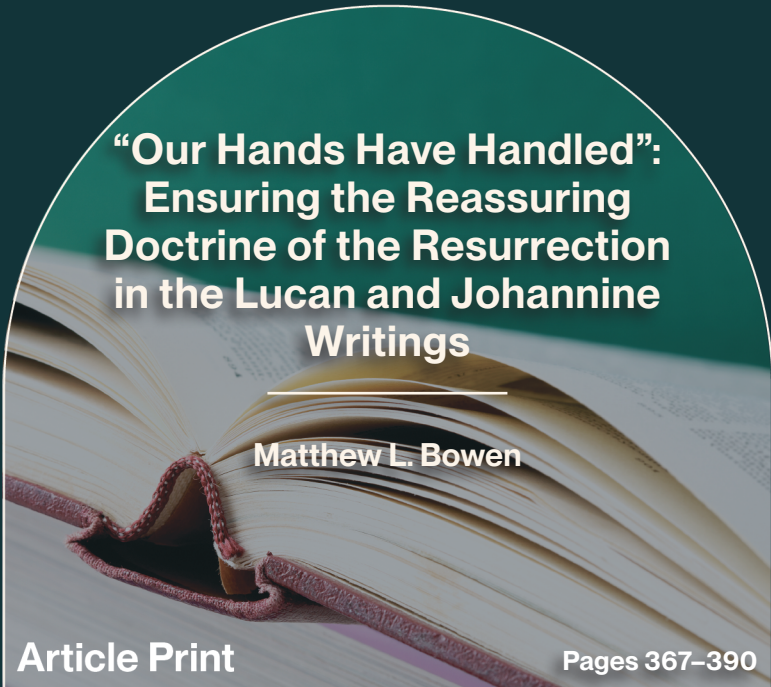


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**“Our Hands Have Handled”:  
Ensuring the Reassuring  
Doctrine of the Resurrection  
in the Lucan and Johannine  
Writings**

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**Matthew L. Bowen**

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# “Our Hands Have Handled”: Ensuring the Reassuring Doctrine of the Resurrection in the Lucan and Johannine Writings

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Matthew L. Bowen

**Abstract:** *The Lucan and Johannine writings emphasize the literalness and physicality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This emphasis does not represent an emerging Christology from an earlier, inchoate conception of Jesus and the meaning of his life. Rather, it reflects an effort to defend the doctrine of the resurrection—of Christ and humanity—against the increasing cultural and intellectual pressures of middle Platonism. Nephi’s vision of the tree of life, which included seeing a “great and abominable church” and its formation among “the nations of the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 13:4–9) matches well with late first- and second-century apostate movements that “made war” with the saints and “overcame” many of them (Revelation 13:7). A conspicuous feature of some movements at that time is the denial of the literal, physically resurrected Jesus Christ and the resurrection of all humanity from the dead. The widespread distortion of Christ’s resurrection and opposition to the concept of bodily resurrection continues to the present.*

**W**hen Luke opens his treatise on “the Acts of the Apostles” and their ministry, he does so with a declaration of a resurrected Jesus, attested by “many infallible proofs” (*en pollois tekmeriois*, “in many sure signs”)<sup>1</sup> given to his disciples throughout a forty-day post-resurrection ministry (Acts 1:3, see Acts 1:1–12). Luke, traditionally the author of the third gospel and the Acts of the Apostles (its sequel), appears

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1. See discussion in Andrew Skinner, *Third Nephi: The Fifth Gospel* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2012), 112.



to have been “a second- or third- generation Christian.”<sup>2</sup> Although its date of composition is uncertain, Luke’s gospel was widely distributed in an increasingly gentile church at a time when most of the original eleven and other apostolic witnesses (including Paul) were increasingly unavailable to bear firsthand testimony of his resurrection (75–95 CE).<sup>3</sup> Although all four gospel writers present Jesus’s resurrection as a physical, concrete reality,<sup>4</sup> Luke and John, usually considered to have been written after Matthew and Mark, go to even greater lengths than those gospels to show how the resurrected Christ interacted with his disciples within the mortal realm—namely, they show Jesus doing what a resurrected being can do (e.g., eat, drink, appear where doors are shut, vanish, etc.).

In addition to Luke-Acts and the Gospel of John, other writings widely regarded as having been written later—e.g., the Johannine epistles—also emphasize the physicality of the mortal and resurrected Christ. I propose that one common and major purpose in the careful emphasis on the physicality of Jesus’s resurrection and a bodily resurrected Christ as found in these writings was to defend the doctrine of the resurrection against increasing incursion from culturally and intellectually ascendant middle Platonism. This emphasis on the physicality of the resurrected Christ and the resurrection did not, as commentators sometimes suggest, represent a developing Christology that emerged out of an early inchoate or abstract sense of who or what the resurrected Jesus was. On the contrary, Peter, John, Paul, and Luke fought to save the doctrines of an incarnate and resurrected Jesus from those within the church who were already making a “shipwreck” of them (cf. 1 Timothy 1:19; 2 Timothy 2:17; 2 John 1:7–10).

I will further attempt to make the case that Nephi’s vision of “the great and abominable church” and its formation among “the nations of the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 13:4–9) matches well with the apostate movement that “made war” with the saints and “overcame” many of them (Revelation 13:7). A key tenet of that church, “abominable above all other churches,” then and now, is the denial of the literal, physically resurrected Jesus Christ and resurrection of the dead—the best of

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2. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX: A New Introduction with Translation and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 35.

