

Resurrection in the New Testament

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Bible Version

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(Note: All underlining of Scripture quotations for emphasis has been added by the author.)

A note regarding the **Intermediate State**, where the dead dwell pending the final Resurrection and Judgment:

- The abode of the deceased saints was called:
Paradise (Lk 23:43; 2Cor 12:3), *Abraham's side* (Lk 16:22), or *Hades* (Ac 2:31; Rev 20:13).
- The abode of the wicked was *Hades* (Lk 16:23), or *Tartarus* (2Pet 2:4).
- Hades, as the generic realm of the dead, was equivalent to the Old Testament *Sheol* (Ac 2:27; Ps 16:10).

Jesus has opened heaven for us

1. Under the Old Covenant, heaven was out-of-bounds, for Jesus had not yet died.
The saints who died went instead to Hades-Paradise (Lk 16:22; 20:37-38; 23:43).
To all intents they were still separated from God and in exile.
In Revelation, John saw the SOULS of the martyrs "under the altar" (Rev 6:9; 20:4).
These martyrs were in Paradise, enjoying their "first resurrection" (Rev 20:5).
They were awaiting their vindication and release and final embodiment (Rev 6:10-11; 20:6).¹
2. According to Hebrews 11:
 - Old Testament saints like Abraham ultimately looked for a heavenly city and inheritance (11:10, 16).
 - They anticipated entry into heaven via a "better resurrection" — one far better than mere physical resuscitation (11:35, Greek text).
 - Consider Hebrews 11:39-40:
³⁹ *And all these [OT saints], though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,*
⁴⁰ *since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*

None of the Old Testament saints received the promised heavenly inheritance.
Only together with New Covenant believers would they receive it.
Indeed, access to God, both in this life and the next, is our great privilege under the New Covenant.
For Jesus has dealt with our sins and "in him" we are holy and righteous and acceptable to God (Rom 4:5; 2Cor 5:21; Php 3:9).

¹ These martyrs are in Paradise as disembodied spirits (or "souls") awaiting their final embodiment (cf. Mt 10:28). They are said to be beneath the altar because that was the place where the blood of the sacrificial victims was poured out (Ex 29:12; Lev 4:7; 8:15). For an explanation as to who these martyrs are, see the article on this website: *Resurrection represents the end of Man's exile*.

Nature of the Resurrection

Main Point: Resurrection entailed the release of souls from Hades, not the raising of bodies from graves.

1. Jesus went to Hades-Paradise when he died (Lk 23:43).
He conquered death and rose again; he broke the powerful grip of Hades (Ac 2:31).
In Revelation 1:18 Jesus declares that, having conquered death, he holds the “keys” of Death and Hades — with the implication that he is about to unlock these realms.
And indeed, the nature of the Resurrection is clearly shown in Revelation 20:11-15.
There we see Death and Hades releasing their inmates to face final judgment.²
2. In Revelation 20, those released from Death and Hades are judged before God’s heavenly throne (20:11).
The lost receive their final reward: the lake of fire (20:15).
The saved are admitted into the heavenly city, New Jerusalem, God’s abode (Rev 21:7).³
Note that this, the Judgment of the Dead, does not take place on earth.
It is, however, concurrent with the Judgment of the Living — the judgment of individuals and nations that is the main theme of the book of Revelation. See Revelation 11:18.
3. The new bodies that the saints were to receive in the Resurrection were not of flesh and blood (1Cor 15:50).
Rather, they were to be like Christ’s present, glorified body which he received in his ascension — a spiritual body suited to the heavenly realm (Php 3:21).⁴
The order is Natural body → Spiritual body (1Cor 15:44-49).

