



The Resurrection In The Old Testament Selected Scripture

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As spring rolls around every year and we prepare to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ in a special and more focused way, our thoughts tend to gravitate toward the numerous New Testament passages which pertain to the Resurrection. I find myself reading through one or more of the gospel records at this time and turning to 1 Corinthians 15. It is certainly not difficult to find a passage of the New Testament that explains or applies the implications of the Resurrection. After all, without the Resurrection, there would be no New Testament, no Christianity, and any faith or hope that we might have, no matter how sincere, would be entirely in vain (**1 Corinthians 15:14**).

But what about the Old Testament? Is the Resurrection central to the Old Testament hope and promises? Do you often turn to Old Testament passages which speak of the Resurrection of Christ? Do you know of any such passages? Are there any? Is the Resurrection of the Messiah something central to the Old Testament promises and predictions, or is it only a central tenet of the New Testament?

Though we seldom think of it, the New Testament speaks of the Resurrection as an event which fulfilled prophecy. Consider a familiar passage, **1 Corinthians 15:3-4**: **“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, . . .”**

What “Scriptures” does Paul have in mind? It was not the New Testament, since that had not yet been written.

So what Old Testament passage(s) predicted the Resurrection? Most would be hard pressed to point to one, yet the Old Testament did predict the Resurrection of the coming Messiah.

In order that we could also boldly affirm that the Resurrection of Christ is “according to the Scriptures,” let’s get familiar with some of the Old Testament passages which were seen by the Apostles to be predictive of the Resurrection of the Messiah.

How The Apostles Preached

The preaching of the Apostles was saturated with Scripture. Peter, John, and Paul did not have a New Testament from which to preach. Their preaching consisted of expositions of Old Testament texts of Scripture. When preaching, they relied heavily on the Old Testament to demonstrate that Jesus was the Christ.

You can see how saturated with Scripture their sermons were when you look at the preaching of the apostles in the book of Acts. In Peter’s well known sermon on the day of Pentecost recorded in **Acts 2**, he quoted at length from the Prophet **Joel (Acts 2:17-21)**, **Psalms 16 (Acts 2:25-28)**, and **Psalms 2 (Acts 2:34-35)** in order to show that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God and that **“God has made Him both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36)**.

Paul followed the same pattern in **Acts 17**, when he spent time in the Synagogue of Thessalonica **“reasoning from the Scriptures, explaining and**

giving evidence that Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ' (Acts 17:1-3).

These Jewish apostles, who were steeped in the Old Testament and knew it well, would never think of trying to show that Jesus was the Christ apart from using the Old Testament to do so. No skeptical Jew of their day could be convinced that Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Joseph, was the Messiah, the Son of David, unless the case could be convincingly made that Jesus was the fulfillment of **“everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14).**

Peter and Paul used the Old Testament scriptures to prove that Jesus was the Christ, and that He must rise from the dead in order to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Which Old Testament prophecies? Let's take a look at some.

Psalm 16:8-11 and Acts 2:25-28

On the day of Pentecost, standing before *thousands* of God-fearing Jews, many of whom had been instrumental in crucifying the Lord (**2:22-23, 36**), Peter relied heavily on quoting the Old Testament to show that the Resurrection of Christ, a fact they could not deny since the empty tomb was only a few minutes' walk away, was a fulfillment of Old Testament scriptures.

After indicting them for their crime of putting Jesus to death at the hands of godless men, Peter rings the central note of his sermon, saying, **“But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power” (Acts 2:24).** Why was it impossible for Christ to be held in the power of death? Because the Scriptures foretold the Resurrection, and the Scriptures must be fulfilled.

Peter then quoted from **Psalm 16:8-11**, a psalm of David, which reads, **“I have set the Lord continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will dwell securely. For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will You**

allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever” (Psalm 16:8-11; cf. Acts 2:24-28).

Peter quoted the clearest and most straightforward prophetic reference to the Resurrection in the Old Testament. Up to Peter's day, the words of **Psalm 16** were considered enigmatic. After all, how could David say that God would not allow his body to suffer decay, when in fact, David's body had decayed and his corpse did undergo corruption after his death? What was David speaking of when he said, **“Because You will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.”** People didn't know how to take those words. Jews were familiar with the Psalm, but they didn't understand what David meant by it.

