

# Resurrection

## There's no such thing as death without resurrection

Throughout the Bible death and resurrection go hand-in-hand. We're never left in Scripture with death being the end of it all. Instead, we are constantly reminded that death has a twin, and that twin is just as real and just as powerful.

In the Garden of Eden, for instance, there was a tree of death, but **right alongside it** was its twin - a tree of life (2:9): "Eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," God told Adam in **Genesis 2:17**, and "you will surely die" - BUT, **Genesis 3:22**, "take also from the tree of life," and Adam and Eve would "live forever." So if they ate off the wrong tree they would die, yes - but - if they'd eaten "**also**" from the tree of life they would have been resurrected from death too.

It was only because God denied access to the tree of life that Adam and Eve weren't resurrected. Did that mean, therefore, that there would *never* be access to the tree of life again? No, because at the other end of the Bible, in the very last chapter, in **Revelation 22:2**, we find the "**tree of life**, bearing twelve crops of fruit," and in just its leaves there is "healing" for entire "nations" (same verse).

The tree of life and restoration, therefore, is alive and thriving, and there's no "sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life" like it was in **Genesis 3:24**. Access to the tree of life is no longer denied; anyone and everyone will be able - as God originally intended in **verse 22** - to "reach out his hand and take from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."

In the beginning of the Bible, therefore - **and** at the end of it - the good news is, death cannot exist on its own. It is always accompanied by the hope of resurrection. They are so attached in Scripture that you can't talk about death without mentioning resurrection in the same sentence. You might as well combine the two words into one and create a new word like **desurrection**, because death on its own is never the final word; it has to include resurrection.

We see that in **Romans 5:12**, which says, "Death came to all men," but in the very same chapter - only six verses later in **verse 18** - there's the promise of "**life** for all men" too. Death and resurrection are hand-in-hand again; death does not exist on its own. Death may loom largest in life for now, yes - but looming just as large right alongside it **all through Scripture** is the hope of resurrection as well.

There is a **clear thread** of death and resurrection weaving its way through the Bible. It takes many twists and turns along the way and it pops up in many different forms, but the message is clear, that things can look as dead as dead can be, but with God they're never really dead because he "**gives life to the dead** and calls things that are not as though they were," **Romans 4:17**.

That was written in the context of God telling Abraham he was going to be "a father of many nations," when Abraham knew for a fact, **verse 19**, that "his body was **as good as dead** - since he was about a hundred years old - and that Sarah's womb was also dead." And God **allowed** that to happen. He waited until Abraham and Sarah *couldn't* have children, and then he promises they'll give birth to whole nations of people. So God allows death, but **holds out the promise of "LIFE to the dead"** too. With God the two go hand-in-hand, to get the point across that death may feel terribly real to us humans, just as it did to Abraham, but right alongside it all through Scripture, is the evidence, the hope, and the promise of God resurrecting the dead, giving life to the dead, and replacing death with life.

And we see that happening - back at the beginning of the Bible again - with the murder of Abel by his jealous thug of a brother. What seems odd is that God doesn't kill Cain; instead, **Genesis 4:15**, God threatens people with "vengeance seven times over" if **they** kill Cain, and then he allows this murdering thug to have children of his own too, who - several generations later - have become so evil that God says, "I will wipe mankind from the face of the earth" (6:7).

God allows death and evil to rule. But tucked away in **Genesis 4:25**, Eve gives birth to Seth and she says, "God has granted me another child **in place of Abel**." So it's NOT all death and hopelessness, because WITH death came resurrection, another son to replace Abel, the result of which was "men began to call on the name of the Lord," **verse 26**. In the middle of all this death, then, God provided a **LIFELINE** of good people that started with Seth and continued all the way through Genesis Chapter 5 to Noah.

But disaster and death threaten again in **Genesis 6:2**, when "the sons of God" - Seth and his line of descendants - marry women from the evil descendants of Cain, and become just as evil themselves because of it. So, the one ray of hope that existed for humanity, the lifeline of Seth, has failed so badly that only "Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord," **verse 8**.

God took humanity to the wire, where it looked like death had won again. But thanks to one good man, Noah, God "said in his heart," **Genesis 8:21**, "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood." No matter how bad humans became in future the earth would survive. At the worst time in human history, then, when God felt like wiping everything out, he comes up with a **promise of LIFE**. He doesn't allow death to exist without life as well.

