

# OpenTheo

## #113 Was Judas predestined to betray? Did the disciples hallucinate?

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### Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

NT Wright answers question about the Easter story.

Is it fair that Judas was predestined to betray Christ? Did the resurrection need to be physical? Could the disciples have hallucinated the risen Jesus? Is it significant that Jesus' mortal body was continuous with his resurrection body... but ours won't be?

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## Transcript

The Ask NT Wright Anything podcast. Hello and welcome back to the show. It's Justin Bryley.

This programme brought to you in partnership with NT Wright Online, SBCK and Premier Unbelievable where I'm Head of Theology and Apologetics. And as we approach the end of Holy Week this year and Easter weekend, Tom and I are looking at some of your questions around Easter. Is it fair that Judas was predestined to betray Christ? That's a classic one, isn't it? Did the resurrection need to be physical? Could the disciples have hallucinated the risen Jesus? Is it significant that Jesus' mortal body was continuous with his resurrection body, whereas ours won't be? These are some of the questions you've been asking and we'll be trying to answer.

Very glad to announce, as I mentioned last week, we've a new website for the show. Ask NTY Anything is now part of PremierUnbelievable.com, your one-stop shop for all our shows and resources in one place. And we'll be expanding the website considerably in coming weeks, so look out for that.

It's all ahead of our big launch of Premier Unbelievable in May at the time of our annual conference. We're launching the whole ministry on a new footing with lots more, shows, video resources, training resources and more. You can sign up to be part of that at Unbelievable the conference 2022.

We'd love to see you there. Saturday the 14th of May, live from the British Library in London. You can be with us in person.

We've got a wonderful day laid on for anyone who comes in person. There's a catered meal as well, but we're doing it at a time that we'll suit anyone who wants to join us online, especially from the US and Canada. So it starts at 2pm in the afternoon, runs through to the evening in the UK.

That's about 9am Eastern if you want to join us from the USA or Canada. It would be great to have you with us. We're expecting lots of friends to be joining online and getting involved with all the Q&A sessions, the seminars and much more besides.

Some wonderful speakers, Alice Demograph, Lisa Fields, Calvin Robertson, Jeff Vines, Glenn Scrivener, Sharon Dierichs, Joseph DeSouza, John Wyatt, Phil Vischer, Sky Jatani. It's a real international group who are joining us. You can get your tickets by going to unbelievable.live and of course, a big conversation event is part of the conference this year.

You'll get to see Ian McGill-Christ and Christian neuroscientist Sharon Dierichs in conversation on the mind and its master. It's going to be an unmissable day. So whether you're joining us at the live in person or live online, unbelievable.live is the place to go and book your tickets.

It's very affordable. If you're going online, there's even a pay what you want option. So we'd love to see you there.

Right now though, it's time to leap into today's edition of the show. Here's your questions on the Easter story. Welcome back to this week's edition of the show and it's Holy Week is the time that we're broadcasting this week's show in 2022.

Tom, I don't know what your pattern looks like as an ordained priest and bishop in the Church of England. I'm sure it's changed a bit now that you're more in academia than in pastoral ministry. But what typically would Holy Week look like for you when it comes to the things that you're doing and commemorating? I am simply based at Whitcliffe Hall, which of course, as part of the university, is invocation at the moment.

So there's nothing particular happening there and I don't have any particular parish responsibilities. Sometimes, some years, I have accepted preaching invitations through Holy Week, particularly, Monday, Thursday, Good Friday, and then Easter Day itself. I haven't this year and one of the reasons for that is that there's a conference in Cambridge, which I'm going to be part of, which is on the art of new creation, which is partly launching a book with that title edited by Jeremy Begby, who's cross-listed to Cambridge and Duke and Durham, North Carolina.

And I and several others, including Rowan Williams and Malcolm Geit and Richard Hayes, are going to be there in Cambridge for three days leading up to Good Friday. My particular role there is to say a few words about the book to meeting on the Thursday, but then particularly to preach at the Maundy Thursday service in King's College Chapel. And actually, when we're recording this, I have just been working on the sermon for that day.

And then, I will be coming back to Oxford for Good Friday, by which time various members of my family will be here, we're having a rather complicated family Easter weekend with some coming for one bit and some and then going and some others coming later. So I think a lot of what I do will be focused on family and whichever members of the family want to join me in going to particular church services will do that. There are some wonderful musical events, as you'd expect, organized in Oxford, around the whole theme of Holy Week and Easter, and we will be attending some of those.

But I will not, apart from that, Cambridge thing, I will not have any other preaching responsibilities, probably just as well. Well, that Cambridge conference sounds fascinating, perhaps, if they release the recordings. We can feature them on the podcast at some point.

