

The Certainty of the Resurrection

“I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead.”

—Acts 26:22,23

The assurance of a resurrection is one of the very prominent themes in the Bible, and thus it should be, else the promises of God would be of no effect. However, it is first necessary to fully discern the nature of death if one is to understand why there must be a resurrection of the dead. The Bible tells us that death is a condition of oblivion—non-existence. (Eccles. 9:5,6,10) When the

perfect man Adam sinned, he incurred the penalty for sin, which was death. (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12; 6:23) The condition of death was described by God in this way: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen. 3:19) There was no mention of an afterlife or of a “soul” not subject to death.

Adam was destined to go out of existence eternally except for the love and mercy of God which was expressed by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. His resurrection was a guarantee that God's plan of a resurrection for all would become a reality. The Apostle Paul in his sermon on Mars' Hill said that God "hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."—Acts 17:31

Jesus' Resurrection Necessary

It was vitally important in the plan of God that Jesus die as the ransom for Adam, but it was equally necessary that he be resurrected out from the condition of death. A dead Christ, or Messiah, would not be able to fulfill the wonderful promises of God's Word, such as contained in Isaiah 9:6,7: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end." The disciples expected this promise to be fulfilled at the time of our Lord's earthly ministry, and that is why they were so discouraged and despondent when Jesus died on the cross. They did not understand that this was part of the Heavenly Father's plan.

On the first day of the week, the third day after Jesus was crucified, he appeared to two of his disheartened disciples who were on their way to Emmaus. (Luke 24:1,21) They thought him to be a

stranger. As they conversed, he mildly rebuked them for not discerning this important part of the Lord's arrangement, saying: "Oh fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:25-27) During the subsequent forty days the disciples came to accept and believe the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead, but it was not until after Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon them that they fully understood the importance of the resurrection in God's plan of reconciliation. This was demonstrated by Peter's sermon recorded in Acts 2:14-36.

The word resurrection is not found in the Old Testament, but the doctrine is taught by many plain statements of Scripture. In Job 14:13-15 we read: "O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! ... Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands." The Prophet Isaiah wrote: "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead." (Isa. 26:19) The Prophet Hosea wrote: "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."—Hos. 13:14

Promise to Abraham

The absolute certainty of a resurrection was illustrated for us in an incident that demanded a resurrection in order for a divine promise to be meaningful. We are speaking of God's promise to Abraham recorded in Genesis 22:15-18. It will be remembered that God had promised Abraham a son who was to be born of Sarah. (Gen. 17:19) Abraham had waited many years for this promise to be fulfilled, for it was to be through this seed that all the other promises God had made to him were to be brought to pass. Yet the account tells us that when Isaac was a young man God asked Abraham to offer his son as a burnt offering. (Gen. 22:1,2) Abraham's faith in God's promises was such that he believed God would resurrect Isaac from the dead, if necessary, in order to fulfill them.

This confidence was demonstrated in Abraham's words to those left behind at the foot of the mount when he instructed the young men, "abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." (vs. 5) The Apostle Paul in Hebrews 11:17-19 confirms this thought: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." We note that in this picture God was represented in Abraham and Jesus was represented in Isaac. All of the promises of God to the world were centered in Jesus. It was necessary for Jesus to live

if he were to carry out these promises, by resurrecting him from the dead.

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. They endeavored to trap Jesus by inventing a preposterous situation that made one woman the wife of seven deceased husbands. The question to our Lord was, in the kingdom whose wife shall she be? Jesus answered, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." (Matt. 22:23-30) Jesus was simply pointing out that in the kingdom there would be no marriage, and therefore the situation invented by the Sadducees had no meaning. However, Jesus saw an opportunity to point out the error in the Sadducees' doctrine when he said, "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."—vss. 31,32; Exod. 3:6

The Sadducees knew that the patriarchs had been dead for centuries, and they also realized that Jesus knew this. They were forced to acknowledge that, if God was true and dependable, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would have to be brought back to life if they were to enjoy once again this promised relationship with God.

A Prophet Like Moses

In Deuteronomy 18:18,19 Moses repeated the words of God to him concerning the kingdom which will function under a new mediator and a new covenant

arrangement. “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and I will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.”

The Apostle Peter in Acts 3:21-26 applies this prophecy by Moses to the kingdom, calling it the “times of restitution of all things,” and stating that this wonderful time was spoken of by God through the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. Then he reminded his audience of the original prophecy spoken by Moses. This wonderful sermon of Peter’s was given on one of the porches of the Temple. Among those in the audience were the captain of the Temple and the Sadducees. When Peter concluded his sermon with this statement, “Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities,” the captain and the Sadducees were angry. They were angry because Peter claimed that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and that through him all who were in their graves would be resurrected in order to benefit from “the times of restitution.” The account continues: “And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”—Acts 4:1,2

Prophetic Features of the Law Covenant

We are told in the Scriptures that many features of the Law Covenant given to the nation of Israel prefigured future events. (I Cor. 10:11; Heb. 10:1)

We find that this is especially true of the twenty-third chapter of Leviticus, which was a part of the Law. In this chapter the Lord gave Moses instructions concerning the feasts which the nation was to observe. On the fourteenth of the first month they were to slay the Passover lamb, and on the fifteenth, they were to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was to last seven days. (Exod. 12:6; Lev. 23:5,6) The Israelites departed from Egypt "on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the morrow after the Passover." (Num. 33:3) After they came into their land and had a grain harvest, the Lord instructed Moses that they were to perform an additional rite. We read: "When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it." (Lev. 23:10,11) The "sabbath" here mentioned was the holy convocation that marked the first day of the feast of unleavened bread.