3. See, e.g., John T. Carroll, “Luke, Gospel of,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 3:720–22.

4. E.g., Matthew 28:9: “And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.”



good news.<sup>5</sup> Moderns, clergy or otherwise, who downplay the reality of the bodily resurrected Christ because of its perceived incompatibility with post-Enlightenment paradigms fall into the same error as many late first-century CE church members who embraced Middle Platonic Greek thought vis-à-vis the core doctrine of Jesus Christ's resurrection

## Contemporary Philosophical Encroachment on the Church and the Doctrine of the Resurrected Christ

Arguably, Luke's use of the word *asphaleian* in the phrase "That thou mightest know the certainty [*asphaleian*] of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1:4) in the introduction to his gospel constitutes the key to understanding why he so carefully depicts the physicality of Jesus's resurrection. In fact, *asphaleia* — "safety, security"; "certainty, truth"<sup>6</sup> or "surety"<sup>7</sup> — nicely sums up the authorial intent of the Gospel of Luke and its sequel the Acts of the Apostles: "safety," "certainty," or "surety" for Theophilus or any "lover of God." Taken together, Luke's two treatises manifest a deep and specific interest in the apostolic witness of Jesus's life, ministry, and resurrection. Since, beyond the thoroughly Jewish confines of Judea and Galilee and their vicinity, those defining events occurred within a wider Greco-Roman world in which middle Platonism gained increasing intellectual ascendancy, the firsthand apostolic witness became increasingly important. Middle Platonism maintained the view that matter was "the third and lowest principle" upon which "God confers order."<sup>8</sup> Thus, the physical

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5. 1 Nephi 13:5, 26. In v. 26: the angel tells Nephi: "They have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away." The doctrine of a literal, resurrected Jesus and a literal, general resurrection is the most plain and precious truth of the gospel and the one upon which the whole plan of salvation hinges, and without which the Savior's Atonement would not be complete.

6. Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. by Fredrick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 147. Hereafter cited as *BDAG*.

7. Cf. 3 Nephi 11:15: "And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did **know of a surety** and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come."

8. John Turner, "Plato, Platonism," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4:547.



body remained, for those who embraced Middle Platonism, the relic of an imperfect world into which the immortal soul had fallen.

Paul affirmed that he and the other apostles “preach[ed] Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23). By implication, they also preached Christ resurrected (see 1 Corinthians 15:12). Any convert—Jewish, Greek, or anyone else in the Mediterranean world—faced an inevitable cultural and intellectual test: reconciling a belief in an embodied, resurrected Jesus in a world which believed that the body and matter were undesirable, even evil. This was the very challenge that Paul faced at Corinth: “Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (1 Corinthians 15:12).

As a rule, New Testament writings exhibit a desire not only to affirm the traditions surrounding Jesus of Nazareth, but to defend them against incursion. Even very early Pauline letters, like 2 Thessalonians insist that its recipients “stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle” (2 Thessalonians 2:15). Paul specifically warns the Colossian saints against the incursion of Greek philosophy: “Beware lest any man spoil you through **philosophy** [*tēs philosophias*] and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

While scholars have long debated the precise identity and religious target of Paul’s warning, Paul conceivably intended this warning against the more general incursion of Greek philosophy into church doctrine and belief. No doctrine would be at greater risk from contemporary Platonic thought than Jesus’s resurrection and the resurrection of the body. Nevertheless, philosophy made tremendous incursions into the beliefs and teachings of many early church members. Regarding Colossians 2:8, Daniel W. Graham and James L. Siebach note, “three centuries later, philosophy had entered into Christianity so completely that one could not be considered a Christian without espousing a philosophical position.”<sup>9</sup>

In preparing Timothy as a church leader, Paul had also admonished him, “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding

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9. Daniel W. Graham and James L. Siebach, “The Introduction of Philosophy into Early Christianity,” in *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: Foundation for Apologetic Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS]; Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 205.



profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science [*gnōseōs*, "knowledge"] falsely so called" (1 Timothy 6:20). The KJV translators' unfortunate use of "science" (following the Vulgate's use of Latin *scientiae*) has obscured for modern readers exactly what Paul was warning against: the so-called knowledge or *gnosis*. The basic meaning of the Greek term *gnosis* is, of course, "knowledge," but this term had broader connotations within Platonism and streams of thought that derived from it, including Gnosticism. James L. Crenshaw writes: "Under gnostic influence, some early Christians claimed special knowledge, prompting a response from Paul that labeled such views false and declaring the cross as God's secret wisdom."<sup>10</sup> Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 2:4–16 (note the abundant repetition of *wisdom* [*sophia*] and *know* [*ginōskō, oida*] in these verses), which may shed additional light on the problem he was attempting to redress in teaching about the physicality of Christ's resurrection and of the resurrection in general in 1 Corinthians 15. It was certainly a philosophical problem (middle Platonism) and perhaps a proto-gnostic one.

### **"I Saw Among the Nations of the Gentiles, the Formation of a Great Church": Apostasy and the Loss of Belief in a Physical Resurrection**

As the second half of the first century CE wore on, the church became increasingly susceptible to apostasy. John W. Welch suggests that disunity and interpersonal conflict among the apostles and disciples bred disunity among church members, thus catalyzing apostasy.<sup>11</sup> This idea finds support in latter-day revelation: "My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened" (D&C 64:8).<sup>12</sup> Jesus's prophetic parable of the wheat and the tares would have been particularly meaningful to church members in the latter-end of the first century, struggling to maintain their community boundaries and identity.

