

The Resurrection

AiF Level 2 - Unit 221



Week 2 – Resurrection in Paul Part 1

1/ Introduction

Paul's entire writings are steeped in resurrection language and metaphors. His absolute hope and belief in a physical resurrection of the saints based on the resurrection of Jesus permeates his theology about not only the future but also how we should live in the present.

One of the most striking features of the early Christian movement is its virtual agreement about the future hope. We might have expected that the first Christians would quickly have developed a spectrum of beliefs about life after death, corresponding to the spectrums we have observed in the Judaism from within which Christianity emerged and the paganism into which it went as a missionary movement; but they did not.

As Christopher Evans put it a generation ago, 'there emerged in Christianity a precise, confident and articulate faith in which resurrection has moved from the circumference to the centre'.²

When considering these texts a number of questions can be asked;

1. Where does Paul's belief about the ultimate Christian hope belong on the spectrum of possibilities in the ancient world?

This question subdivides into four:

- a. Granted that he spoke frequently of this hope in terms of resurrection, what did he mean by that?
 - b. Did he, like various Jewish thinkers, develop ways of speaking about an intermediate state between death and eventual resurrection?
 - c. How did he handle questions of continuity and discontinuity between the present life and the ultimate future one?
 - d. How does the resurrection function within his larger picture of the future which the true god had promised?
2. In what ways did Paul use 'resurrection' and similar language and ideas metaphorically? What has happened, in his writings, to the Jewish metaphorical use, denoting the restoration of Israel?
 3. What does he say about Jesus' own resurrection, and what precisely does he mean by it?¹

² Evans 1970, 40.

¹ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2003), 213.

1 and 2 Thessalonians

Paul's opening summary of the Thessalonians' initial faith focuses on how they came to believe in the true and living God as opposed to the idols of paganism. Then, in a hint of what is to come towards the end of the letter, he summarizes what his gospel has to say about Jesus.

1 Thess. 1:8-10

1 Thess. 4:13–5:11

This is a spectacular text, addressing a particular pastoral problem (what happens to those who die before the lord returns?), and exhibiting several of Paul's key beliefs about the resurrection.

1. Where does Paul's belief about the ultimate Christian hope belong on the spectrum of possibilities in the ancient world?
 - a. What does Paul mean by 'resurrection'? Jesus resurrection is a model for the resurrection of every Christian. οὕτως houtōs "in the same way" 4:14
 - i. Paul's use of *anastasis* falls firmly within the 2nd Temple and Pharisaic view of resurrection.
 - ii. 'Clouds' refers back to Daniel 7:13. The idea of clouds and smoke often indicate the presence of the spirit of God affecting his people. *Discuss the arrival of the emperor image that Paul is using.*

This passage thus belongs very closely with 3:13, and with Philippians 3:20–21, pointing towards the larger picture of 1 Corinthians 15:20–28 and Romans 8:12–30, indicating not that believers will be taken away from the earth, leaving it to its fate, but that—in the language of apocalyptic imagery, not in literal spatial reality—they will 'meet' the lord as he comes from heaven (1:10) and surround him as he comes to inaugurate God's final transformative, judging-and-saving reign on earth as in heaven.²

- b. What does Paul have to say about an intermediate state? In verses 4:14, 15 Paul speaks of those that are asleep; (*Κοιμηθέντας koimaō* VAPP-PAM who have fallen asleep)

² N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2003), 218.

- c. What signs are there of continuity and discontinuity between the present life and that final resurrection state? 5:4-8 Paul states boldly that Christians are already ‘children of light, of the day’.
 - d. How does resurrection in this passage function within Paul’s larger picture? Initially, as an incentive to the right sort of grief (4:13): not the kind of grief that overtakes people without hope, people in the pagan world the Thessalonians knew so well.
2. What of the metaphorical use of resurrection? For Paul it has disappeared in this passage as he presents resurrection as a real bodily event. However metaphorical language such as awake and asleep is still present.
 3. What does it say about the resurrection of Jesus? The whole passage assumes that this took place physically.

Galatians

Galatians 1:4–5 thus already addresses questions 1(d), 2 and 3. The death and resurrection of Jesus are the inauguration of the promised new age; and this ‘age to come’ is the long-awaited time of deliverance.

Gal 2:19-20

Gal 4:1-7

Gal 5:21

Gal 6:7-9

We observe that Paul can denote the final goal in a number of different ways;

- as ‘righteousness’ in 5:5
- ‘God’s kingdom’ in 5:21
- ‘eternal life’ in 6:8

Philippians

This letter has several clear statements regarding resurrection and its influence on our lives.

1:3-11

Note the references in verses 6, 10 and 11.

3:12-21

The resurrection and exaltation of Jesus proclaim and install him as the world's true lord and saviour; in other words, according to Paul's gospel it is because of the resurrection that Jesus is lord and Caesar is not. The future resurrection and glorification of Jesus' followers will vindicate them as the true people of the one true God, despite their present suffering and humiliation, and herald the victory of the gospel over the powers of the world through the final act of new creation. As in Pharisaic belief, resurrection challenges the powers of the world, as no other theology or spirituality can do, with the news of the kingdom of the creator and covenant God.³

³ N. T. Wright, [*The Resurrection of the Son of God*](#), Christian Origins and the Question of God (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2003), 233.