

Three Resurrections

by Rod Reynolds

According to Scripture the Kingdom of God will be established on earth at the time of the second coming of Jesus Christ ([Daniel 7:13-14](#); [Revelation 11:15-18](#)). Foretold is a resurrection to occur at that time, to be followed by other resurrections later.

The hope of the resurrection enters into the faith of all who believe the true gospel ([Acts 24:15](#); [I Corinthians 15:4, 11](#)).

But upon what is that belief predicated? The second coming of Jesus Christ is predicated on the reality of his first coming. And the resurrection that will occur at Christ's second coming is predicated on the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ following his death at the time of his first coming. And so also are other resurrections spoken of in the Bible.

Let's examine what the Bible reveals about the resurrections, beginning with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Resurrection of Christ

The Bible tells us salvation is contingent in part on our belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. "... if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and **believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead**, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame'" ([Romans 10:9-11](#)).

But what evidence is there for the resurrection of Christ? None of us has actually seen Jesus Christ. None of us now living was there to witness the death of Jesus Christ, nor the resurrection of Jesus Christ, nor did we see him alive after his death.

If you seek evidence for something that occurred in the past, where do you look? No one living today was alive at the time of the Civil War in the United States, which began in 1861. How do we know there was a Civil War? Or, for that matter, any other historical event which we did not personally witness?

The answer is, we look for documentary evidence. With sufficient documentary evidence you can have an assurance, a firm belief, that a historical event occurred.

With the Civil war, for example, there are records that were made at the time. There was correspondence that has been preserved, there are diaries recorded, there are accounts

written later by participants in the Civil War, such as the autobiography of Ulysses S. Grant. Since photography had been invented shortly before the Civil War, there are also photographs of people and events having to do with the war. There are also physical remains of places where the events associated with the Civil War occurred. Based on the documentary and physical evidence we can conclude with certainty that the Civil War actually occurred, even though none of us was there to witness it.

What evidence is there, then, for the occurrence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ? We will survey three lines of evidence: The testimony of prophecy; Eye witness testimony; and the evidence concerning the reliability of the eye witness testimony.

The Testimony of Prophecy

There are prophecies in the Bible testifying of the resurrection of the Messiah.

Let's begin with Psalm 16: "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol [the grave], Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption" ([Psalm 16:10](#)).

The book of Acts records Peter's statement concerning this prophecy: "For David says concerning Him: 'I foresaw the Lord always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades [the grave], Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.' Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades [the grave], nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses" ([Acts 2: 25-32](#)).

Saul, more commonly called Paul in the New Testament, preaching in Antioch in Pisidia about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, said, "But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are **His witnesses** to the people. And we declare to you glad tidings – that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.' And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: 'I will give you the sure mercies of David.' Therefore He also says in another Psalm: '**You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.**' For David, after he had served his own generation by the

will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption [his body decayed into dust]; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption [Jesus was resurrected before his body had any chance to significantly decay]” ([Acts 13: 30-37](#)).

Isaiah prophesied of the **death, burial and resurrection of the Messiah**, as follows: “For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His **grave with the wicked – But with the rich at His death**, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, **He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied.** By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. **Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong,** Because He **poured out His soul unto death**, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors” ([Isaiah 53:8-12](#)).

The prophet Jonah was swallowed by a huge fish, which vomited him up after three days and three nights. “Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights” ([Jonah 1: 17](#)).

Jesus prophesying before his death, said that this was a type of his own death and resurrection. “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be **three days and three nights** in the heart of the earth” ([Matthew 12:40](#)). This is exactly the space of time Jesus was in the tomb according to Scripture (for details see our book [When Is the Biblical Passover](#), pp. 22-24, available online at cogmessenger.org or in print by request).

Eye Witness Testimony

Jesus chose from among his disciples twelve apostles, whose commission expressly included that of being **witnesses to his resurrection**.

