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THE PROMISED RESURRECTION

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“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and **I will raise them up at the last day.**” – *John 6:39-40*

Yes, it is the will of the Father that all who believe and exercise faith in Jesus Christ will have everlasting life by means of a resurrection from the dead! There is one exception where some would have a direct translation from earth to the heavenly realm (*1 Corinthians 15:51-52*), but for the vast majority, the means of survival after death is the promised resurrection.

All Christians believe in the hope of a resurrection, but there is a controversy as to where they will be resurrected. Some believe the resurrection will be to heavenly life; others believe that only 144,000 will be resurrected to the heavens, and the remaining billions will be resurrected to live again on the earth. But what did the Bible writers believe? Let’s take a look at the resurrection hope through the eyes of the Bible writers and see where, in fact, faithful mankind will be resurrected.

We know that many in the nation of Israel believed in a resurrection. In the last verse of the Bible book of Daniel, a promise is made to the prophet Daniel that he would fall asleep in death, rest for a little while, and then be resurrected “at the end of the days.”

“As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.”– *Daniel 12:13*

We also have the comments of Martha, the sister of Lazarus, showing that she fully expected her brother to be resurrected “on the last day.”

“Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”– *John 11:23-24*

However, not all Jews believed in a resurrection, as recorded in the book of Acts:

“When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)” – *Acts 23:7-8*

The Pharisees consisted of the scribes and the rabbis. They were extremely superstitious, and, like most Jews of that day, had little comprehension of spiritual things, though they did believe in the resurrection, in angels and in spirit. To the Pharisees, the resurrection was to life on earth “in the last day,” similar to the resurrections performed by Elijah and Elisha:

“Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the Lord, “Lord my God, let this boy’s life return to him!” The Lord heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, “Look, your son is alive!” Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth.” – *1 Kings 17:21-24*

“When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the Lord. Then he got on the bed and lay on the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out on him, the boy’s body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out on him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.” – *2 Kings 4:32-35*

The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection. They comprised the priesthood and the wealthy class. They were not at all spiritual minded men; they were fleshly in their reasoning and their beliefs and they had no comprehension of heavenly or spiritual things. They strongly promoted religious ritual and dogma, even when those rituals and dogma often failed to honor God. (*Matthew 15:9*) And as their reign continued, they were determined to doggedly hold on to their superior position over the peoples.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees were more like political parties than religious sects. The Sadducees strongly disagreed with the Pharisees and considered the belief in spiritual matters as absurd, and the earthly resurrection as foolishness. Though they both joined together in seeking the death of Jesus, the Sadducees were the most aggressive. And they were the foremost ones who sought to entrap him.

On one occasion, they sought to demonstrate the foolishness of an earthly resurrection to the Pharisees and all the people who were present by offering a convoluted story of the resurrection according to the way the Pharisees taught it. The account reports:

“Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. “Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. The second and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. Finally, the woman died too. Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”” – *Luke 20:27-33*

Jesus knew, and so did the people, that these Sadducees were not sincere in asking this question because it was not likely that such a case would really occur; and besides, this practice of the brothers of a dead man seeking to beget children for him was practically a dead letter at this time among the Jews. Nevertheless, Jesus condescended to reply to their mischievous question.

“Jesus replied, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; **for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection.**” *Luke 20:34-36*

Clearly, Jesus explained that the resurrection was not a returning to life on earth, but a restoration to life in heaven – as angels, as children of God. He assured the Sadducees that the resurrection was real by directing them to the words of Moses:

“But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ He is not the God of the dead, **but of the living**, for to him all are alive.”
– *Luke 20:37-38*

Here, Jesus explained that although Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had died, to God, they were alive. They had a resurrection guarantee! And as part of the resurrection, they will be as angels in heaven, not as men on earth. Jesus made this same point in an earlier conversation about an army officer who demonstrated tremendous faith in Jesus. He said:

“I say to you that many will come **from the east and the west**, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob **in the kingdom of heaven.**” – *Matthew 8:11*

But what about the resurrection of Lazarus. Was he not resurrected to the earth? Does that not prove that some would be resurrected to everlasting life on earth? Actually, no, it does not. The resurrection of Lazarus was not the type of resurrection Jesus promised his followers. The resurrection of Lazarus had a particular purpose.

