

Saints' Resurrection 31AD

Dateline: Jerusalem: 1944 AD:

My Dad and my Uncle Albert were enjoying some leave after serving with the British Army in North Africa. As they were wandering around the so-called "Holy City," sightseeing, a powerful bomb exploded in one of the city's cemeteries. Some coffins were unearthed by the blast, and a few of them were broken open. My Uncle Albert liked to spice up the story by telling us that they found scratch marks on the insides of some of the coffin lids!

Dateline: Jerusalem: 31 AD: Abib 14: 3:00pm:

We read of a somewhat similar scenario in Matthew 27:45-46 and 50-54:

Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"... And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

This was an amazing and, no doubt, frightening event, and one that raises many questions, all of which we do not have the answers to at this time. Here are just some of those questions that come to my mind:

- When did the earthquake take place?
- At the moment of Christ's death?
- Or shortly before His resurrection?
- Were there two earthquakes? (See Matthew 28:2)
- Did all these saints awake from the dead at the time of Jesus' death and stay in the tombs until after His resurrection?
- Or did they awake at Jesus' resurrection and come out right away?
- Who were these "many" saints?
- How many of them were there?
- In which era did they live their *original* lives?
- Were they made immortal at the time described here?
- Were they raised to eternal life as sons of God, brothers of Jesus Christ with glorified spirit bodies like His?
- Or were they raised to second, temporary lives?
- Why did this event happen?
- What was its purpose?

This article homes in on the last five of these questions.

Two main types

The first thing that we need to consider when discussing this event is that the Bible reveals that, although the scriptures describe three great resurrections in addition to Jesus' resurrection, there are *two main types* of resurrection.

Although only a few have witnessed it so far, the type we are most familiar with is the resurrection to immortal, spiritual life. This is the type of resurrection Jesus Christ experienced, and this is the type Christians look forward to at the time we call "the First Resurrection."

But the Bible also has quite a lot to say about another type of resurrection – the resurrection to mortal, physical, temporary life, similar to the life humans enjoy or endure now. This process of physical resurrection is actually described in more detail in the Bible than is the process of resurrection to immortal, spiritual life. Here is our first example:

So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them. Also He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.'"" So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army. Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it," says the LORD.'""
(Ezekiel 37:7-14)

This exciting scripture is just one scene from the event that we talk a lot about on the Last Great Day of the Feast. We have called it "the Second Resurrection" and it describes the time when all of those millions, small and great, who never had their opportunity for salvation will be physically reconstructed (as only God knows how) to live again. To live a physical life – yes – but a physical life with a difference. A physical life with the opportunity for, and the great probability of, salvation and eternal, spiritual life.

Numerous physical resurrections

The next point that we need to consider is that physical resurrection is not exclusively restricted to the time of the future Second Resurrection. In fact, there are numerous cases in the Bible of miraculous resurrections to physical life. If you look into this subject, I'm sure you'll be amazed, as I was, to discover how many of these "physical resurrections" are recorded in the Bible. Here are some examples:

God used Elijah to resurrect the son of the widow of Zarephath:

Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. So she said to Elijah, "What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?" And he said to her, "Give me your son." So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. Then he cried out to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son? " And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, I pray, let this child's soul come back to him." Then the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives!" Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth." (I Kings 17:17-24)

In a very similar episode, God used Elijah's successor, Elisha, to raise a little boy back to life:

When Elisha came into the house, there was the child, lying dead on his bed. He went in therefore, shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the LORD. And he went up and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands; and he stretched himself out on the child, and the flesh of the child became warm. He returned and walked back and forth in the house, and again went up and stretched himself out on him; then the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunammite woman." So he called her. And when she came in to him, he said, "Pick up your son." So she went in, fell at his feet, and bowed to the ground; then she picked up her son and went out. (II Kings 4:18-37)

Jesus Himself raised a little girl:

While He was still speaking, some came from the ruler of the synagogue's house who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not be afraid; only believe. " And He permitted no one to follow Him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James. Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and saw a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly. When He came in, He said to them, "Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping." And they ridiculed Him. But when He had put them all outside, He took the father and the mother of the child, and those who were with Him, and entered where the child was lying. Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha, cumi," which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement. But He commanded them strictly that no one should know it, and said that something should be given her to eat. (Mark 5:35-43)

