

YOUR HEAVENLY BODY

May 28, 2023

▶ CONNECT

As you begin your group, take time to look back and answer the following questions:

How did God's Word speak to you this week?

Where do you see God at work in your life?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of our faith. His death on the cross was essential, but the resurrection showed that Jesus was more than a prophet or a great moral teacher. He was the Son of God and had authority over something no one else does—death. The empty tomb is the ultimate symbol of Jesus's ministry of reversal. Jesus came to reverse for us the consequences of sin and death. To bring life out of death. To bring healing out of sickness and disease. To bring freedom out of slavery and oppression. To bring us from being separated from God as His enemies to being reunited with Him as His Bride. To bring us from being hopeless to having every reason to hope because we, too, will one day be resurrected with glorified bodies like His.

Imagine you already have a resurrected body. You're now perfected and can do things you couldn't do before. What's the first thing you would do? Be fun, be creative!

▶ GROW

The Bible teaches that when Jesus returns, the dead will be resurrected for the Final Judgment. Believers' bodies will be reunited with their souls and transformed from being perishable and natural to imperishable and spiritual, like Jesus's resurrected body. Believers alive at Christ's Second Coming will also be changed, giving all believers the same glorified and perfected resurrection bodies.

This transformation is called *glorification* and is the final step in God's redemptive work. Having shed the image of the earthly, we will bear the image of the heavenly with purified souls free from all sin and fit for eternity. Like a bride who looks most beautiful on her wedding day, we, the Church, will be made beautiful for the wedding feast of the Lamb. On our wedding day, Christ, our groom, will come for us, and we will be joined forever in eternal life.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:42-49, Philippians 3:20-21, and Revelation 19:7-8 as a group. Make observations about the passage by answering questions such as these:

- What do you see? What do you find interesting or insightful? What's something new you learned or hadn't seen before?
- What is the author's main point? How does he make it?

- What lesson am I meant to learn from this passage (or story)?

Next, ask what this passage says about God, people in general, and yourself in particular.

- What does this passage say about God? What does it say about His character and activity in our lives and the world?
- What does this passage say about us? What does it reveal about human nature?
- What does this passage say about you? How does it directly apply to your identity, worth, and purpose?

► SHARE

Paul made it clear that if Christ was not raised from the dead, we are still in our sins, and our faith is in vain. The resurrection proved Christ's victory over death and sin and assured us that one day we will be resurrected and reunited with God for eternity. The resurrection gives us hope for the future, but it also gives us hope in the present. Christ's ministry of reversal continues today, and He promises to give us resurrection lives here and now, not just in the sweet by-and-by.

Despite the trials and difficulties we face today, there is a future for us that will be marked by joy and celebration with our Savior on our wedding day. Because Jesus lives, we have purpose. Because He lives, our faith is not in vain. Because He lives, we have the promise of our own resurrection. One day, we will be made new. The effects of sin and death will be once-and-for-all reversed, and we will be reunited with God to live forever with Him in eternal love.

As we look forward to that day, may we be motivated by the hope of the resurrection to persevere in faith and prepare ourselves with lives that please God and give all glory to Him.

Think of an area where you are experiencing a trial or difficulty. How might the resurrection give you hope in that area?

What would it look like to live a resurrection life, believing that Jesus came, died, and rose again to reverse the effects of sin and death for you?

What could you do this week to remind yourself that the promise of resurrection life gives you hope for the future and today?

How would our community change if everyone were motivated by the resurrection to persevere in faith and prepare themselves for our wedding day with Jesus?

Think of someone with whom you could share what you have learned from our conversation about God and His truth. Commit to sharing with that person this week.

► PRAY

As we prepare to leave group tonight, we desire to step out and live a Jesus-centered life and submit to the Spirit (Romans 8:6-8). Take time to reflect on this past week and set intentions for next week by answering the following questions:

- *How have you fed your spirit this week?*

- *What are ways you drifted to feeding your flesh?*

Take a few moments to pray for each other and God's continued growth in those areas.