“When he heard this, Jesus said, “**This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.**” – *John 11:4*

Lazarus’ resurrection was to demonstrate the **power** of God, to show that the Son of God had the authority to bring life back into a body. We also know Lazarus’ death was not the promised resurrection because Lazarus eventually died again, likely of the same illness that took his life the first time. It was similar with the resurrections performed by Elisha and Elijah. Their resurrections were **not** to everlasting life, for each of them eventually died. Whereas the resurrection promised by God is to everlasting life to the heavenly realm, like the resurrection of Jesus:

“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him **through baptism into death** in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, **we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.** For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”
– *Romans 6:3-6*

We also know that these temporary resurrections are not the resurrections of promise because Jesus was the first to undergo the resurrection of promise:

“That the Messiah would suffer and, **as the first** to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.” – *Acts 26:23*

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the **firstfruits** of those who have fallen asleep.” – *1 Corinthians 15:20*

“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.” – *John 3:13*

So, the resurrection of Lazarus, and those performed by the prophets of old were powerful demonstrations of divine power, but they were not the promised resurrection.

Still, questions remain about the resurrection of promise. For example, Paul wrote:

“But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? **With what kind of body** will they come?” – *1 Corinthians 15:35*

Early Christians had some confusion about what the resurrected bodies would be like since all they could imagine is the fleshly body of man. So Paul explained that there are several types of bodies depending on the need. Seeds have bodies suitable for its needs; mammals have bodies suitable for their needs; birds and fish have bodies suitable for their needs. There are earthly bodies (planets) and heavenly bodies (sun, moon, stars) all suitable for their needs. (*1 Corinthians 15:36-41*) And then there is the spiritual body:

“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised 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 natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. **If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.**” – *1 Corinthians 15:42-44*

Yes, those who gain the resurrection of promise will have spiritual bodies, like the angels. He also explained the development of earthly man, and the stages he must pass through:

“So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and **after that the spiritual**. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And **just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.**” – *1 Corinthians 15:45-49*

So we can see that spiritual life in heaven is the nature progress of man!

Another question might be, who will be among those resurrected? Jesus answered:

“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when **all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come **out**—**those who have done what is good** will rise to live, and **those who have done what is evil** will rise to be condemned.”**
- *John 5:28-29*

And the Apostle Paul said:

“And I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that **there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.”** – *Acts 24:15*

So it appears that **all** who have died will be resurrected – the righteous and the unrighteous, even those who ‘practiced vile things.’ But not all would gain the promised everlasting life. Some would receive a resurrected of judgment.

How are we to understand the resurrection of judgment? We can only speculate, but we have some ideas based on what we know about the Father’s mercy and justice.

We know that all those who have died are said to be sleeping. (*1 Corinthians 11:30*) They have not yet been judged and they have not yet been destroyed. True justice require a fair hearing and an adjudication. We might liken this to a person who was caught stealing on camera with several eye witnesses and the contraband in hand. In spite of all this damning evidence, justice requires a trial and an adjudication before that person can be sentenced for the crime. And he is entitled to an attorney or advocate to plead on his behalf.

So can we assume it might be similar with the resurrection. At that time, ‘in the last day,’ all mankind must show up for an adjudication of whether they are to be given everlasting life or everlasting destruction. How the actual process of resurrection occurs is a mystery to mankind. However, we imagine it must involve a reuniting of the non-physical aspects of the human being – his personality, his memories, his identity, etc.