When to occur

1. As noted above, access to God, both in this life and the next, is our great privilege under the New Covenant.
2. According to Isaiah 25:7-8, God would someday bless the nations by abolishing death.
This would happen when God begins to reign on Mount Zion amidst his people (Isa 24:23).
In other words, death would be abolished when the kingdom of God comes.⁵
Paul cites Isaiah’s prophecy in his well-known resurrection discourse — see 1 Corinthians 15:54.⁶
3. Daniel, in 12:2, gives us perhaps the clearest Old Testament anticipation of the Resurrection.
Chapters 11 – 12 deal with what would happen to Israel in the “latter days” (cf. Dan 10:14).
It’s in this context that Daniel mentions both the Tribulation and the Resurrection (12:1-2).
As to the timing, Daniel 12:7 declares:
“... all these [things] shall be accomplished when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered.” (Literal translation, from the Hebrew.)

² Rather than being one and the same, *Hades* and *Death* in Revelation may refer to the respective abodes of the saved and the lost. In support, note that Jesus holds “the keys of Death and of Hades” (Rev 1:18, Greek text) — keys (plural) of the separate realms. Then later, Death and Hades give up the dead who are “in them”, and both are cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:13-14).

³ This resurrection and final embodiment in heaven represents a “second resurrection” for the martyrs and saints since it follows their “first resurrection” into Hades-Paradise (cf. Rev 20:5). In contrast, the lot of the lost is a “second death” — the death beyond death — in the lake of fire (Rev 20:14-15).

⁴ See Appendix 1, below.

⁵ Jesus has fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy of the messianic banquet: he has brought the “wine” of God’s kingdom (Isa 25:6; Jn 2:1-11), and he invites people to participate in the feast via the gospel (Lk 13:28-30; 14:15-24).

⁶ Ciampa and Rosner note that: “Isaiah 25:8 is cited in rabbinic literature as a divine promise that death would be no more in the age to come.” (“Age to come”, in Jewish thought, denotes the future messianic age and kingdom.)

See Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner. Section on 1 Corinthians 15:54. In: G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, editors, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 747.

Paul’s application of Isaiah 25:8 to the Resurrection shows that he supports this rabbinic tradition.

Daniel clearly connects the Tribulation and the Resurrection with the destruction of his own nation. (Israel's demise is further mentioned in Daniel 9:26b, which clearly refers to the events of AD 70.)

4. Paul viewed the resurrection as imminent in his day (1 Corinthians 15:51b):
"We shall not all sleep ..."
A time was coming soon when believers would not have to "sleep" in Hades-Paradise pending the final Resurrection.
5. Peter viewed the Judgment as imminent in his day (1Pet 4:5, 7, 17).
6. Revelation 22 declares that the Resurrection and Judgment were to happen soon (22:6, 10-12).⁷

What Now?

With the Resurrection as a one-off event that took place in AD 70, Christians have been able to enter heaven directly at death. This is our hope and privilege to this day!

Paul wrote concerning this "new norm" for us under the New Covenant in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10:

- Our earthly body ("tent") will be replaced with an eternal heavenly body (5:1).
- In the meantime, we groan while we long to be clothed with this heavenly body (5:2-4).
- In our (present) bodies we are away from the Lord (5:6); we long to be away from this body and at home with him (5:8).
- Judgment follows immediately after death (2Cor 5:10; cf. Heb 9:27).

According to Paul:

Jesus has "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10).

And Jesus himself declared:

John 8:51: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."*

John 11:25-26 (my translation):

²⁵ *"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, shall live.*

²⁶ *And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."*

With the Resurrection now past, physical death for us is but a portal to eternal life in heaven.

⁷ John saw and wrote Revelation prior to the onset of the first Roman persecution of the Church — that under Nero — which broke out around November 64 AD and probably continued until his suicide in June 68 AD. (A period of about 3½ years or 42 months, as noted in Revelation 13:5.) Nero was the sixth king (Caesar) and the 666-man (Rev 13:18; 17:10).

Appendix 1: Jesus' resurrection body and ours

The fact that Jesus was raised physically does not mean that we will be.

To him alone was the promise given that his body would not see decay (Ps 16:10; Ac 2:27).

