

Old Testament Promises Of the Resurrection

(part 2)

Last week's bulletin examined passages in the Law and Job that provided hints to life after death. Even though they do not use the word "resurrection," they are sufficient to conclude that there will be a resurrection.

In this bulletin, we will conclude by looking at several more examples in the rest of the Old Testament.

The Resurrection in the Historical Books

The historical books are full of examples where God miraculously raised people from the dead.

In 1 Kings 17:17-24, the prophet Elijah raised from the dead the son of the widow of Zarephath (an incident to which Jesus refers in Luke 4:26). In 2 Kings 4:18-37, the prophet Elisha raised from the dead the son of a Shunammite widow. In 2 Kings 13:20-21, a dead soldier sprang to life after touching the bones of Elisha. Their spirits had left their bodies, but were brought back by the power of God.

This is not exactly the same as the glorified, never-to-die-again body of the resurrection. Still, it speaks to the fact that the individual soul has life and identity and personality after the death of the body.

Maybe the most memorable occasion is found in 1 Samuel 28:8-19, when the witch of En-dor called upon the spirit of the long-dead Samuel. She was as surprised as anyone when her tricks worked this time, and Samuel actually appeared (v. 12)! God does not approve of such things, but accommodated it here, to teach King Saul a valuable lesson. The spirit of Samuel spoke of being at rest (v. 15); he also told Saul to expect to see him again the next day (v. 19)! Once again we are convinced that death is not the end of a person's consciousness, and that there is another life beyond this one.

One of my favorite passages in the whole Bible is the end of 2 Samuel 12, in which King David faced the loss of his infant child because of his own terrible sins. David prayed to God and fasted, that God would change His mind and spare the life of the child. But God refused to change His mind, and the child died. At that point, David washed his face and returned to his duties. The servants questioned his backwards and seemingly callous behavior. David replied, While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, "Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live." But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me (22-23). There is a lot of grief here, but if we focus on the last sentence, there is a tremendous statement of hope rooted in David's understanding of the immortal nature of the soul. David realized that the child had departed and could not be brought back to the palace. But David knew that one day, after he had died, he would be reunited with his dead son.

Christian funerals are very different affairs. We all look forward to such a great promise of reunion, which provides tremendous comfort to those dealing with the loss of family members in Christ.

The Resurrection in the Psalms and Wisdom Literature

Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 12:7 “the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.” That tantalizing truth is borne out in countless other statements of praise throughout the poetic books.

In Psalm 17:13-15, David says,

Deliver my soul from the wicked with Your sword,
From men with Your hand, O Lord,
From men of the world, whose portion is in this life,
And whose belly You fill with Your treasure;
They are satisfied with children,
And leave their abundance to their babes.
As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness;
I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake.

What a beautiful psalm to read when I am envious of the world! People of the world store up treasures on earth. They eat and drink and play, they are full of the pleasures of life, they pass on piles of riches to their children. They don't even stop to realize it is God who provides all these things; sometimes they even attack godly people. But eventually the pleasure will stop. David, on the other hand, has only one overriding hope—when his eyes behold God in heaven, then and only then will he be satisfied!

Of course, one of the most important Old Testament witnesses to the resurrection are the Messianic prophecies that refer to the resurrection of Jesus, especially Psalm 16:10.

You will not abandon my soul to Sheol;
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.

Peter used this Scripture in Acts 2:25 as the basis of his first gospel sermon, that Jesus rose from the dead. And it is the resurrection of Jesus which serves as the downpayment on the resurrection of all believers.

The Resurrection in the Prophets

There are several mentions of resurrection in the prophets. For the sake of space, I will simply provide them without context:

[God] will swallow up death for all time,
And the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces
And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth,

For the Lord has spoken (Isaiah 25:8).

Your dead will live;

Their corpses will rise.

You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy,

For your dew is as the dew of the dawn,

And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits (Isaiah 26:19).

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

Conclusion

You see, resurrection is not a hope-come-lately, but one that God has been revealing and clarifying over the whole course of His dealings with mankind, to provide a bright hope for a future reward. Even though the Jewish people had a limited understanding of eternal life, they were not left without information.

Our faith becomes entirely worthless when the truth of the resurrection is sundered from it (1 Cor. 15:12-19). Seeing the resurrection developed throughout the Old Testament—from Genesis all the way to Revelation—gives us an even greater confidence when Jesus tells us to expect it, to long for it, to prepare for it (John 5:28-29).