

Newsletter July 2019

In this Newsletter we shall discuss the resurrection of the dead. This is a major theme of Scripture beginning back in the Old Testament (cf. Is.26:19; Job 14:13-15; Ps.16:9-11 etc) and continuing throughout the New Testament. The word for resurrection in the Greek is *anastasis*, which literally means to “stand up again.” In the context in which it is commonly used it means to stand up again after death of the body has taken place. When the body dies, the immortal soul lives on in an “unclothed” state. It is apparent that a soul, lacking any physical attributes, could not stand up; therefore, we know that resurrection refers specifically and only to the human body.

The Old Testament Scriptures clearly speak of two distinct groups of people whose bodies will be resurrected for two different purposes, as is found in book of Daniel:

“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” (Da. 12:2)

The Apostle Paul later affirmed this in his defense before Felix at Caesarea when he said,

“But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust” (Ac. 24:14,15).

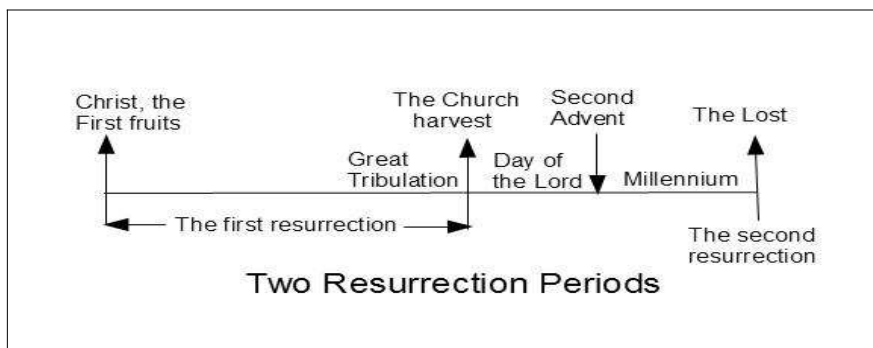
Resurrection is the central doctrine of the Christian faith, for without a future physical resurrection of the body the entire basis for saving faith in Christ becomes meaningless. Paul makes that fact quite clear in Chapter 15 of his first epistle to the Corinthians:

“Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1Co.15:12-19).

Indeed, Christians would be in a hopeless miserable state of self-deception if they only look to Christ for comforting thoughts that He can provide in this mortal life. When the moment of death finally comes, all our false hopes would evaporate in the light of reality. Indeed, that would be the doleful condition of all of us if Christ had not been raised from the dead:

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1Co.15:20-23).

The resurrection of the just and the unjust will be separated by a span of time, with the just being resurrected first; followed more than a thousand years later by the unjust, as is represented by the timeline in the following illustration.



The first resurrection encompasses an interval of time that is anchored by two very significant events. This interval began with the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the first fruits, inasmuch as He also brought many of the notable Old Testament Saints out of their graves to bodily ascend along with Him at that time:

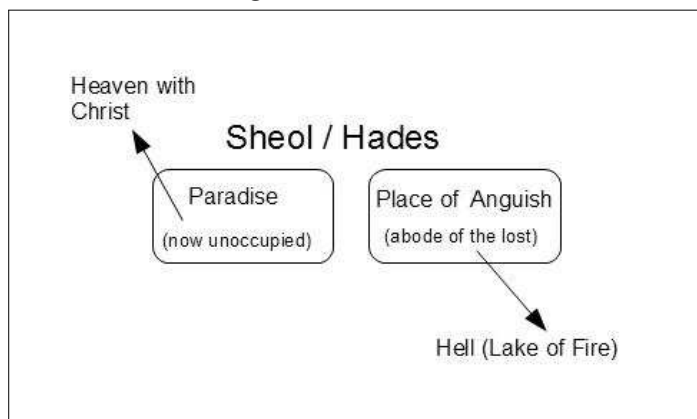
“And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many” (Mt.27:52,53).

For what is now nearly two millennia following that momentous event, the souls of those who die in Christ are escorted directly into his presence:

“We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done in his body*, according to that he hath done, whether *it be good or bad*” (2Co.5:8-10).

