

## BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

# THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (1 Cor. 15:14). This shows the central place which the resurrection of Jesus Christ has in the gospel message of salvation, the gospel which Paul says, “I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved” (vv. 1,2).

### **Objections to the resurrection**

There are many references in Scripture to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and each Gospel contains detailed accounts of his appearances to people after his resurrection. Attempts have been made to dismiss the truth of these accounts on a number of different grounds:

- The women who first saw the resurrected Jesus went to the wrong tomb, an empty one, and wrongly concluded he had risen.
- Jesus did not really die, but revived after being put in the tomb.
- The body of Jesus was removed from the tomb by someone.

To deny that Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead is to deny that the Scriptures are the Word of God, so clear and detailed are they on the matter. In any case, these efforts to deny that the resurrection really happened do not make sense for a number of reasons:

- There was considerable reluctance to believe that Jesus had actually risen. Twice Mark records that the disciples did not believe those who said that they had seen the risen Jesus, and when he appeared to them he reproved them for this (16:14). John records that Mary Magdalene did not at first recognise the resurrected Jesus when she met him, and Thomas declared that he would not believe until he had seen the wounds of his crucifixion (20:11-18,24-29).
- How could a man laid to rest as dead have had the strength to roll away the great stone from the mouth of the tomb and then convince people he had been raised?
- The Jewish authorities were strongly opposed to the idea that Jesus had risen, and if they could have produced his body they would have done so.
- The apostles suffered much from the authorities for preaching that Jesus rose from the dead. They must have been thoroughly convinced that he had, which rules out the idea that they had taken his body from the grave and pretended that he had risen.

### **Many witnesses**

The Apostle Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 to the many witnesses there were to the resurrection of Jesus:

- Peter
- The apostles
- Over 500 brethren
- James (presumably Jesus’s brother)
- The apostles again
- Paul himself.

In Acts 1 we read that Jesus “shewed himself alive” to his apostles “by many infallible proofs” (v. 3), and that the eleven apostles, in choosing a successor to Judas Iscariot, were mindful of the need to choose one who had been a follower of Jesus in his ministry and who could be “a witness with us of his resurrection” (vv. 21,22). In their preaching the apostles attested to the fact that Jesus Christ had indeed risen from the dead. Peter, preaching to

the Jews on the day of Pentecost, said: "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (2:32). It is recorded later that "with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (4:33).

### **The importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a key element in God's plan for the earth. The following is a selection of passages in which the significance of his resurrection is brought out:

- 1 "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you . . . whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:22,24). Jesus, because he was sinless, did not deserve to be left dead in the tomb, and so God raised him.
- 2 "God . . . That brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb. 13:20). Jesus, though Son of God by the circumstances of his birth, shared our nature, being mortal and subject to temptation. By his perfect obedience and death upon the cross he overcame sin and instituted a new covenant that brought eternal life, which he was the first to obtain.
- 3 Our faith is counted to us for righteousness, "if we believe on Him That raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:24,25). The resurrection of Jesus is just as important in God's plan of salvation as his death. He did not die as our substitute but as our representative. If the former were the case he would have remained dead, but he has gone before us as our representative, dying to sin and being raised to a new and eternal existence.
- 4 Paul in Colossians speaks of believers as "buried with [Christ] in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, Who hath raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12). Believers show they believe in God's work through Christ by identifying themselves in baptism with his death and resurrection.
- 5 "The gospel of God . . . concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:1-4). Jesus had to be Son of David and Son of God to fulfil the promises to David of one who would rule over God's Kingdom for ever. His resurrection to immortality confirmed that he was this promised Son, with power to rule the world and to save his people from sin.
- 6 "[God] raised [Jesus Christ] up from the dead, and gave him glory" (1 Pet. 1:21). Jesus was not a divine being who divested himself of his divinity to die on earth, then took it up again afterwards. God glorified him by raising him from the dead and exalting him to His right hand.
- 7 "[God] hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's assurance that one day he will return to the earth to judge the world.
- 8 "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1 Cor. 15:20-23). Believers in Christ do not go to heaven at death, they wait in the grave for him to return from heaven to raise them and give them the immortal life which he already possesses. Without his resurrection they have no hope of life (vv. 17-19).

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