But our bodies do decay, and our constituent minerals are recycled.

Jesus was raised with his own body for evidential purposes (Lk 24:39; Jn 20:20, 27).

But he was further transformed when he ascended into heaven in the Shekinah Cloud.

Our new bodies will be like his present glorified body (Php 3:21), not like his post-resurrection physical body.

Paul declares that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1Cor 15:50).

Our physical bodies waste away (2Cor 4:16) and are "destroyed" (2Cor 5:1).

Yet, there may be some continuity of form with our present bodies to permit recognition of loved ones.

An important consideration here is the following:

The term "resurrection of the body" is not actually found in the Bible.

This erroneous phrase comes from the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in ... the resurrection of the body."

Or, as the earlier versions of the Creed have it: "I believe in ... the resurrection of the flesh."

But the correct, biblical terms are "resurrection of the dead", and "resurrection from the dead".

Denoting, respectively, *the resurrection of those who are dead*, and *resurrection from the realm of the dead*.⁸

The following is from Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*.

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988.

Excerpt from page 1199, concerning Jesus' post-Resurrection body:

It is sometimes assumed that our new bodies will be just like that of Jesus in the period immediately following his resurrection. His body apparently bore the physical marks of his crucifixion, and could be seen and touched (John 20:27). Although the Scripture does not explicitly say that Jesus ate, we draw that inference from Luke 24:28-31 and John 21:9-15. It should be borne in mind that there were more steps remaining in Jesus' exaltation. The ascension, involving a transition from this space-time universe to the spiritual realm of heaven, may well have produced yet another transformation. The change which will occur in our bodies at the resurrection (or, in the case of those still alive, at the second coming) occurred in two stages in his case. **Our resurrection body will be like Jesus' present body, not like that body he had between his resurrection and ascension.** We will not have those characteristics of Jesus' post-resurrection earthly body which appear inconsistent with the descriptions of our resurrection bodies (e.g., physical tangibility and the need to eat).

[Emphasis added. End of quote.]

⁸ In the ESV, the phrase "resurrection of the dead" is found in Paul's resurrection discourse (in 1 Corinthians 15:12-13, 21, 42) as well as in Matthew 22:31; Acts 17:32; 23:6; 24:21; Hebrews 6:2. Whereas "resurrection from the dead" is found in Luke 20:35; Acts 4:2; Romans 1:4; Philippians 3:11; 1 Peter 1:3.

The phrase Paul employs in Philippians 3:11 is particularly interesting: *eis tēn exanastasin tēn ek nekron*.

The prefix *ex* on *exanastasis* (Strong's G1815) serves to intensify its meaning: "a rising up completely out from / thoroughly removed from" the realm of the dead. Such was Paul's hope!

Appendix 2: The error of Hymenaeus

Paul's response to Hymenaeus in 2 Timothy 2:17-18 is interesting.

That Hymenaeus could even claim that the Resurrection had already taken place strongly suggests that Paul was himself teaching an imminent, invisible, and unverifiable resurrection. For, if Paul had been teaching that graves were to open and bodies visibly rise, Hymenaeus could never have claimed past fulfillment.

Hymenaeus' error was that he was "jumping the gun" when in fact the Resurrection was still several years away.

But what was it about Hymenaeus' teaching that elicited Paul's vigorous response?

How did it undermine people's faith (2:18)?

Was he teaching that resurrection merely relates to one's new birth — our being raised to new life along the lines Paul speaks of in Ephesians 2:5-6?

Or, was he promoting the notion of "corporate resurrection" along the lines intended by Ezekiel's Dry Bones Vision (Eze 37:1-14), which finds fulfillment in Israel's spiritual restoration under the New Covenant as the "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16)?

(Similar to the erroneous Corporate Body View of the Resurrection held by some preterists.)

Either view, by denying (future) individual bodily resurrection into heaven, would undermine one's hope of eternal life.