

# Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."  
Isaiah 40:31*



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## Jesus and Resurrection Mythology

A popular attack on Jesus' resurrection holds that the story of Jesus grew out of a larger collection of pagan death-and-resurrection myths. What are the facts?

*"For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16).*

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The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of Christianity. Skeptics know this, so they attack His story with special ferocity. They know if they can undermine the authenticity of Jesus' resurrection, everything else will crumble.

One tactic used to discredit the resurrection of Jesus is to link His story to numerous death-and-resurrection myths found in old pagan religions. According to this theory, the early Christians picked up an already popular theme and retroactively applied it to their favorite (and dearly departed) teacher. This claim, first promoted in the early 1900s, has recently enjoyed a resurgence among unbelievers. If you spend any time talking with atheists, this version of the Jesus story will almost surely surface. How should we respond?

First, whatever the facts concerning these ancient myths, the *positive* evi-

dence for the bodily resurrection of Jesus must still be accounted for. The documentary witness to that event is so overwhelming that modern scholarship solidly affirms its historicity. (See the works of Gary Habermas for a fuller treatment of the subject.)

But even if we choose to disregard this evidence, the comparisons to early pagan death-and-resurrection myths still come up short. In his exhaustive study of these myths — *The Riddle of Resurrection: "Dying and Rising Gods" in the Ancient Near East* (2001) — Swedish scholar Tryggve N. D. Mettinger specifically addresses the claim that the Jesus story grew out of this pagan background. His conclusion:

"There is, so far as I am aware, no *prima facie* evidence that the death and resurrection of Jesus is a mythological construct, drawing on the myths and rites of the dying and rising gods of the surrounding world. While studied with profit against the background of Jewish resurrection belief, the faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus retains its unique character in the history of reli-

gions" (quoted in William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, p. 391).

Mettinger's mention of "Jewish resurrection belief" highlights a further fatal weakness in the theory. Without question, the story of Jesus' resurrection sprang out of a decidedly *Jewish* culture. No self-respecting Jew would go anywhere near a pagan religion. In view of this virulent anti-pagan bias, to speak of a borrowed pagan resurrection myth suddenly sweeping through Judaism in the first century is simply laughable.

Even skeptic Robert Oerter, in his review of Mettinger's work, notes that "recent scholarship has been skeptical of the very category of dying and rising gods, and more still of any connection between it and Christian mythology" ([http://infidels.org/library/modern/robert\\_oerter/rising-gods.html](http://infidels.org/library/modern/robert_oerter/rising-gods.html)).

The claim that Jesus' resurrection is a fiction based on pagan mythology lacks any credibility among those who study the field. We can be confident that the Jesus story is not a "cunningly devised fable," but an historical truth upon which we can stake our lives.

— David King