

## RESURRECTION

Daniel 2:2, 2 Corinthians 4:14

By Raymond White

All religions offer some promise or hope of an afterlife. After all, that is the point of religion. In that respect, Christianity is no different. We promise an afterlife.

But what makes Christianity different from all other religions is its unique notion of resurrection; or more specifically, the resurrection of the one man, Jesus Christ which is then applied to all of us. It makes sense that if one man can do it then the rest of us can too. That resurrection is possible for one man makes it possible for every man.

This is no trivial idea. It is not merely afterlife that Christianity promises, but a *bodily* afterlife, similar to this life. No other religion is bold enough to offer such a thing.

And the reason that Christianity is so bold is not because we have braver, more outrageous philosophers, but because of a single event: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not a theology or a philosophy that grips us, although there is that, but that something *happened* in real history: a dead man got up, resurrecting himself by his own divine power. The belief that it actually happened, is what Christianity is.

The New Testament is all about that. Everything else — atonement, forgiveness, grace, right living, whatever — is born from the single idea of Christ's resurrection. If that did not happen, then nothing else matters, it is all a lie.

Did the idea of resurrection just suddenly arrive at the New Testament from nowhere? Actually, no. Resurrection is an ancient Jewish idea with its roots in the Old Testament. So that is where we should begin, at the oldest texts, then move forward to Christ and the Christianity that followed.

### [1] OLD TESTAMENT

*Job 14:7 For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease.*

Is this anticipating a resurrection, or is it just poetic optimism? As for instance: although nations die, they are sometimes reborn from the ashes of the old, like the mythical Phoenix bird that rose from its own ashes.

Jesus used this idea to describe his own resurrection: **John 12:24** ... *Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.* So this cyclic notion of death followed by new life is, at the very least, a Hebrew foundation to the Christian idea of resurrection.

*Job 19:25 For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. :26 And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. :27 Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.*

Some have suggested this means that Job will see God in the flesh as he is dying. That makes no sense whatever because the time that he will see God in the flesh is *at the latter day*. Job is clearly anticipating a resurrection of his own body.

*Jeremiah 8:1* At that time, saith the LORD, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of his princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves.

Is this intended to be taken literally? Is this a resurrection verse or just an overly poetic way to describe the eventual return of the nation of Judah? It seems to carry both meanings, as though the prophet was being poetical (after all, the fate of the nation was Jeremiah's concern) but God, who inspired the prophet's words, had in mind the far more literal meaning of an actual resurrection.

*Ezekiel 37:3* And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. :5 Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live.

Is this a resurrection text or not? Does this describe the resurrection of individual dead people back to life, or is it a parable describing the restoration of the nation of Israel?

One thing is certain: it describes the *longing* that people have *for* a resurrection, else there would be no point to the parable. If there is no thought of an actual bodily resurrection, then using that image to describe the fate of the nation would make no sense. Ezekiel sees bones. They're dead and that's bad. God brings them back to life and that's good. So whether allegorical or not, resurrection is good. It is what we want, and what we hope that God has in store for us.

*Daniel 2:2* And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Here is the first verse in the Old Testament that cannot be interpreted allegorically. It can only be literal. This is the resurrection he is speaking of. Perhaps Daniel read Job and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and took those verses to their literal extremes. But that's okay. It appears that God meant him to.

*Hosea 13:14* I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.

Hosea, like Daniel, takes the earlier verses literally and offers a promise of a literal bodily resurrection. God will destroy death. Surely that means physical death.

## [2] NEW TESTAMENT — JESUS CHRIST

When Jesus arrived, it is clear that some Jews — Pharisees in particular — had a clear idea of resurrection, clear enough to argue about it with their less believing fellow Jews, the Sadducees, who did not believe in a resurrection.

***Luke 20:27** Then came to him [Jesus] certain of the Sadducees, which deny that there is any resurrection; and they asked him, **:28** Saying, Master, [they make their argument] ... **:33** Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? For seven had her to wife.*

These non-resurrection-believers understood the notion of resurrection well enough to lampoon it. They were ridiculing the idea, presenting a case that exposed its ludicrousness. Jesus sidestepped their logical assault and demonstrated in a back-handed sort of way that there is indeed a resurrection. Back-handed in that his argument proved that there is an afterlife which, I supposed, was sufficient evidence of a resurrection if you equated the two, which, the Sadducees did; they believed neither. See the next verse.

But my point is that resurrection was already a well established Jewish notion by the time Jesus arrived, and therefore our Christian understanding of Job, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Hosea must be correct because that's how the Jews understood those verses, even the Jews who didn't believe it.

***Acts 23:7** And when he [Paul] had said so, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. **:8** For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.*

Just to reiterate that Jews believed resurrection — some Jews anyway. This also confirms that in the Jewish mind, afterlife and resurrection were the same thing, there was no other afterlife. If there is an afterlife it is resurrection that provided that afterlife which is why Jesus' argument prevailed with the Sadducees — ***Luke 20:37** Now the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. **:38** For he is not the God of the dead, but of the living ...* Jesus' logic was not challenged because to the Sadducees, proving that there was afterlife (God of the living) also proved resurrection because there was no other.