When Judas, one of the twelve, who betrayed Jesus and subsequently hanged himself, was dead, lots were cast to determine from two men who were chosen, which one would replace him among the twelve apostles. Peter said: “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a **witness with us of His resurrection**” ([Acts 1:21-22](#)).

Peter, on the day of Pentecost following Jesus' crucifixion, testified: **"This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.** Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool'" Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" ([Acts 2:32-36](#)).

"And with great power the apostles gave **witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.** And great grace was upon them all" ([Acts 4:33](#)).

Paul, who became an apostle some while after Jesus' death and resurrection, recalled the following: "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, **and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time"** ([I Corinthians 15:1-8](#)).

Paul went on to comment: "... if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up – if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" ([I Corinthians 15:13-20](#)).

How Credible are the Witnesses?

Jesus warned his disciples that they would be subject to persecution and martyrdom for their devotion to him.

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how

or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved" ([Matthew 10:16-22](#)).

Jesus assures his servants that only God can put a permanent end to one's life: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill [or destroy] the soul [life]. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [*Gehenna* – the lake of fire]" ([Matthew 10:28](#)). "The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave **and brings up**" ([1 Samuel 2:6](#); cf. [Deuteronomy 32:39](#)).

Jesus further warned his disciples, "... 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" ([Matthew 10:36-39](#)). It's clear that Jesus expects his disciples to endure suffering and be willing to die if necessary in the service of Christ.

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus solemnly said to those he had chosen to become apostles, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also" ([John 15:18-20](#)).

Those witnesses, knowing they would be persecuted, and perhaps martyred, forsook their former lives, and traveled to far-flung parts of the earth to spread the message of the gospel, including witnessing of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They sacrificed greatly, and eventually gave up their lives as a testimony to the sincerity of their beliefs. They were persecuted from the outset, and eventually, according to tradition, all of them were martyred, with the possible exception of John, whom they nevertheless sought to kill.

As Peter and John were in the Temple in Jerusalem, Peter said to a crowd that had gathered, after they had healed a man in the name of Jesus Christ [or through his power]: "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, **whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses**" ([Acts 3:13-15](#)).

“Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and **preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead**. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening” ([Acts 4: 1-3](#)).

“And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, ‘By what power or by what name have you done this?’ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man [the one whom had been healed], by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, **whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead**, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, ‘What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.’ And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. **For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.**’ So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed” ([Acts 4:5-22](#)).

Despite the threats of the Jewish authorities, the apostles continued to witness concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ. “And with great power the apostles gave **witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus**. And great grace was upon them all” ([Acts 4: 33](#)).

Eventually, however, “Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison” ([Acts 5:17-18](#)).

The apostles were released by an angel at night, but were soon arrested again, and after being brought before the council and questioned, “...when they had called for the apostles

and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” ([Acts 5:40-42](#)).

Eventually the persecutions became more severe. Stephen, who had been ordained a deacon serving the Church, was martyred, and nearly all the members of the church in Jerusalem were scattered into the countryside as a result of persecution: “Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a **great persecution arose** against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” ([Acts 8:1](#)).

Then the first of the apostles to be martyred was killed. “Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he **killed James** the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also” ([Acts 12:1-3](#)).

Peter was freed by an angel, and was not killed at that time. But eventually, according to scattered traditions, all the apostles were put to death through persecution, except possibly John, as I stated earlier.

Paul, who started out as a persecutor of the Church, became a leading apostle. Paul spent his life ministering to Israelites and Gentiles, especially Gentiles, in various places. He frequently suffered much as a result of his labors in preaching the gospel, including persecution, in the form of beatings, having to fight beasts, being imprisoned, and eventually martyred ([II Corinthians 11:23-33](#); [I Corinthians 15:32](#); commentators disagree on whether the term “beasts” in the latter verse is to be taken literally or figuratively).

He wrote to the Philippians: “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and **the power of His resurrection**, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the **resurrection from the dead**” ([Philippians 3: 8-11](#)).

Note that he was motivated by a desire to attain to the resurrection from the dead. He believed in Christ’s resurrection, and in the possibility of his own resurrection.