► DISCOVER MORE

BACKGROUND ON THE RESURRECTION

Resurrection From the Latin *resurrectio*, meaning “rising again.” A return to life after having died. Mainly refers to the resurrection of Christ—the central event of the Christian faith. Also refers to the Christian doctrine of corporate resurrection, which is connected to the judgment of both the living and the dead.

Introduction

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to the New Testament and foundational for the theology of the Church. These events have been acknowledged as paramount from the early church to the present. For example, Paul argues that if Jesus did not bodily rise from the dead as the firstfruit of believers, biblical faith is fallacious and ineffective, preaching is useless, apostolic witnesses were false, sin remains unforgiven, and believers have died without hope (1 Cor 15:12–19). He also asserts that Christians are misguided without this distinctive doctrine (1 Cor 15:32).

Old Testament Background

The Old Testament contains many references to the decay of death, the depths of the grave, and Sheol as the pit of destruction. It addresses despairing circumstances and inevitable death with a confident hope in the living God: even though death disrupts the harmonies of life, it cannot destroy believers' fellowship with the sovereign of life—God (Psa 104:29–30). However, the Old Testament writers do not speculate about what happens in the afterlife. They simply present the belief that faithful people will live because Yahweh lives, and He will not abandon His covenantal people in the pit. The issue of transcending death gave faithful worshipers of Yahweh an occasion to celebrate His steadfast love toward them in affirmation of His justice and their hope.

Historical Narratives

The historical narratives contain several references to a transformation or a return to life, but no statements specifically speak of a resurrection:

- Genesis 5:24 states that Enoch “walked with God, then he was no more, because God took him away” (Gen 5:24). Like Enoch, Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, and Elisha saw him no more (2 Kgs 2:11–12). As the references contain no additional details, readers can only conclude that Enoch and Elijah entered the presence of the Lord.
- Job 19:25–27 identifies the principle of hope and life in the presence of God: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end ... I will see God” (Job 19:25–27).
- In 2 Sam 12:23, David responds to the loss of his child by stating: “Now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me” (2 Sam 12:23). David bases this statement on Deut 32:39: “I myself am He. There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life” (compare 1 Sam 2:6).

Several Old Testament individuals were miraculously returned to life, including:

- The widow's son in Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:17–22)
- The Shunammite's son (2 Kgs 4:18–37)
- The man thrown into Elisha's grave (2 Kgs 13:20)

Psalms

The Psalms continue the theme of God as the sovereign of life, but develop the promises of the living one and their applicability for messianic resurrection:

- In Psa 88:4–5, the psalmist, who cries for deliverance from a terminal disease, identifies himself as one of “those who go down to the pit.” The lament is a Job-like plea for the sole source of comfort to intervene in his despair.
- In Psa 86:11–13, the psalmist praises God for “deliverance from the depths of the grave.”
- In Psa 73:24, the psalmist testifies, “You guide me with your counsel and afterward you will take me into glory.” Comparing himself to a “brute beast” before You” (Psa 73:22), he extends the comfort of the Lord's fellowship into His glorious presence beyond the grave. Both before and after death, he treasures his unending fellowship with his life-sustaining God.

Psalm 16 expresses joy and security in the Lord “who will not abandon me in the grave, nor will You let your Holy One see decay” (Psa 16:9–11). Consistent with the larger Old Testament context, the psalmist saw no end to his communion with God. Peter quotes this passage in Acts 2:25–28, and viewed it as a messianic promise: “He spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life” (Acts 2:29–31; compare 13:34–35). Therefore, from the Psalms emerges a skeletal contour of hope in Davidic promises that framed the apostolic doctrine of resurrection from the dead.

The Prophets

The prophets developed the contours of messianic expectation. Daniel moved from an implicit expectation of life with God beyond the grave to an explicit affirmation of resurrection “from the dust of the earth” to everlasting life or judgment. This progression can also be seen in Hosea, Isaiah, and Ezekiel.

