



## THE VERBS OF THE RESURRECTION

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The verbs of the resurrection, *ἐγείρω* and *ἀνίστημι*, are modest verbs. They can function in quite ordinary fashion: one can raise stones or a horn of salvation in the same way that the Father raises the Son; one can rise from sitting the same way Jesus rises from the tomb. That's why *ἐκ νεκρῶν* (*ek nekron*, "from the dead") follows both verbs so often—there's no self-evident reason to see the miracle otherwise.

*ἐγείρω* (*egeirō*) means "to raise" in a very straightforward, active, transitive sense. "God raised him from death"—no ambiguity there. Like most active verbs, *ἐγείρω* can also take a passive form: *ἠγέρθη* (*ēgerthē*), "was raised," as in Matthew 28:6. But there's a possibility that what appears to be a passive is actually a deponent: namely, a word passive in form but active in meaning. The model Greek deponent verb is *πορεύομαι* (*poreúomai*), "I go." If the deponent rule held for *ἠγέρθη*, it would mean "he rose," not "he was raised." That's why the ESV and the NRSV can report the news of the resurrection with the apparently converse formulations "he has risen" and "he has been raised" for the exact same verse.

Similar ambiguities attend *ἀνίστημι* (*anistēmi*). It's just the word "to stand" with the prefix "again" attached. But *ἀνίστημι* is not nearly as beloved in the New Testament as *ἐγείρω*, even though when it does appear it's used synonymously. *ἀνίστημι* is found only in Mark, Luke, John, and Acts; the Epistles will have no traffic with this verb at all, with the one exception of 1 Thessalonians. It has been suggested that this is because *ἀνίστημι* carried overtones from Hellenistic religion that didn't quite fit with what the apostles were getting at, whereas *ἐγείρω*, rarely used in pagan sources to describe the "rising" of salvific figures, "brings out better the concrete nature of the divine action."<sup>1</sup>

Curiously, though, the discomfort with the verb didn't extend to the noun derived from it. *ἀνάστασις* (*anastasis*)

is overwhelmingly preferred to *ἐγερσις* (*ēgersis*) to name the resurrection, the latter being a *hapax legomenon* (a word that appears only once in the Bible) in Matthew 27:53. And *ἀνάστασις*, loved even more by Acts than by John, appears almost twice as often as *ἀνίστημι*'s various verb forms.<sup>2</sup>

*ἀνίστημι* can shift around the agency too, just like the possibly passive, possibly deponent *ἐγείρω* does. In one setting *ἀνίστημι* is an active, transitive verb: "raise," as in John 6:44, when Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father Who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day." But in another setting the exact same *ἀνίστημι* can, in the middle voice, be an intransitive verb with a self-referential meaning.<sup>3</sup>

With this range of potential meanings in mind, it's illuminating to see the distinctive uses to which the various New Testament authors put these two verbs.

Matthew never uses *ἀνίστημι*, only *ἐγείρω*, and even *ἀνάστασις* only occurs in the debate with the Sadducees. More significantly still, *ἐγείρω* only ever appears in the passive—and never with a named instrument of the rising. If *ἠγέρθη* were taken deponently, emphasizing the action of the subject rather than the subject's being acted upon, then also John the Baptist (Matthew 14:2) and the dead in the tombs (Matthew 27:52) could have "risen" rather than having "been raised"—which seems unlikely. The narrative structure of this Gospel excludes the deponent option.

Matthew's self-restriction to *ἐγείρω* is a notable departure from his predecessor Mark, who uses *ἀνίστημι* the first three times Jesus prophesies his death and resurrection—in 8:31, 9:9, and 10:34—in the active or middle voice. Jesus uses *ἐγείρω* of himself just once, in 14:28, his last prophecy of his death and resurrection, but this time in the passive voice. Herod employs *ἐγείρω* in his speculations

about John the Baptist being raised, in 6:14 and 6:16. The “young man” sitting by the tomb tells the women that Jesus *ἠγέρθη*, “was raised.” Here also a passive rather than deponent meaning is likely, though not because of the verb itself so much as the context: God is mysteriously absent from the final eight (undisputed) verses of Mark. The “divine passive” that darts through Scripture is the subtle witness to Whose work has done this thing.