A letter commonly called the *First Epistle of Clement*, believed to have been written toward the end of the first century, mentions the martyrdom of Peter and Paul (*First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, V; cf. Eusebius, *Church History*, II.XXV).

James, the brother of Jesus, became the overall leader of the New Testament Church under Christ at some point in the first century until his death. His death as a martyr is attested by Josephus, a Jewish writer of the first century.

Josephus' account of the death of James, occurring in 62 A.D., is generally accepted as unembellished and accurate. He relates that after the death of the Roman Procurator, Festus, and before the new Procurator arrived in Judea, the High Priest, Ananus, convened the Sanhedrin and had James put to death (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus, 20.9.1; cf. Eusebius, *Church History*, II.XXIII).

In addition to New Testament accounts, the persecution of Christians in the first century is attested to by the Roman writers Suetonius (*The Lives of the Twelve Caesars/Nero*, ¶ 16), Dio Cassius, and Tacitus (*Annals*, 15.44). Some "early fathers," among them Melito, Tertullian, Irenaeus, and Hegesippus, writing in the second century and later, also mention such persecutions.^[1] It should be noted that persecutions were not necessarily state sponsored, especially in the first century. Sometimes, perhaps more often, they were spontaneous actions on a local level ([Acts 13:50](#); [14:1-6](#); [17:1-15](#); [21:27-26:32](#)).

All the apostles mentioned in the Bible are mentioned in other early sources, which give us some information concerning how they died. The deaths of the apostles as martyrs, in addition to those named above, except for John, are found in various sources that record early traditions about their deaths. Some of the accounts are believed by many to be less than trustworthy.

Sean McDowell, as a research project for his doctoral dissertation, studied the documentary evidence for the martyrdom of the apostles, and published the results in a book, *The Fate of The Apostles*. In a subsequent article he summarized his conclusions. He rated the probability of martyrdom for each apostle from the available evidence from highest to lowest. The martyrdoms of Peter, Paul, James the son of Zebedee, and James the brother of Jesus, were given the highest possible probability. More probable than not was the martyrdom of Thomas. More plausible than not, Andrew. As plausible as not, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon the Zealot, Matthias ("DID THE APOSTLES REALLY DIE AS MARTYRS FOR THEIR FAITH?" *Christian Research Journal*, vol. 39, number 2, 2016).

The testimony of New Testament Scripture, which is a product of the ministry of Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the early Church, attests that Jesus Christ was crucified, and that he was

resurrected. It attests that the apostles were specifically commissioned to bear witness to his resurrection. It's known from Biblical and extra-biblical sources that the early Church was severely persecuted, many of its members were killed, and that several, if not all, of the original apostles were martyred (except John).

You must decide for yourself which you will believe: That the apostles were lying about having witnessed the resurrection, but chose to sacrifice their lives to sustain what they knew to be a lie. Or, that they had actually witnessed the resurrection, and lived lives of suffering and willingly died as martyrs because they were convicted by what they had witnessed.

The "First" Resurrection

The Bible tells us that there will be a second coming of Jesus Christ. "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him **He will appear a second time**, apart from sin, for salvation" ([Hebrews 9:27-28](#)).

"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits [properly, firstfruit, as in the Rotherham translation] of those who have fallen asleep [a metaphor for death]. 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 [firstfruit, see note above] afterward those who are Christ's at His coming" ([1 Corinthians 15:19-23](#)).

"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" ([1 Thessalonians 4:13-17](#)).

Note the dead are spoken of as asleep. A better rendering, more faithful to the original, of [1 Thessalonians 4:14](#), is, "...God will through Jesus bring with him those who sleep." Or as it is in the Conybeare and Howson translation, "for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also will God, through Jesus, bring back those who sleep, together with him." Note it is speaking of those who are now dead, asleep, as it were, in their graves. Yet they shall accompany Christ as he descends to the earth. The sixteenth verse tells us when the trumpet

of God sounds the dead will be raised back to life. Those truly converted and faithful Christians, who are alive, shall be caught up – note up – with the newly raised dead. The resurrected saints will **ascend from the earth** to meet Christ in the air as he is coming down to the earth. The saints will then accompany Jesus as he goes forth to fight the nations and eventually to descend to the mount of olives.

