

# The Resurrection

The doctrine of the resurrection of Christ is the foundation of Christianity. It provides the physical, historical, space-time verification for the faith. Without it, Christianity is quite literally, dead. The resurrection of Christ is proclaimed vigorously throughout the New Testament, especially in the teachings of Paul. It is primarily because of Paul's teachings that the resurrection has such a substantial place in Christianity. Indeed, there is no gospel without the resurrection. Consider the following:

*<sup>1</sup> Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup> by which also you are saved, if you possess the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. <sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you first what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve (1 Corinthians 15.1-5).*

It is important to understand what is meant by resurrection. Jesus was the first person resurrected from the dead (1 Corinthians 15.20). His resurrection was the rising from the dead from an earthly body into a new kind of body. His resurrection body appeared to be like our present bodies but had dramatically different properties. These properties included eternal life and the ability to transcend normal space. God had raised, i.e., resuscitated several persons in the record of the Scriptures. Elijah resuscitated the widow of Zarephath's son. Jesus raised (i.e., resuscitated) Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. Paul raised Eutychus (Acts 20.7-12). These individuals were given new life but died

again. A resurrected body is different; it can no longer experience death.

The chief historical verification for the resurrection was its effect upon the disciples. Christ's crucifixion left the disciples defeated. Their world collapsed. Even though Jesus had told them He was going to die and rise from the dead, it never registered (Luke 18.34). After his resurrection, these weak disciples confronted and defied the authorities who had crucified Him. They boldly continued to preach His resurrection and that hope remained for the nation of Israel. These facts vindicate Christ's resurrection as a fact of history (cf. Acts 4.1-22) for no other explanation is reasonable. They had everything to lose by perpetrating a fraud. Had they benefited from their efforts—prestige, wealth, etc. one might argue they had a vested interest in their activities. But, on the contrary, they obtained no benefit or reward for their bravery. They were ridiculed, beaten, stoned, and tortured. They laid down their lives because they were certain what they had witnessed was true.

The fact the Sanhedrin could not produce a body from the empty tomb—a tomb heavily guarded by the Roman army and sealed with a great stone—further attested to the historicity of the resurrection. Who does not believe the Jews of the Sanhedrin, who conspired in the murder of Jesus, exercised all their power to produce His body? Had they been successful, the claims of Jesus as the Messiah would have collapsed. Can anyone seriously believe the disciples risked their lives for a corpse? Such a thought is not reasonable; they would not risk their lives for Jesus when he was alive! They all ran away when he was arrested.

Many Bible critics of the 19th and 20th centuries labored to remove the supernatural from the Scriptures. They advanced vigorous attacks and naturalistic explanations for events such as Jesus' miraculous feeding of the 5,000, His walking on water, His healing of disease and demon possession, calming

storms, etc. Critics attempted to *demythologize* the Scriptures, to remove the supernatural and miraculous from them. Some critics have claimed the witnesses and writers of that day were superstitious and naive. But it is clear from reading the New Testament that those who witnessed miraculous events knew they were extraordinary. They knew what they witnessed violated the laws of nature. When Peter walked on the sea to meet Jesus, he knew he was doing the miraculous. He was a fisherman. He didn't walk on water to fish—he used a boat. When Jesus gave sight to the blind and raised Lazarus from death, the people knew the laws of nature had been suspended and overcome. They knew no one had ever restored sight to the blind (John 9.31-32). But those miracles, great as they were, pale in comparison to Jesus' resurrection. The resurrection was the *grand miracle*. All other miracles were warm up acts. The resurrection of Jesus was the premier event of human history and the most important metaphysical event of the universe. It violated the most obvious and transcendent natural law—death, decay, and entropy. If one can believe in the resurrection of Christ, (and to be a Christian one must) to accept the other miraculous events recorded in the Bible is child's play. The resurrection of Jesus is the big door. Through it all other supernatural and miraculous events follow.

When investigators remove the miraculous from Jesus, little of the historical Jesus remains. The so-called “quest for the historical Jesus” or separating the “Jesus of history” from the “Jesus of faith” is a game for fools. At the end of the “quest” the “historical” Jesus is barely recognizable. All we are left with is an ethical, moral, naive, religious teacher who fell afoul of envious religious teachers who executed Him. The supernatural acts of Jesus are indivisible from his natural acts. He is the God-Man. They are as much a part of Jesus as His eating and drinking.

