

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Review & Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_rande_01.php

DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACH THAT CHRIST ACTIVELY PARTICIPATED IN HIS RESURRECTION?

PROFESSOR B. H. TUKEY, WILLIAM JEWELL COLLEGE.

In discussions of the resurrection of Christ it is sometimes stated, or tacitly assumed, that the Greek text gives additional light on this question such as is not found in the English translations. This additional information is thought to be conveyed by the grammatical voice of the Greek verbs that are used in the passages where our Lord's resurrection is mentioned. On first thought it would seem to be reasonable that the voice of the verb should be decisive in this matter; that wherever the verb is in the active voice, it is to be understood that the subject effects His own resurrection, and that the middle voice denotes the same conception with greater precision, but that the passive voice indicates the action of some one other than the subject. Further study, however, will show that the voice of the verb is not always a sufficient criterion in such matters.

In Greek, as in other languages, many intransitive verbs in the active voice denote no activity in the sense of effort or exertion on the part of the subject. For example, we say that a feather "rises" or a boat "drifts" when the one is borne by the wind or the other by the tide. That the middle voice of a Greek verb does not always denote reflexive action is seen, for example, in the middle future of the verb "to be", where action of the subject upon himself is inconceivable. In like manner the passive form may fail to carry a passive meaning, as in the case of one of the common words of wishing (ἐβουλήθην). The significance of voice varies with different verbs so that one must know something of the general usage of a verb before one can rightly decide in a given case in what way the subject participates in the action of the verb.

Two verbs are used in the New Testament to denote resurrection from death; one, *ἀνίστημι* with the primary meanings of *to raise* or *to rise* to an erect or higher position, and the other, *ἐγείρω* with the primary meaning of *to rouse*, as from sleep. The original meaning of these words is seen in such passages as Acts 12:7, where the angel "smote Peter on the side and awoke (*ἠγείρεν*) him, saying, "Rise up (*ἀνάστα*) quickly." When they are used to denote resurrection from death they seem not to differ from each other in their general meaning. Thus in parallel accounts of the same utterance, Matthew uses one verb and Mark the other.¹ On the other hand the two verbs show a decided difference in their use of voice.

Both in classical Greek and in the New Testament the active forms of *ἀνίστημι* in the present, imperfect, future, and first aorist tenses have a transitive meaning, "to raise"; but in the second aorist, the active forms are used intransitively in the sense of "to rise". This same intransitive meaning is conveyed in the present, imperfect, and future tenses by the use of the middle forms. Thus a writer or speaker using this verb in the future in the sense of "to rise" is compelled to use the middle form, whereas he may express the same idea in the past by the use of the active form of the second aorist. In view of this fact it is not at all strange that the middle forms of this verb are found in the words attributed to our Lord which foretell His resurrection and do not recur in the accounts given by His disciples. We may see the absurdity of insisting on a reflexive meaning for the middle forms of this verb by noting the passages in which these forms occur with other subjects. Shall we say that Christ intended to teach that the men of Nineveh would raise themselves,² or that Lazarus would raise himself at the last day,³ or that Paul believed that the dead in Christ would effect their own resurrection?⁴

1. Compare Matt. 16:21 and Mar. 8:31; also Matt. 17:23 and Mar. 9:31.

2. Matt. 12:41, Luke 11:32.

3. John 11:23, 24.

4. 1 Tim. 4:16.

The other verb, *ἐγείρω*, generally conveys the intransitive meaning by the use of the passive forms.⁵ Here again the voice is not a sufficient test of activity or passivity. When no outside agent is suggested by modifying phrase or context, the passive form may well denote simply the process of rising on the part of the subject, without indicating whether his resurrection is the result of his own effort or that of another. Thus the Easter cry comes to all of us who use the English tongue in the words, "He is risen," although the Greek verb in the text of the Gospels is in the passive form. Doubtless the translators have given the thought with greater precision than they would have done, if they had attempted to match the passive of the Greek with an English passive.

It is evident then that in the passages in the Gospels where these two verbs occur, the matter of voice was largely determined by the choice of verbs⁶ and the necessities of tense. If the evangelist is accustomed to the use of *ἐγείρω*, he will regularly use the passive form

5. Compare Matt. 8:15 and Luke 4:39; Matt. 9:7 and Luke 5:25; Matt. 9:25 and Luke 8:55. So, too, in John 13:4 *ἐγείρεται* is to be taken as a passive rather than a middle form. This verb is occasionally used intransitively in the active voice, e.g., Matt. 9:5, but never so in connection with Christ's resurrection. For further discussion of the use of voice with *ἐγείρω* see Robertson, "A Grammar of the New Testament Greek," pp. 799, 817, and Moulton, "Prolegomena," p. 163.