Written sometime between 53 and 57 CE, 1 Corinthians is rife with evidence of division within the church at Corinth (see 1 Corinthians

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10. James L. Crenshaw, "Knowledge," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 3:545.

11. John W. Welch, "Modern Revelation: A Guide to Research about the Apostasy," in *Early Christians in Disarray*, 102.

12. Welch, "Modern Revelation," 102.



1:10–17; 3:3–15; 11:17–18).<sup>13</sup> Paul correlates this division with the difficulty that the doctrine of Christ presented for both Jews and Greeks (see 1 Corinthians 1:24). Chapter 15 of that same letter articulates some of the most important doctrine on the resurrection anywhere in scripture. Paul cites witness after witness—Cephas (Simon Peter), more than “five hundred brethren at once,” James the Lord’s brother, and himself—in support of the reality of the resurrected Christ. Paul reveals exactly what occasions his citation of these witnesses and everything else that he teaches on the resurrection in this chapter in verse 12: “How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (1 Corinthians 15:12). As noted above, already in Corinth some church members were teaching that bodily resurrection was not real or was allegorical. Paul recognized the challenge that this presented to his apostolic authority and witness (“we are found false witnesses of God,” 1 Corinthians 15:15). This very problem would only grow worse within the nascent church over the course of the ensuing decades.

The textual evidence of the New Testament itself also strongly suggests that the closing decades of the first century saw a war for the soul of the nascent church. Near the beginning of John’s Apocalypse, the Lord both praises and castigates seven of the churches of Asia Minor. The Lord praises the Ephesian saints because “thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans [*tōn Nikolaitōn*], which I also hate” (Revelation 2:6). The Nicolaitans are widely thought to have represented (or become) a gnostic libertine sect.

Regarding the Nicolaitans, Adela Yarbro Collins notes, “the name may be allegorical, meaning ‘conqueror(s)’ of the people.”<sup>14</sup> John’s inference seems to be that Nicolaitans with their immoral and heretical doctrines and practices were “conquering” or “overcoming” the heretofore faithful saints. Whatever the case, the manifest concern here (and later) is that each church member “conquer” or “overcome” (*nikaō*) rather than be overcome (e.g., the refrain “to him that overcometh [*tō nikōnti*],” Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26). Conversely, the Lord castigates the saints of Pergamos because they had “them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate” (Revelation 2:15). Thus,

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13. The same situation, though probably to a lesser degree, existed at Rome at an earlier date. Paul wrote them thus: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Romans 16:17).

14. Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Apocalypse (Revelation)” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 1002. Hereafter cited as *NJBC*.



Revelation 2:6–7, 15, with its evident wordplay on *Nikolaitēs* and participial forms of *nikaō* marks an appropriate launching point for John's *nikaō*-Leitmotif throughout the Apocalypse.<sup>15</sup>

Revelation 2:14 records that the Lord also upbraided the saints of Pergamos for having those who "h[e]ld the doctrine of Balaam" which is explained as teaching other saints "to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication." If "fornication" (*porneia*) here is understood to be literal, rather than as a metaphor for idolatry, we have two distinct violations of the moral requirements for church members established by the Jerusalem Council (see especially Acts 15:20, 29). In any case we appear to be dealing here with libertines and perhaps a gnostic libertinism that gave rise to the beliefs and practices of later groups like the Carpocratians of the second century CE, a libertine gnostic group that originated in Alexandria.<sup>16</sup>

The epistle of 2 Peter also recognizes and addresses libertine apostasy as a real and present threat to the saints. 2 Peter 2:1–2 foretells apostasy that denies Jesus Christ: "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." The same chapter goes on to describe these apostates as "them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government [authority, *kyriotētos kata-phronountas*]. Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities [glorious things]" (2 Peter 2:10). 2 Peter 2:12–19 goes on to describe the sexual licentiousness of these apostates and, like John, connects their behavior with the Old Testament prophet Balaam (see especially Numbers 22–24).

Jude uses very similar language to describe apostasy and

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15. The verb *nikaō* ("overcome," "conquer," "prevail," "be victorious") occurs seventeen times in Revelation: Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21 (2 x); 5:5; 6:2 (2 x); 11:7; 12:11; 13:7; 15:2; 17:14; 21:7. John emphasizes overcoming versus being overcome.

16. "The Carpocratians have been called libertine Gnostics because they contended that the attainment of transcendent freedom depended on having every possible experience, sinful or otherwise. Such an array of experiences normally required more than one lifetime, so the Carpocratians espoused the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, perhaps inspired by Indian or Pythagorean beliefs." *Britannica*, s.v. "Carpocratian," [britannica.com/topic/Carpocratians](http://britannica.com/topic/Carpocratians).



licentious libertinism (2 Peter and Jude are in one way or another intertextually related, though the direction of textual dependency is debatable). Jude 1:4 mentions “certain men [who have] crept in unawares . . . ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness [*asel-geian*], and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” He describes these apostates as “giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, [who] are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion [*kyriotēta de athetousin*, NRSV, “reject authority”], and speak evil of dignities [glorious things]” (Jude 1:7–8). He further states: “But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should **walk after their own ungodly lusts**. These be they who separate themselves [*apodiorizontēs*, who cause divisions], sensual [*psychikoi*, natural men and women], having not the Spirit” (Jude 1:17–19). Note how Jude specifically emphasizes both apostolic authority and the apostolic witness over against this group of licentious apostates.

