand, there's a

tremendous amount of similarity. What Christians believe to us ought to be what the Jews believe as Jews, that their Messiah has come and things have changed and now there's no longer any sacrifice, book a Hebrew stuff. But since that time, there's been lots of changes in Judaism.

And those who take the religion seriously that do not believe that Jesus and Messiah are almost universally works salvation oriented. So the important thing to remember here is that this is one story. And the difference between say Christianity and Islam, because Islam also will say that God, that Jesus was a prophet, Moses was a prophet.

And they worship the same God. But they reject things about Christianity. Whereas as Christians, what we are saying is that we are the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham.

And we don't reject anything in the Old Testament. We don't say that something was changed or we don't have an alternate Old Testament. We accept everything because this is all one story.

Paul talks about the Jews a lot. The Christians share the accounts basically with Jews. And so we are part of that entire narrative without exception.

Biblically speaking. So of course, the Jewish people today reject Jesus as the Messiah. Not the ethnically Jewish people, but the religiously Jewish people reject him.

But we don't reject anything of what came before Christianity. We're saying that we see ourselves as part of this whole same story. It's one story.

Paul says in Romans 9, he talks about the Israelites to whom belongs, the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh who is overall. There it is. Yeah.

So he talks more about that in chapters 9 through 11. He talks about our relationship to the Jewish people and how those who are unbelieving are broken off and were grafted in. But the idea is we don't see ourselves as something new.

We see ourselves as the fulfillment. So for example, when you look at, you know, Paul just mentioned the temple service, what Paul says in other places is that this was a shadow of what was to come. So when you look at everything God commanded, it was pointing towards Christ.

It was it was teaching them that they needed a sacrifice. It was teaching about what the sacrifice would be. It would be perfect.

It blood would be shed for us. All these things were reflected in the tabernacle and then

later in the temple. Those were all shadows of Christ.

So everything was leading up to and teaching them, preparing them for the fulfillment of this. Plus you see the details of that worked out in more precise terms in the book of Hebrews. Yes.

Especially chapter 10. Yeah. And in fact, he says the reason why Moses had to build it exactly according to the plans was because it was supposed to teach them specifically about the coming of Christianity, of Jesus, basically.

So I guess that's the easiest way to explain this. We see this as one story. We're not rejecting things that happened in the Old Testament.

We're accepting them and seeing Christ as the fulfillment of what was promised to them. Paul also talks about Jesus being the fulfillment of his promises and grace to the Gentiles. So he saw this as being the fulfillment of what God had promised.

And Islam, regardless of their claims that that gospels are inspired and that the law was inspired and that Moses and worship the same God and the Jews and they worship the same. The key here is that the story is changed radically. Their story is not the biblical story.

By the way, if it was the biblical story, then Muhammad wasn't necessary. Muhammad brought something different and that's why Islam is a different religion than Christianity and Judaism. And I mean radically different, even though they have their monotheistic and they claim it's the same God.

So at one point, second point is that if you go to also Ephesians 2, you'll see that there there's a fairly clear characterization of how God brings the Gentiles who were without God and without hope in the world. Into the covenant by removing the dividing wall, which was the law. Now, notice I mentioned the Abraham covenant, the Mosaic covenant, and then the New Covenant.

The New Covenant supersedes the Mosaic covenant. Jeremiah 31, 31 says that explicitly and it gives things that were foreshadowed but now explicitly available. And so it's not unusual for Paul to say in Ephesians 2 that that dividing wall of the law has been broken down.

That's removed now so that the two, the Gentiles and the Jews can become one new body, which would be the church, all under the provisions of the New Covenant and the provisions of forgiveness and the promise of God. And this then becomes a fulfillment of the Abraham covenant in which the Jewish nation turns out to be a blessings to all the goyim is the word that's used there, all the nations as it's translated. And just to add to something you just said about Islam, in Judaism in the Old Testament, they were looking forward to a Messiah.

That was expected. Now, when you get to Hebrews, it says up till now we've had these prophets, but in these last times, God has spoken through Jesus and there's a clear sense of this is the end. So when Islam comes and says they have another prophet and that things have been removed from the New Testament or things have been changed, you can see that there's not this connection, there's not this expectation of another prophet because things have been fulfilled.

The story is complete. It is one story and it's complete now. All right.

Thank you, Greg. And thank you, Tracy and Asif. We really appreciate your questions.

If you have a question, send it to us on Twitter with the hashtag #strask. This is Amy Hall and Greg Kockel for Stand to Reason.

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(upbeat music)