The Testimony of Others

The resurrection is a fact of history as certain as Julius Caesar's crossing the Rubicon. While some have tried to negate the resurrection, many have found the historical record sufficient and compelling. Professor Thomas Arnold, fourteen years a headmaster of Rugby, authored the famous *History of Rome* and held the Chair of Modern History at Oxford. He wrote,

*"The evidence for our Lord's life and death and resurrection may be, and often has been shown to be satisfactory; it is good according to the common rules for distinguishing good evidence from bad. Thousands and tens of thousands of persons have gone through it piece by piece, as carefully as every judge summing up on a most important cause. I have myself done it many times over, not to persuade others but to satisfy myself. I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weight the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."*<sup>1</sup>

Brooke Foss Westcott, Regius Professor at Cambridge University, wrote,

*"Indeed, taking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ. Nothing but the antecedent assumption that it must be false could have suggested the idea of deficiency in the proof of it."*<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Simon Greenleaf, Royal Professor of Law at Harvard University, was one of the greatest legal authorities. He wrote, *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence*, considered by many the greatest legal volume ever written. Dr. Greenleaf believed

the resurrection of Jesus was a hoax and determined to expose it. His investigation yielded a different result. After thoroughly examining the evidence, he concluded that according to the rules of legal evidence, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was supported by history. He stated,

*“It was therefore impossible that the apostles could have persisted in affirming the truths they had narrated, had not Jesus Christ actually risen from the dead, and had they not known the fact as certainly as they knew any other fact.”* <sup>3</sup>

## The Testimony of Jesus

Jesus taught the resurrection. When the Sadducees set forth a situation to confound him, he chided them,

<sup>29</sup> *But Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. <sup>30</sup> For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. <sup>31</sup> But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: <sup>32</sup> ‘I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living” (Matthew 22.29-32).*

Jesus proclaimed God was not the God of dead people but of the living. Therefore, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all who had put their trust in Him were alive.

Jesus spoke of his own resurrection. Mark recorded,

<sup>27</sup> *Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, “Who do people say that I am?” <sup>28</sup> They told Him, saying, “John the Baptist; and others say*

*Elijah; but others, one of the prophets.”<sup>29</sup> And He continued by questioning them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and \*said to Him, “You are the Christ.”<sup>30</sup> And He warned them to tell no one about Him (Mark 8.27-31).*

Several times Jesus declared He would rise from the dead (Mark 9.31; 10.34; Luke 18.33). His disciples, however, failed to comprehend His words because God hid it from them (Luke 18.34).

In addition to teaching His own resurrection, Jesus taught those who believed in him would be resurrected. John recorded:

*<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.<sup>36</sup> But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe.<sup>37</sup> All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.<sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.<sup>39</sup> This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.<sup>40</sup> For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (John 6.35-40).*

*<sup>21</sup> Martha then said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.<sup>22</sup> Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”<sup>23</sup> Jesus \*said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”<sup>24</sup> Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,<sup>26</sup> and everyone*

*who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"* <sup>27</sup> *She \*said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world" (John 11.23-27).*

In His teaching of the resurrection of those who believed in Him, the timetable was that they would be raised on "the last day." Later, God revealed to the apostle Paul, additional information about the resurrection.

### The Order of Resurrection

There are two kinds of resurrections. One is to life and one is to judgment. Jesus declared He was the giver of life and the judge. Regarding these two resurrections, he said,

<sup>20</sup> *For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.* <sup>21</sup> *For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.* <sup>22</sup> *For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son,* <sup>23</sup> *so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.* <sup>24</sup> *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life* <sup>25</sup> *Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.* <sup>26</sup> *For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself;* <sup>27</sup> *and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.* <sup>28</sup> *Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His*

*voice, <sup>29</sup> and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment (John 5.20-29).*

The resurrection has a definite order and the picture is that of a harvest. Paul described Jesus' resurrection as being "the firstfruits". The book of Leviticus discusses various harvests which are pictures of the resurrections (cf. Leviticus 23.9-10; 19.9-10). Part of the doctrine of the resurrection is the Rapture, the removal of the Body of Christ, the Church, from the earth before God pours out his wrath in the Day of the Lord to a Christ-rejecting world and Jesus returns as judge to establish his earthly kingdom. Those who reject the Rapture are like the Sadducees, who in Jesus' day denied the resurrection. They erred, not knowing the Scriptures. The Rapture was a "secret," a doctrine God revealed to Paul. One will not find the Rapture taught by Jesus or any of the Twelve. It was a secret. Before God's call and commission of Paul it was unknown. The order of the resurrections is not explicitly clear. Below is a probable order.

