

CHAPTER 11

RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

Confessional statements

WCF 32:2-3, WLC 87, WSC 38

[Note the changes made in the WCF and WLC by the first synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church in 1938, specifying a premillennial resurrection of the just.]

All the dead will be raised:

Those in Christ will have the same bodies, but glorified (WCF 32:3).

Those who are lost will be raised to dishonor (BP WCF 32:3 specifies after the thousand years).

When Christ returns, all who are still living who are in Christ, will not die, but will be changed. This event often is called the “translation,” emphasizing the change that will take place, or the “rapture,” emphasizing the suddenness of the event, as a “taking up, catching up,” 1 Thess 4:17, ἀρπάζω *harpazo*.

Scriptural support for the resurrection

There are many passages dealing with this subject. Only the most important or striking passages will be mentioned here.

OT Promises

Job 19:25-27

I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.

And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;
I myself will see him
with my own eyes—I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!

The Hebrew phrase in v. 26 “from my flesh” (מִבְּשָׂרִי *mībb^esārî*) does not necessarily mean “without my flesh,” as it is translated in Gesenius, para. 119w; Delitzsch, *Job* 359-60; BDB 578b; ASV, RSV, NASB. It also can mean “in my flesh,” or “from within my flesh,” as “yet from” in BDB 579-80 (usage of מִן *min* similar to Greek *ek*); KJV, NIV, NRSV. In this sense the construction would be similar to the idea of “looking out of a window.”

Abrahamic covenant (esp. Gen 17:8; 26:3; 28:13)

These verses promise the personal participation of the patriarchs themselves in the promises, including the permanent occupation of Canaan. Hebrews 11:13 states that these promises were not fulfilled during their lifetimes; hence, a resurrection is necessary for them. The idea of resurrection was not foreign to them (Heb 11:19). Compare Jesus’ argument, cited below (Matt 22:31-32).

Isaiah 26:19

“But your bodies will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.”

This passage is in the apocalyptic section of Isaiah (ch. 24-27).

Ezekiel 37:12-14

“Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’”

Daniel 12:1-2

“At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found

written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”

This passage places the resurrection in the time context of the great tribulation (cf. Matt 24:15-21). It includes the just and the unjust.

Statements of Christ

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

Jesus speaks of the future resurrection from the graves of the just and the unjust.

Matt 22:23-33, Jesus and the Sadducees

Matt 22:29-32, “Jesus replied, ‘You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.’”

Jesus proves that there is a resurrection of the body as he argues with the Sadducees. His scriptural argument is based on a quotation of Exod 3:6. Jesus refers to the Abrahamic covenant, as God spoke of it to Moses, and deduces from it that there will be a physical resurrection of the patriarchs.

Peaching of Peter and John

Acts 4:1-2, “And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”

Statements of Paul

1 Thess 4:13-17.—Paul here includes specific information concerning both the resurrection and the translation of living saints.

1 Cor 15:20-24, 42-44, 51-57.—This section also mentions both the resurrection and the translation of living saints, and he here makes these doctrines central to Christianity.

Acts 23:6-8, “Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, ‘My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.’ 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 acknowledge them all).”

In his testimony to the Sanhedrin, Paul makes the resurrection of the body the central belief that has led to his imprisonment.

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

In his testimony to Felix Paul asserts the resurrection of both the just and the unjust, and claims to hold the same belief in this area as that held by the Pharisee party.

Phil 3:20-21, “And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

Here Paul refers to the “fashioning anew” of our bodies at the time of the resurrection and translation.

Statement of John

Rev 20:4-6, 11-14.—In his vision of the future, John saw the double resurrection, with the “thousand years” intervening between the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust.

Scriptural support for two resurrections

The premillennial view requires two resurrections—of the just and of the unjust—separated by the thousand year “millennium.” The amillennial and postmillennial views believe in a “general resurrection,” with the just and the unjust being raised simultaneously.

The following biblical passages normally are used by either side in this argument. In each case premillennialists believe these passages either specifically teach the reality of two separate resurrections, or at least are compatible with those passages which do.