By the way, soul-sleep Christians like Jehovah's Witnesses for example could use this argument to make their case. I am not a soul-sleep Christian, but let's be fair with the text.

Now, Jesus. He of course believed in resurrection. He certainly believed in his own resurrection and said so. From their time in Caesarea Philippi on, his death and resurrection occupied his full attention.

***Matthew 16:21** From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.*

***Matthew 17:9** And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.*

**Matthew 17:22** ... *Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: :23 And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.*

**Matthew 20:18** *Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death. :19 And shall deliver him to the gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.*

**Matthew 26:31** *Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. :32 But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.*

There is absolutely no doubt what Jesus believed concerning the resurrection: it was literal and it was personal. In fact, no man believed the resurrection more than he. Not only did he believe it, he *was* it — **John 11:25** ... *I am the resurrection, and the life.*

So if you have any lingering notion that the resurrection is maybe only figurative, get over it. Yes it's complicated. Yes it's even weird. But whatever it is, it is literal.

To show how literal, Jesus went to extra ordinary lengths to show his disciples just how real, how physical he was.

**Luke 24:39** *Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.*

Jesus' point was not just that he was alive, but that that he was *physically* alive, *as himself*. He was not a spirit, not a ghost. He was the same *man* who had died on a cross thus confirming to us not just an afterlife but what *kind* of an afterlife. It is physical, just as physical as our current mortal life.

**John 21:13** *Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise.*

To really drive home the point that he is a physical, corporal being, *he ate!* And please note that he was not a vegan — he ate fish.

Decades ago, I said all this to a non-believing friend who quipped back, “You Mormons have given new meaning to the expression, ‘Holy Shit!’” I don't apologize for my bluntness; after all, they are not my words, they are someone else's, and I put them in quotes. But my friend made a valid point. I mean, think it through. It's the kind of argument that the Sadducees might have made had they thought of it. And that, I think, gives us a more accurate view of what the resurrection really is than all the spiritual theology we can muster.

I think I still need to defend my bluntness. I will do it by pointing out to you that Paul was just a blunt.

*Philippians 3:8 ... I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung ...*

The polite word “dung” is not the best translation of Paul’s Greek word skubalon (σκύβαλον). The word is vulgar, not polite. But the vulgar translation in English is that pesky “S” word (I won’t repeat it) which offends Christian ears, and so we best leave it as dung. After all, we want to talk more holy than God, right? And I certainly won’t quote **2 Kings 18:27**. I’ll leave that with you as an assignment. You’re brave, you can read it yourself, and then ask yourself, how would *you* translate those ugly words spoken by God in rage?

Back to the subject.

But Jesus’ point is undeniable. By eating, he proved that he was physical.

Now, briefly, and more annoyingly, if he had a digestive tract — (which he had, unless you want to believe as some Gnostics believed, that it was all figurative including the crucifixion, in which case there was no resurrection and it’s all a fairy tale) — then what other appendages did his resurrected body have that were recovered from (or copied from) his mortal body? My answer: *all* of them. He was a fully functioning human *male*. And that drags us, kicking and screaming, to a scary but obvious question: what use might a resurrected male have for a penis? To answer that, read my other article about marriage and sex in heaven. Enjoy. Or agonize, whichever you prefer. But the Bible says what it says, whether you like it or not.

### [3] NEW TESTAMENT — CHRISTIANITY

Now that we know what the Jews thought of resurrection and what Jesus thought of resurrection, it’s time to consider what Jesus’ disciples thought of resurrection.

This is important. In fact, there is nothing in the universe that is more important. Jesus’ resurrection was the message and the energy of the Christian movement. Their belief in that single event is what caused them to go to lions and crosses and fire stakes. It is our hope, our *only* hope, of a real afterlife because it is the only religion that provides anything like real evidence, a verifiable and falsifiable event of history. Words are cheap. But an empty tomb, now that’s evidence.

Here then is a whirlwind tour of some of the Bible’s most important resurrection verses. The focus begins with Jesus’ resurrection, but then spans out to include the resurrection of all human beings.

Now, a belligerent non-Christian might argue that it is ridiculous to suppose that the resurrection of a single person could effectively accomplish the resurrection of the whole human race. But I say that *that* is the ridiculous argument. It does in fact happen, and frequently, that the act of a single person does affect the whole human race. For instance, bacteria and antibiotics were discovered by one man: Louis Pasteur. And no one can deny that the discoveries of that one man have since benefited the entire human race.

Jesus rose from the dead, and promised that we will too. He showed us the way; indeed, he is the way.

Enough. Now the verses.

*Acts 2:24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.*

*Acts 24:15 ... there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.*

*1 Corinthians 15:4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures. :5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: :6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once ... :7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.*

*1 Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. [Affirms my point that one man really does affect everyone.]*

*2 Corinthians 4:14 Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.*

*Philippians 3:21 Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body...*

*1 Thessalonians 4:16 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:*

*1 John 3:2 ... we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

That's pretty much it. There are others but these are the lion's share. And what more could you possibly need or want? The Bible promises an afterlife, and more specifically a resurrection afterlife. And the Bible secures that promise to us with the fact of one resurrection already in the books; namely, the resurrection of one man, Jesus Christ. On that belief, we hang our eternity.