Hosea 13:14 mocked death in a setting where God judged Israel for rebellion against Him: “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction.” Paul quoted the verse in his celebration of the resurrection in 1 Cor 15:55, leading some to see it as a prediction of Christ's resurrection. However, Hosea was affirming God's sovereign control over death and promising that He will redeem His people from it. Paul freely uses the prophet's point that the ultimate victory over death will be achieved by the resurrected Redeemer.

Related to Hosea's passage is Isa 25:8, which Paul quoted in 1 Cor 15:54: “Then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ” Isaiah foresaw an eschatological time when the Sovereign of life will destroy death. This is Paul's emphasis as well. Levenson argues that, contrary to widespread misconceptions, the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic traditions did anticipate an eschatological resurrection of the dead to restore deserving people to life: “the resurrection of the dead ... drew, most centrally, on the long-standing conviction that God would prove faithful to his promise of life for his people.... Without the expectation of resurrection, the restoration of Israel would be something less

than what the rabbis thought the Torah had always intended it to be—the ultimate victory of the God of life” (Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, xiii, 229). Isaiah 26:19 may also briefly anticipate the resurrection of Israel.

Levenson’s viewpoint was paralleled in an earlier period by Martin-Achard who stated about the Servant in Isa 53: “The destiny of the humiliated and glorified Servant presupposes his resurrection; yet Deutero-Isaiah makes no specific reference to this” (*From Death to Life*, 122). Later, Barry built on Levenson’s work by showing that the Suffering Servant in Isaiah is a special servant who will offer his life as a sin offering and will be raised from the dead. Commenting on Isa 53:10, he stated, “One can logically conclude from the context of the passage that it is because of the servant’s obedience to Yahweh’s will—resulting in his ultimate fulfillment of the office of servant—that he is resurrected and blessed” (Barry, *The Resurrected Servant in Isaiah*, 70). Barry’s work undermined long-standing arguments by Orlinsky and Whybray that had been used to deny resurrection in the passage.

Ezekiel’s vision of “dry bones” (Ezek 37) has been frequently interpreted as a prediction of Israel’s resurrection and restoration to the land. In a vision, the prophet sees a valley filled with corpses from Nebuchadnezzar’s massacre. In response to God’s question, “Can these bones live?,” Ezekiel responded, “You alone know, O Sovereign Lord.” The dialogue emphasizes that only God can resurrect corpses with His breath, imagery that is based on Gen 2:7. God then decrees, “O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them.... I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land” (Ezek 37:12–14).

Daniel 12 also asserts that believers will be delivered in a time of unique, eschatological distress: “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and enduring contempt” (Dan 12:2). This is the first biblical reference to a general resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. Justice mandated the resurrection, for it is the only answer for the death of the faithful servants of the covenantal God of Israel.

Intertestamental Views

The period between the testaments exhibited a variety of beliefs that imply resurrection, but they add little to the Old Testament (Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life*, 1972):

- Second Maccabees affirms the belief that God will vindicate the faithful by bringing their bodies to life (e.g., 2 Macc 14:46).
- *Ethiopic Enoch* 90:33 implies resurrection and describes the righteous as living with the Son of Man forever and ever.
- The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs affirm the resurrection of righteous Israelites (e.g., *T. Jud.* 25:1–4).

At the time of Jesus, the Sadducees believed that only the Torah was authoritative and denied the resurrection, which was not explicitly taught there. Thus, they opposed the Pharisees (compare Matt 22:23; Acts 24:20–21). The Essenes affirmed an immortality of the soul akin to Greek notions of the soul’s release from the fleshly body (Josephus, *Jewish War* 8, 11).

New Testament Developments

The New Testament developed the Old Testament emphasis on the Living God as the sovereign of life (compare Matt 3:9), focusing on “the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt 16:16). The Son of God came from above to incarnate life (John 3:16, 5:24, 1 John 5:10). Given the universal reality of death, God’s mission in Christ necessitated the resurrection. In John 11:25, Jesus declares: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies.”

