

The Resurrection of the Dead

My soul cleaveth to the dust, quicken thou me according to thy word.—Psalms 119:25

By Robert Davis

The ransom is often called the most fundamental doctrine of the Bible, the hub to which all scripture in spoke-like fashion attach. However, the full operation of the ransom requires that a resurrection take place, making the latter doctrine even more fundamental. The resurrection would be the rim of the wheel, without which the hub and spokes would be useless.

Carrying the analogy further, the plan of God represented in the wheel is essentially made up of many elements that connect the death of Christ with the hope of eternal life. Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 15, the "resurrection chapter": "For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ is not raised; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished" (vs. 16-18). The ransom, even the whole plan of God, is inoperative without the resurrection.

Christ's victory over the grave became the first true resurrection in the history of creation and provided a guarantee to the Church that God indeed has the power to resurrect. Many have endured terrible suffering as followers of the Lord. What good would all this have been if the dead rise not, otherwise Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:32: "let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die". It's Christ's resurrection that gave comfort and assurance to the Church as they struggled through their darkest hour: "if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him; Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more. . ." (Rom. 6:8-9).

The Sleep of Death

The Bible does not detail the mechanics of a resurrection, unless something can be drawn from the symbolic language of Ezek. 37:7-9. However, threaded throughout scripture is the thought of renewed life after death often called the resurrection. The death condition is metaphorically called a sleep (John 11:11-14, Acts 7:60, 1 Kings 2:10). Christ's return is pictured as the morning because it is the beginning of a new day of God's beneficial rule (Mal. 4:2) and a time when everyone arises from the sleep of death (1 Thes. 4:16). The sleeping saints are initially aroused and are with Christ at the resurrection and judgement of the world (Rev. 20:1-5, Mat. 25:31-32).

The Soul Not Immortal

The symbology of sleep communicates the correct understanding of the death state, unconsciousness (Ecc. 9:10, Psa. 146:4, Psa. 6:5). By this symbology the scriptures offer an rebuttal for the false doctrine of the immortal soul. The Bible never equates immortality with the soul of common man, only with the saints, and then only as a gift for faithfulness (Rom. 2:7, 1 Cor. 15:53-54). This proper understanding of death forms the basis for a good understanding of how the

resurrection operates.

Adam was the only human formed from the elements of earth (Gen. 2:7). Eve was apparently created using biological material from Adam, perhaps in a method akin to genetic engineering (Gen. 2:21). The remainder of mankind came through procreation. The combination of Adam's body with the breath or spirit of life created a synergism of a living soul. Death mirrors this creation process. The spirit departs from the body, returning to God from whom it came, and the body returns to its earthly elements, resulting in the elimination of the soul (Job 34:14-15, Eccl. 12:7).

Possibly the spirit that returns to God contains the unique "data" of each individual can be compared to computer information on a removable disk. The resurrection of an individual could be a recreation after the pattern of Adam. The original body had passed to dust so a new one, either spiritual or fleshly, would be created. The individual again comes to life when the (unique?) spirit is returned to the body and he becomes a living soul again. Whatever the exact process is, we know the resurrected fleshly body will be in its intended perfected state. Job intimates that the flesh will be fresher than a child's and will have the beauty and vitality of youth (Job 33:25).

Resuscitation Is Not Resurrection

The resurrection is different from the miraculous resuscitation to life that performed by Jesus, Peter, Elijah, and Elisha. In these cases no recreation of the body was necessary since it had not returned to dust and without the application of the ransom they soon returned again to the sleep of death. The Bible never called any of these miracles a resurrection. When Jesus heard of Lazarus' death he announced that he was going to awaken him (Greek: *exupnizo*, to arouse out of sleep) (John 11:11). Upon arriving at Bethany Jesus told Martha that Lazarus was going to raise again but Martha mistook his meaning by saying: "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:23-24). Jesus indicated that he was going to revive Lazarus from the dead while Martha mistook him to be referring to THE resurrection, an event commonly held among the Jews to be the raising of all the dead at the last day (the culmination of this present evil day).

The Greek word for resurrection used in the New Testament is *anastasis* (Strong's 386), literally meaning "a standing up again." Also, the word is translated once each from the Greek words *egersis* (Strong's 1454) and *exanastasis* (Strong's 1815). The Old Testament writers understood the being more deeply considered during the Hellenistic period with the realization that the resurrection would a single, dramatic event. The developing Rabbinical schools during this time no doubt focused upon the resurrection teachings of the Old Testament.

The scripture reveals two sects of Jewish thought regarding the resurrection during Jesus' ministry. The Sadducees constituted a small minority of politically-minded upper class Jews that did not believe in any resurrection at all (Matt. 22:23) while the Pharisees (who Paul called the most exact of all sects, Acts 26:5) believed in a future resurrection of the just and unjust (Acts 24:15). The majority of the people held the Pharisaic opinion, as is common among Jews today. While the Jews before Christ understood that the resurrection would include the just and the unjust, they did not comprehend a spiritual resurrection.

There is only one mystery that is called such in scripture—it is the mystery concerning the Church, true and counterfeit. Christ brought life and immortality to light by revealing the mystery God had planned long before (Eph. 3:5, Rom. 16:25); that God will call a body of faithful people to receive the almost incomprehensible blessing of the immortal divine nature (1 Peter 1:4). The Christ, head and body, is the only part of God's creation that was planned "before the foundation of the world" (with the one exception concerning the spilling of the blood of the prophets—Luke 11:50). Therefore, the development of Christ and the Church was the primary objective for the creation of the earth and maybe even the universe. It is conceivable that the main objective of all God's creation is to develop a close-knit family of beings existing on his plane.

