

# 16. RESURRECTIONS

## DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The hope of all mankind and the promise to the Christian is the resurrection from the dead. There are references to four resurrections in the Bible: 1) the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead and the pioneer of our salvation; 2) the resurrection of the saints at the return of Christ when the true believers shall become spirit-composed members of God's family; 3) the resurrection back to physical life of all who have ever died without having understood God's way, for their first opportunity for salvation; 4) the resurrection of all those who have refused to repent and have rejected God's way, to be consumed in the lake of fire (called the second death).

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The resurrection from the dead is the only real hope of man, whether he believes it or even knows about it. It gives him final, ultimate victory over death which is the common enemy of every human being (1 Cor. 15:26). Paul referred to the "hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago" (Titus 1:2). When Paul was brought before Felix, he admitted that "according to the way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law or written in the prophets, having a *hope* in God which these themselves accept, that *there will be a resurrection* of both the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:14-15).

The resurrection was the central theme of the apostles' message which they preached powerfully. It was often controversial. Paul was called a "babbler" by certain Greek philosophers "because he preached Jesus and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18); the resurrection from the dead was subjected to ridicule by some, and it intrigued others. "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, We will hear you again about this" (Acts 17:32).

And hear again they shall; not only those ancient Greeks, but every man, woman and child who ever drew breath on this earth. None who have ever died—in whatever place at whatever time—are forgotten by God. Numerous scriptures make plain that a resurrection from the dead is an integral part of God's plan for all mankind (Job 19:25-27; John 5:21-29; John 11:23-25, etc.).

Jesus Christ was the first to be resurrected from physical death to eternal life. He was in fact "designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). His resurrection is extremely important to the Christian because it proves the viability of God's plan. We have "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable" (1 Pet. 1:3); but "if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor. 15:14). Christ's resurrection demonstrates positively that God can and shall resurrect a person who has God's Spirit dwelling within him. It is the faith and belief that God shall resurrect the Christian as Christ was resurrected that encourages one to continue along the path of salvation. "For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His" (Rom. 6:5).

Jesus Christ is called the "firstfruits" of the dead, because He was the first of many who shall follow Him in the resurrection, but "*each in his own order.*" 1 Corinthians 15:20-26 explains further:

"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order: Christ the first fruits; then at His coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when He delivers the Kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

The scriptures record three resurrections for three different classifications of persons. The first is prophesied to occur at the return of Jesus Christ. A comparison of the pertinent verses indicates that this first resurrection shall include all saints that have lived and died from Adam's time until Christ's second coming, including those still alive when He comes (although technically, they shall be "changed" rather than resurrected—1 Cor. 15:51). This resurrection is from the nothingness of physical death to the incredible majesty of spiritual life as members of God's family. "Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ. and they shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6).

Another resurrection is prophesied for the multiple billions of human beings who have lived and died never having had a chance for salvation. This resurrection is from physical death to a second physical life during which a person shall be given God's Spirit and the knowledge of salvation. The truth of God shall be opened to their understanding at this time and their lives shall be lived according to the biblical precepts. Ezekiel 37:1-14 paints a breathtaking picture of this resurrection to physical life, "Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves" (verse 12). Though only Israel is discussed, this is because it shall be the example—the nation that shall show how God's plan works; thus, all nations and peoples of the earth are included in Ezekiel 37 by implication. This is confirmed in Revelation 20:11-12:

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it; from His presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done."

The scriptures record one final resurrection. It is mentioned in various passages (e.g. Dan. 12: 2-3; John. 5:21-29; etc.) but is explained most precisely in Revelation 20:14-15. Here John explains that the unrepentant—those who have had a chance for salvation but have adamantly rejected it—shall be resurrected to physical life and cast into the lake of fire where they shall be consumed. The death they suffer is called in Revelation 20 "the second death" (v. 14), which occurs only for those whose names are not found written in the book of life—that is, those who have not obtained salvation (v. 15). This final resurrection is in a sense a mercy killing for those to whom eternal life in their state of rebellion would eventually mean extreme agony and misery.

The first resurrection of saints to eternal life and the subsequent resurrection of the innumerable multitudes to physical life will be moments of unimaginable emotion when loved ones who thought they were separated forever—parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, friends and relatives—shall be suddenly reunited. To all of them it will be as though no time had passed, like awakening in the morning after a solid night's sleep without dreams; it will be the next instant of their consciousness from the instant of their death no matter how they might have died or how long ago it might have been.

Immediately it is to be expected that numerous questions about these awesome events will be raised. Paul asked and answered the most obvious one himself. "But some one will ask, How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" (1 Cor. 15:35). He then explains that, just as different animals have different types of bodies, so the body of the resurrection is different from all others. It is celestial, imperishable, glorious and spiritual.

"So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor does the perishable

inherit the imperishable. Lo! I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall 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 shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy 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. 15:42-57).

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