The Foundational Resurrection of Christ

In accord with Old Testament emphases, the Father raised the Son from the dead (Acts 2:24; Rom 4:24; 8:11; Heb 13:20). This also reflects the theme of the Son's submission to the Father's will. However, the Savior as personified life transitions from the Old Testament's monotheistic life-in-God to a Trinitarian bestowal of the authority to bestow life from the Father to the Son: "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.... For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom He is pleased to give it" (John 3:35; 5:21). Thus, resurrection power issued from God and belongs to the Son, who is one with the Father in their deity.

The New Testament also provides examples of people being miraculously returned to life:

- Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:41)
- The young man at Nain (Luke 7:14)
- Lazarus (John 11:38–44)

Jesus's authority was so great that even in His earthly ministry, death was mere "sleep" and life emanated from Him with no bounds.

The same limitless power and authority were supremely true in Jesus' own resurrection. After predicting His glorification several times (Mark 8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:34 with parallels), Jesus journeyed to Jerusalem for crucifixion. The chief priests and Pharisees obtained permission to seal Jesus' tomb with a large stone and a guard of soldiers, "lest his disciples go and steal Him away ... and the last fraud will be worse than the first" (Matt 27:64). An Angel of the Lord appeared at dawn, immobilized the guards, and rolled back the stone (28:2–4). Several women came to anoint the Lord's corpse and found the empty tomb with an angelic explanation: "You seek Jesus who was crucified. He has risen, He is not here; see the place where they laid him. But go tell his disciples that He has risen from the dead and is going before you to Galilee" (Mark 16:5–7). Matthew 28 records a conspiratorial bribe between Jewish elders and the guards to spread a rumor that "His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep" (Matt 28:13). Matthew also places the 11 disciples with the Lord in Galilee for their commissioning. Their response was mixed—some worshiped while others doubted (Matt 28:16).

Luke similarly narrated two postresurrection appearances; first to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, who then announced the resurrection to the 11 disciples (Luke 24:13–35). The resurrected Lord explained twice how the Christ had to suffer before His entry into glory (Luke 24:25–27, 45–46). In Luke 24:38–39, Jesus asks His disciples, "Why are you troubled ... and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. You may touch me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." He then ate broiled fish before them (Luke 24:43). John likewise wrote about their doubt, Christ's challenge to believe, and a meal of fish (John 20–21). These narratives describe the death and resurrection of the Lord in terms of a body that could be seen, felt, recognized, and experienced in fellowship (1 John 1:1–3). Each of the narratives records the empty tomb, the confusion of the disciples, and their transformation after the resurrection.

The effect of the resurrection was the Lord's ascension to the right hand of the Father as Priest-King on behalf of His people (Heb 7–10). He was anointed by the Spirit of holiness for this office in accord with Davidic promises "with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to Him" (Acts 13:30–37, Rom 1:3–4, 1 Pet 1:3, 3:21–22). His resurrection as firstfruit suggests the foundational priority of a "living hope" for His people as well as the supreme authority to deliver them from the curse of death.

The resurrection also transformed Jesus' disciples, for it established His historic claims as true. The Messiah had used Psa 110 to show that He was both son and Lord of David (e.g., Mark 12:35–37). David, "speaking in the Spirit," had addressed his own son as "Lord" as He was exalted to the Father's right hand until all enemies were brought into subjection to God's rule. Consequently, the Easter speech flooded the life of the Church and became the focal point of opposition to the preaching of the gospel (Coenen, DNTT 3:280).

Resurrection as the Foundation of Christian Belief and Experience

Christ's resurrection initiated a progression of resurrections that will achieve the ultimate subjection of sin and death, so that God will be "all in all." Hence, believers enter an eschatological process upon salvation. The foundation of the future, "of first importance," is the gospel which rests on the crucifixion and resurrection "according to the Scriptures." Paul was significant among these "as to one untimely born" (1 Cor 15:3–8), referring to his encounter with the exalted Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–9). In Christ, all will be made alive, each in order, until the destruction of the last enemy—death (1 Cor 15:20–26).

In the meantime, believers are "to suffer with Him in order that we might be glorified with Him" (Rom 8:17; Phil 3:9–10). This means that they should "walk in newness of life as slaves of obedience and righteousness by God's grace (Rom 6). In the Spirit of Christ, believers have been adopted into God's family as fellow-heirs of Christ (Rom 8) until He appears again (1 John 3:1–3). Hebrews encourages believers to focus on Jesus, "the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:2 NIV).