The resurrection is the time when this long planned-for creation of the body of Christ occurs. Thus the resurrection has a spiritual component for the church as well as a natural component for mankind. Revelation details a first (spiritual) resurrection and intimates a second (fleshly) resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6).

The First Resurrection

The contrast drawn between the Church's resurrection and the resurrection of the "the rest of the dead" is the Church's immunity to the second death. They received the immortality of the divine nature and became incapable of dying a second time. When one considers the wonders of God's creation, from the creation of this massive universe with its complex and unfathomed laws to the birth of a child who will develop into a highly complicated organism in the likeness of God, one is amazed that God has the power to even surpass all this by the creation of another immortal divine being like himself! Truly Paul's words are not lost when stating that he was seeking "the POWER of his resurrection" (Phil. 3:10).

The resurrection of the world is accomplished by the death of a perfect man Jesus to cancel the penalty of death brought upon all by the sin of the perfect man Adam (1 Cor. 15:21, 22, Rom. 5:17-19). They are raised with the same selfish, indifferent heart they died with so a period of rehabilitation is required.

Resurrection of Just and Unjust

The first and second resurrections are also called the resurrection of the just and the unjust for this reason (Acts 24:15). In John 5:28, 29 Jesus states that the just will come to a resurrection of life since they have already proven worthy of life through faith, while the unjust will come to judgement. (The KJV has "damnation" but the Greek word *krisis* conveys more a thought of trial than of condemnation.)

This judgement is illustrated in Matthew 25:31-46. Here all nations are gathered before the returned Lord Jesus Christ and all his holy angels in a judgement setting. The "holy angels" give strong reference to his glorified body, the saints (compare Jude 14, 15; Rev. 20:4; 19:11-14). Therefore, the good people that receive everlasting life are not the saints, but rather are the ones who performed well in the judgment day, which can last up to a thousand years (Psa. 90:3-4).

Apparently even though the path to righteousness will be straight and broad like a highway and Satan's deceptive, corruptive influence will be removed (Isa. 35:8-9) life in the Millennial Age will not be totally easy, for there are still many in adversity that require help. The statement "the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished" in Revelation 20:5 shows how mankind

will not inherit eternal life until they had successfully passed judgement.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:12-54 presents a wonderful defense of the belief in the resurrection of the dead. He stresses the human-to-spiritual resurrection because he was speaking to those that had the heavenly hope and also because it was a new concept. The idea of a common man, Jesus, or his common followers obtaining the nature of the divine must have been totally foreign. The Jews had nothing like it, and the pagan Romans and Greeks could only conceive of Kings as ones who could approach divinity status (perhaps this is why the Greeks rejected the resurrection of the dead, Acts 17:31, 32). Paul states the existence of a spiritual body, just as much of a body as our natural bodies, but different in glory. He also illustrates varying degrees of glory which implies various levels of glorification given to the saints (compare Luke 19:12-19).

Jesus' Resurrection Body Not of Flesh

Many fall into error by believing that Jesus rose from the dead in his body of flesh, not discerning Paul's words regarding the necessity of having a spiritual body to gain immortality (1 Cor. 15:48-50, 53). In verse 39 Paul implies that as birds, land animals, and fish all have bodies adapted to the element in which they live, so likewise the spiritual body must be adapted to the spiritual realm. Paul clearly states that the resurrection of the dead (the first resurrection) requires the putting off (not the transforming of) the fleshly body and putting on the spiritual body. He says that Christ was made a life-giving spirit in verse 45. The primary proof offered for the fleshly resurrection of Christ is his appearance to Thomas in his crucified body after his resurrection.

Jesus allayed the disciple's fears of seeing a spirit, or ghost, by identifying himself as not being one. The key to understanding the nature of Jesus at that moment was in the comment "a spirit hath not flesh and bone as ye see me have" (Luke 24:39).

The scriptures use blood as a symbol of life. Jesus gave his life for the world; the crucified flesh of Christ did not have the life that was already given for the ransom. The Bible says that the life is in the blood (Gen. 8:4, Lev. 11,13-14, Deut. 12:23). The term "flesh and blood" is always used in scripture to describe living natural man (Matt. 16:17, Gal. 1:16, Eph. 6:12). The only other time "flesh and bone" is used (Eph. 5:3) the phrase is omitted by pre-sixth century manuscripts. Given these facts Jesus was probably telling us that the body in which he had appeared is not the living body of Jesus but only used as graphic evidence of his resurrection for Thomas.

The Resurrection of the Saints

The resurrection of the saints happens soon after the return of the Lord: "for the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16-17). The three events described—the Lord's return, the raising of the sleeping saints, and the raising of the living saints—from their scriptural context, could all happen in short order or could be stretched out over years. The common misconception of the rapture assumes the former, but other scriptures indicate a period of time occurring between the raising of the sleeping and living saints. For

instance some argued with Paul that the resurrection was past (2 Tim. 2:18) but how could they have attempted this claim if it was commonly held that all would be instantaneously "raptured" at the event?

The spiritual resurrection is the doorway to a face-to-face relationship with the Father and the Bridegroom. If our hearts burn for this experience then we must burn off the dross of the heart as John says in 1 John 3:2, 3: "Beloved now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"—Matthew 5:8.