The third Johannine letter mentions a local church leader Diotrephes who has rejected John’s (or “the elder’s”) authority: “I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church” (3 John 1:9–10). Assuming John’s authorship of the letter, Diotrephes’ rejection of John and other visiting brethren (“us”), would constitute a rejection of John’s apostolic authority. And Diotrephes’ apostasy goes further: “prating against [John and “the brethren”] with malicious words” — i.e., what we might call “speaking evil of the Lord’s anointed.”

Thus, Revelation, 2 Peter, Jude, and 3 John all paint a pretty bleak picture of the state of the church and many of its members in terms of moral praxis and the rejection by many church members of existing ecclesiastical authority, including apostolic authority (such as it remained), in the closing years of the first century CE. Nephi saw in vision that the “multitudes of the earth,” including the “house of Israel” and “nations, kindreds, tongues, and people” would “fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (1 Nephi 11:34–36). The vision equated this scenario with the great and spacious building of his father Lehi’s dream (1 Nephi 8). Later, Nephi receives a more detailed vision of the



meaning of this building and its relationship to the rejection of apostolic authority (see 1 Nephi 13:4–9). Among other things, Nephi learns that this “great and abominable church” destroyed the saints of God in a manner not unlike what John describes in Revelation 2:20 and that its members pursued wealth (cf. the Balaam motif)<sup>17</sup> and engaged in licentious behavior. For such individuals, the doctrine of a bodily resurrection, followed by a divine judgment according works done in the body, would hold little appeal.

Regarding the identity of this “great and abominable church,” Stephen E. Robinson asks, “Can we, then, identify the historical agency that acted as the great and abominable church in earliest Christianity? Such an agent would have had its origins in the second half of the first century and would have done much of its work by the middle of the second century.”<sup>18</sup> Libertine Gnostic Christianity, as later manifest in second-century movements such as the Carpocratians, meets this criterion, but it also meets the additional criterion of “harlots” being one of the major “desires” of the “great and abominable church.” The “seduction” of Christ’s servants to such desires (Revelation 2:20) would surely fulfill Nephi’s vision of a church that “slayeth the saints of God, yea, and tortureth them and bindeth them down, and yoketh them with a yoke of iron, and bringeth them down into captivity” (1 Nephi 13:5). Destroying the saints’ faith in the reality of Jesus Christ’s literal resurrection and their own would constitute the ultimate example of spiritual murder, torture, binding, yoking, and captivity.

Regarding the impact that Gnosticism had within the second-century Christian church, Hugh Nibley observes:

The oldest definition of the Gnosis specifies that it was the knowledge imparted secretly by the Lord to the Apostles after the Resurrection. The Gnostics claimed to have that very knowledge, and their tremendous initial success shows how hungry the Christian world was for it—the “main church,” in fact, had to invent a counter-Gnosis of its own to meet the threat and ended up with a compromise that has left a Gnostic stamp on Christian thinking ever since. The Gnostics did not invent the 40-day situation, as has been claimed, for they were the last people in the world to imagine

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17. See 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 1:11; Revelation 2:14, citing Numbers 22–23.

18. Stephen E. Robinson, “Warring against the Saints of God,” *Ensign*, January 1988, 38–39, [www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1988/01/warring-against-the-saints-of-god](http://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1988/01/warring-against-the-saints-of-god).



a return of the Savior in the flesh, and any tinkering would have been readily exposed in a quarreling and hyper-critical society; but they did exploit it because it was there and they had to: at a time when everything else was being questioned, it is one of the few things that is never challenged.<sup>19</sup>

Nibley believed that the post-Apostolic efforts of the early Christian church to blunt the impact of Gnosticism with a “counter-Gnosis of its own” had a permanent effect on broader Christianity, even up to the present. It should be noted that there is still great value in the cornucopia of so-called Gnostic documents, not only in terms of understanding what types of teachings circulated within that milieu, but also in identifying which among the earliest teachings of the Jesus movement and nascent church were being corrupted. The writings of Luke, John, and other authoritative writers helped believers during this period and later “know the certainty of those things, wherein [they had] been instructed” (Luke 1:4).

### “Handle Me and See”: The Evidence of Luke 24

Luke 24, more than any other single chapter in Luke’s writings, provides the crux of the *asphaleia* or “certainty”—the “surety”—that he promised at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:4). The annunciation of the resurrection begins with “two men” in “shining garments” (Luke 24:4), who ask Jesus’s female disciples, “Why seek ye the living among the dead?” and then declare, “He is not here, but is risen” (Luke 24:5–6). What exactly that means, however, Luke soon illustrates with the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The climax of that account comes with the moment of recognition when Jesus, still unrecognized by them, physically breaks bread with them: “And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, **he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave** [*epedidou*] to them. And their eyes were opened, and **they knew him** [*epegnōsan auton*]; and he vanished out of their sight” (Luke 24:30–31). Jesus performs four distinct, concrete actions involving the bread in front of Cleopas and his

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19. Hugh W. Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1987), 15. Originally published as: Hugh Nibley, “Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 20, no. 1 (March 1966): 1–24, [jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1581972](https://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1581972). Reprinted as Nibley, “The Forty-day Mission of Christ—The Forgotten Heritage,” in *When the Lights Went Out: Three Studies on the Ancient Apostasy* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970; Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001), 33–54, 49–90.



companion. These actions engaged their physical senses: they saw Jesus, heard his voice, touched the bread as he gave it to them, then presumably smelled and tasted it.