Dan 12:2.—Note the structure of this verse: “Many shall awake, these to . . . and these to . . .” The *waw* here actually is disjunctive—“but.”

The use of “many” at the beginning of this verse, as well as in verse 3, fits best with the righteous (cf. Montgomery in *ICC*; Leon Wood, *Daniel*). The “many” links best with the first “these” (contra E. J. Young, *Daniel*, who admits some difficulty here, expecting the word “all”). See discussion in A. J. Gordon, “The First Resurrection,” *Premillennial Essays*, pp. 78-102, and in Van Oosterzee, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:786, 798-800.

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

Jesus here clearly separates the two resurrections, repeating the anarthrous noun, “a resurrection of life . . . a resurrection of judgment.” These two phrases are parallel to the “first resurrection” and the “second death” John describes in Rev 20.

The use of the word “hour” (*ὥρα hora*) in verse 28 does not demand a general resurrection, as that word often designates a longer period of time. Compare BDAG, p. 1103, “ὥρα” sect. #3; cf. 1 John 2:18, “Dear children, this is the last hour.”

Acts 24:15 (in Paul’s trial before Felix), “and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.”

Since the terms “resurrection, just, unjust” are all anarthrous, the Granville Sharp rule does not apply; rather, the terms are used qualitatively, simply meaning that both just ones and unjust ones will be raised. Further, the *τε καί te kai* (“and also”) emphasizes the distinction of the two groups.

1 Cor. 15:22-24, “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.”

The “order” of the various groups being raised is given in three stages:

- (1) Christ
- (2) Christ's people, at his coming, vv. 24-25
- (3) "the end," when death itself is destroyed, v. 26

The "end" spoken of ties in with the second death of Rev 20, when the unjust are raised; this takes place after he reigns (v. 25).

Rev 20:4-6, 11-14, "I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. . . . Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death."

In verse 4 "they lived" (ἐζήσαν *ezesan*) most naturally refers to physical resurrection. Cf. "lived" in verse 5, where it refers to the physical resurrection of the lost. The NIV properly translates both "came to life."

The events in verse 4 are called a resurrection in verse 5.

Verse 5 separates the first resurrection in time from the second death (= second resurrection; cf. John 5:28-29).

Verses 12 and 14 specifically say that the unsaved are not to be raised until the 1000 years are over, after the saved are "reigning."

Death is destroyed after the unjust are raised; cf. 1 Cor 15:26.

Note on Matthew 25:31-46

This passage often is used to show a general resurrection, but there is no mention in the passage of a resurrection of the dead. Rather, it seems to depict the judgment of the living nations at the outset of the millennial kingdom (cf. the time interval in Dan 12:11-12). At that time, special attention will be given to the

manner in which people treated the saints of God during the time of their great persecutions (Dan 7:21, 25; 12:1; Rev 12-13).

For a collection and discussion of all the biblical passages speaking of the promised “millennium,” see the classic work of William Biederwold (1867-1939), *The Millennium Bible*, now reprinted as *The Second Coming Bible*.

Nature of resurrection body

Bodies of the unsaved

WCF 32:3, WLC 87

- Standards use the phrase “raised to dishonor”
- Bodies have physical substance
- This substance will exist forever
 - But these bodies not glorious; will befit their wicked hearts

Bodies of the saved

WCF 32:2, WLC 87

- Same bodies as during life, physical substance
- Cf. body of Christ after resurrection:
 - Feel hands and side, John 20:27
 - Eat fish, Luke 24:42-43 (“honeycomb” not in Greek; UBS {B})
 - Called “flesh and bone,” Luke 24:39
 - Able to transport itself supernaturally
- Cf. description in 1 Cor 15:35-54 (resurrection bodies of believers):
 - Honor

- Power
- Spiritual (“flesh and blood” in v. 50 an expression for the present mortal body; it does not imply the absence of physical flesh or blood in the resurrection body);
body empowered by spiritual force
- Incorruptible (contrast with present bodies, Eccl 12)

Note the excellent study by J. A. Schep, *The Nature of the Resurrection Body* (Eerdmans, 1964).