“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, **will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven**. Then they returned to Jerusalem **from the mount called Olivet** [Mount of Olives, as in several translations], which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey” ([Acts 1:9-12](#)).

“Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, And your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; The city shall be taken, The houses rifled, And the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, But the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth And fight against those nations, As He fights in the day of battle. And in that day **His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives**, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, Making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, For the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee As you fled from the earthquake In the days of Uzziah king of Judah. **Thus the Lord my God will come, And all the saints with You [or Him**, as some manuscripts read, see *Gill’s Commentery*]” ([Zechariah 14:1-5](#)).

“And I saw thrones; and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them; and the souls of those beheaded on account of the testimony of Jesus, and on account of the word of God; and those who had not done homage to the beast nor to his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and hand; and they lived and reigned with the Christ a thousand years: the rest of the dead did not live till the thousand years had been completed. This is the first resurrection” ([Revelation 20:4-5](#), Darby translation).” “Others also besides martyrs shared in Christ’s victory, those who refused to worship the beast or wear his mark as in 13:15; 14:9 ff.; 16:2; 19:20” (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*).

“Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him” ([Daniel 7:27](#)).

The “Second” Resurrection

While the first resurrection is often discussed among those who profess Christianity, another resurrection is less well known. It is what has often been called the “second” resurrection among those in the Church of God. It’s not actually called the second resurrection in the Bible, but it is the general resurrection that follows the initial 1000 year period of Christ’s reign on the earth.

Among other things, the “Last Great Day” of the feast portrays the second resurrection, and associated events.

“Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the **Feast of Tabernacles for seven days** to the Lord. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. On the **eighth day** you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it” ([Leviticus 23:34-36](#)).

Note that the Feast of Tabernacles proper lasts seven days, and the eighth day, immediately following, is a holy day, or annual Sabbath, and technically is a separate feast, having its own meaning from a prophetic standpoint.

The Bible teaches clearly that **everyone** who has lived and died in the flesh will at some point be resurrected. But not all at the same time. “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ **all** shall be made alive. But each one in his own order” ([I Corinthians 15:22-23](#)).

“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which **all** who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation [or judgment]” ([John 5:28-29](#)).

For those not resurrected at the time of Christ’s second coming, there is a resurrection to judgment. For most, that will be the resurrection portrayed by the Last Great Day.

Jesus was illustrating the import of this feast, the Last Great Day, when he had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” ([John 7:37-38](#)).

The physical resurrection that will occur at the time portrayed by the Last Great Day is spoken of in some detail in Ezekiel.

“The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them

all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. And He said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' So I answered, 'O Lord God, You know.' Again He said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, "O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God to these bones: 'Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.'"' 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, prophecy, 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 prophecy 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 37:1-14](#)).

Those spoken of in this prophecy are descendants of Israel. But they are only a portion of all the dead from every nation and tribe who will be resurrected at that time to physical life, to be taught the truth, and given a chance to learn, and repent of their sins, to receive the Holy Spirit, and to prove by their works that they will be faithful.

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books [the Scriptures] were opened. And another book was opened, which is the **Book of Life**. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades [the grave] delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works" ([Revelation 20:11-13](#)).

Jesus said, "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard [better translated "hears"] and learned [better "learns" or "is learning"] from the Father comes to Me" ([John 6:45](#)). The Concordant translation renders it, "Every one, then, who hears from the Father and is learning the truth, is coming to Me." "It is not enough to hear God's voice. He must heed it and learn it and do it. This is a voluntary

response. This one inevitably comes to Christ” (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*).