First Resurrection: Resurrection of Life	
First-fruits	The resurrection of Christ, first of the "the firstfruits" (Psalm 16.10; 1 Corinthians 15.20-23a).
	The resurrection of additional "firstfruits": Jewish saints buried around Jerusalem (Matthew 27.51-53).
Main Harvest	The resurrection of the Church, the Body of Christ: the Rapture (1 Corinthians 15.23, 52-53; 1 Thessalonians 4.14-17; 2 Thessalonians 2.3; Philippians 3.11).



Gleanings	The resurrection of Old Testament believers (Job 19.25-26; Daniel 12.1-2, 11-13; Isaiah 26.19-21).
	The resurrection of Tribulation believers (Revelation 20.4-5).
Second Resurrection: Resurrection of Judgment	
Great White Throne	The resurrection of unbelievers: those who have rejected YHVH-Christ (John 5.28-29; Revelation 20.11-15).

The Bible teaches humans live forever. Jesus taught two resurrections: one to life (the first resurrection) and one to judgment (the second resurrection). The first resurrection, the resurrection unto life, will come in phases. Christ was the first to be raised and some saints buried around Jerusalem were raised shortly after that.

The next resurrection will be the resurrection of the Church, the Body of Christ. Of that group, those who have died will be resurrected first. Then those who are alive when Christ appears will be raised. This means a large number of people will not experience physical death. This event is known as the Rapture ([ἄρπάζω](#), 1 Thessalonians 4.16) and was a [secret](#) until Paul revealed it (1 Corinthians 15.51-52). After the Rapture will follow the Day of the Lord or the Tribulation, as Jesus called it (Matthew 24.21), or the “time of Jacob’s trouble” as Jeremiah referred to it. During this time God will renew His plan with national Israel. Sixty-nine weeks of years from Daniel’s prophecy (Daniel 9.25-27) have already been fulfilled for national Israel and one week of years (7 years) remains.

The “rapture” is for the Church, the body of Christ, Christ’s return. The prophets of Israel, while they diligently searched the Scriptures (1 Peter 1.10-11) did not understand that the prophecies described two advents of the Messiah. Just as God revealed two advents to the Old Testament prophets, He

revealed another advent to the apostle Paul. In the first phase, Jesus will return to claim his Church, the body of Christ, from the coming wrath, i.e. "the time of *Jacob's* trouble" (Jeremiah 30.7). In the second phase, he will come to rescue a repentant Israel (cf. Matthew 23.37-39) and establish His kingdom (cf. Acts 1.6-7). To understand the Rapture one must understand the distinction between the Church and Israel, law and grace, God's heavenly people and God's earthly people, and the "gospel of the kingdom" and the "gospel of the grace of God." Without understanding the distinctions between these two programs (Israel and the Church), the Bible is a muddle. A theological system that fails to recognize these distinctions is incapable of providing sound interpretation of the Bible and eisegesis replaces exegesis.

The Church and Israel are distinct entities. Jesus, in his earthly ministry, came expressly to present himself as the King and Messiah of Israel (Romans 15.8). Gentiles were not included (cf. Matthew 10.5-7; 15.21-28) in Jesus' earthly ministry although He made a couple exceptions, e.g., the Canaanite woman and the Roman centurion. Following the nation's rejection of their Messiah, however, God acted in grace rather than judgment. Rather than follow the prophetic timetable of pouring out His wrath, God acted in grace and commissioned Paul as the "apostle to the Gentiles". God revealed to Paul a new, "secret" entity, the Church, the body of Christ. Jesus did not teach it nor did the Twelve. It was a truth God kept hidden until He chose to reveal it to Paul (cf. Ephesians 2.11-22; 3.3-9; Colossians 1.26-27). Since Israel would not repent and accept Jesus as their Messiah-King, the nation has been *temporarily* set aside. Paul explained this in Romans 9-11.

For God to complete his work with Israel and fulfill His promises to the nation which He had made through covenants, Israel has to repent. Repentance was the message John the Baptizer, Jesus, and the Twelve proclaimed to the nation. It

continued to be Peter's message after Jesus' resurrection and ascension (Acts 2.37-40; 3.19-21). The nation refused to repent and God judged the nation in 70 A. D. Since that time, God has been dealing with the Church, the body of Christ. After God removes the Church in the Rapture, He will renew His dealings with national Israel and judge a Christ rejecting world. This judgment is called "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30.7), the Tribulation, and the Day of the Lord. This judgment will result in a repentant Israel who will recognize and accept Jesus as their Messiah-King (Matthew 23.39; Zechariah 12.10). He will return to rescue them and all mankind from annihilation (Revelation 19 cf. Matthew 24.22).

