

# Old Testament Promises Of the Resurrection

Now and then you'll hear so-called scholars scoff at the resurrection on the basis that the Jews didn't believe in it, that it was a notion dreamed up later by Christians to attract followers.

While it is true that the word "resurrection" is not found in the pages of the Old Testament, the concept most certainly is. Many Jews, such as the Pharisees, firmly believed in the resurrection (Acts 23:8). And with good reason!

In fact, Jesus used the Old Testament to show the Sadducees the reality of the resurrection. The Sadducees were a pampered Jewish sect who accepted only the first five books of Moses, and who believed in neither the eternal nature of the spirit nor the resurrection.

In Matthew 22, some Sadducees came to Jesus with a hypothetical situation that, in their minds, presented a watertight argument against the resurrection: a woman who marries each of seven brothers in turn. They challenged, "In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had married her" (v. 28).

Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 'I am 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" (vv. 29-32).

Jesus pointed out that the Sadducees' concept of the resurrection was faulty in the first place. To think that people are stuck with their same spouses for all eternity, or experience any or all the various features of human life on earth—hunger, thirst, shivering, overheating, sexual desire, exhaustion, sickness, etc.—places unnecessary limits on God's power. Heaven will not be the place where we have our physical appetites fulfilled; it will be more like the place where we will not have physical appetites at all. I may have difficulty imagining such a situation—how could I enjoy a place that doesn't serve filet mignon?—but that is due to my lack of experiential vocabulary. It would be like trying to explain to concept of "blue" to a blind person, or the sound of the wind in the pine trees to a deaf person. In the resurrection, we will be changed (1 Cor. 15:35-53, 1 John 3:2). We will have body, but a different sort of body, a spiritual body. We will take upon ourselves an aspect which we have not yet known. What a glorious hope!

Jesus went on to quote Exodus 3:6 (a Scripture the Sadducees would accept). Now, you may be looking at it above, and wondering how that passage is such a masterstroke that proves the resurrection and stuns the Sadducees into complete silence (v. 33).

Well, in the Exodus context, God calls to Moses from the burning bush, and identifies Himself as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob." That encounter occurs hundreds of years after the deaths of those three men. And God is the God of living ones, not dead ones. Thus, Jesus draws a necessary conclusion that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still alive and well in God's presence, though their physical bodies had long since perished and decayed. Clearly, there is life

beyond the grave!

### **The Resurrection in Job**

Many scholars believe that Job is among the oldest Scriptures, set somewhere during the days of the patriarchs. Even Job, at such an early century, hinted at the resurrection. He used an illustration:

For there is hope for a tree,  
When it is cut down, that it will sprout again,  
And its shoots will not fail.  
Though its roots grow old in the ground  
And its stump dies in the dry soil,  
At the scent of water it will flourish  
And put forth sprigs like a plant...  
If a man dies, will he live again?  
All the days of my struggle I will wait  
Until my change comes.  
You will call, and I will answer You;  
You will long for the work of Your hands (Job 14:7-15).

Job's thoughts seem to meander between questioning and confidence. He worries about his future; but, if a chopped-down tree can come back to life, why not a human being whose body is buried in the earth? God will send forth the call, at the last trumpet, and all His creation will come forth to stand before Him!

Later, Job says something that expresses an even greater hope of eternal life with God.

As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,  
And at the last He will take His stand on the earth.  
Even after my skin is destroyed,  
Yet from my flesh I shall see God;  
Whom I myself shall behold,  
And whom my eyes will see and not another (Job 19:25-27).

Job is certain that, after the death of his body, and "at the last" when his Redeemer appears, He will see God face to face. This is our hope, too.

### **The Resurrection in the Law**

One of Moses' favorite phrases to describe the passing of the sons of Abraham is, "he was gathered to his people."

Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life; and he was gathered to his people (Gen. 25:8; see also Gen. 25:17, 49:29–33, Numb. 20:24–26, 27:13, 31:2, Deut. 32:5, Judges 2:10).

There's no way this refers to being buried in some sort of common tomb, sharing space with the moldy bones of one's descendants. In fact, Gen. 35:29 makes it clear that burial and being gathered to one's people are two different things happening at different times. Besides, Moses

never uses this phrase to describe the experience of non-Jews. Being gathered to one's people expresses a hope of reunion with other faithful Jews beyond this life, which is the same kind of reunion we Christians long for (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Interestingly, one of the best places to grasp the reality of life after death is on the earliest few pages of the Bible, in a brief description of the patriarch Enoch:

Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty five years. Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him (Gen. 5:22-24).

Apparently, Enoch never suffered physical death (Heb. 11:5, cf. Elijah in 2 Kings 2:10-11). And yet he did not continue upon the earth, but was translated to be with God. The great testimony of his experience is that there is something great that awaits us beyond our bodies, and that we receive it after walking faithfully with God