Jesus explained further, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life” ([John 6:47](#)). The Greek word translated “believes” is πιστευων (*pisteuōn*), present active participle of πιστεύω (*pisteuō*). The present participle, or “continuous participle,” of Biblical (koine) Greek describes **continuous** action (cf. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek*, 1993, pp. 240-241). Young’s Literal Translation renders the phrase, “He who is believing in me.” The kind of belief Jesus refers to is a living, abiding faith, a faith that produces the fruits of righteousness (cf. [Matthew 3:8-10](#); [7:16-21](#); [13:18-23](#); [John 15:1-10](#)).

A Greek word in the form of a “present participle,” such as *pisteuōn*, is commonly referred to as a “present” participle, because this form is built on the present tense stem of the verb. Such nomenclature can be misleading. One may be led to: “...infer that the present participle describes an action occurring in the present time, which it may not. It describes a continuous action.... there is no time significance to the participle” (Mounce, p. 241). The point is, Jesus’ statement applies to anyone who develops an abiding faith as described above, whether now or in the future.

Those who are brought to life in the “second resurrection” will have an opportunity to be taught, and develop such faith. The dead resurrected at that time will have a full opportunity for salvation, and to fulfill their God given destiny as children made after God’s image, sharing his life, eternal life, in the Kingdom of God.

Third Resurrection

There is yet another resurrection that is implied in the Bible. It has sometimes been referred to as the “third” resurrection, although that term does not occur anywhere in the Bible.

It is the resurrection of those judged incorrigible in this age. The Bible speaks of the destruction of the incorrigibly wicked in the lake of fire. “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [Gehenna, the lake of fire]” ([Matthew 10:28](#)).

Jesus warned that some would be shut out of the kingdom of heaven. “And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” ([Matthew 8:11-12](#)).

The “sons of the kingdom” who will be cast into outer darkness are those who, knowing the truth, have hardened themselves against it to the point of being incorrigible.

“When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know you, where you are from,’ then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’ But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’ There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out” ([Luke 13:25-28](#)).

In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, the rich man faces the lake of fire as soon as he is resurrected: “The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in [could be translated by, or before] this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us’” ([Luke 16:22-26](#)). The “great gulf” is the gulf, or separation between those given eternal life in God’s kingdom, and those who will suffer the “second death” in the lake of fire. For a more detailed explanation of this parable see the article “[Lazarus and the Rich Man](#)” at [cogmessenger.org](#).

One can sear his conscience to the point of no return. When does one reach that point? God will judge. But we would be wise to take warning.

“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after

you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 'For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.' But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul" ([Hebrews 10:26-39](#)).

If you want to please God, if you really want to be in his kingdom, and you are willing to follow Christ wherever he leads, you have not become incorrigible, and likely will not, as long as you endure in seeking to please God. A person who is incorrigible generally doesn't care, and is unreachable. That's why he's incorrigible, because nothing that is said or done will move him to repentance.

The incorrigible are those who will not under any circumstances repent, so they cannot be in God's kingdom, because they would spoil it for everyone else. So, Christ says, "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" ([Revelation 20:15](#)).

"He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" ([Revelation 21:7](#)).

God is merciful to all. God wants to give every single human being every possible opportunity to have eternal life ([II Peter 3:9](#)). Anyone reading this has that opportunity now. We can be in the better resurrection, to be attained by those who remain faithful to God in this age, as spoken of in [Hebrews 11:35](#). It is the first resurrection, the one to be preferred over the second, and certainly over the third. Strive to make the most of your opportunity to be with Christ in his kingdom when he returns to the earth, as being among those privileged to be in the first resurrection.

Notes:

[1] For discussions regarding persecution of Christians under the Roman Emperor Domitian, see the following: "[The Occasion Of The Domitianic Persecution](#)," Donald McFayden; "[The Persecution under Domitian](#)," Eusebius, *Church History*; "[The Second Persecution, Under Domitian, A.D. 81](#)," *Fox's Book of Martyrs*; "[Did Domitian Persecute Christians?](#)" Arthur M. Ogden, Ferrel Jenkins; "The Alleged Persecution By Domitian," *Essays in Early Christian History*, Elmer Truesdell Merrill, MacMillan, 1924.

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