

Growing Doubts about the Resurrection of the Dead

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

In his defense before Agrippa, Paul asked his Jewish audience: “Why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth raise the dead?” (Acts 26:8).

There have always been those who found the concept of the bodily resurrection incredible, i.e., unbelievable, and their modern counterparts are appearing increasingly—even in today’s church.

False Ideas

The ancient Greeks disdained the notion that the body could ever be raised. Thus when Paul spoke concerning “the resurrection of the dead [ones—plural]” in Athens, his message was mocked (Acts 17:32). During the time of Jesus, the Sadducees denied the resurrection of the body (Matthew 22:23; Acts 23:6-8).

Even some Christians in the primitive church had fallen for this error and so affirmed: “There is no resurrection of the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:12)—a heresy which Paul attempted to correct. In the late decades of the apostolic age, a sect known as the Gnostics arose, denying the resurrection of the body.

In our own age, atheism, of course, rejects the idea that the human body will be raised from the dead. An article in the *Soviet Encyclopedia* asserts that the concept of the resurrection is in “decisive contradiction with scientific natural knowledge” (Smith 1999, 455).

Religious modernism repudiates the idea of the resurrection, since, having “demythologized” the Scriptures, it rejects any element of the miraculous.

Cultish groups also have a problem with the doctrine that God will raise the body. The Jehovah’s Witnesses assert that the incorrigibly wicked “will never be remembered for resurrection” (*Make Sure of All Things* 1953, 314).

Within the churches of Christ, those who have converted to the dogma of Max King deny the resurrection. Like Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who erred in Paul’s day, these brethren suggest that the resurrection is past already (2 Timothy 2:17, 18), having been spiritually effected in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem (see [The Menace of Radical Preterism](#)).

Whether ancient or modern, within the church or outside of it, the denial of the bodily resurrection is radical error. And in this age of biblical illiteracy, this false doctrine will continue to make its presence felt among the people of God unless gospel preachers return to a teaching of the fundamental principles of the Christian faith, one of which is the resurrection of the dead (cf. Hebrews 6:1, 2).

The Bible and the Resurrection

The Bible clearly affirms the doctrine of the general resurrection of the dead. Note, in brief, the following points.

Old Testament Evidence

The concept of the resurrection is found in the Old Testament—though not as vividly as it comes to light in the New Testament (cf. 2 Timothy 1:10). God’s declaration to Moses regarding Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was an indication of the eventual resurrection (Matthew 22:31, 32). Other Old Testament passages also suggested that man’s body would be raised ultimately (see Job 19:25-27; Psalm 17:15; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2; Hosea 13:14).

New Testament Evidence

The doctrine of the bodily resurrection is affirmed abundantly in the New Testament (see John 5:28, 29; 6:39, 40; Mark 12:18-27; Acts 17:32; 26:8; Romans 8:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 5:1, 2; Philippians 3:21).

How any person could read Paul's great discussion of the eventual disposition of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15 and not believe in the resurrection has to be one of the mysteries of the ages. In that remarkable chapter the apostle develops his line of argumentation in the following fashion:

(1) Paul persuasively pled for the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ on the basis of numerous eyewitnesses of the risen Lord, which, on one occasion, consisted of more than five hundred people (15:1-11).

(2) The apostle maintained that the Lord's resurrection is Heaven's guarantee that we too shall be raised. Jesus is the "first-fruits" (a figure suggesting a future harvest) of the general resurrection to be effected at the time of his return (vv. 12-34).











(3) Paul discussed the nature of the resurrected body. It will not be a physical or a corruptible body; rather, it will be spiritual and incorruptible (vv. 35-49). Nevertheless, there will be an identity continuum between the former body and the new one. Only in this light can the term "resurrection" (which means to stand up) have any relevance.

Moreover, each body will have its own individuality (v. 38). Further, it is thrilling to reflect upon the fact that our new bodies will be identical in form to the glorious body of our resurrected Lord (see Philippians 3:21).

(4) Finally, the theological impact of the resurrection is set forth. It is a declaration of victory (vv. 50-57). In view of this great hope, saints are admonished to persevere in their fidelity (v. 58).

The biblical doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is a comforting concept. Those who would rob us of this hope are not friends of the cause of Christ.

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Works Cited

Make Sure of All Things. 1953. Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible & Tract Society.

Smith, Wilbur M. 1999. *Wycliffe Dictionary of Theology*. Everett Harrison, Geoffrey W. Bromily, Carl F. Henry, eds. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

Scripture References

Acts 26:8; Acts 17:32; Matthew 22:23; Acts 23:6-8; 1 Corinthians 15:12; 2 Timothy 2:17, 18; Hebrews 6:1, 2; 1 Timothy 1:10; Matthew 22:31, 32; Job 19:25-27; Psalm 17:15; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2; Hosea 13:14; John 5:28, 29, 6:39, 40; Mark 12:18-27; Acts 17:32, 26:8; Romans 8:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 5:1, 2; Philippians 3:21

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