Luke seems to care little whether he uses *ἐγείρω* or *ἀνίστημι*, in passive or active and once middle voice (18:33), freely using both verbs of Jesus, the dead, John the Baptist, the prophets of old, and “someone” (16:31). Whatever constraints Matthew felt are evidently not at work here. In Acts the witness is more consistent: up through 10:40 it is always God Who is raising Jesus, though either verb might be used to describe it. At 10:41 we have the first indication that Jesus *rose*, with the aorist active infinitive of *ἀνίστημι*, which occurs again in 17:3. But the three mentions in chapter 13 revert to the Father raising Jesus, though still switching freely from *ἐγείρω* to *ἀνίστημι* and back again, and it’s the same in 26:8.<sup>4</sup>

John tends to cluster his resurrection verbs. The first round, in chapter 2, are all *ἐγείρω*, playing off the double meaning of the temple as both the building in Jerusalem and Jesus’ own body. *ἐγείρω* appears again in 5:21, with the Father raising the dead. The next set, in chapter 6, are all *ἀνίστημι*, but this time Jesus is the subject of the transitive action and those whom the Father has given him are the objects of his work of raising. In chapter 11, Lazarus is the subject of the rising—*ἀνίστημι* in the intransitive format of middle voice—which is perhaps the grammatical setup for Jesus’ stunning declaration in v. 25: “*I am* the resurrection and the life.” And indeed, the three instances of *ἐγείρω* in chapter 12, all active, report that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Resurrection verbs appear only twice in the Easter narratives, one of each: the aorist

active infinitive of *ἀνίστημι* in 20:9, and the aorist passive participle of *ἐγείρω* in 21:14. It is a remarkably restrained testimony to Jesus’ own resurrection after all these other raisings, actual and prophesied. John seems at ease with either interpretation: that Jesus rose and that Jesus was raised from the dead.

Paul apparently allowed for Jesus’ rising early in his apostolic career. In 1 Thessalonians, widely thought to be his first letter, he asserts in 4:14 that “Jesus died and rose again,” using *ἀνίστημι* in the aorist active, and in 4:16 he adds, “the dead in Christ will rise,” which uses *ἀνίστημι* in the intransitive future middle. But from this point onward he will be utterly consistent: the entire remaining Pauline catalogue proclaims that God (subject) raised (active) Christ (object); or that Christ (subject) was raised (passive) by God (instrument)—and the verb is always *ἐγείρω*. *ἀνίστημι* simply vanishes.<sup>5</sup> In 1 Corinthians, the dead are passively raised by God (but not by Christ, as John says). In Ephesians 2:6, “we” are raised up, and in Colossians 2:12 and 3:1 so are “you,” in both cases *with* Jesus but always *by* God. The few remaining New Testament instances of resurrection verbs, namely Hebrews 11:19 and 1 Peter 1:21, agree with Paul that God raised Christ and employ *ἐγείρω* to say so.

It’s been said that all the theological action is to be found in the prepositions. But credit is due also to the original action words—verbs—whose active or passive voices supply implicitly what prepositions make explicit.

What emerges from these apparently arcane details about a pair of synonyms is that something big is at stake in how we talk about the resurrection. The earliest Pauline letter, which is probably the earliest New Testament document; Mark, the earliest Gospel; and Luke and John, relatively late Gospels, all allow for the possibility of double agency in Jesus’ triumph over death. They say that Jesus *was raised*, and they also say that

Jesus *rose*.<sup>6</sup> Whereas Matthew, Paul (barring the outlier 1 Thessalonians), and the other Epistles insist that Jesus *was raised* only, and *ἐγείρω* is the verb of choice to the absolute exclusion of *ἀνίστημι*.

It’s on this fertile soil that the dogmatic tradition of christology arose. Speaking of Jesus’ divinity, in the abstract, with a preconceived notion of what constitutes godliness, is bound to go astray and can easily be deconstructed. But refracted through the prism of resurrection verbs, the shorthand formulations of doctrine gain their true meaning. Jesus’ divinity is defined and attested in his *rising* from the dead. And yet he is and remains always the Son Who is begotten of the Father, took on human flesh, and offered himself for death, even death on the cross, a real and not a fictional death, from which only the Father can call him forth.

Both are true the same way that the Son’s two natures in one person are true. The stereoscopic vision of faith sees the double reality: the Son is raised; the Son also rises. LF

#### Notes

1. Albrecht Oepke, “ἐγείρω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 335.

2. Oepke asserts that, except for Luke 2:34, ἀνάστασις “is used exclusively of the resurrection of Christ from the dead.” Albrecht Oepke, “ἀνίστημι,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 372. But in fact ἀνάστασις is also used to speak of the general resurrection, for example in the debate with the Sadducees or when Martha speaks of Lazarus’s resurrection on the last day.