As part of the ritual, the priest would go out among the fields, select the grain that was ripe, gather a bundle and tie it into a sheaf. He would return and at the altar would wave the sheaf before the Lord as an offering of the firstfruits of the harvest. This act marked the beginning of the grain harvest, which was to last fifty days.—vss. 15,16

This feature of the feast was marvelously prophetic in the case of Jesus. It was incumbent upon Jesus to keep the details of the Law perfectly. The fourteenth of Nisan began at sunset, and sometime after midnight Jesus was arrested in the Garden of

Gethsemane and delivered to Caiaphas and then to the Romans. (Matt. 26:47-75; 27:1-26) The account in Mark states that he was crucified the third hour, approximately 9:00 a.m., still the fourteenth of Nisan. Jesus was on the cross until the ninth hour, which was approximately 3:00 p.m., and he died. (Mark 15:25-37) Thus, Jesus died on the same day, the 14th of Nisan according to Jewish reckoning, that Israel's Passover lambs were slain. Paul confirms this connection, saying, "Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us."—I Cor. 5:7, *New Living Translation*

Jesus' body was placed in a sepulcher before sundown on the fourteenth of Nisan. (Luke 23:53-55) The body lay in the sepulcher the entire next day, from sunset to sunset, which was the Sabbath, or fifteenth of Nisan. (vs. 56) Then very early in the morning—the first day of the week, or sixteenth of Nisan—the women came to the sepulcher and found that Jesus had been raised from the dead. (Luke 24:1-6; Mark 16:1-6) Thus Jesus became the "firstfruits" of the spiritual harvest and the "firstfruits of them that slept" in death—that is, the firstfruits of the resurrection. (I Cor. 15:20) We might think of the Jewish priest fulfilling the rite of waving the sheaf before the Lord early in the morning of that sixteenth day of Nisan, at the same time Jesus was fulfilling the Law by being resurrected from the dead.

Paul's Detailed Testimony

In the Apostle Paul's day, as in ours, there was skepticism concerning the resurrection of the dead. To address this he wrote the fifteenth chapter

of I Corinthians to show that the promised resurrection was an essential and integral part of God's plan of salvation. In the opening verses of the chapter Paul reminds the church at Corinth that the message he declared to them was the Gospel [Greek: a good message], and the first and foremost part of that message was the death and resurrection of Jesus. "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."—I Cor. 15:3,4

The apostle then presents the resurrection of Jesus as a fact because he was seen by the apostles and then by more than five hundred brethren, the greater number of whom were still alive at the time of Paul's writing. Last of all, the risen Lord was seen by Paul himself on the road to Damascus. (vss. 5-8) In verses 12-19 Paul demonstrates that the entire doctrine of the resurrection hinges on the resurrection of Jesus, and because he was raised all who are in their graves will also be raised from the dead. If Jesus had not been raised, then all—even his disciples and followers—would still be in their sins. For even though Jesus died to take Adam's place in death, it was necessary for him to live again in order that he might appear in the presence of God to present the value, or merit, of his ransom offering into the hands of divine justice.

The apostle concludes this part of his argument saying: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man [Adam] came death, by man [Jesus] came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in

Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive,”—that is, all will be given an opportunity, by means of obedience, to gain everlasting life. (vss. 20-22) The resurrection will be according to a set plan, Paul continues: “Each in his proper order, a first-fruit Christ, afterwards those who are the Christ’s in his presence.” (*vs. 23, Young’s Literal Translation*) Christ means anointed, and the apostle is saying that the anointed footstep followers of Jesus will be resurrected first. This is logical and reasonable since they will be associated with Jesus in the kingdom as kings and priests. (Matt. 19:28,29; Rev. 20:6) Then the subjects of the kingdom, all who are in their graves, will come forth from the tomb so that they might have an opportunity for life.—John 5:28,29, *YLT*

Fleshly Bodies and Spiritual Bodies

Then Paul says: “But some man will say, How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come? ... That which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in

incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; 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. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.”—I Cor. 15:35-44

In this statement by the Apostle Paul several illustrations are used, all of them pointing out the fact that in the resurrection there will be more than one kind of body, specifically, those with bodies of flesh and those with spirit bodies. The kind of body that each individual will have depends on what is sown in death. The “it” that the apostle speaks of in verse thirty-eight is the personality or character that the individual develops in this life. The vast majority of the human race will have a character that will be best suited for a life here on the earth. They, therefore, will have a body of flesh. In the kingdom the earth will be a glorious place in which to live, and those who attain to everlasting life here on the earth will praise God eternally for his favor and blessing.

However, during the present time, since Pentecost, some have learned of a higher provision for life made possible through the blood of Jesus. Responding to the call to walk in his footsteps, they are invited to transform their minds and affections from the things of the earth and set them on things of the spirit. (Rom. 12:1,2; Col. 3:1-3) These, during the course of their Christian walk, transform their minds by the study of God’s Word. Applying its principles in their lives to the point that they develop a spiritual mind, which is the character that they sow in death, these will receive a spirit body in the resurrection.

The apostle concludes his explanation of the resurrection by stating that those who are resurrected to a spirit nature are granted immortality. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." (I Cor. 15:53,54) The thought of the text is that when the work of the present age is completed and all of those who are to be of the divine nature have been resurrected, then the prophecy in Isaiah 25:6-10, which Paul quoted in part, will come to pass. This is a prophecy of the kingdom and the blessings that will flow to the human race when they are returned from the dust of the ground in the resurrection.

"He [God] will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." (Isa. 25:8,9) Let us, then, rejoice in the certainty of the resurrection, spoken of by the prophets, by Jesus, and by the faithful apostles. Praise be to God for this understanding! ■

*"He remembers His covenant forever,
the word which He commanded,
for a thousand generations."
Psalm 105:8, New King James Version*