From Noah the lifeline of Seth continued through Noah's son, Shem, to Abraham. But with Abraham came an even **greater promise of life** that would continue all through history until, **Genesis 12:3**, "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." So, no matter how much death would ravage humanity from this point on, it would always be travelling hand-in-hand with this promise of life being just as real. One day, despite death and suffering being the pattern of human history, all people will be blessed.

It was an amazing promise, because for "all people" to be blessed the dead ones would have to be resurrected. It was a promise of resurrection too, therefore. But would Abraham **believe** such a resurrection was possible? So let's find out, Abraham: "Take your only son Isaac," **Genesis 22:2**, and "Sacrifice him as a burnt offering."

What a test that was, because, as **Hebrews 11:17-18** says, "He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.'" But, **verse 19**, "**Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead**, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death."

Note how Abraham "REASONED" this through. He reasoned that the only way God could fulfill his promise through Isaac was to resurrect him from the dead, even though nobody had been resurrected from the dead before. Amazingly, **Romans 4:21**, Abraham was "**fully persuaded** that God had the power to do what he had promised." And note what happened next, because in **verse 22** it was Abraham's belief that God really could create life from dead reproductive organs, and God really did have the power to resurrect Isaac back to life again, that was "credited to Abraham as righteousness."

And why was that important? Well, back in **verse 8**, "credited as righteousness" is defined as not having his sins "count against him." At the very moment, therefore, that Abraham believed God had the power to resurrect Isaac he, Abraham, is cleared of all charges against him. The sentence of death hanging over Abraham's head from the Garden of Eden is dropped and his "transgressions are forgiven" (verse 7). That's how important it is.

Take into account that nothing like this had ever happened before either. There is no mention in Scripture up to this point of anyone having their sins forgiven and being justified, or declared righteous, on the simple belief that, for God to be true to his promise to bless all humanity he'd have to raise human beings from the dead.

Take into account too, that Abraham had never actually SEEN God raise anyone from the dead. Abraham, therefore, was taking a huge risk killing Isaac, because what if death really **meant** death, and there was no coming back from it? Isaac would be dead and Abraham had killed his son for nothing.

But Abraham had reasoned this through: God would **have** to resurrect Isaac back to life to fulfill his promise; God, therefore, must have the power to resurrect people. And based on that simple conclusion by Abraham, a ball then began to roll that would continue all the way through the **rest** of human history too, as explained to us by Paul in **Romans 4:23-24**, because “The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for Abraham alone, **but also FOR US**, to whom God will (also) credit righteousness.”

Oh, so what happened to Abraham reasoning it through that God must have the power to raise humans from the dead, also applies to us. We see that in **verse 24**, where we too are credited with righteousness when we “believe in him who raised Jesus from the dead.”

So Abraham’s belief that God had the power to raise Isaac from the dead **applies equally to our belief** that God had the power to **raise Jesus** from the dead. And in the same way that God credited righteousness to Abraham for believing he’d raise Isaac from the dead, God credits righteousness to us for believing God raised Jesus from the dead. Righteousness, therefore, is credited to us for exactly the same reason it was credited to Abraham. It is based entirely on our reasoning it through that, for God to fulfill his promise to bless all peoples, he had to resurrect Jesus from the dead, because it was Jesus he was fulfilling his promise through.

And just like Abraham we place all our bets on that. Just as Abraham in **verse 20** “did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God,” neither do we. And just as Abraham “was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,” so are we. That’s what sets us apart as Christians; it’s our belief that God “delivered Jesus over to death for our sins,” **verse 25**, BUT he also “**raised Jesus to life** for our justification.”

As Christians we believe there was no such thing as death without resurrection for Jesus either. And the moment **WE** place all **our** bets on that **we too** are credited with righteousness. On that belief alone the great court of heaven dismisses all charges against us and pronounces us righteous in God’s sight.

Imagine the risk we are taking, though: Like Abraham, we have no evidence that God raises people from the dead. Imagine how stupid we’ll look, then, if we’re wrong about God resurrecting the dead, because, as Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 15:14-15**, “if Christ has not been raised our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God, that he raised Christ from the dead.”

As Christians we put all our eggs in one basket - which to God is extremely important because he credits righteousness to us for doing so - but what if we’re wrong? What if someone comes up to us after a funeral and says, “Prove to me that God will resurrect my husband from the dead”? What proof have we got?

Well, just like Abraham, our proof is God's word. And, just like Abraham, that's all we need, isn't it? Where most people at funerals are yawning at the idea of people being resurrected, we totally believe it's true. We have **good reason** for believing it's true, though, because of the clear thread of death and resurrection we see weaving its way all through God's word, from Seth replacing Abel, to the lifeline of people God preserved through to Abraham, to Abraham's belief that God would raise Isaac from the dead, and to God raising Jesus from the dead.