He also raised a young man:

Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep. " Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, " Young man, I say to you, arise." So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us "; and, "God has visited His people." And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region. (Luke 7:11-17)

There is, of course, the very well known account of the raising of Lazarus:

Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard Me. And I know that you always hear me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that you sent me." Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go." (John 11:41-44)

The message was passed on to John the Baptist in prison that it was quite as common for Jesus to raise the dead as it was for Him to heal the sick:

And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. (Matthew 11:2-5)

Jesus even gave His disciples the power to raise the dead when He sent them out to preach and heal:

And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease... These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. (Matthew 10:1 & 5-8)

After the coming of the Holy Spirit, God gave this same power to His apostles. Through Peter, He raised a woman back to life:

At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. (Acts 9:36-42)

In our final example in this section, we read that God worked through the apostle Paul to resurrect a boy named Eutychus who was killed after falling from a third story window:

And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, "Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him." Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed. And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted. (Acts 20:9-12)

So, even though the resurrection of the saints described in Matthew 27 is the only recorded instance of a *multiple* physical resurrection, it certainly was not unique... in that many other physical resurrections had taken place before, and at least a few more took place afterwards.

This was a physical resurrection

If we take another look at the account of this multiple resurrection in the twenty-seventh chapter of Matthew, we see that verse 52 specifically states that it was the *bodies* of these saints that were resurrected:

And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised;

Notice also that Matthew does not describe them as having any outstanding or remarkable appearance, as do the spirit bodies of the resurrected Jesus and His brethren after the First Resurrection. For example:

Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. (Daniel 12:3)

Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Matthew 13:43)

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. (Mark 9:2-3; see also Matthew 17:1-2)

And in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. (Revelation 1:13-16)

When these resurrected saints of 31AD went into Jerusalem, they did not restrict their appearance to a comparative few, as Jesus did after His spiritual resurrection. Rather, "they appeared to many."

Like Lazarus, and all the others who had been brought up in physical resurrections, these saints lived for a while longer (who knows for how long?), served the purpose for which they were raised, and then died once again. There is no record of them living eternally after this resurrection.

Only One so far raised to eternal, spiritual life

The members of God's church are His "firstfruits," but Jesus Christ is the FIRST of those firstfruits – His resurrection and initial ascension to His Father being represented by the Wave Sheaf Offering (See Leviticus 23:9-14).

As is pictured by the Feast of Trumpets, the resurrection of the saints – *all* of the saints – comes later, at Christ's return. Notice that there is a six month (approximately) period separating the Wave Sheaf Offering from the Feast of Trumpets. This period represents the period (approximately two thousand years, we think) separating Jesus' resurrection from the resurrection of the saints... again, *all* of the saints! The Bible makes no exceptions. The time sequence is mentioned in the fourth chapter of I Thessalonians, but is most effectively explained in I Corinthians 15:20-23 and 50-53:

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming... Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

Like all of their brothers and sisters from throughout the ages, these saints written of in Matthew 27 need to be resurrected and changed to spirit in order to be part of the Kingdom of God. As we have just read in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, there is a set time for this spiritual resurrection, and that is at Christ's return. No exceptions!

Purpose for this multiple resurrection

Finally, we shouldn't leave this discussion without looking into the reason for this special, multiple, physical resurrection of saints. Even though its purpose may not be formally stated in the scriptures, this was *not* just some strange, inexplicable, supernatural happening.

By comparing this account with accounts of other physical resurrections in the Old and New Testaments, we can see that this was a powerful sign and witness to those living in the Jerusalem and Judea of 31AD that:

- Jesus was the Son of God (Matthew 27:54), despite the Jews' rejection of Him,
- Very, VERY important events and changes were taking place at that juncture,
- A vast change was being made in the very nature and irreversibility of death.

We do not yet know the answers to all of the questions we might come up with about this event. But we do know that those saints are once again dead – peacefully sleeping, and unconsciously waiting for the sounding of the seventh trumpet and for the return of Jesus Christ.

Dateline: Jerusalem 20?? AD!

Whatever the actual date may be, let us look forward to meeting those saints there and then!

John Plunkett

Building Bridges, The Church of God Canada

Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada