

Paul's Preaching on the Resurrection

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Many who read this short overview of I Corinthians 15 are already familiar with my work on Matthew 24. When I began studying the prophets forty years ago, I saw the Old Testament basis for much of the language contained in the Olivet Discourse. All of it was in reference to national judgments God had carried out on various nations under the Old Covenant, and was never used of a universal judgment at the end of time.

We've seen the same thing in II Peter 3, popularly applied to a planet-burning judgment at the end of time. Once one sees just two things about that chapter, we must come to the conclusion that Peter foretold not the destruction of the planet and stars, but the destruction of Jerusalem. *First*, according to Peter, we live under a different heavens and earth that Noah did then, yet we live under the same planet and stars as he did, thus we must realize that the term "heavens and earth" is not being used of the planet and stars. *Second*, when we understand "elements" not to mean atoms and molecules, when it means the basics of the Mosaic Law throughout the New Testament. Again, our lack of Old Testament background of Peter's prophecy and terminology led us to an improper interpretation.

Many of us have seen the same thing with our modern view of hell as endless torment. In my essay on *Jesus' Teaching on Hell*, I demonstrate that the popular concept is purely Roman Catholic and

Islamic doctrine, which is taught neither in the Old or New Testaments. When we see how many of the terms traditionally used to describe hell are used in the Old Testament, we realize that our lack of Old Testament knowledge was the problem.

The same can be said with the subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage, the sermon on the mount, dispensational premillennialism, as well as a great many other New Testament topics with an Old Testament background.

I realize now that we've done the same thing with the resurrection as taught in I Corinthians 15. William Robert West, who's done yeoman work studying, writing, and publishing on the nature of man said:

There were [*sic*] some light given in the Old Testament on the afterlife [Daniel 12:2; Micah 4:1] but the doctrine of the resurrection, life, and immortality, which Christ taught, were new. The words, resurrection, immortal, and immortality are not in the Old Testament in the King James Version or the American Standard Version. (William Robert West, *Immortality and the Resurrection*, Third Edition, p. 94, 2006.)

I'm certainly not disparaging Robert, as he's only saying what most of us tacitly believe, that the subject of the resurrection is predominantly (or even exclusively) a New Testament subject. I believed the same thing until 2005 myself. I now realize that we simply cannot understand Paul's teaching on the resurrection without understanding Paul's concept of the hope of Israel from the Old Testament.

Some argue, "You're doing this exactly backwards. We use the New Testament to interpret the Old Testament, not the Old Testament to interpret the New Testament."

If we think we can take our modern concept of the resurrection and read it back into the prophets, if we deal with the prophets at all, consider how the admirable Berean Jews treated Paul's teaching in Ac. 17.11:

Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of the mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so.

The “scriptures” the Bereans examined and tested Paul's teaching by were the Old Testament scriptures, were they not? As they compared Paul's teaching to the Old Testament, they concluded that Paul's teaching was true, not *vice versa*. They did not read our modern popular concept of Paul's teaching on the resurrection back into their Old Testaments. Had they done so, their approach would have been just exactly backward!

Consider a second example. Many passages in Acts tell us that Paul went into the synagogues every sabbath and persuaded the Jews from the scriptures (Ac. 14.19, 17.4, 18.4, 19.26, etc.). What would have happened had they asked, “Paul, how can you give meanings to Hosea, Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, etc., that they simply did not give us?” Had Paul responded, “The Holy Spirit gave me this fresher, fuller meaning that isn't in the prophets!” do you think his Jewish audience would have accepted Paul's new teaching? Of course not. They would have sent him down the road or killed him.

We'll see momentarily that Paul told the Jews on the resurrection that he taught nothing but what Moses and the prophets said would come to pass. *Nothing*. How could he have said that if he was giving newer revelation on the resurrection than was contained in their Old Testament scriptures?

Until we realize how Paul and the Berean Jews used the Old Testament scriptures, we can't understand the chapter like Paul did, and we won't teach on the subject like Paul did. That's the purpose of this essay, to show the Old Testament background of Paul's teaching on the hope of Israel and the resurrection.

An initial clue is the fact that Paul quoted Isa. 25.8 and Hos. 13.14 in I Cor. 15.54-55. Have you noticed that? I didn't for most of my life, even though I've taught Corinthians many times, and all the prophets several times. When I first noticed that simple fact, I thought, “Aw aw! Here we go again. I've got to go back and see what the Old Testament teaches about the resurrection!” I hope you have the same experience.

I think West inadvertently gives the Old Testament's teaching on the subject short shrift. You can be a good guy and do that because I've done exactly the same thing—all of us have. We've done it prodigiously on all the subjects mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Statements like the one quoted above may have contributed to our passing over the resurrection of Israel in the Old Testament.

I invite you to consider the Bible's teaching on the resurrection outside of I Corinthians 15, beginning with Paul's teaching in Acts.

I'm sure you recall Paul's paying for the vows of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Afterwards, he was mobbed in Ac. 21.27-28:

...the Jews from Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the multitude and laid hands upon him, crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place; and moreover he brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath defiled this holy place.

Of course, none of these charges was true, as Paul made clear in his defenses before Felix and Agrippa.

To Felix, Paul said, in Ac. 24.14-15:

...after the way which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our fathers, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets; having hope toward God, which these also themselves look for, that there shall be (lit., about to be) a resurrection both of the just and unjust.

So the rub with the Jews accusing Paul was his preaching on the resurrection, not based on I Corinthians 15, but based on the law and the prophets, whether they believed in Jesus or not.

To Agrippa, Paul said, in Ac. 26.6-8:

And now I stand here to be judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers; unto which promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. And concerning this hope I am accused by the Jews, O King! Why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth raise the dead?

Notice in vv 21-23, he explained further his preaching on the resurrection:

Having therefore obtained the help that is from God, I stand unto this day testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come; how that the Christ must suffer, and how that he first by the resurrection of

the dead should proclaim light both to the people
and to the Gentiles.

In one final passage in Acts, notice 28.20, where to his Jewish audience, Paul said:

For this cause therefore did I entreat you to see and
to speak with me: for because of the hope of Israel I
am bound with this chain.

Please consider this. Paul said that when he preached the gospel, he taught the hope of Israel on the resurrection, saying nothing but what Moses and the Prophets taught. That was also the very reason he was imprisoned!

Here's the problem. When he preached the hope of Israel on the Old Testament's teaching on the resurrection, the people took it as an attack on the Jews, the Law, and the temple.

Why would that be? What's the connection? I've taught and preached on the resurrection from I Corinthians 15 many times, yet no one has accused me of attacking the Jews, the Law, or the temple. You may have, too, with no such accusation. Wonder why? Could it be it's because we haven't preached the hope of the resurrection from Moses and the prophets like Paul did? Yet, that's the gospel he preached! That's the disconnect between our teaching and Paul's on the hope of the resurrection. Paul's concept of the resurrection wasn't that fleshly bodies would come out of holes in the ground at all, because that's not what Moses and the prophets taught.

I've never even heard a sermon on the hope of the resurrection from the Old Testament, have you? Ever? Have you ever preached one? Again, permit me to suggest that until we understand the Old Testament's teaching on the resurrection, we're never going to interpret I Corinthians 15 correctly. Neither are we going to preach like Paul on the subject, nor are we going to get the reaction from the audience he got. It is also important to realize that Paul had already written I Corinthians 15 when he made these statements in his defenses in Acts. Thus, I Corinthians 15 has to be based on nothing else than Moses and the prophets as well! Yet we believe all kinds of things are taught in I Corinthians 15 that cannot be found in Moses and the Prophets.

The Old Testament foretold the resurrection quite a number of times, not the popular view of fleshly bodies coming out of holes in the ground, but a lot about the resurrection of Israel: how Israel

would die, be planted like a seed, be resurrected and transformed, etc. This is why Paul could quote his conclusion in I Corinthians 15 from Isaiah 25 and Hosea 13, which we'll soon see, were to be imminently fulfilled when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed.

It's truly said that the word "resurrection" is not in the Old Testament, but we may be inadvertently ignoring a lot of plain teaching from the prophets on the very subject. What about language like Isaiah saying of God in Isa. 25.6-9 (quoted in I Cor. 15.54) that God would "swallow up death for all time," or Hosea, an eighth-century BC contemporary of Isaiah, in Hos. 6.1-2, saying, "Come, and let us return to the LORD; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; *On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight.*"

Hosea also has God saying of Israel in Hos. 13.14 (again, quoted in I Cor. 15.55), "Shall I redeem them from death? O Death, where are your thorns? O Sheol, where is your sting?" In verse 1, Hosea said that Israel was dead through Baal, their idols, and certainly referred to their spiritual death, not biological death. I'm afraid there are more parallels between Hosea and I Corinthians 15 than you can shake a stick at. The whole context of Hosea is behind I Corinthians 15. This is made more likely when we realize that many of Paul's points can be found in Hosea: sowing or planting of Israel (1.4, as Hosea's first child by his harlot wife was named Jezreel, "God sows.") God's seed in the earth (2.23); Israel died (1.5); harvest appointed for Judah (6.11) at the resurrection (13.14, quoted as about to be fulfilled in I Cor. 15. 55); David ruling on his throne (3.4-5); Israel the firstfruits (9.10); God becomes their king (13.10).

Ezekiel 37 also refers to the death of Israel, and God told them, "Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life." West is absolutely right that the word "resurrection" isn't there, but what word should we call the process whereby Israel was dead, and God's purpose was to bring them to life?

In Dan. 9.26-27, Daniel was told:

And after the threescore and two weeks shall the anointed one be cut off, and shall have nothing: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and even unto the end shall be war; desolations are determined. And he shall make a firm covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the

oblation to cease; and upon the wing of abominations shall come one that maketh desolate; and even unto the full end, and that determined, shall wrath be poured out upon the desolate.

Jesus quoted from this passage early in Matthew 24, indicating it would be fulfilled in his generation.

In Dan. 12.2 (Jesus quoted verse 3 in Mt. 13.43), Daniel foretold a national resurrection, "And 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." When Daniel asked when these things would be fulfilled, God said, "that it would be for a time, times, and half a time (like the religious persecution of the saints in Revelation 11) and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed."

So Isaiah, Hosea, Ezekiel, and Daniel (and others) spoke of a resurrection and judgment of Israel. Hardly any scholar on earth takes these words as teaching resurrection of physical bodies, as we think Paul taught in I Corinthians 15. In context, Israel was dead, destroyed, and went into captivity because of their sin. If Israel were going to be saved, there needed to be a resurrection, which would occur when God destroyed Jerusalem, when he redeemed the righteous from death, and destroyed the impenitent when he shattered the power of the holy people.

This essay is intended to be just an introduction to this subject, with the suggestion that we need to review Isaiah, Hosea, Ezekiel and Daniel, and try to absorb their teaching on the death, planting, resurrection, and transformation of Israel at the time the power of the holy people was shattered, and see if we can get together a sermon on the resurrection like Paul preached.

Having seen Paul's preaching on the resurrection, we proceed to his written teaching on the same subject in I Corinthians 15.