Luke furnishes even stronger and more concrete evidence for the resurrected Christ in the verses that follow:

And they [Cleopas and his companion] rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread. And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? **Behold my hands and my feet** [*idete tas cheiras mou kai tous podas mou*], that it is I myself [*egō eimi autos*]: **handle me** [*psēlaphēsate me*], **and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones** [*sarka kai ostea ouk echei*], **as ye see me have** [*kathōs eme theōreite exonta*]. And when he had thus spoken, **he shewed them his hands and his feet** [*edeiken autois tas cheiras kai tous podas*]. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, **Have ye here any meat** [*echete ti brōsimon enthade*; or do you have any food here]? **And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish** [*hoi de epedōkan auto ixthyos optou meros*] [and of an honeycomb]. **And he took it, and did eat before them** [*kai labōn enōpion autōn ephagen*]. (Luke 24:33–43)

Luke's text belabors the point that the resurrected Jesus is tangible, physical, and real. Regarding these verses Fitzmyer writes, "That the members of this household are incredulous or mistake him for a ghost is at first understandable. But their rapt silence in the episode is striking; Christ is the only one who speaks. He tries to dispel their doubts 'with many proofs.'"<sup>20</sup> Luke's mention of their abject fear that they were seeing a spirit was relevant to contemporary controversy over the reality of Jesus's resurrection. Metaphorical resurrection to a blissful

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20. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XIV: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary* (New York, Doubleday, 1985), 1574.



state of “disembodiment” becomes a hermeneutical impossibility with Luke’s account. Jesus invites them not just to “behold [his] hands and [his] feet,” but to “handle” him. The Greek verb *psēlaphaō* means “to touch by feeling and handling,” thus “touch, handle.”<sup>21</sup> The essential point of Luke’s text is that Jesus cannot be a mere spirit being.

The disciples’ initial trouble believing parallels the ongoing trouble believing among many of the saints of the late first century. Here Luke depicts Jesus presenting yet another infallible proof of the resurrection. Jesus insists on eating in their presence. The concreteness of Jesus’s request and subsequent meal—“a piece of a broiled fish [and of an honeycomb]”<sup>22</sup>—ensures that nobody can walk away from this episode and coherently argue against the reality of the resurrected Jesus. Fitzmyer further notes, “Though the motif of the meal is there [i.e., later in Acts 1:4 and 10:41] and helps fill out the parallelism of the Emmaus incident, one cannot help but realize that the scene is intended also to stress the identity and physical reality of the risen Christ who has appeared to his disciples.”<sup>23</sup>

Luke seals the evidence that his account has thus far presented with Jesus’s statement “Ye are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:48). Indeed, Jesus’s subsequent promise to endow or invest his disciples with power from on high “will be the basis of the boldness with which Peter and the others will speak (Acts 2:29; 4:13, 29, 31; 28:3).”<sup>24</sup> In other words, Jesus endows them with power to bear witness of his concrete, tangible, physical resurrection from the dead as the ultimate reality.

### **“With Great Power Gave the Apostles Witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus”: Acts 1–5 and the Apostolic Witness**

Luke’s emphasis on the apostolic witness of the resurrected Jesus forms a fitting bridge between the unforgettable and unmistakable events of Luke 24 and the launching of the ministry of the apostles as witnesses of Jesus’s resurrection. The “sure signs” of Jesus’s resurrection in Luke 24 are answered by “many infallible proofs” or “sure signs” through which Jesus “showed himself alive” during his

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21. BDAG, 1097.

22. Some ancient textual witnesses lack the words *kai apo melissiou kēriou* “and from a honeycomb.”

23. Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XIV*, 1574–75.

24. Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XIV*, 1582.



forty-day ministry (Acts 1:3). Regarding Acts 1:3, Fitzmyer states: "This is yet another way in which he [Luke] emphasizes the reality of the experience of the apostles to whom the risen Christ has appeared."<sup>25</sup>

Luke takes pains in Acts 1 to describe the selection of a new member of the twelve to replace Judas Iscariot in part, at least, to help his audience understand just what kind of "witness" the apostleship implied: "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection" (Acts 1:21–22). Many saints at the time of Luke's authorship of his gospel had lost their sense of these requirements for an apostolic witness of Jesus's resurrection.

Fitzmyer surmises that "The Twelve are reconstituted so that they can confront Israel assembled in Jerusalem on the first great feast day following Passover, the feast of Assembly or (in Greek) Pentecost. What Peter and the other eleven will proclaim at that important assembly is the first instance of testimony given by the apostles to the Twelve Tribes of God's people: despite the death of God's anointed one, God still addresses the message of salvation first to the children of Abraham, to the Twelve Tribes of Israel."<sup>26</sup>

The apostles assert this witness powerfully before their fellow Israelites: "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:32; see all of Acts 2:30–32); "Therefore **let all the house of Israel know assuredly** [*asphalōs oun ginōsketō pas oikos Israēl*], that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Fitzmyer calls Acts 2:32–33, 36 "the major affirmation and climax of the whole speech" since "it portrays Peter testifying about the risen Christ to 'the whole house of Israel,' represented by the Jews assembled in Jerusalem from every nation, and calling Israel to repentance and conversion."<sup>27</sup> The power of Peter and the Apostles' witness is evident in the conversion of three thousand fellow Jews who "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42), to which Luke poignantly adds: "And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles."