Resurrection as the Foundation of the New Creation

The progression of resurrections in their order will culminate in the new creation, since sin and death have subjected the "old creation" to a groaning travail of decay (Rom 8:18–25). The future resurrection of believers will involve a bodily transformation from death to life. However, because perishable flesh and blood cannot inherit immunity from eternal death (Jeremias, "Flesh and Blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God," 151–59). "this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality" (1 Cor 15:53). The resurrected body will be powerful, glorious, and "spiritual," referring to the gift of the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor 15:42–48). Morissette asserts that the two bodies will be different, but the person will be the same—as with Christ, there will be two dwellings and one occupant (Morissette, "La Condition de ressuscité," 208–28).

The priority of the New Testament concerns the transformation of believers (compare John 6:39–40; 11:24), which involves both resurrection and translation: "We who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep ... the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we always be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:15–17; compare 1 Cor 15:51–52 ESV).

Before the new creation, the Lord also promised a general resurrection for judgment. In Revelation 20, John saw thrones and the souls of those who had been given authority to judge. The martyrs who had not compromised in the great tribulation "came to life" in "the first resurrection" to reign with Christ for a thousand years with exemption from "the second death" (Rev 20:4–6). At the conclusion of the thousand years, the forces of evil will surround "the city God loves" and will be devoured by fire from heaven. The devil will be "tormented with them day and night forever and ever" (Rev 20:7–10). The Lord will then judge all of the dead according to what they had done. Finally, "death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire," which is the second death (Rev 20:11–15). This was John's vision of Christ's triumph over

dominion, authority, power, and death (compare 1 Cor 15:24–26).¹

1 CORINTHIANS 15:42-49

15:42–44 That a resurrected body is of a different sort is the point Paul now introduces: (lit.²) “thus also the resurrection of the dead.” He then points out just how different the resurrection body is from the present earthly body. The present earthly body is subject to corruption, disgrace, and weakness; it is a physical body. The resurrection body is the exact opposite; it will be raised incorruptible, it will be raised in glory, and it will be raised in power; it is a spiritual body. Whereas the Greeks might consider the expression “spiritual body” to be an oxymoron, this phrase is at the heart of Paul’s argument here.

The contrast between these two bodies Paul expresses by means of two verbs, “to sow” (*speirō*) and “to raise” (*egeirō*). The idea of resurrection is certainly behind the second of these verbs. For the former verb Paul is likely linking back his use of *speirō* in vv. 36–37 in connection with a seed that is buried in the earth. The human body (except, of course, for those that are changed at the time of Christ’s return) decays when it is buried in the ground; it is sown “perishable.” According to Paul’s Jewish background, touching a dead body brought uncleanness and its accompanying disgrace; “it is sown in dishonor.” The death of a human being demonstrates an inherent weakness to the body in that it cannot live forever (as God had originally created it); “it is sown in weakness.” What is placed in the grave is a “natural” body (a body that had been animated by a human *psychē*, “soul”); what is raised from the grave is “a spiritual body” (a body animated by the divine *pneuma*, “Spirit”).

15:45–46 From the reference to a “natural” body and a “spiritual” body Paul moves to the representative of each of these bodies—Adam and Christ. Paul quotes from Genesis 2:7 that when God formed the man out of the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, Adam (“the first man”) “became a living being.” He is the representative of those who are animated by the human soul. Christ, whom Paul calls here “the last Adam,” became “a life-giving spirit.” In vv. 21–22 Paul had introduced the Adam-Christ typology (see comments there), and he carries it further here. In the earlier verses he pointed out how our solidarity with Adam leads to our death, while our solidarity with Christ by faith leads to our future resurrection. Here our solidarity with Adam leads to our having a body that is perishable and subject to dishonor, disgrace, and weakness; our solidarity with Christ leads to his reanimating our dead bodies to come back to life so that they cannot die a second time.

