

# Challenging Concepts Of The Resurrection

by William H. Bell Jr.

It is clear that for some, that resurrection can only mean the rising of a human body from the grave. "What ever there is about man that "lies down" when he dies, is that which will "stand up" at the time of the resurrection. What is there of man that lies down at death; is it his soul? Of course not, it is his body. The word resurrection itself, therefore, suggests the eventual raising up of the human body." (The A.D.70 Theory, by Wayne Jackson, p.57).

One of the first steps in understanding any subject is to grasp an understanding of the terms. The term "resurrection" is used in a much wider scope than the average person allows. As above, some confine its use only to a dead body rising from the grave. However, various sources reveal a wider usage of the term resurrection.

First, "resurrection" comes from the Greek word anastasis. This is a compound word. The first part, ana means "up" and the second, stasis means "a standing" (from histemi, to cause to stand). Therefore, the very simple and basic meaning appears to be "a standing up."

Further, when used as a verb, it can be either transitive (with an object) or intransitive (without an object). When the transitive form anistemi is used, the object (that which is raised) does not inhere in the word and is no part of the word. One must carefully consider the context to determine what is raised. When this is observed and practiced it will guard one from unwarranted assumptions which result from an indiscriminate use of the word. On the other hand, the subject does not inhere in the word when the intransitive form is used. Again, the context determines who or what rises.

Secondly, an examination of the various uses of the word will help one to understand the foregoing comments. The definition of anistemi given by Thayer is, "to cause to rise, raise up." Observe that Thayer does not say what is raised up. Next, he lists four usages of the word:

a. of one lying (or sitting) down;

"Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive," (Acts 9:41).

b. to raise up, to cause to be born;

"Saying, Teacher, Moses said, that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up offspring for his brother, (Matt. 22:24).

"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," ( Acts 2:30).

c. to cause to appear, bring forward;

"For Moses truly said to the fathers, The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever he says to you." (Acts 3:22).

d. to raise up from death (both spiritual and physical)

"This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all he has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. (Jno. 6:39).

"This Jesus hath God raised up, of which we all are witnesses," (Acts 2:32).

From the passages listed above, consider the following observations. One, the word "lifted" (KJV) is the word used for the resurrection. Dorcas, after having been brought back to life, was sitting when Peter extended his hand and "raised her up," (Acts 9:40,41). That raising up was not from the dead but from the position of sitting to that of standing. This was a literal standing up on one's feet, yet the term for resurrection is used. Hence, the context forbids the use of the word to refer to the rising of a body from the dead.

Next, the word is used in reference to bringing one into existence at birth.

"Saying, Teacher, Moses said, that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up offspring for his brother, (Matt. 22:24).

This denotes a raising up of that individual yet it is not a raising of his body from biological death.

The figure of "resurrection" as a birth was also understood and used by Paul.

"And He is the head of the body, the church, Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence," (Col. 1:18).

Paul speaks of resurrection as a birth while the Sadducees used a birth as an illustration of anastasis.

Third, the term means to cause to appear (manifest or reveal) or to bring forward. "For Moses truly said to the fathers, The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever he says to you." (Acts 3:22).

Note that God would "raise up" or cause to stand a prophet. This passage points to the manifesting of Jesus to Israel which was done in a public and extraordinary manner.

Jesus' personal ministry began when he was about thirty years of age, (Lk. 3:23). He was then raised up, made to appear, manifested or revealed to his brethren. One special purpose of John's baptism was to manifest Christ to Israel.

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' 'I did not know Him; but that he should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.' And John bore witness, saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God" (Jn. 1:29-34).

This was an official public act of God by which Christ was manifested to Israel. It was called a raising up or causing to appear. Christ was no longer in obscurity as it pertained to his mission and ministry, but was publicly manifested by an official act and divine declaration of God. Again, this did not involve a literal raising up of his body from the dead.

Fourth, the term resurrection is used to denote the raising up of a body from the dead. "This Jesus hath God raised up whereof we all are witnesses," (Acts 2:32).

Fifth, it is used to signify the raising up of the spirit from spiritual death (Jno. 6:39).

Sixth, the release of the soul from hades was considered as a resurrection. "Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (hades), neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption," (Acts 2:27). "He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell (hades), neither his flesh did see corruption. Observe that David does not refer to Christ's flesh when he speaks of his spirit's release from hades. To the contrary, he is careful to show that Christ's spirit went to hades while his body remained in the tomb.

Seventh, it is used to denote the restoration of Israel from Babylonian captivity to their own land. The land of Babylon was the "graves" in which Israel was buried in captivity. The opening of their graves and causing them to live signified restoration to their own land, (Ezk. 37:1-14). In the New Testament there is a similar restoration of the church or spiritual Israel out of spiritual Babylon or the Jewish age into their own land, the new heavens and earth. Note the following comments by a writer who has well observed this point in commenting on John 5:28-29:

"...it is assumed that the graves are literal graves. This also remains to be proven. Many mock the idea of the word grave being used figuratively as a synonym for death, but such usage is common in the scriptures. The word "grave" was used to picture the

national death of Israel while in Babylonian captivity (Ezk. 37). They were referred to as "dead men," (Isa. 26:19) and their restoration to Palestine was spoken of as a resurrection. The graves were opened when Cyrus gave them release from Babylon in order to return home. This captivity was symbolic of the captive state of the New Testament saints during the last days of fleshly Israel. They were oppressed and persecuted until the very end of that second Babylon (I Thess. 2:14-16). The fall of Babylon (Israel) and the resurrection of the saints to their homeland, the new heaven and earth, are the basic theme of God's final revelation to man. As with national Israel in ancient Babylon, the release or deliverance of the saints from Israel (Babylon) was the opening of the graves and the bringing forth of all into judgment," (The Spirit of Prophecy, by Max R. King, p. 219).

Eighth, the word is used to denote one standing up or rising out of spiritual inertia or slothfulness.

"Therefore he says, Awake you who sleep, Arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light," (Eph. 5:14). The one who slept here was neither physically nor spiritually dead. He was one who had been baptized but was lacking in spiritual development. Paul tells such to arise from that death. Further, the word in the original is a shortened form of anistemi, but it is the same word. The shortened form is understood by the use of an apocope, (the loss of one or more sounds or letters at the end of a word, Webster).

Since it is both true and acknowledged above by Jackson that "resurrection" (anastasis) means a "standing up," and since it is true that anastasis is used in a broader sense than merely to the human body, then it logically follows that the "object" of anastasis, be it referent to body, soul, posture, birth, national freedom, or spiritual development, etc., was in some sense "lying down" or, better said, in a "non-standing" position. A soul void of a right relationship with God is a non-standing soul, i.e., dead and in need of anastasis. A nation held in captivity is a non-standing nation, having lost its freedom and therefore is in need of anastasis or "national" resurrection. An unborn child though not physically dead, is separated from this life by its mother's womb, hence it is non-standing and in need of birth, anastasis or separation from the womb. In view of these facts, the transparent glossing over of evidence that forces dead human bodies to be the object of "resurrection" passages is objectionable when other options may be valid considerations.

In addition, a futuristic eschatological resurrection of the body creates a serious exegetical problem in the text of Romans 8:11. **"But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."** If there is one indubitable fact in this text it is that the indwelling Spirit effects resurrection of the body. Three questions are naturally raised at this point. One, how does one get the Holy Spirit to presently indwell physically dead bodies? Two, is the Spirit necessary to raise the bodies of the wicked and if not, how will they be raised? Three, how does the Spirit indwell dead bodies today in a non-miraculous age?

