

What is a Resurrection?

The concept of resurrection is initially derived from references of it in the Old Testament. The prophets Isaiah and Daniel indicate that resurrection involves the reuniting of a dead person's spirit with their body at some point in the future, and that those who live after death are exclusively God's people.

O Lord our God, other masters besides You have ruled us;
But through You alone we confess Your name.
The dead will not live, the departed spirits will not rise;
Therefore You have punished and destroyed them,
And You have wiped out all remembrance of them. (Isa 26:13-14)

Your dead will live;
Their corpses will rise.
You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy,
For your dew is as the dew of the dawn,
And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits. (Isa 26:19)

"Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, **everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.**" (Dan 12:1-2)

The Old Testament idea of resurrection of the dead was difficult to understand and a controversial topic among Jews of the first century A.D. While Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, Sadducees did not.

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!" As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 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)

In an attempt to publicly debase Jesus' religious authority, Sadducees attempted to trap Him with the problems presented with resurrection.

On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him, asking, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife, and raise up children for his brother.' Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. Last of all, the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had married her." But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. **But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: '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.**" When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching. (Matt 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40)

Recorded in three different gospel accounts, this account is significant because Jesus explains why the resurrection is absolutely necessary: the real life God in heaven (John 1:18) is the God of the living! When God spoke to Moses, He was saying that the Patriarchs were still alive (Ex 3:2-6)!

Jesus' gospel message is more than the forgiveness of sin and restoration of one's broken relationship with God. God esteems this relationship, because He made it eternal. However, it is only through Jesus Christ that this restoration is mediated, and only those who know Jesus Christ have eternal life. Resurrection however, is not just limited to Believers! It is the duration of life after their resurrection that is determined by one's faith. Note carefully that Jesus seemingly indicates that the resurrection of Believers starts when "all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and will come forth."

"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. 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. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, 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 5:24-29)

Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, **"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.** Do you believe this?" 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 11:21-27)

Beyond the initial comprehension of His disciples, Jesus Christ provided the first example of what a resurrection tangibly looked like and validated the truth of Christianity: God is a real living Being, because He provided His only Son, a historical person in human history, to die and atone for the sins of mankind and whose resurrection demonstrated the power of the Son of God over death.

"A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me." Some of His disciples then said to one another, "What is this thing He is telling us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" So they were saying, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is talking about." Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, "Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me'? Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. (John 16:16-22)

So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles. (Acts 26:22-23)

Many questions swirled around how resurrection pertains to Believers in the first century. The apostle Paul was asked this question, which he responded in his letter to the church at Corinth.

Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. (1 Cor 15:12-19)

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Paul reminds the Corinthian Believers the importance of the gospel as it was passed down to him – that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried and raised on the third day. Not only predicted by Old Testament prophecy, the historical reality of the resurrection of Christ was established fact, because the risen Christ was seen by so many witnesses, many of whom were still alive at the time of Paul's letter: the twelve original apostles, over five hundred disciples, Jesus' half brother James and Paul himself (1 Cor 15:1-11).

To those in the church of Corinth who deny resurrection: if there is no resurrection, there is no historical or factual basis of Christianity. The apostle Paul would be a false witness, the church's faith in Christ vain, and they would be pitiful for their belief in something worthless.

But someone will say, **“How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?”** You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, **it is raised in glory**; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So also it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living soul.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly. (1 Cor 15:35-49)

From his personal experience of seeing the resurrected Jesus Christ (Acts 22:17-21), Paul answers the question “how” by using a comparison to agriculture: the resurrected body is akin to the fruit that naturally results from the growth and death of its seed. Paul answers “what kind” by using a comparison to God's creation of the natural world: the resurrected body is as unique as creation itself.

The use of the term “glory” is significant, because it is in reference to God's all encompassing goodness (Ex 33:18-19). To be “raised in glory” is to be raised through the all encompassing goodness of God, which can also be seen in Paul's letter to the Roman church:

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:4)

The apostle is making a comparative distinction: there are two classes of human beings: a) those who are of Adam will bear the body and likeness of the earthly man and b) those who are of Jesus will bear the body and likeness of the heavenly Man. The significance is that only the one with a spiritual body will enter the kingdom of God.

The spiritual body is immortal yet a real body made of a substance that is imperishable and functions differently than the earthly body.

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, **at the last trumpet**; for the trumpet will sound, and **the dead will be raised imperishable**, and we will be changed. **For this perishable must put on the imperishable**, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality,.. (continues)

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... then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 15:50-57)

Paul indicates that the resurrection of Believers begins when the "last trumpet" sounds. But observe carefully that Paul says the "dead will be raised imperishable" and the "perishable must put on the imperishable." Rather than being given a new body, the Believer must put something on; life with a new body is given later (Rev 20).

Whenever Jesus spoke of His return, He too referred to the sound of a trumpet (Matt 24:31; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27), and when Jesus arrives in the clouds, before the seven bowls of God's wrath, He comes with His angels to gather, reap, or rapture the elect (Rev 14:14-16) "from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matt 24:29-31).

The breaking of the fifth seal introduces the only instance when the spirits of deceased Believers put something on – a white robe, and this signals the start of the death of other Believers who will later put on their white robe (Rev 6:9-11).

After the release of the seventh bowl of God's wrath, the marriage of the Lamb occurs with the marriage supper of the Lamb where the spirits of deceased Believers are all clothed in "fine linen, bright and clean, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev 19:7-9).

When Paul speaks of the last trumpet, "the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed (1 Cor 15:52-54), he is speaking in the context of immortality and being clothed, which is a part of the process of the Believer's resurrection. It is this robe of righteousness that defines "immortality" and fulfills the saying that "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

The process of resurrection for Believers is completed in the book of Revelation when they are brought to life with a body. After the war at Armageddon and the defeat of the Beast and False Prophet (Rev 19:11-21), there are two resurrections that take place: one before the thousand year reign of Jesus Christ and one after.

The first group of Believers to complete their process of resurrection will be of those who died for their faith (Rev 20:4-6). This special honor is also alluded to in Hebrews 11:35.

After the thousand year reign, the second group to complete their process of resurrection will be all other Believers who will be judged for their works and rewarded accordingly (Rev 20:11-13; Matt 16:27; Eph 6:7-8).

Non-Believers do not participate in the process of resurrection of life and never receive the white robe of righteousness. The resurrection of non-Believers is a singular event as seen in Revelation 20:13:

And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them; and they were judged, each one of them according to their deeds. (Rev 20:13)

Because Jesus Christ has already gathered all Believers during His Second Coming, all remaining dead human beings on earth are non-Believers. And Hades is the temporary residence for the souls of non-Believers.

Non-Believers are brought to life in resurrection to face judgment before the Great White throne before being thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:14-15). This resurrection of condemnation is short lived and results in the second death.