

Isaiah 45:23 Every Knee Shall Bow: Divine Sovereignty, the Resurrections, and Final Judgment

Introduction

One of the most sweeping prophetic assertions in holy scripture is the declaration that every creature in existence will ultimately recognize the supreme authority of the Almighty. This theme of universal submission is not a minor thread but a structural pillar of biblical eschatology. It marks the definitive conclusion of human history, where rebellion is completely neutralized, and cosmic order is perfectly restored. Central to this narrative is the intersection of prophetic announcements, historical timelines concerning the resurrections, and the administration of final justice at the great white throne before the execution of the second death. Rather than a singular, uniform sentencing event, scripture reveals a multi-faceted judgment process that perfectly balances absolute justice for the willfully rebellious with equity for those who died in spiritual ignorance.

The Prophetic Foundation: Isaiah 45:23

The blueprint for universal submission is firmly anchored in the Old Testament. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord proclaims His unique identity as the sole Savior and righteous Judge, swearing an oath by His own unalterable character. In the King James Version, Isaiah 45:23 reads:

"I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."

The immediate context of this passage expands into the next verse, Isaiah 45:24, which introduces a critical element regarding those who oppose the Lord: "Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed." Here, scripture establishes that even those who were actively "incensed" or raging against the Lord will be brought before Him, stripped of their arrogance, and filled with deep, undeniable shame.

This prophetic mandate is developed further by the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, who applies this specific language directly to the final judgment and the exaltation of Jesus Christ. In Romans 14:11, Paul uses the text to reinforce human accountability before the divine tribunal:

"For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

Furthermore, in Philippians 2:10–11, Paul elevates this prophecy to declare the supreme lordship of Christ, meticulously categorizing who will be included in this act of submission:

“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

By including “things under the earth,” Paul captures the total scope of creation. This phrase encompasses the dead and fallen spiritual entities who historically resided in rebellion. Their confession is not a joyful hymn of salvific conversion, but a compelled, undeniable recognition of absolute spiritual reality.

Chronology and Daniel’s Blueprint

To understand when and how this universal bowing occurs, one must turn to the chronological framework established by the Hebrew prophets and later clarified by Christ. Daniel 12:1–2 provides the foundational Old Testament blueprint for an individual, bodily resurrection of both the righteous and the ungodly:

“...and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

Daniel introduces two crucial concepts: a cosmic ledger (“the book”) and a clear distinction between the final destinies of those who awake. The rebellious awake not to inherit life, but to face “shame and everlasting contempt,” an internal and external state of repulsion that perfectly aligns with the shame prophesied in Isaiah 45:24.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus explicitly adopts Daniel's vocabulary, connecting this awakening directly to His own divine authority. In John 5:28–29, Jesus proclaims:

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

The Greek word used for damnation is *krisis*, which refers to a legal evaluation or an ongoing tribunal process. Jesus establishes that the ungodly are raised to stand trial, where the books of record are opened, and their actions are evaluated against the perfect light of truth. They cannot choose to remain in the dust; the voice of Christ compels their physical reconstitution and attendance.

Compelled Submission vs. A Tolerable Judgment

A critical theological nuance emerges when comparing the different groups who enter the second resurrection. Scripture indicates that this period of judgment is not a uniform, immediate sentencing to destruction, but an equitable evaluation based on the amount of spiritual light a person possessed during their first life. Jesus outlines this principle when rebuking the cities of Galilee that witnessed His ministry firsthand, comparing them to ancient, notoriously wicked societies in Matthew 11:22–24:

“But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.”

The phrase “more tolerable” reveals that the second resurrection serves as an active period of evaluation rather than an instant execution. Individuals from ancient Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon died in deep spiritual ignorance, lacking the scriptures, the prophets, and the presence of the Messiah. Because accountability is directly proportional to spiritual light, their judgment process is bearable. When raised, they are given an unhindered understanding of the Lord for the very first time. Their eventual submission and bowing of the knee will flow from an enlightened realization of the Lord’s righteousness.

In stark contrast stands the fate of the willfully rebellious—those who fully possessed the truth, experienced the power of God, and consciously chose to reject it. For this group, no learning window remains, because they already sinned against the highest level of spiritual light. Their heart hardened permanently, making repentance impossible. As Hebrews 10:26–27 warns:

“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”

For these individuals, the second resurrection is strictly a mechanism of legal sentencing and final vindication of the Lord's justice.

The Verdict: The Sheep and the Goats

The mechanics of this final, separation process are visually captured in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. In Matthew 25:31, Christ assumes His place on the throne of His glory, mirroring the Great White Throne described in prophetic visions. When the nations are gathered, the rebellious (characterized as the goats) attempt to defend their record, yet they are forced to explicitly verbalize the supreme authority of Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 25:44:

“Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when did we see thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?”

By addressing Him as “Lord,” the goats physically fulfill the dictates of Isaiah 45:23 and Philippians 2:11. Their tongues openly confess His absolute sovereignty right at the threshold of their final sentencing. Their defense is systematically dismantled by the King, leaving them entirely speechless and silenced, fulfilling the scriptural reality that every mouth may be stopped before the judgment seat.

Conclusion and the Final Lake of Fire

The grand biblical narrative of resurrection and judgment culminates at the definitive closure of the Great White Throne event. Once the books are fully opened, the ledger of the Book of Life is checked,

and the ultimate sentences are carried out. The willfully rebellious, having fully confessed the Lord's authority under the crushing weight of reality, face the final penalty for incorrigible rebellion. Revelation 20:15 describes this conclusive act:

"And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

This event represents the "second death"—the total, permanent eradication of sin, death, and unrepentant rebels from the cosmos. Through this structured sequence of resurrections, equitable krisis, and definitive execution, the Lord demonstrates His perfect balance of justice and mercy. Every knee is brought to the ground, every tongue acknowledges the truth, and the universe is forever cleared of rebellion, leaving the Lord supreme over all creation.