First, the careful reader will observe that the bodies in Romans 8 were yet alive physically, but died in some sense both when and only upon the condition that Christ

entered them (v.10). Does "Christ in you" bring about physical death? What a hope of glory! Second, the bodies in this context were only those of Christians who were physically alive. Third, the indwelling of these bodies was by a "then present" (A.D.57) miraculous indwelling of the Spirit whose "completed" work was future but not removed from the age of the miraculous--by His Spirit that indwells you. Clearly, this is a "non-Rover" perspective of bodily resurrection of which the critics of realized eschatology have very little to say.

Further, could the "bodily" resurrection of Romans 8 which clearly is non-physical death be the same as that of I Corinthians 15? The context of Romans carries the subject of bodily resurrection all the way through to verse 25. This connects several important eschatological facets, namely, "bodily resurrection," "heirs," glorified together," "revealing of the sons of God," "deliverance of the creation," "redemption," and "hope." One must ask, **"Were they hoping for two "bodily" resurrections, one before physical death and one after physical death, all within the one framework of biblical eschatological endtime?"**

Concerning the soul Jackson writes, "If one argues that the resurrection is of the soul, then he must contend that the soul dies, because whatever dies is that which is raised. If one alleges that the soul dies, he put himself into the category of the Jehovah's Witnesses and other materialists," (The A.D.70 Theory, p.49).

Here, Jackson's reasoning regarding death of the soul puts him at odds with scripture. He assumes that death of the soul means that it ceases to exist, that it is "dead all over, just like Rover." He fails to grasp the deeper meaning of "soul-death" which according to scripture means separation from God (Isa. 59:1,2; Jas. 5:20). God promised Adam that the day he ate of the "tree" he would die. Must one call God a liar as the Jehovah's Witnesses do and deny that man has a soul or rather acknowledge sin-death of Adam the very day he ate? Further, is God a materialist for teaching the death of Adam's soul, that day, for we know that he did not die physically until several hundred years later? (Gen.5:4).

Next, other New Testament writers have affirmed the death of the soul, yet they never affirm or imply that it ceases to exist.

"For the love of Christ compels us, because we thus judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died" II Cor. 5:14).

"And you He made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1).

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved." (Eph. 2:4,5).

"And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses." (Col. 2:13).

"But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives" I Tim. 5:6).

"Let him know, that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins." (Jas. 5:20).

Moreover, Jackson's position on bodily resurrection is strikingly similar to the materialism of the Jehovah's Witnesses. They object to Adam's death because they do not see in scripture where his body lies down. Likewise, Jackson objects to "resurrection" on the ground that he does not see man's physical body rise up. The positions are precisely the same. The only difference is the direction of the body.

It should be clear from the above that one cannot deny a spiritual event that takes place both in time, and within the dimensions of the physical realm, yet undetected by the physical eye. One could not merely look upon Adam's outward appearance and know that a change had occurred within, i.e., a fall from his spiritual relationship with God. The Jehovah's Witnesses are yet unable to grasp this simple but well attested fact of scripture. The advocates of physical resurrection make the same error by reasoning in the reverse.

In addition, one cannot look upon another by physical senses alone and determine whether that individual is saved or alienated from God. The details following Paul's conversion adequately substantiate this fact. "And when he had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple (Acts 9:26, NASV). Before this event in Jerusalem, Paul had been a Christian for about three years (Gal. 1:17,18). Even Paul's "fruits of repentance" did not convince his Jewish brethren that he was a disciple. It is worthy of note, however, that their unbelief in what had transpired on a spiritual level did not make the truth of Paul's conversion of none effect.

Similarly, the resurrection of saints from hades and the change of the "living" as far as we know, was not perceivable to the physical eye. The limits of physical observation do not deny, disprove, or otherwise negate the clear teachings of scripture that the resurrection occurred in 70 A.D., in connection with the fall of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:31,34; Lk. 21:22; I Cor. 15). Many could benefit by kicking the "physical observation habit" to which the Jehovah's Witnesses are "addicted" rather than kicking against the "pricks" of scripture.