But for now, we've got some questions that are Easter-related from listeners. That old conundrum about Judas has come up in a few different ways. Here's one from Jeff in Austin, Texas, who asks, "How should we regard Judas as scariest?" Did Judas have free will in his betrayal of Jesus? Jesus speaks of his betrayal before the scene in the garden.

So was Judas destined, predetermined, fated, etc, to betray Jesus? Did Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection require a betrayal? And if it did, should Judas be villainized or be shown compassion? If Judas hadn't betrayed Jesus, would someone else have? I've always felt uncomfortable with the idea that Judas was chosen by Jesus to be a disciple, destined to betray Jesus, destined to feel guilt for his actions, destined to commit suicide and be blamed for Jesus' imprisonment, trial, and execution. And this could segue, of course, into a general discussion on Judas as a chosen disciple and the later Gnostic Gospel of Judas. But anyway, any insights would be gladly appreciated, says Jeff.

So how do you deal with this question of Judas' role? The later so-called Gospel of Judas is a whole other story. And I've written about that in a book called Judas and the Gospel

of Jesus, which was about, oh, 10 or a dozen years ago, actually 2006, I think, it's as long as that. So quite a long time back.

But I think it's still available. But it raises particular questions. The problem here is that we tend to flatten down theological questions into this either/or of determinism versus free will, which is basically a philosophical dilemma and which doesn't do justice to the way in which actually the God of the Bible and human beings relate to one another.

It's not like are we machines or are we just random blobs zipping around doing whatever occurs to our electrodes, whatever. It's really not like that. It's very difficult to address this because the nature of evil is such that if you try to analyze it and say, ah, I understand it now, this is where evil fits into the whole picture, then you've done something pretty shocking.

You've implied that God has made a world in which there is a perfectly sensible place for evil. And evil is itself, in the technical sense, absurd. It doesn't belong.

It doesn't fit. And that's why both in the ancient and in the modern world, we find that people then and people now don't have very good language to describe the powers and forces of evil. In John 13, it says that the Satan entered Judas.

Now, the Satan has *satan* in Hebrew is the accuser, the kind of public prosecutor who's always looking for people to accuse. And it looks as though what's going on. And you see this throughout the gospel stories, is that when Jesus is announcing the kingdom and going around healing people, then the dark forces mass and try to attack and try to stop him and and and he scream at him and and and try and pull him back and so on and tempt him to go in the wrong direction.

And he says to Peter at one point, get behind me Satan. But now Judas has as it were become the accuser personified. And people have tried to psychoanalyze Judas and get inside his motivation.

I think there's a couple of hundred pages in Karl Barth's church dogmatics all about this. And I'm not sure we're any of the wiser at the end of it. Because at the end of the day, evil is mysterious.

And I don't think we should expect to be able to understand it. But if you want to say did Judas have free will, I'll say of course he did, but it's more complicated than that. He certainly has responsibility and responsibility implies that there were probably dozens and dozens of moments where he just lingered on the possibility that maybe things might be thus rather than this way and so on until finally whether out of disappointment or ambition or greed or whatever he tips over.

And it's very difficult to analyze what's going on there. And what we do see however is that in that story, there's a kind of quintessential moment which picks up as Jesus said,

the theme from older texts from the Psalms about the one who ate my bread and has lifted up his heel against me and so on. As though all the way through scripture, there is a sense that when God is doing what God is going to do, the powers of evil are going to try to hit back and try to pull him back and stop God's plans coming to fruition.

And that's the mystery of the cross that it is both the wickedest thing that human beings ever did and the most amazingly loving thing that God did. And you see that in the book of Acts when it says that Jesus was given up by the determinate council and foreknowledge of God, but you with wicked hands took him and killed him. And how we put those two together remains a great mystery.

What we can't do is to think of God as simply one agency among others as though God does this bit and people do that bit. God is overall and around all but the forces of evil unleashed through human idolatry and the summoning up of dark forces are in their proper sense incomprehensible. We cannot find a theory which says, ah, this is how they work.

If we did, we would have actually accused God of making a world in which evil had a natural place. Poor Judas gets caught in the middle of that. If we feel sympathy for him, well, yes, absolutely.

But that doesn't mean that, oh, well, he couldn't help it. We tend to collapse these things into these philosophical categories. And I'm not really answering the question.

I'm just explaining why there isn't. I think the sort of good answer that would satisfy our modern rationalist approach. That's helpful.

There's of course a whole bunch of questions that come about when it comes to the resurrection, both of Jesus and of our own future resurrection too. Paul in Maryland in the US wants to ask about the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Now you say here, Paul, Enthyrte makes a point of Jesus' resurrection being a physical, bodily resurrection in his book, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* from the Greek noun, Anastasis.

However, the gospel writers describe Jesus' resurrection using the verb and you'll have to forgive me if I mispronounce this, Tom, *ageario* or *ageario*. Do you want to correct me on that? Because I'm probably going to give you a wrong *ageario*. Okay, which is also used in the gospels for someone waking up from sleep.

In other words, it doesn't seem to be pointing to a bodily resurrection. Now your book had a deep impact on me, but as I've studied the resurrection language more, I wonder why *ageario* is used and not a verb form for Anastasis in the gospels to indicate Jesus bodily rose from the dead. Okay, what's your thoughts on that, Tom? Yeah, I was struck by that question.

And I think I would hold out certainly for the way in which the noun, Anastasis, standing

up, it literally means a standing up, Stasis standing and Anna is up, is used in quite a definite way throughout the New Testament. And it's a word which as a noun clearly refers to a newly embodied state of somebody who was previously bodily dead. But the cognate verb, I actually, I was intrigued enough, as I always am, by linguistic phenomena, to look it up in the Greek concordance to the New Testament.

And of course, the verb *anhistē*, me just means to stand up. So it's used much more widely than just resurrection. So it wouldn't do for a resurrection word, because Luke 139, Mary got up in those days and went to visit Elizabeth, that's Mary Anastasis.

And you get it again and again, somebody just gets up and does something. And so the word would be much too unspecific for resurrection itself. And clearly the word *ageario* is not going to be a fulcrum around which you can push a lever saying, ah, therefore it was only, it meant something else other than resurrection, because they're using the word *ageario* to refer to the great story, which clearly you see laid out in say 1 Corinthians 15 verses three following the Messiah died for our sins and accordance with the scriptures was buried was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures and was seen.

And then there follows a very detailed discussion, as we know in 1 Corinthians 15 of resurrection as the fulfillment of the messianic texts in Psalm 110, Psalm 8, Daniel 7, etc. That splendid passage in 1 Corinthians 15, 20 to 28. So it's quite clear, this is the standard early Christian story and whichever verbs they use here and there, this is what they think they're talking about.

This is to be honest, why people laughed at Paul in Athens, if he was simply saying something more generalized, and I'm not sure what that would have been, they would have said, oh well that's an interesting theory, but they all know perfectly well that dead people don't get up out of their graves. So I think ultimately that's a red herring and though it's important to study these words in great detail, of course, the distinction between the *anastasis* root and an *agearo* root isn't going to get us anywhere. There's another question here from Daniel in Los Angeles, which is more about the origins of the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection.

And Daniel says, I'm curious of what thoughts Bishop Wright has on the idea that Jesus' own passion predictions could perhaps serve as the basis for the origin of the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection. I know many scholars are skeptical in regards to the authenticity of those predictions, but I do know scholars such as Pesh and Alison, who have entertained it in the past, I'm curious how you would respond to the idea that these predictions by Jesus, perhaps combined with a grief hallucination thesis, might account for why the disciples came to believe that Jesus rose three days later. Yeah.

It's an interesting question. I actually just recently read Dale Alison's book, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, which came out two or three years ago, and I just, two days ago,

wrote a long email to Dale Alison about his book because I enjoyed a lot of it, and it's a very interesting book, and just last night I had a nice email back from him. So I'm right in the middle of this discussion as we speak.

Dale is quite clear that he does not agree with the theory of Rudolf Pesh, German scholar, who is trying to explore this idea, "Oh, well, Jesus said he would rise, Jesus said he would rise." Therefore, once Jesus was killed, that sense that he was going to rise, overwhelmed them, and they started to say that he had all words that effect. That's an oversimplification, but that's where it would go. But what Dale does do, as this question Daniel from Los Angeles suggests, is to explore in great detail this phenomenon of people who having died then seem to appear to people, people who they love, people who've known them, or maybe even other people after they've died.

And that's a very, very interesting suggestion because a lot of people in today's world don't realize that this was a well-known phenomenon in the ancient world as it is in the modern. Dale Alison himself tells stories in the book of things that he himself has experienced, and people that he knows well have experienced. And I have known people very well who have had this experience, including one where it wasn't a grief-induced hallucination because, tragically, it was a young woman who was shot in a random drive-by shooting somewhere in Texas, and her fiancé in California who knew nothing about this suddenly experienced her, appearing in the room, smiling at him and greeting him, and then disappearing again, whereupon he phoned up to see what was going on and learned the awful truth.

So, this sort of thing does happen, but they knew about it in the ancient world as well. And the parade example, which I was frustrated that Dale Alison doesn't discuss, is in Acts chapter 12. When Peter is in jail, Herod is going to kill him the next day, and the disciples are praying in a secret place somewhere.

Peter gets out of jail, and Angel comes and wakes him, and the guards are struck with sleep, etc. Peter turns up at the house where the disciples are praying, knocks on the door, and Rhoda the maid hearing his voice is so excited she doesn't let him in. She says, "It's Peter, it's Peter," and they say, "You're mad." And then they said, "No, it is Peter, I've heard his voice." And what do they say? They say, "It must be his angel." What do they mean? Well, we can tell because in Acts 23, there's the debate about resurrection when Paul is on trial at the Sanhedrin, and Luke explaining the dynamics of the debate says that the Sadducees don't believe in resurrection, nor do they believe in the angel or the spirit, but the Pharisees believe in them both.

In other words, the Pharisees have a theory that we will be bodily raised, and that in between death and bodily resurrection, you may encounter people in a spirit form or an angel form, that this is a way of talking about continuity between the present person and the ultimate resurrection. So they say, maybe Paul is innocent, maybe an angel or a

spirit spoke to him. In other words, they don't actually think he's met a really raised from the dead person.

So in other words, they knew perfectly well the difference between somebody who has recently died appearing in the form of an angel or a spirit, where you have one of these sudden, may feel like a hallucination, but I think people today probably would come round to saying, "Something is going on here, we don't know what it is or how that works, but it seems to be a real event." They know the difference between that and resurrection. In other words, if it turned out that this was Peter's angel, a kind of angelic post-mortem visitation, that would be perfectly compatible with going to the prison, asking Herod's guards for the body, giving it a reverent burial and saying "Caddish" etc in the normal Jewish way. It wouldn't mean that they would then go around saying, "Peter's been raised from the dead," because obviously he wouldn't have been.

Indeed, if it was one of those post-mortem visitations, nor hallucinations call them what you will, the whole point is this person is dead, they're bodily dead, they're not coming back in this whole new way. What they say about Jesus is not, "Oh, will he still be alive somewhere?" Many people who don't believe in the bodily resurrection are prepared to say, "Oh, I think Jesus is alive," but alive as what, in what capacity, etc. The whole point of the resurrection stories is that this is something radically different from that.

As to the expectation, well, this is the other very, very important point. We know of at least a dozen messianic or prophetic movements between roughly 100 years before Jesus and roughly 100 years after Jesus, ending with the Bar Kokhba revolt in the 130s AD. In each of those cases, the movement ended with the violent death of the founder, as far as we can tell.

When that happened, and there are several movements which crop up in the historian Josephus, we can track them, and I've written about these as others have done, when that happened, when the founder dies, the followers have a choice. They can either clear off and forget the movement, this whole kingdom of God idea, we're not going to get into that mess anymore, or they get another leader. Going around saying that the original leader has been raised from the dead is not an option, even though if they were loyal Pharisee Jews, as many of them were, resurrection would be very much in their minds, that that's what we're aiming for, the kingdom of God, the raising of all the dead, but not one person coming back in the middle of history.

And I've sometimes fantasized and imagined, say, after the death of Simon Bar Kokhba, who was the Messiah of the war period, 66 to 70, who the Romans killed at the end of Titus' triumph in Rome in 72. If somebody the next day had said, I think God has raised him from the dead. And his friends might say, what do you mean God has raised him from the dead? And if the person had said, oh, well, you know, he always said that one day there'll be a glorious resurrection.



So maybe that's happened. Then his friends would say, don't be so stupid. They just killed him.

We've just buried him. What do you mean he's raised from the dead? And if somebody at that point would come out with a sort of built manion explanation, oh, well, we have a sense of his presence with us. We have a sense that our sins have been forgiven.

They would say, well, maybe he is in some sense present. Maybe our sins have been forgiven. But why did you say he's been raised from the dead? That's not what that means.

So I think once we start to think historically about what people actually knew, believed, expected, anticipated, and how they reacted as first century Jews, those theories simply fall away. And we're left with this very stark and striking claim, which was stark and striking in the first century as it is today, that they say that the tomb was empty and that they really did experience Jesus in a new transformed physicality, which seemed capable of inhabiting in both heaven and earth and moving easily between the two. That's a very strange thing.

And Jesus never talked about that in advance. And nor as far as we can tell, did any of the Jewish writers who wrote about resurrection. So there's all sorts of new things which come out in the resurrection stories and Paul's theories about resurrection, for which they were unprepared and for which theories like that of Pesh and even the rather different theories of Dale Allison simply don't address.