Paul has two new emphases in vv. 45–46. First, the One who will give us the resurrection life is Christ himself, who by the power of the Spirit will someday give life to our dead bodies. Second, the order is important, for just as Adam came first and then Christ, so also the first body we receive is the physical, natural body, and the second one we will receive is the spiritual body.

15:47–49 Paul continues the contrast between these two representative persons. Adam, of course, was formed from the dust of the earth; Christ came down from heaven (cf. Php 2:6). Just as our solidarity with Adam enables us to live a physical life on this earth, so our solidarity with Christ will enable us someday to live in heaven, where he presently is,

END NOTES

1. J. Lanier Burns, “Resurrection,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).
2. *lit. literally*

seated at the right hand of the Father (cf. Col 3:1). When that day comes—when we are raised from the dead and go to be with him—we will have a spiritual body, i.e., a body that will “bear the likeness of” Christ’s body, which can inhabit the heavens (v. 49).³

PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21

3:20. While on earth, believers in Christ are foreigners or aliens away from their true home. In stark contrast to the enemies of the cross, the Christian’s **citizenship is in heaven**. Earthly goals and self-centered desires fade in importance. Mature, godly believers live in anticipation not in participation. Believers know the Lord Jesus Christ is coming back from heaven. He will fully establish the kingdom of heaven, where we have citizenship. While we wait, we participate in kingdom activities, not worldly activities.

3:21. Why look to the future rather than the present for satisfaction and joy? Because in the resurrection, Jesus has shown that he is sovereign. Everything is **under his control**. We have no reason to pamper and value the earthly body. It passes away. Jesus has another body for us, one like his resurrected body. It can take up citizenship in heaven with the resurrected Christ. The joy there is so great, we can forsake any pleasures earth might give. The apostle gives more details of this event in 1 Corinthians 15:51–54.

Our bodies get sick, hurt, desire sinful pleasures, grow old, and eventually die. Followers of Christ have the hope that life in this world is not the end. Someday, we will have a perfect body that will never die, a body like the one the Savior now has (1 John 3:2). Chapter 3 communicates the joy that Paul had in knowing Christ. Through his growing experience with the Son of God, he shared how this relationship is superior to false teaching, the pride of life and reckless living. Instead, he anticipated the day when he would be like his Savior and live forever in perfect joy with him.⁴

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-17

4:13 sleep. This euphemism for death is common in biblical texts and antiquity, so it does not support the notion of “soul sleep”—the idea that the soul exists in a nonconscious state of “sleeping” between death and resurrection. **no hope.** The ancient Greek poet Theocritus concisely captures the widespread sense of hopelessness in the Greco-Roman world concerning life after death: “Hopes are for the living; the dead have no hope” (*Idyll* 4.42).

4:14 Jesus died and rose again. The first reason that the Thessalonian church can have hope for their fellow believers who have died is grounded in Jesus’ resurrection, which in Paul’s theology guarantees that God will resurrect believers (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:12–23; 2 Cor 4:14; Col 1:18) so that they will be alive and participate fully in Christ’s glorious return.

4:15 Lord’s word. The second reason for hope is grounded in Jesus’ words, which may refer to a saying of Jesus not recorded in the Gospels (John 21:25), a paraphrase of Jesus’ end-time teaching (Matt 24; Mark 13), a general summary

END NOTES

3. Verlyn D. Verbrugge, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans–Galatians (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III & Garland, David E., vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 402–403.

4. Max Anders, *Galatians–Colossians*, vol. 8, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 247.

of Jesus' teaching, or a teaching revealed to Paul on the Damascus road or elsewhere. Paul is giving not merely his opinion but an authoritative teaching of the Lord Jesus himself. Jesus' words emphasize that living believers "will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep." All believers—the deceased-but-now-resurrected ones (1 Thess 4:14, 16) and the living-but-now-transformed ones (1 Cor 15:51–52)—will share equally in the glorious "coming of the Lord." Paul employs yet again (1 Thess 2:19; 3:13) a term (Greek *parousia*) commonly used to describe the coming of an emperor, general or other dignitary into a city with great pomp and celebration (see v. 17 and note).