There, they immediately appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive rewards for those things that they have done for Him on earth while they were yet clothed in mortal flesh: It must be noted that following death of the body the soul will first enter in to an intermediate state. Jesus was resurrected body, soul, and spirit, and He also ascended to Heaven body, soul, and spirit – as the first fruits of those whose bodies sleep in the earth. However, those of us who die within the interval between his ascension and the physical ascension of his own in the Rapture, must first subsist in a disembodied state inasmuch as our bodies will still rest in their graves on earth.

When men and women in Old Testament times died, their bodies went into the grave and their souls went into an unseen place called *Sheol* in the Hebrew tongue (*Hades* in the Greek). It is the unseen world where the souls of the dead live on in one of two specific locations, Those locations are represented in a very simplistic graphic form in the following illustration:



Sheol, or Hades, was not intended to be a place to incarcerate the reprobate soul for eternity nor was it intended to be a purgatory for saints to gain entry into heaven through their penitential suffering or the works of others, as Romanists falsely assert. It was but a temporary place to hold the souls of the dead prior to the recombining of their souls with a resurrected body, which they would receive in the last days. It must be clearly understood that all souls in Sheol, although separated from their mortal bodies, will nevertheless be fully awake and aware of their surroundings and more significantly their present and

future circumstances.

Sheol is divided into two far removed areas or “compartments;” the first is a very pleasant place known as *paradeisos* in the Greek, which is translated three places in the English New Testament as “paradise.” Paradise is properly defined as a pleasant and beautiful parkland for the soul – a spiritual Eden, a place of great happiness and comfort where no pain or despair can exist. It was reserved for the souls of Old Covenant saints who had sought to do God’s will under the law. There, they could contemplate the even greater joys of eternal life in resurrected bodies in Heaven itself. The second area in Sheol is a doleful place of extreme anguish reserved for the souls of the reprobate, wherein they must contemplate their future torment in Hell. It will be noted that both Sheol and Hades are often translated as “Hell” in Holy Scripture, and the place of anguish has much of the attributes of hell. In that sense, this fearful compartment within Sheol/Hades may be thought of as the “threshold of Hell.”

A vast gulf separates these two compartments so that there can be no direct correspondence between the two. It would appear, however, that souls in the place of torment have some means of insight into the existence of paradise, which only further increases their anguish. Jesus evidently spoke of this perception when He told of two men who had died and as their spirits departed, their souls had entered into Sheol. One, a very proud rich man commonly referred to as Dives, was led by his fallen spirit into the place of terrible anguish. The second, a crippled, destitute beggar, named Lazarus, who had once lay despised and neglected at Dives’ gate, had been ushered into paradise (i.e. Abraham’s bosom; cf. Lu. 16:22).

Dives, being greatly tormented by his condition, saw Abraham afar off in paradise, and he also saw Lazarus being comforted in his loving embrace.

“And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame” (Lu.16:24).

The words “eyes,” “finger,” and “tongue” found in this text are somewhat problematic, inasmuch as souls in Sheol do not possess a physical body. This is but a form of anthropomorphism wherein physical attributes are being attributed to non-physical souls. Likewise, the word “flame” in this verse is *phlox* in the Greek, which can literally mean a flame, or perhaps here it can be perceived as a flash of extreme heat that Dives may have sensed in prospect of the fiery torture he would ultimately receive in his resurrected body within the lake of fire.

“But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.” (Lu. 16:25,26).

Today, the souls of the reprobate who have not responded to Jesus’ offer of redemption continue to go into the place of anguish within Sheol/Hades. There they must abide in torment until a future day in which they will be resurrected in their mortal bodies to stand before the “great white throne” of Christ to receive their final sentence based upon their contemptible works.

However, the soul of the redeemed Christian, after separation from the body, immediately goes to be with Christ. Thus, the paradise that temporarily held the souls of Old Testament saints is now vacated (cf. Mt.27:52,53). Admittedly, it is difficult for us to understand an existence of living souls without bodies. The Apostle Paul had this to say, which hints of the awkward existence of redeemed saints within this temporary intermediate state:

“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Ro. 8:22,23).