It seems that a resurrected one would likely be unconscious, and perhaps his angel will plead on his behalf in the manner of an attorney. (*Romans 8:26*) Those who died in union with Christ are given the resurrection to life. For the others, perhaps there are extenuating circumstances. Maybe, in spite of their behavior, they showed respectful honor to those who came in the Father’s name:

“Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person **will certainly not lose their reward.”** – *Matthew 10:40-42*

And at the end of the day, all whom mercy can save will be given a heavenly body, similar to angels, and returned to consciousness. But if not, his life will be extinguished and true and unquestioned justice will be served.

This may, or may not, be the way the resurrection is carried out, but it is a possible way to understand it. Mankind will have to await a further revelation from the Father should He wish us to know this matter in detail. But however it is done, we are certain it will be in harmony with the Father's justice, wisdom, mercy and love. Nevertheless, we can avoid an adverse outcome by making sure we are a part of the resurrection to life by accepting our sonship in union with Christ, practicing righteousness, and choosing to do the divine will to the best of our ability.

It is never too late to turn to the Father and chose the divine will. We remember the account of the evil-doer who was impaled alongside Jesus. This was his last day on earth, yet in this moment, his destiny changed:

“One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other criminal rebuked him. **“Don't you fear God,”** he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, **for we are getting what our deeds deserve.** But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”” – *Luke 23:39-42*

The second evildoer had a ‘fear of God.’ He recognized and admitted the seriousness of his error. He exercised faith in Jesus and his humility was well received; it was counted to him as righteousness.

“Jesus answered him, **“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”**” – *Luke 23:39-43*

This repentant evildoer was promised a resurrection to Paradise. So the question is, where is Paradise? Many believe this is a reference to a regenerated earth into a beautiful garden like the one in which Adam and Eve were privileged to dwell. That place came to be known as the Garden of Eden. But a review of the scriptures reveals that the Garden of Eden was never known as a paradise. There is a specific Hebrew word for “Paradise” and it was not used in reference to the Garden of Eden.

However, the Bible does refer to a place called “Paradise” in three specific instances – the one referenced above at *Luke 23:42*, and:

- As a heavenly place where the Apostle Paul apparently visited:

“And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— **was caught up to paradise** and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.” – *2 Corinthians 12:3-4*

- And as the heavenly place of God:

“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in **the paradise of God.**”
– *Revelation 2:7*

Each of these references identify paradise as a place located somewhere **other than earth**. While the earth has the potential to be truly beautiful, that would not be the equivalent of a true Paradise. We are told:

“However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived”— the things God has prepared for those who love him.” – *1 Corinthians 2:9*

Thus we are assured that the Paradise of God’s making would far surpass every idea we currently have of what Paradise could be. It is otherworldly! This scripture also implies that we will be able to experience heaven through our senses – our eyes and our ears. So it should not be surprising that there could be something akin to physical beauty in the heavens.

The shortsightedness of the resurrection of promise arises when we assume that the heavens are nothing more than an ethereal place where spirits float about, when, in fact, it is a glorious world where life continues on a higher plane with untold grandeur and beauty. It is referred to as ‘truly life’ (*1 Timothy 6:19*) with heavenly residences (*John 14:2*), crystal clear waters of life, and plants and fruit-bearing trees. (*Revelation 2:7; 22:1-2*) There is music and singing (*Revelation 14:3*) and myriads of angels and unique companions who will all praise the Father with us. (*Revelation 5:11*) To learn more of what the Bible reveals about the heavens, see the series of articles, **The Glorious Heavenly Hope**.

In all of our research, we can find no reference in the entire Christian writings that would lead us to conclude that mankind would be resurrected to any place other than heaven. No, the hope for earthly resurrection is not a Biblical teaching. We expect that all who have ever lived who gain the resurrection of promise will be in the heavenly kingdom, including Daniel, Lazarus, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and those ‘from eastern and western parts.’ (*Matthew 8:11*) Yes, as Jesus said:

“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and **I will raise them up at the last day.**” – *John 6:39-40*

Come Lord Jesus, come!

“Elaia Luchnia”