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25. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 200.

26. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 221.

27. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 250.



The Apostles' witness continues in the temple, and later before the Sanhedrin, the governing body of Judaism, including Caiaphas, the very high priest who passed sentence on Jesus: "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33); "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. **The God of our fathers raised up Jesus**, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. **And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him**" (Acts 5:29–32). Luke does not include this as merely some fond reminiscence of the days of the Apostles. Luke's readership needs to know how committed the Apostles were to their witness of Jesus's bodily resurrection: "And to [Gamaliel] they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and **beaten them**, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council [Sanhedrin], rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:40–42). Jesus's resurrection was no rhetorical ploy.

### **"Even to Us, Who Did Eat and Drink with Him After He Rose from the Dead": Witnesses Who Dined with the Resurrected Christ**

Peter's apostolic witness also serves as an important part of Luke's account of the transition from what had been a wholly Jewish church in its first generation to one that would include Gentiles, including Greek Gentiles who had been steeped in philosophy and Platonism. Luke records Peter again testifying to the Roman gentile God-fearer Cornelius and his household in unmistakable terms, even returning to the concrete images of the Apostles eating and drinking with a resurrected, embodied Christ who was eating and drinking with them:

**And we are witnesses of all things which he did** both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: **Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat**



**and drink with him after he rose from the dead.** And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and **to testify** that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. **To him give all the prophets witness,** that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. (Acts 10:39–44)

Here again, Luke's account reiterates that Jesus ate and drank with the disciples after his resurrection, recalling Luke 24 and Acts 1:4. In other words, he emphasizes that the resurrected Lord ate the same food as those who witnessed him, including Peter. The testimony of these details would have been particularly important for future non-Jewish converts. Indeed, during the time of Luke's writing of Luke-Acts, the polity of the church increasingly included Greek gentiles, whose cultural, religious, and intellectual backgrounds would make them susceptible to misunderstanding the resurrection of Jesus Christ and its meaning.

For similar reasons, Luke emphasizes that Paul attempted to bear his bold witness of Jesus's resurrection in Athens, the heart of Platonism on earth, as it were: "Because [God] hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given **assurance** [*pistin*, a token or pledge] **unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.** And **when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked:** and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter" (Acts 17:31–32). Luke's inclusion of Paul's use of *pistis*, "a token," fits well with the *asphaleia*/assurance theme begun in Luke 1:4 and the "infallible proofs" or "sure signs" that Jesus himself mentions in Acts 1:3.

Regarding this passage, N. T. Wright observes, Jesus's "resurrection from the dead is the start of the single event still known as 'the resurrection of the dead' or 'out from among the dead'. It reinforces belief in that future hope, so that announcing Jesus can be presented as loyalty to Judaism's cherished expectation."<sup>28</sup> He further asks, "Why did they [the early apostolic witnesses] come to hold that kind of hope

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28. N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 456.



in that kind of way? Acts, like Paul and the synoptic gospels, answers: because of what happened to Jesus.”<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, even among those who professed to believe in Jesus as Messiah, Paul knew and Luke records that “grievous wolves [would] enter in among you [the church members], not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29–30). Among those “perverse things” would be the claim that “there is no resurrection of the dead” (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:12) in spite of what all the Apostles had testified. Paul’s recorded prophecy matched the apostasy and schismatic conditions within the Church in the closing decades of the first century. I submit that Luke’s inclusion of this prophecy helps shed light on the urgency of Luke’s gospel portrait of the resurrected Jesus.

### “Hold Me Not”: John’s Account of Jesus’s Appearance to Mary

One of the oft-most cited lines from the intercessory prayer as recorded by John is Jesus’s statement: “And this is life eternal, that **they might know** [*ginōskōsin*] thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). At a minimum, John’s enlistment of the verb *ginōskōsin* and its cognates, here and elsewhere, in the context of the late first century would push back against the incipient Gnostic notion of the knowledge of God, so-called *gnosis* (“knowledge”).

The final chapters of John show just what truly “knowing” God and Jesus Christ look like as the disciples meet the resurrected Jesus, and thus the nature of an embodied God and resurrected humans. Wright notes that “‘Resurrection’ is never, for John, simply a metaphor for present spiritual life, though its wider levels of meaning certainly include that.”<sup>30</sup> This is no “Platonized expectation of immortality” but “firmly within the bounds of Jewish resurrection theology, and within the early Christian parameters of the redefinition of that theology around Jesus himself.”<sup>31</sup> It is the virtual antithesis of the Gnostic redefinition of “resurrection.”

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29. Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 456.

30. Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 447.

31. Wright (*Resurrection of the Son of God*, 447) also correctly notes that “This, too, is Paul’s picture of the future. It is a rich, many-sided set of promises, which cannot be flattened out into a spiritualized ‘realized eschatology’, or a Platonized expectation of immortality.”