3. As a rule the middle voice indicates action upon oneself, but in the case of ἀνίστημι the middle voice appears to function deponently and intransitively, rather than especially underscoring such action upon oneself. Thanks to Troy M. Troftgruben for clarifying this point.

4. The translation in the ESV and NRSV of Acts 26:23, “the first to rise from the dead,” makes an infinitive out of a noun. It would better read, “the first of the resurrection.” There’s also an ambiguous case of resurrection in Acts 9:41, when Peter “raises” Tabitha—except

that she's already alive again when he does this, having responded to his voice. Apparently for this reason the NRSV prefers to say that Peter "helped" her up. "Lifted" might be better still.

5. It has been speculated that these two unusual appearances of ἀνίστημι in 1 Thessa-

lonians are from an early creed that Paul was quoting, rather than being his own formulations. But this itself would testify to how early the church was confessing that Jesus rose, not only that he was raised.

6. Oepke claims, "The idea of the self-

resurrection of Jesus is first found in Johannine theology (Jn. 2:19, 21; 10:17, 18)," in Kittel, vol. 2, 335, but the grammatical evidence offered here suggests it was a present, if muted, theme already in early Paul and in Mark and Luke.

VERBS OF THE RESURRECTION				
	GREEK SBL	GRAMMAR	ESV	NRSV
<b>MATTHEW</b>				
10:8	ἐγείρετε	pres. imperf.	raise	raise
11:5	ἐγείρονται	pres. pas.	are raised up	are raised
14:2	ἠγέρθη	aor. pas.	he has been raised	he has been raised
16:21	ἐγερθῆναι	aor. pas. inf.	be raised	be raised
17:9	ἐγερθῆ	aor. pas. sub.	is raised	has been raised
17:23	ἐγερθήσεται	fut. pas.	will be raised	will be raised
20:19	ἐγερθήσεται	fut. pas.	will be raised	will be raised
22:23	ἀνάστασιν		resurrection	resurrection
22:28	ἀναστάσει		resurrection	resurrection
22:30	ἀναστάσει		resurrection	resurrection
22:31	ἀναστάσεως		resurrection	resurrection
26:32	μετὰ δὲ τὸ ἐγερθῆναί με	aor. pas. inf.	after I am raised up	after I am raised up
27:52	ἠγέρθησαν	aor. pas.	were raised	were raised
27:53	ἔγερσιν		resurrection	resurrection
27:63	ἐγείρομαι	pres. pas.	I will rise	I will rise
27:64	Ἦγέρθη	aor. pas.	He has risen	He has been raised
28:6	ἠγέρθη	aor. pas.	He has risen	he has been raised
28:7	Ἦγέρθη	aor. pas.	He has risen	he has been raised
<b>MARK</b>				
6:14	ἐγήγερται	perf. pas.	has been raised	has been raised
6:16	ἠγέρθη	aor. pas.	has been raised	has been raised
8:31	ἀναστῆναι	aor. inf.	rise again	rise again
9:9	ἀναστῆ	aor. subj.	had risen	had risen
9:31	ἀναστήσεται	fut. mid.	he will rise	he will rise again
10:34	ἀναστήσεται	fut. mid.	he will rise	he will rise again

Only the uses of ἐγείρω and ἀνίστημι that clearly refer to the resurrection of the dead are included here. Tense is always noted. Mood is indicative unless otherwise noted. Voice is active unless otherwise noted. The nouns ἀνάστασις and ἔγερσις (synonyms for "resurrection") and their derivatives are included for the sake of comparison but without grammatical comment. Differences in English translation between the ESV and NRSV are shaded.