4:16 with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God. These three phrases suggest that Christ's return will be a public event that is heard and witnessed by all people, not just believers. **dead in Christ will rise first.** Paul continues to comfort his readers, stressing that their deceased loved ones will rise first—even before the ascension of living believers (see v. 17 and note)—and thus not miss out on Christ's return.

4:17 caught up. The only explicit reference in the Bible to the "rapture" (from the Latin translation of the Greek verb used here). Paul envisions the church being "raptured," joined to Christ at his return. **together with them.** Paul's concern is not to predict but to pastor, as he stresses (the word order in Greek is emphatic) yet again that both living and deceased believers in Thessalonica will participate equally in Christ's glorious return. **meet.** Greek *apantēsis*; refers to a delegation party meeting an arriving dignitary outside of town to bestow honor on that visitor by escorting him back to their city. This practice of sending a delegation party to meet and escort an important visitor on the final leg of their journey is found in the only two other NT occurrences of this Greek term (Matt 25:6; Acts 28:15). Paul's word choice, therefore, implies that the church, once it has been "raptured" to Christ in the air, escorts him to earth.⁵

REVELATION 19:7-10

The bride, of course, is the church (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22–33); and Jesus Christ, the Lamb, is the Bridegroom (John 3:29). At a wedding, it is customary to focus attention on the bride; but in this case, it is the *Bridegroom* who receives the honor! "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him."

"What did the bride wear?" is the usual question asked after a wedding. The Lamb's bride is dressed "in the righteous acts of the saints" (literal translation). When the bride arrived in heaven at the Judgment Seat of Christ, she was not at all beautiful (in fact, she was covered with spots, wrinkles, and blemishes according to Paul in Eph. 5:27); but now she is radiant in her glory. She has "made herself ready" for the public ceremony.

Jewish weddings in that day were quite unlike weddings in the Western world. First, there was an engagement, usually made by the parents when the prospective bride and groom were quite young. This engagement was binding and could be broken only by a form of divorce. Any unfaithfulness during the engagement was considered adultery.

When the public ceremony was to be enacted, the groom would go to the bride's house and claim her for himself. He would take her to his home for the wedding supper, and all the guests would join the happy couple. This feast could last as long as a week.

END NOTES

5. Douglas J. Moo, "The Letters and Revelation," in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 2155–2156.

Today, the church is “engaged” to Jesus Christ; and we love Him even though we have not seen Him (1 Peter 1:8). One day, He will return and take His bride to heaven (John 14:1–6; 1 Thes. 4:13–18). At the Judgment Seat of Christ, her works will be judged and all her spots and blemishes removed. This being completed, the church will be ready to return to earth with her Bridegroom at the close of the Tribulation to reign with Him in glory (see Luke 13:29; Matt. 8:11). Some students believe that the entire Kingdom Age will be the “marriage supper.”

Revelation 19:9 contains the fourth of the seven “beatitudes” found in the book (see Rev. 1:3). Certainly the bride is not invited to her own wedding! This invitation goes out to the guests, believers from the Old Testament era and the Tribulation. During the eternal state, no distinctions will be made among the people of God; but in the Kingdom Age, differences will still exist as the church reigns with Christ and as Israel enjoys the promised messianic blessings.

John was so overwhelmed by all of this that he fell down to worship the angel who was guiding him, an act that he later repeats! (Rev. 22:8–9) Of course, worshiping angels is wrong (Col. 2:18) and John knew this. We must take into account the tremendous emotional content of John’s experience. Like John himself, this angel was only a servant of God (Heb. 1:14); and we do not worship servants (see Acts 10:25–26).⁶

▶ ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Max Anders, *Galatians—Colossians*, Holman New Testament Commentary.

J. Lanier Burns, “Resurrection,” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

Douglas J. Moo, “The Letters and Revelation,” *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*.

Verlyn D. Verbrugge, “1 Corinthians,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans—Galatians*.

Warren W. Wiersbe, “Revelation,” *The Bible Exposition Commentary*.

END NOTES

6. Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 617.