John presents Mary Magdalene as the first disciple to "know" or "recognize" the resurrected Jesus:

[S]he turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and **knew not** [*ouk oida*] that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, **Touch me not** [*mē mou haptou*]; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her. (John 20:14–18)

The KJV rendering of Greek *mē mou haptou* as "touch me not" obscures what is happening here. C.K. Barrett notes that "the present imperative with *me* [*mē*] in a prohibition signifies the breaking of an action already in progress, or sometimes the attempt to perform an action."<sup>32</sup> JST John 20:17 renders it "hold me not" — i.e., "don't hold onto me," perhaps a gesture similar to that of female disciples holding Jesus by the feet (in worship) in Matthew 28:9–10.<sup>33</sup> Here N.T. Wright points out that "If, as is often suggested, the proper interpretation of this is 'do not cling on to me', the story may be making the point that this was not simply the appearance of a phantom, a bodiless spirit, such as Odysseus attempted to cling on to but could not."<sup>34</sup> In other words, the language of the narrative suggests that Mary touched, physically held onto, or clung onto Jesus. She now knows Jesus as the resurrected Christ. The narrative thus begins its strong emphasis on the physicality of the resurrected Christ and the resurrection. Wright adds, "The same point is made in Luke, John, and Acts by the stories of Jesus eating with the disciples."<sup>35</sup>

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32. C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 565.

33. Pheme Perkins, "The Gospel According to John," *NJBC*, 983.

34. Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 691.

35. Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 691.



## “He Showed unto Them His Hands and His Side”: True Tokens, Sure Signs

John builds on the previous recognition scene with his subsequent inclusion of the Savior’s appearance to the disciples behind “shut” doors: “Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when **the doors were shut** where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, **he shewed unto them his hands and his side**. Then were the disciples glad, when they **saw the Lord**” (John 20:19–20). The disciples’ misconception that he was a disembodied spirit (cf. Luke) explains Jesus’s next actions: showing them his hands and his side. The clear implication is that they handled both, but John proleptically reserves his most precise language for the forthcoming Thomas episode. John’s mention that “the doors were shut” additionally serves the function of showing that the resurrected Jesus was able to do something similar to what Joseph Smith reports the resurrected Moroni doing: appearing into a room through some kind of “conduit” (see Joseph Smith — History 1:30, 43).

## “Reach Hither Thy Finger, and Behold My Hands”

Going even further than the previous episodes, the Gospel of John includes the so-called “doubting Thomas” episode precisely to dispel doubt about the reality and physicality of Jesus’s resurrected body. This description’s concreteness will admit no Platonic separation of the physical and spiritual realms or any Gnostic allegorizing:

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, **Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe**. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: **then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst**, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, **Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing**. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto



him, **Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.** (John 20:24–29)

For traditional, non-Platonized Jews, the only conceivable resurrection worthy of the name would have been a physical one. But, as for Martha who told Jesus "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:24), a resurrection of the physical body remained only an eschatological reality in the minds of most Jews. Thus, Wright comments, "Thomas comes to the question with one particular epistemology uppermost in mind: he wants to touch as well as to see. Indeed, he insists that the data must be caught within his proposed epistemological net or he will not acknowledge it as real data at all."<sup>36</sup>

Again, the doors are "shut," suggesting something of a duplication of the feat of Jesus's previous appearance. Notwithstanding the shut doors, Jesus "came." The Lord then invites Thomas to receive what can best be described as a "knowledge"—what Peter calls an *epignosis*—of his bodily resurrection by every conceivable "token" or "proof" (cf. the Lucan Paul's use of *pistin*) or "infallible proofs" (Acts 1). Where Mary's recognition is marked by the exclamation, "Rabboni" or "[My] Master," Thomas's recognition is marked by the ultimate declaration, "My Lord and my God." John here wishes us to remember Thomas's question on the night of his suffering in Gethsemane "how can we know the way?" and Jesus's response "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me. If ye **had known** [*egnōkeite*] me, ye should have known [*ēdeite*] my Father also: and from henceforth **ye know** him [*ginōskete*], and have seen him" (John 14:5–7). Thomas now "knows" God the Father and Jesus Christ in the manner Jesus prescribed in the intercessory prayer (John 17:3). What the Father is, Jesus now is. Thomas now possessed *gnosis* better than any Platonist or gnostic could ever claim.

The "real target" of this passage, Wright notes, is "any future reader who might respond by saying, 'It was all very well for Thomas; you can't expect me to imitate that kind of faith unless I have the same evidence.'"<sup>37</sup> Thus the Thomas episode offers the concrete apostolic witness upon which saving faith can be built: "blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." This constitutes the very

36. Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 715.

37. Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 678.



purpose of the Johannine gospel: “these [signs] are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31).

### “Come and Dine”: Witnessing the Resurrection Again Through a Sacred Meal

The foregoing in John’s gospel would seemingly constitute sufficient evidence of a resurrected Christ with a resurrected physical body. However, like Luke, John wishes to demonstrate that the resurrected Christ was not only seen, heard, touched, and held by the disciples, but also that he ate with them: “Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? **knowing** that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead” (John 21:12–14). John adds this episode as a kind of third witness of the resurrected, embodied Christ, which may hint at a Christological interpretation of the Law of Witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15): “at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established” or “shall the Word [*dābār*] rise up/resurrect [*yāqûm*]” (Deuteronomy 19:15).