	GREEK SBL	GRAMMAR	ESV	NRSV
12:18	ἀνάστασιν		resurrection	resurrection
12:23	ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει... ἀναστῶσιν	... aor. subj.	In the resurrection... they rise again	In the resurrection... [omitted]
12:25	ἀναστῶσιν	aor. subj.	they rise	they rise
12:26	ἐγείρονται	pres. pas.	being raised	being raised
14:28	μετὰ τὸ ἐγερθῆναί με	aor. pas. inf.	after I am raised up	after I am raised up
16:6	ἠγέρθη	aor. pas.	He has risen	He has been raised
16:14	ἐγηγεμένον	perf. pas. part.	he had risen	he had risen
<b>LUKE</b>				
7:22	ἐγείρονται	pres. pas.	are raised up	are raised
9:7	ἠγέρθη	aor. pas.	had been raised	had been raised
9:8	ἀνέστη	aor.	had risen	had arisen
9:19	ἀνέστη	aor.	has risen	has arisen
9:22	ἐγερθῆναι	aor. pas. inf.	be raised	be raised
14:14	ἀναστάσει		resurrection	resurrection
16:31	ἐάν τις ἀναστῆ	aor. subj.	if someone should rise	if someone rises
18:33	ἀναστήσεται	fut. mid.	he will rise	he will rise again
20:27	ἀνάστασιν		resurrection	resurrection
20:33	ἀναστάσει		resurrection	resurrection
20:35	ἀναστάσεως		resurrection	resurrection
20:36	ἀναστάσεως		resurrection	resurrection
20:37	ἐγείρονται	pres. pas.	are raised	are raised
24:6	ἠγέρθη	aor. pas.	has risen	[omitted]
24:7	ἀναστήναι	aor. inf.	rise	rise again
24:34	ἠγέρθη	aor. pas.	has risen	has risen
24:46	ἀναστήναι	aor. inf.	rise	to rise
<b>JOHN</b>				
2:19	ἐγερῶ	fut.	I will raise up	I will raise up
2:20	ἐγερεῖς	fut.	will you raise up	will you raise up
2:22	ἠγέρθη	aor. pas.	he was raised	he was raised
5:21	ἐγείρει	pres.	raises	raises
5:29	ἀνάστασιν (2x)		resurrection	resurrection
6:39	ἀναστήσω	aor. subj.	I should raise up	I should raise up
6:40	ἀναστήσω	fut.	I will raise up	I will raise up
6:44	ἀναστήσω	fut.	I will raise up	I will raise up
6:54	ἀναστήσω	fut.	I will raise up	I will raise up

	GREEK SBL	GRAMMAR	ESV	NRSV
11:23	Ἀναστήσεται	fut. mid.	will rise	will rise again
11:24	ἀναστήσεται ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει	fut. mid.	he will rise again in the resurrection	he will rise again in the resurrection
11:25	ἀνάστασις		resurrection	resurrection
12:1	ἤγειρεν	aor.	had raised	had raised
12:9	ἤγειρεν	aor.	had raised	had raised
12:17	ἤγειρεν	aor.	raised	raised
20:9	ἀναστήναι	aor. inf.	he must rise	he must rise
21:14	ἐγερθεὶς	aor. pas. part.	was raised	was raised
<b>ACTS</b>				
1:22	ἀναστάσεως		resurrection	resurrection
2:24	ἀνέστησεν	aor.	raised	raised
2:31	ἀναστάσεως		resurrection	resurrection
2:32	ἀνέστησεν	aor.	raised	raised
3:15	ἤγειρεν	aor.	raised	raised
4:2	ἀνάστασιν		resurrection	resurrection
4:10	ἤγειρεν	aor.	raised	raised
4:33	ἀναστάσεως		resurrection	resurrection
5:30	ἤγειρεν	aor.	raised	raised up
9:41	ἀνέστησεν	aor.	raised up	helped up
10:40	ἤγειρεν	aor.	raised	raised
10:41	ἀναστήναι	aor. inf.	rose	rose
13:30	ἤγειρεν	aor.	raised	raised
13:34	ἀνέστησεν	aor.	raised	raising
13:37	ἤγειρεν	aor.	raised up	raised up
17:3	ἀναστήναι	aor. inf.	to rise	to rise
17:18	ἀνάστασιν		resurrection	resurrection
17:32	ἀνάστασιν		resurrection	resurrection
23:6	ἀναστάσεως		resurrection	resurrection
23:8	ἀνάστασιν		resurrection	resurrection
24:15	ἀνάστασιν		resurrection	resurrection
24:21	ἀναστάσεως		resurrection	resurrection
26:8	ἐγείρει	pres.	raises	raises
26:23	πρῶτος ἐξ ἀναστάσεως		first to rise	first to rise
<b>ROMANS</b>				
1:4	ἀναστάσεως		resurrection	resurrection
4:24	ἐγείραντα	aor. part.	raised	raised