Peter offered an explanation for the passage by pointing out the obvious; that David was dead, buried, and decayed. The tomb of David was in Jerusalem at that very day, and everyone present knew that. Nobody could argue that these words of David were ever true of David. He had died, been buried, and rotted. Look at **Acts 2:29**, **“Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day” (Acts 2:29).**

Why then did David write these words? Peter explained, **“And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ. . . .” (Acts 2:30)** David was describing that which was true of the Messiah. He knew that God had promised to sit one of his descendants upon his throne. In fulfillment to all the Old Testament promises, this Son would rule and reign forever. There would be no end to His reign (**Psalm 89:4, 28-29, 36-37; Luke 1:32-33; Isaiah 9:6-7**). How could a mere mortal accomplish such an unending reign? Only if He were raised uncorruptible and immortal.

David knew that the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant hinged upon the Resurrection of Christ. So he spoke prophetically of Christ, saying that God would not allow “His Holy One to suffer decay.”

He is risen just as the Old Testament predicted and foreshadowed. He *had* to rise since there is so much more that has to be fulfilled. He must come to sit on David's throne and bless the nation of Israel and conquer every enemy. He must come to judge. There must a kingdom, the judgment of all nations, and the resurrection of the just and the unjust. All that is yet to come requires a resurrection. That was the reason why David could say with confidence that God would not allow the Holy One to undergo decay. God would raise Him.

Some might object saying, "But, Jim, was David really looking forward to a throne and a kingdom and a *literal* fulfillment to the Old Testament promises when he made that prophecy?" Yes! Absolutely. It is absurd to suggest that David would have understood those promises to be merely *symbolic* or have understood them to be fulfilled in some *spiritual* way. That is why Peter says that David "**knew that God had sworn to Him with an oath to seat one of His decedants on His throne**" (Acts 2:30). Further, that is why Peter then quoted from Psalm 110, saying, "**The LORD said to my LORD, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.'**"

Now it is easy to follow Peter's line of reasoning: *The psalm speaks of a resurrection. David is still dead. Therefore, the psalm does not speak of David, but rather a descendant of David. David, knowing that one of His descendants must sit on his throne and rule forever, was thus speaking of that King. Christ is risen, therefore He is that King, the Messiah, the Son of David, the fulfillment of that promise to David.*

The biggest proof of Christ's Messianic credentials is not His claims. It is not His works. It is not His lineage. It is His Resurrection. **Psalm 16** predicted the bodily resurrection of one of David's descendants. Christ is risen the third day, according to the Scriptures, therefore, this Jesus is the Christ.

Psalm 2, Isaiah 55, Psalm 16 and Acts 13

Acts 13:32-37, "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He

raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.' As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY AND SURE BLESSINGS OF DAVID.' Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.' For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; but He whom God raised did not undergo decay."

This sermon of Paul from **Acts 13** contains quotations from three different passages of the Old Testament as he builds his case for the Resurrection of Christ being central to the fulfillment of God's promises to the nation of Israel through David.

Psalm 2 speaks of God's Son, who is also David's son, the "Lord's anointed." This One is the King who will be installed upon Zion, God's holy mountain (**2:6**), will receive the nations as an inheritance (**2:8a**), even the very ends of the earth as a possession (**2:8b**). He will break the nations with a rod of iron (**2:9**) when He sets up His Kingdom in Jerusalem. All these events are yet future. Their literal fulfillment requires the Resurrection! Paul, and the Jews of his day, expected the literal fulfillment¹ of these promises--that is, the promise made to David by God concerning the Lord Jesus. The fulfillment of these promises is impossible without the Resurrection.

Paul applied those words in a very peculiar way to Christ, indicating that this One is the descendant spoken of in **Psalm 2**. The word "begotten" literally means "brought forth." Paul is arguing that that refers to the Resurrection of Christ, whereby Christ was "brought forth" from the grave in resurrection from the dead. That is not some *spiritual* fulfillment of the promise but a very *literal* one by a very *literal* resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Jesus was "**declared the Son of God with power by resurrection from the dead**" (Romans 1:4). God had declared Him to be the Son of God by bringing Him

¹ Not the allegorical, symbolic, spiritual, metaphorical fulfillment that is argued for by those who deny the literal Millennial Reign of Christ on earth.

forth from the dead with power, in fulfillment of **Psalm 2**.

Continuing to build his case, Paul quoted from a second passage, **Isaiah 55:3**, “**Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David.**”

What specifically was this “everlasting covenant” and the “faithful mercies shown to David?” **2 Samuel 7:14-16** tells us, “**My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.**” Specifically the promise to David was that one of His descendants would sit on His throne and that the kingdom and throne would endure forever.²

How could this happen? How could one of David’s sons, the Messiah, the Anointed One, rule forever and ever and ever? More problematic, how could He do so after being crucified and laid in a tomb? Simple. God raised Him from the dead and He is never to return to decay. Christ lives, never to return to the grave. He is not subject to death, for death has no hold over Him.