From Job 19.25-26, Daniel 12.1-2, and Isaiah 26.19-21, it would appear Old Testament saints are not raised at the Rapture but later, following the Tribulation, at the time of the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. All Old Testament believers as well as all Church believers will be resurrected before the Millennium. Also raised before the Messianic Kingdom are those martyred in the Tribulation. They are those who refused to worship the Antichrist as God (Revelation 20.4-5).

Life will be greatly extended in the Messianic Kingdom, but death will occur (Isaiah 65.20). No passage of Scripture clearly indicates the resurrection of Millennial saints but they may be resurrected at the end of the Millennial Kingdom.

The final resurrection will be the resurrection of those who have rejected Christ (Revelation 20.11-15). See the discussion on Hell and Judgment for a fuller treatment of this event.

### The Myths of Resurrection

James Frazier, in his highly influential work, *The Golden Bough*, contended most ancient civilizations and cultures had myths of resurrection. These were expressed as myths of the dying god returning to life. The Egyptians had Osiris, the

Phoenicians had Baal, the Babylonians had Tammuz, and the Greeks had Dionysius. The myths of the dying and resurrected god were associated with fertility cults and with the celebration of rebirth, regeneration, and the renewal of springtime. These celebrations revolved around the natural order of death and germination in the earth. Critics of the Bible took Frazier's work and maintained the resurrection of Christ was just one more dying god/resurrection myth. Frazier's work has received much criticism by scholars. The consensus is Frazier overreached—that stories of the dying god resurrecting to new life are based upon little evidence. Accepting Frazier's thesis, C. S. Lewis wrote an essay entitled, "Myth Became Fact" in which he maintained that the resurrection of Christ fulfilled the shadowy world of the pagan resurrection myths with the true fact of resurrection. Thus, he argued, in Christianity, the myth of the dying god became *real*.

God's creation of nature is like a black and white image of reality while supernature is a color picture. Nature is but a pale reflection of much greater reality: supernature. Nature is supernature on training wheels. Thus, seeds must die in order to germinate and bring forth new life. All manner of plant life returns to life in the spring. But dead humans do not. Dead, buried humans stay in the ground. But Christ, by his resurrection, broke the natural order of death. He is of a higher, supernatural order. What nature cannot do, supernature can do. Christ, the one who created heaven and earth and all that is, overcame the natural order. The dead Christ walked out of the tomb. Through His resurrection all who believe in Him and are united in Him through faith in His death and resurrection have hope of resurrection. Christ's conquering death gives hope to all who have trusted in Him. This is the good news!

The apostle Paul witnessed to the pagan culture of his day regarding Christ's resurrection. The Greeks had no belief

in bodily resurrection. Some believed in the immortality of the soul but not of the body. This is evident from their writings and also from the testimony of the Scriptures. Plato discussed the immortality of the soul but never the body. When Paul went up to the Aeropagus in Athens, he taught the philosophers about the true God and the resurrection. The Scripture recorded their response:

*<sup>32</sup> Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." <sup>33</sup> So Paul went out of their midst. <sup>34</sup> But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them (Acts 17.32-34).*

The preaching of the gospel always evokes a response. Either it is accepted or rejected. If one accepts it, the result is eternal life; if one rejects it, the result is eternal death.

The resurrection of the body was believed in by the Jews. Job's testimony was,

*<sup>19</sup> As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19.25-26).*

Jesus taught the resurrection of the body. It is clear from his conversation with Martha that the common people knew about it and believed it. John wrote of this conversation in his gospel,

*" <sup>23</sup> Jesus \*said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup> Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live*

*even if he dies, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" Jesus \*said to her, "Your brother will rise again" (John 11.23-26).*

In Jesus' day, the Jewish leadership of the Sadducees and the Pharisees was divided on the matter of the resurrection. The Pharisees believed in it; the Sadducees did not. Paul cleverly used this controversy to his advantage before the Sanhedrin when he was being accused and persecuted by the Jews. Luke recorded the event:

*<sup>6</sup> But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" <sup>7</sup> As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. <sup>8</sup> For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all (Acts 23.6-8).*

## Conclusion

The Lord Jesus Christ's resurrection secured, sealed, and consummated His redemptive work. Through his work we have forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1.7; Colossians 1.14) an eternal inheritance (Romans 8.17; Ephesians 1.11; Colossians 1.12), and the indwelling Holy Spirit (Romans 8.16; Ephesians 1.13-14; 2 Corinthians 1.22, 5.5) we know we will share in the benefits of Christ's resurrection and victory with our own resurrection. This is the great hope of Christians. Christ's appearing is our resurrection and our "blessed hope" (Titus 2.13).

<sup>1</sup>Josh McDowell. *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup>Josh McDowell. *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, p. 192-3.

<sup>3</sup>Josh McDowell. *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, p. 192.

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