	GREEK SBL	GRAMMAR	ESV	NRSV
4:25	ἠγέρθη	aor. pas.	was raised	was raised
6:4	ἠγέρθη	aor. pas.	was raised	was raised
6:5	ἀναστάσεως		resurrection	resurrection
6:9	ἐγερθεῖς	aor. pas. part.	being raised	being raised
7:4	ἐγερθέντι	aor. pas. part.	has been raised	has been raised
8:11	ἐγείραντος... ἐγείρας	aor. part.... aor. part.	raised... raised	raised... raised
8:34	ἐγερθεῖς	aor. pas. part.	was raised	was raised
10:9	ἤγειρεν	aor.	raised	raised
<b>I CORINTHIANS</b>				
6:14	ἤγειρεν... ἐξεγερεῖ	aor... fut.	raised... will raise	raised... will raise
15:4	ἐγήγερται	perf. pas.	was raised	was raised
15:12	ἐγήγερται... ἀνάστασις	perf. pas....	raised... resurrection	raised... resurrection
15:13	ἀνάστασις... ἐγήγερται	... perf. pas.	resurrection... has been raised	resurrection... has been raised
15:14	ἐγήγερται	perf. pas.	has been raised	has been raised
15:15	ἤγειρεν... ἤγειρεν... ἐγείρονται	aor... aor.... pres. pas.	raised... did raise... are raised	raised... did raise... are raised
15:16	ἐγείρονται... ἐγήγερται	pres. pas.... perf. pas.	are raised... has been raised	are raised... has been raised
15:17	ἐγήγερται	perf. pas.	has been raised	has been raised
15:20	ἐγήγερται	perf. pas.	has been raised	has been raised
15:21	ἀνάστασις		resurrection	resurrection
15:29	ἐγείρονται	pres. pas.	are raised	are raised
15:32	ἐγείρονται	pres. pas.	are raised	are raised
15:35	ἐγείρονται	pres. pas.	are raised	are raised
15:42	ἀνάστασις... ἐγείρεται	... pres. pas.	resurrection... is raised	resurrection... is raised
15:43	ἐγείρεται (2x)	pres. pas.	is raised	is raised
15:44	ἐγείρεται	pres. pas.	is raised	is raised
15:52	ἐγερθήσονται	fut. pas.	will be raised	will be raised
<b>II CORINTHIANS</b>				
1:9	ἐγείροντι	pres. part.	raises	raises
4:14	ἐγείρας... ἐγερεῖ	aor. part.... fut.	raised... will raise	raised... will raise
5:15	ἐγερθέντι	aor. pas. part.	was raised	was raised
<b>GALATIANS</b>				
1:1	ἐγείραντος	aor. part.	raised	raised
<b>EPHESIANS</b>				
1:20	ἐγείρας	aor. part.	raised	raised
2:6	συνήγειρεν	aor.	raised up with	raised up with

	GREEK SBL	GRAMMAR	ESV	NRSV
<b>PHILIPPIANS</b>				
3:10	ἀναστάσεως		resurrection	resurrection
3:11	ἐξανάστασιν		resurrection	resurrection
<b>COLOSSIANS</b>				
2:12	ἐνεργείας... ἐγείραντος	aor. pas.... aor. part.	were raised... raised	were raised... raised
3:1	συνηγήρθητε	aor. pas.	have been raised with	have been raised with
<b>I THESSALONIANS</b>				
1:10	ἡγίρειν	aor.	raised	raised
4:14	ἀνέστη	aor.	rose again	rose again
4:16	ἀναστήσονται	fut. mid.	will rise	will rise
<b>II TIMOTHY</b>				
2:8	ἐγηγεγμένον	perf. pas. part.	risen	raised
2:18	ἀνάστασιν		resurrection	resurrection
<b>HEBREWS</b>				
6:2	ἀναστάσεως		resurrection	resurrection
11:19	ἐγείρειν	pres. inf.	to raise	to raise
11:35	ἐξ ἀναστάσεως... ἀναστάσεως		by resurrection... that they might rise again	by resurrection... resurrection
<b>I PETER</b>				
1:3	ἀναστάσεως		resurrection	resurrection
1:21	ἐγείραντα	aor. part.	raised	raised
3:21	ἀναστάσεως		resurrection	resurrection
<b>REVELATION</b>				
20:5	ἀνάστασις		resurrection	resurrection
20:6	ἀναστάσει		resurrection	resurrection