For God to keep His promise to David **required** that He raise a descendant of David, His Son, the Son Whom He has begotten from the dead, never to decay or die, to live forever and thus to receive the throne of David establishing David’s kingdom and to sit on that throne forever. That was God’s promise. For God to fulfill that promise **required** that He raise the Messiah from the dead. In that way, the Resurrection of Christ was a fulfillment of **Psalm 2** and **Isaiah 55** and **Psalm 16**.

The blessings promised to David, and through David to us, could not be poured out through a dead and rotting Messiah. A dead and decaying Messiah is no eternal King, but a resurrected Messiah can and will sit on David’s throne and rule forever. The Resurrection was necessary if God was to keep His word to David!

² Read all about the Davidic Covenant in Psalm 89 and notice the repeated references to that promise. This was the Old Testament Jewish hope. It was not and is not, fulfilled by the Church.

The third passage that Paul quoted was **Psalm 16**. This was the same one we looked at earlier in connection with Peter’s sermon in **Acts 2**. We find Paul using the *same argument* that Peter used, saying, “**David. . . fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay but He whom God raised did not undergo decay**” (v. 36).

Now that we have considered all three quotations and their contexts, we can easily follow Paul’s argument in **Acts 13**: *God promised to enthrone a King, a son of David, the Son of God. God said of that King, “You are My Son, I have brought You forth.” Ultimately that is fulfilled in Christ who was brought forth from the grave and declared to be the Son of God with power by resurrection from the dead.*

It was necessary for God to raise the Messiah from the dead and that He never again be subject to death and decay. God promised to seat the Messiah upon the throne of David in order that He might rule forever and ever and establish the Davidic kingdom, an eternal kingdom, with an eternal King. To fulfill that promise, it was necessary that the Christ rise again.

Jesus fulfills all of this. He is the Son of God. He can and will reign from David’s throne forever, since He did not undergo decay. His Resurrection is the fulfillment of God’s promise to bring forth a King, to grant the blessings of David through that King and to not allow that King to undergo decay.

The case that both Paul and Peter build from the Old Testament rests upon a **literal** interpretation of the promises to David concerning a King and Kingdom. If Peter and Paul believed that there was to be no literal fulfillment of those promises, then their argument would make no sense. It would be entirely nonsense. If Paul believed that those promises were now spiritually fulfilled in a spiritual way through the church, and that the church replaced Israel and was now the spiritual heir to all those promises, then his whole argument crumbles to the ground. It is **only** if the Old Testament promises to Israel are interpreted **literally** that the Resurrection can be seen as a fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. If those promises are to be spiritualized and seen as fulfilled in the church, then no Resurrection is necessary for their fulfillment. In short,

to read Peter in **Acts 2** and Paul in **Acts 13** and to suggest that they did not believe in a literal fulfillment of Old Testament promises concerning the King and the Kingdom is absurd in the highest degree. They never once suggested to the Jews that those promises were not to be taken literally. They based their argument for the Resurrection of Christ on a *literal* understanding of those Old Testament promises.

Isaiah 53

We could also point to the familiar passage in Isaiah 53 which predicted the Servant of the Lord being crucified for our iniquities. He was “cut off from the land of the living” (v. **8**). His grave was assigned with the wicked (died with thieves, v. **9**), and he was buried in a rich man’s tomb (v. **9**). Yet verse **10** of the same passage says that **“He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.”** How?

Isaiah 53:11-12 says that this same Servant who “poured out Himself to death” would also be **“allotted a portion with the great,”** and **“will divide the booty with the strong,”** **“justify many”** and **“see the result of the anguish of His soul and be satisfied.”** How? These things can only be possible if that very Servant of the Lord who poured out His soul to death and bore the sin of many would also rise again for their justification (**Romans 4:25**).

The Old Testament Hope

Truly in every way, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament hope and expectation (**Acts 26:22-23**). The Resurrection is God’s promise kept: the promise to David concerning the Resurrection of his Son. God keeps His Word. He kept His Word concerning the Messiah. He will keep His word to David and will establish that Kingdom,³ He will keep His word to us as well. Not only was Jesus raised from the dead victorious over death, but someday **“there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked”** (**Acts 24:15**) and the Lord Jesus will **“transform the body of our humble state**

³ The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave is proof positive that the promises to David in the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom will be fulfilled exactly as predicted.

into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (**Philippians 3:20-21**). Oh, glorious day!

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