Very interesting. Thank you so much, Tom. And thank you, Daniel, for the question.

And I should just say, as it happens, our Easter weekend edition of Unbelievable coming up features Dale Allison in conversation with another New Testament scholar Justin Bass who wrote a book called The Bedrock of Christianity. They're going to be debating the historical facts around the resurrection. So look out for that.

If you're listening on podcast or watching on video, you'll be able to catch that on Unbelievable over the weekend. And we've maybe time just to squeeze one more in, Tom. And this is from Parker in Sacramento who says Jesus, his resurrection seems to present us with an advanced presentation of the hope for those who trust in him, namely a resurrection from the dead with resurrection bodies.

In that sense, his resurrection has continuity with our future hope because his was the first everlasting resurrection that paved the way for our future resurrections. Now given the significance of that continuity between our resurrections and his, what is the significance of the discontinuity that we see in the fact that while our bodies will decay and be completely replaced entirely with new incorruptible bodies, as 1 Corinthians 15 says, Jesus's initial body never decayed, Acts 2, 27 and Psalm 16 verse 10, but rather

seems to have been transformed into his resurrection body. Yeah, it's a great question.

And you can see the early Christians coming to terms with this. For instance, in Philippians 3, when Paul says that Jesus will change our present shabby old body to be like his glorious body. And at the end of 1 Corinthians 15, he talks about being changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye so that Paul does envisage that those who are still alive when the Lord returns will experience a radical transformation into this new kind of still physical but now also completely animated by the spirit body, which will be an immortal physicality.

So there is something going on there for which we don't have really much better language than that, that of transformation. But of course, Paul was well aware that even by the middle of the first century when he was writing, there were many people who'd been following Jesus in his lifetime, who were now dead and their bodies were decaying in the earth. And as time went on, the Christians realized that some people were being burnt at the stake, some people were being chopped up for their faith.

And by the end of the second century, you see writers like Araneus addressing this question and helping people understand if somebody is burnt at the stake and their ashes are then thrown into a river, how is God going to raise this person from the dead? And the early Christians quickly come to the view that after all, our bodies, as they are at the moment, are all in a state of flux anyway. As C.S. Lewis says in his book *Miracles*, we are to that extent like the curve in a waterfall, all the atoms, all the molecules in our bodies are borrowed from the rest of creation and will pass back into the rest of creation. And we change our molecular kit roughly every seven years.

So it's no big deal to get the same atoms and molecules back again. Indeed, they get shared around. So what we're talking about in the transformation, we are also talking about God giving us a new body.

And indeed Paul uses exactly that language in 1 Corinthians. He says, God gives it a body each in its appropriate way. And so we need to be prepared simultaneously to celebrate the fact that in Jesus' case, and in the case of those who are left alive at his coming, there will be a transformation of the present body into the future one, while at the same time saying that for most people, God will do a great act of new creation.

Resurrection itself is all about new creation is not about resuscitation. It's about fresh new creation. And that's the thing which we celebrate and for which we long, we have anticipations of it by the spirit in the present.

The spirit is the one who's going to raise us from the dead. And so the experience of the spirit in the present is meant to be an anticipatory experience of that new creation, even in the midst of the corruption and decay of the old. I hope that's been helpful for you, Parker.

And I hope all these questions have been helpful as we approach the Easter weekend, thanks to all those who sent them in. And I wish you, Tom, a very happy Easter, even in often difficult and confusing times in our world. I pray that you and your family really do enjoy and celebrate Easter this weekend.

Thank you very much and for you and yours as well. Hey, thank you for being with us on this week's edition of the show for Easter. Next time, we're going to be looking at the first of two bonus episodes here.

"Enthi writes conversation with Reverend Esau McCauley." He's the author of "Reading Wild Black." They'll be talking about race and the Bible and its impact on the church. This is from an event that was broadcast last year by Together PDX. It's hosted by Tim Mackey of the Bible Project.

So look out for that on your podcast feed next time. You can receive news from the show and ask a question yourself by registering at our brand new website, [premierunbelievable.com](http://premierunbelievable.com). If you do that, we'll even send you a free e-book. You're welcome to support the show there too.

And just a reminder, now's the time to get booked into [unbelievable.live](http://unbelievable.live) Saturday the 14th of May, only about a month away. Check out the ticketing for the conference. You'll be helped to take God off mute in your life.

That's what it's all about. [Unbelievable.live](http://unbelievable.live). The link is with today's show for now. Thank you for listening.

Have a very happy Easter and see you next time.

[Music] [ Silence ]