6. According to the text of Westcott & Hort, Matthew uses only *ἐγείρω* in his references to Christ's resurrection (16:21; 17:9, 23; 20:19; 26:32; 27:63; 28:6, 7). Mark uses *ἐγείρω* three times (14:28; 16:6, 14) and *ἀνίστημι* four times (8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:34). Luke uses *ἐγείρω* two or three times (9:22; [24:6;] 24:34), and *ἀνίστημι* three times (18:33; 24:7, 46). John uses *ἐγείρω* twice (2:22; 21:14) and *ἀνίστημι* once (20:9). Matthew's uniform use of *ἐγείρω* might be interpreted as indicating a different point of view from that of the other evangelists, were it not for the fact that this same preference for *ἐγείρω* appears in other uses of the word. In all he uses it about thirty-five times and its synonym *ἀνίστημι* only four times, one of which is in a quotation. So strong is his fondness for this word that he uses it even of getting a sheep out of a pit (12:11, cf. Luke 6:8).

whether his meaning be passive or merely intransitive. If on the other hand for any reason he prefers ἀνίστημι, he will express the intransitive meaning by the use of the middle forms in the future and by the use of the active forms in the aorist. Such being the case we cannot hope to get any light from these passages on the question under discussion. Furthermore, any significance of voice that we might insist on finding in these passages must in all fairness be shared by the same verbs in like passages where persons other than Christ are mentioned as rising from the dead, so that we should gain no ground thereby for establishing the uniqueness of Christ's resurrection.

That Christ was raised by the Father is so clearly stated in many passages⁷ that one would hardly think of denying that statement *in toto*, but it is sometimes modified so as to give room for the view that the Son participated in the Father's action in such a way that it might properly be said from the standpoint of the Son that He effected His own resurrection, at least in part. Aside from the passages in the Gospel that have already been discussed, there are two passages in John that are often cited in support of such a theory. The first is the nineteenth verse of the second chapter, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

We have here a saying of Jesus that was misunderstood by the Jews and was comprehended only dimly, if at all, by His disciples. Perhaps there is some danger that we also may misinterpret the very brief explanation that is given here by John: "He was speaking about the temple of his body." Of course it is easy to say that this means that "body" is to be substituted for "temple" in the saying of Jesus and that He really meant that three days after His death He would raise His own body. But before we put upon the passage a

7. Acts. 2:24, 32; 3:15, 26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 33, 37; 17:31; Rom. 4:24; 8:11; 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:15; 2 Cor. 4:14; Col. 2:12; 1 Thess. 1:10; 1 Pet. 1:21.

meaning that is somewhat opposed to a definite statement which is repeatedly made elsewhere in the New Testament, let us look at the context. John goes on to say that when Jesus "was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this: and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus spoke." Some of them, we may believe, were made to remember when He appeared to the eleven and "opened their eyes that they might understand the Scriptures, and said to them, Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and should rise from the dead on the third day." It would be strange, indeed, if on so vital a point as this the disciples failed to make clear and definite what they remembered from His teaching. Surely what they understood Him to mean by that enigmatical sentence must appear in the letters and discourses that have come down to us. Furthermore we should expect to find them quoting the same Scripture that He quoted.

In Peter's address on the day of Pentecost the resurrection is the central theme as affording the supreme proof that Jesus is the Messiah, and yet Peter seems to feel no necessity for claiming in his argument that Jesus had other than a passive part in His resurrection and states definitely that the raising of Jesus was the act of God. He speaks of the resurrection as a fulfillment of Scripture, but the passage that He quotes⁸—May we not believe it is the same that our Lord has quoted for the same purpose?—gives no hint of any activity on the part of the Messiah in His own resurrection. Again in the speech before the rulers Peter speaks of "Jesus, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead." In like manner Paul, in that masterly discussion of the resurrection in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, declared that it was the common teaching of the apostles that "he (God) raised up Christ," and makes no further claim for His master.

8. "Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (Hades), neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Acts 2:27; cf. Acts 13:35.

There is another passage in John that is often cited in this connection: "I lay down my life that I may take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."⁹ We need not linger to discuss the fact that the Greek word, *ἐξουσία*, which is translated "power" in the Authorized Version, is rendered "right" in the margin of the American Standard Version and "authority" in the text of the American Bible Union Version. It is beyond dispute that in some sense our Lord looked forward to "laying down" His life and to "taking it again." But before we assert that the words "take it again" were intended to mean that He was to effect His own resurrection, let us see whether the words "lay down my life" will bear a like literal interpretation. Obviously He did not need to put forth effort in any physical sense to secure His death; the "laying down" was a voluntary act of submission by which He became a passive sufferer. Is it not clear then that both of these phrases owe their form to a desire to emphasize His absolute independence of human control both in His death and in His resurrection, but that they in no way modify the teaching of the apostles that He died at the hands of men and He rose again uplifted by the hand of God.

9. John 10:17, 18.