For a short while, we must wait for the redemption of our physical bodies that will occur at the time of the Rapture. We find an example of souls living in this disembodied state as the fifth seal was broken in Revelation 6:9-11:

“And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.”

And again, we read of this difficulty regarding a “naked soul” in Paul’s second epistle to the Corinthians:

“For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life” (2Co. 5:2-4).

The bodies we occupy on earth are temporal, subject to death, and therefore cannot enter into Heaven. The bodies we shall receive when Christ returns to call us up to be with Him in Heaven will be immortal in composition and made perfectly suitable for Heaven.

The concluding event of the first resurrection will occur as the souls of the great multitude who are presently with Christ return to earth to occupy their resurrected bodies as they rise up from the grave (1Th. 4:14,16). The bodies of those saints who are yet alive in the flesh at that time will likewise be translated into immortal flesh (1Th.4:17). Both groups of saints will then be caught up together to meet with Christ in the air as the true and complete Church. This last event of the first resurrection period will also include all of those saints who will have died as martyrs during the future tribulation period.

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years” (Re. 20:6).

Following this Millennial Age, a second resurrection, the resurrection of the eternally lost, will take place. After Satan has been cast into the lake of fire (i.e. Hell), and the Kingdom has been purged of all evil, the unjustified of all the ages must stand before Christ to receive a verdict regarding their final state in eternity: All men are born in a lost state before the Holy Spirit enters into them. Following a spiritual rebirth from above,

many of the lost are no longer lost, but are redeemed and regenerated to take their place among the justified. There are, however, those that will remain in a lost state and remain perpetually unjustified because they have not been regenerated through a spiritual rebirth. It is important to understand that only the reprobate lost are being spoken of in the text below.

“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Re. 20: 12).

Here we see the great white throne with Jesus Christ sitting upon it. We know this is Jesus, “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (Jn.5:22). The fact that the “book of life is opened here leaves open the very slight possibility that some who find themselves here among the lost could actually be redeemed individuals. Perhaps they were godly men and women, both Jew and Gentile, who had faithfully served God, but did not have the opportunity to hear and receive the Gospel before their death. If so, they will be as brands snatched from the fire. Be all that as it may, the vast majority standing here will have stubbornly rejected the Gospel, and will not find their names written down in the book of life. The unsaved will be judged from still other books containing a complete record of their many sinful deeds committed while on earth.

A number of these may claim to be redeemed Christians and try pleading their case based upon their works. Jesus said concerning these, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Mt.7:22,23). Their own prideful works will have condemned them to the lake of fire in Hell.

“And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works” (Re.20:13).

Unlike those in Christ whose bodies will be translated into immortal flesh suitable for the permanency of eternity, no mention whatsoever is made regarding the bodies of the unsaved being translated in this way. We could infer from this portion of the text that the mortal bodies of the unsaved who have died and reside in the ground or remain in the sea will be restored to them so that they can stand before the great white throne. What a terrible thing to have to stand before Christ in corrupt mortal flesh and know that every sin that you have ever committed is visible to his eyes.

All who have ever said that they could stand before God by virtue of their own works will be given that opportunity, but as we see the record of their deeds will only be used to determine their final punishment since all of fallen men’s works are as filthy rags (cf. Is. 64:6).

We find, then, that even as the saved are to be rewarded for their deeds performed for Christ in this mortal life, the unsaved will be judged for every evil deed they have committed without fail; the greater the sin, the greater the punishment. The more they benefited from their evil deeds, the more they must suffer. Nevertheless, even the very best of the deeds of the unsaved will not prevent them from going into the place of eternal torment refereed to here as the “lake of fire.”

“And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Re. 20:14,15).

Even “...death and the grave were cast into the lake of fire.” Death and the grave, which had a hold over their mortal bodies, will be cast into the lake of fire along with the resurrected lost. Death first came about when Adam heeded the words of Satan and sinned against God. Death and the grave will no longer serve a purpose in the eternal ages that follow. All sin and rebellion of all men and women will either have been justified by the blood of Christ, or they will be forever cast away and eternally punished for their sins within the great inferno of the lake of fire. © Arthur J. Smith July 2019