### “That Which . . . Our Hands Have Handled”: The Importance of the Johannine Witness

The authorial intent of the epistle of 1 John differs little from that of the Gospel of John: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13). The epistle concludes: “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, **that we may know him** [*ginōskōmen*] that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 5:20).

These statements of intent provide a context within which to view the letter’s opening statement, which possesses lexical affinities with the prologue of John’s gospel. This opening declaration recalls the scenes in John 20 and Luke 24 in which Jesus is held and handled:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard,  
**which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon,** and **our hands have handled** [*epsēlaphēsan*], of [regarding] the Word of life; (for **the life was manifested,**



**and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you,** that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1–3).

First of all, the “we” is often interpreted here as having reference to a Johannine community of believers, but John may also have reference to a wider “community” or “fellowship” (*koinōnia*) of the apostles and their converts.<sup>38</sup> Secondly, the expression “Word of life” is deliberately ambiguous, referring both to Jesus Christ and the message of salvation of which Jesus is the center and focus.

In describing physically touching the Lord, John uses the same verb that Luke used in Luke 24:39, *psēlaphaō*, “to touch by feeling and handling.”<sup>39</sup> PHEME PERKINS writes that “1 John stresses the physical character of the revelation that the community has received.”<sup>40</sup> This may indicate that this “community” had an experience with the resurrected Jesus much along the order of what the Lamanites and Nephites experienced in 3 Nephi 11 and 17:

And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto them saying: **Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.** And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and **thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come.** And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying: Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him.

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38. I.e., the “us” of John 1:14, etc.

39. *BDAG*, 1097.

40. PHEME PERKINS, “The Johannine Epistles,” *NJBC*, 898.



And it came to pass that he spake unto Nephi (for Nephi was among the multitude) and he commanded him that he should come forth. And Nephi arose and went forth, and bowed himself before the Lord and did kiss his feet. (3 Nephi 11:13–19)

And it came to pass that when he had thus spoken, all the multitude, with one accord, did go forth with their sick and their afflicted, and their lame, and with their blind, and with their dumb, and with all them that were afflicted in any manner; and he did heal them every one as they were brought forth unto him. **And they did all, both they who had been healed and they who were whole, bow down at his feet, and did worship him; and as many as could come for the multitude did kiss his feet, insomuch that they did bathe his feet with their tears.** (3 Nephi 17:9–10).

And when he had said these words, he wept, and the multitude bare record of it, and **he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them.** And when he had done this he wept again; and he spake unto the multitude, and said unto them: Behold your little ones. (3 Nephi 17:21–23).

The New Testament attests the early saints having such experiences. For example, Paul records that Jesus “was seen of above five hundred brethren at once” (1 Corinthians 15:6). The experience of John’s “community” may have been similar.

The testimony of 1 John is not only that the resurrected Word can be seen (he uses two verbs of seeing) but “handled” (cf. especially Luke 24:39). As Wright notes, “There is evidence enough to lure sceptics forward even if they have lessons to learn about how we know things as well as about what there is to be known. And the faith which, in its most mature form, might be happy to go forwards without either touch or sight, is after all a belief and trust not simply in otherworldly realities, but (for John of all people!) in the Word made flesh, which can be heard, seen and handled.”<sup>41</sup> John also recognizes that this has enormously important implications for those who embrace the doctrine of Christ and Jesus’s atonement and resurrection. Just as “the Word was made [became] flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14), John knows

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41. Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 715–16.



that "we" (the apostles and the community of saints who believe in their witness) become like the resurrected Word in "our" resurrection: "when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

The initial emphasis in 1 John on a physically resurrected Christ that could not only be heard, seen, looked upon, and "handled" with hands, sets up its later condemnation of gnostic docetists in the church — namely, those who believed or professed that Jesus only "seemed" (*dokeō*) to have been born in the flesh, lived in the world, suffered, died, and resurrected: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that **Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh** is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world" (1 John 4:1–3).

At the writing of the first letter, a gnostic or proto-gnostic (docetic) apostasy was already widespread. At the writing of the second letter, it was even more so: "For many **deceivers** are entered into the world, **who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh**. This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (2 John 1:7). The second letter goes even farther in outlining a policy for dealing with this kind of heresy: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. **If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine**, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed" (2 John 1:9–10). The individuals whom these letters warned congregations against were apostate evangelists or traveling missionaries who would speak in church meetings, still then in "house"-churches.

## Conclusion

Apostolic writers (e.g., Peter, John, Paul) and their immediate successors, such as Luke, understood that the literal, physical resurrection of Jesus Christ constitutes the basic fact upon which the gospel message stands or falls. Middle Platonism's intellectual pervasiveness in the first-century CE Roman world made acceptance of Jesus's resurrection difficult for many. Emerging from Platonism and widespread religious syncretism, "proto-Gnostic" forces (within the church) presented a concomitant challenge to apostolic authority and the



apostolic witness of Jesus's resurrection. They catalyzed the "formation" of the "great and abominable church" (1 Nephi 13:3–9, 26–29, 32). All of this helps explain the tendency of "late" first-century writers (e.g., John, Luke) to assert the reality of Jesus's resurrection in *increasingly* concrete terms (see, e.g., John 20:19–29; 1 John 1:1; Luke 24:36–43; Acts 1:3–11, 15–26). As Latter-day Saints, living in a post-Enlightenment world, similarly influenced by Greek philosophy, we must take care not to be seduced away from the resurrected Christ and the apostolic witness of that doctrine.



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