We have good reason, therefore, for believing **Romans 5:21**, that "just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness **to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**" Yes, sin killed off every human being, and deservedly so, but we have good reason for believing sin has now lost its power to kill people forever, because a human being called Jesus was resurrected from the dead, upon whom **all** sin was put. So even if the wife's dead husband was a rotten sinner, sin is no longer a barrier to him, or to any other human, being resurrected.

But what makes resurrection so clear to us personally is that we're living the death and resurrection of Jesus ourselves, because, **Romans 6:5**, "If we have been united with Jesus in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection." When Jesus died and was raised back to life again, we were **included** in his death and resurrection.

So here we are now actually experiencing what this thread of death and resurrection is like. And we know **why** we're experiencing it too: It's the fulfillment of God's original promise to Abraham to bless all peoples through his offspring, because here we are right now **BEING those blessed people** (Galatians 3:29, Ephesians 2:11-13 and 19).

Christians were the first and only people to understand this, because up to the time of Jesus' death most Jews thought the blessing given to Abraham was physical, and the Messiah was coming to resurrect and restore Israel as a **nation**. They had no idea the Messiah would die and be resurrected, or that they'd be included in his death and resurrection as the start of God restoring the whole world to a state of sinlessness.

The Jews **could have reasoned it through**, though, just as Abraham did, because the death and resurrection of Jesus was there all along in their own scriptures, which Jesus pointed out to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus soon after his resurrection. They were all downcast because Jesus had been crucified (Luke 24:20-21). But why were they downcast, and more importantly, why hadn't it crossed their minds that **Jesus might be resurrected**, when it was clear in their own scriptures that with death comes resurrection, and Jesus himself had told them (in Matthew 16:21) he would be killed **AND resurrected**? So Jesus took the time in **Luke 24:27** to "explain to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

He had to explain it all again too, with the rest of his disciples in **Luke 24:44-46**, because for all their knowledge of the “the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” they’d totally missed the verses that said, “The Christ will suffer **AND rise from the dead on the third day.**” Jesus’ resurrection on the third day was in Scripture? But **where?**

Well, Jesus had already given one example from the Old Testament in **Matthew 12:40**, of **Jonah** spending three days in the stomach of a huge fish. But there’s also **Genesis 22:2**, when God tells Abraham to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering on a mountain in the land of Moriah and they arrive “On the third day,” **verse 4**. For three days, then, Isaac was **as good as dead** in Abraham’s mind, but **on the third day** God tells Abraham in **verses 16-18**, that “because you have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you....and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.” With death comes the promise of resurrection **on the third day** through Abraham’s “offspring,” clearly referring to Jesus, GOD’S “only son” (John 3:16), through whom all nations would be blessed following **his** resurrection on the third day.

It was sitting there in scripture all along, reinforced in **2 Chronicles 3:1** by Solomon “building the Lord’s temple in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah.” So, on the very spot where Abraham would have sacrificed Isaac, the temple with all **its** sacrifices was built, pointing ahead to the time in **John 2:19** when Jesus would say, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days,” referring to himself as that temple (verse 21), and his own sacrificial death and resurrection three days later.

We also have David in **Acts 2:31**, who “spoke of the resurrection of the Christ,” referring back to a quote by David in **verses 34-35** from **Psalms 110:1**. David knew that one day “one of his descendants” (verse 30), the second “lord” in verse 34, would be given power in heaven over all nations (verse 35), and for that to happen he would “not be abandoned to the grave” (verse 31), a direct quote from Psalm 16:10. So here again, in the Old Testament, David knew that the Messiah would die, BUT he also knew the Messiah wouldn’t stay dead; he would be resurrected and remain alive until all his enemies were defeated.

For someone, then, who wonders where we Christians get the idea that someone’s dead husband will be resurrected one day, we have all sorts of evidence in God’s word that **there’s no such thing as death without resurrection**. God never lets death get the final word, whether it’s the death of Abel, or the near death of Seth’s descendants at the Flood, or of Isaac, of Israel in Egypt, of Jonah in the fish’s stomach, of sinners, or of Jesus. In every case there is resurrection, including promises yet to be fulfilled of Israel’s restoration, all peoples being blessed, and the tree of life being open to everyone again.

But the greatest proof of all is the death and resurrection we Christians **experience in our own lives now**. And we’ll touch on that in Resurrection Part 2.