

Resurrection

A very common belief amongst many people, and not just those of the Christian faith, is that they go to heaven after death. However, the Bible has no such doctrine; it contains no statement which tells us this happens.

When Paul was being tried by the chief priests and their council, he was speaking in his own defence and he declared to them:

Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged (Acts 23:6).

This was effective as it started an argument amongst his opponents because there were strong differences of opinion on the subject of resurrection (see verses 7–9). More importantly, it shows that Paul himself believed in the resurrection of the dead. We can find references and allusions to this in both Old and New Testaments, so let us start at the beginning to see what we can discover.

In the Old Testament

A long time ago, the patriarch Abraham was told by God:

Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you (Genesis 22:2).

Such was Abraham's faith and trust in God, he set about doing His bidding without any protest – he trusted that

God would raise his son Isaac from the dead, no matter what happened. As we are told in the New Testament commentary on the event:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense (Hebrews 11:17–19).

Although Old Testament references to resurrection are generally less explicit than in the New Testament, we do find them, and we see that this is not solely a New Testament teaching. For example:

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:25–27).

At that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:1–2).

Notice that the verse in Daniel refers to the dead as 'sleeping'. Death is only a temporary condition for the faithful, obedient believers in Christ who will be



‘awoken’ and granted immortality in the Kingdom of God, but the rejected will die again (see 1 Thessalonians 4:14–18, Matthew 13:36–43, Revelation 2:11).

Jesus’ Teaching

In John’s gospel, Jesus talked to Martha about her brother Lazarus, who had just died:

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:23–26).

Even now, God knows who are His, to whom He will grant eternal life through Jesus His Son. So, in prospect, any who truly believe in Jesus Christ in this life, will not perish but ‘sleep’, awaiting resurrection. In the same way, Jesus said this about how his Father related to the patriarchs, who by then had already been dead for a long time:

“I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” God is not God of the dead, but of the living (Matthew 22:32).

On one occasion when Jesus was preaching in the temple, he was confronted by the Jews about his healing on the Sabbath and saying that he was the Son of God. In his reply, Jesus said:

Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:25–29).

Resurrection from the dead is promised to all who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who love him and obey his commandments.

This is the will of Him who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son, and believes in him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:40).

Resurrection is a key word, a corner stone of Christian teaching and Jesus preached it, that whosoever believed in him would be raised to eternal life in the age to come. It is a matter of eternal life or death that we heed the words of Jesus and obey them as he asks us to.

Paul’s Time, and Ours

The doctrine of the resurrection from the dead was a radical teaching in

Paul's day, and not everyone he spoke to believed his words. When he preached to the Greek philosophers in Athens, they gave a mixed reaction.



"He has appointed a day, on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all, by raising him from the dead." And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, "We will hear you again on this matter" (Acts 17:31–32).

Surprisingly, in Corinth even the believers gave him trouble in this respect, because there were some who said there was no resurrection.

Now if Christ is preached that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up — if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have

fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable (1 Corinthians 15:12–19).

These inspired words of Paul should have allayed any such doubts about the resurrection; and he continued emphatically:

Now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (v20).

When a baptised believer rises from being immersed in water, that is a symbol of being raised to a new life in Christ. The intention is to leave the old selfish former life behind. The new life has with the promise of bodily resurrection when Jesus returns. As Paul wrote:

Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection (Romans 6:4–5).

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