Short Studies in
BIBLICAL THEOLOGY



RESURRECTION HOPE

AND THE DEATH OF DEATH

MITCHELL L. CHASE

"In this beautifully clear book, Mitchell Chase takes us through the entire biblical witness, showing that the resurrection is woven into the fabric of the entire narrative. Chase demonstrates that the promise of the resurrection isn't confined to the New Testament but is clearly taught in the Old Testament as well. Our hope is for life after death—bodily, resurrected life—and we are reminded in this timely book that this hope is ours in Jesus Christ."

Thomas R. Schreiner, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"In one of the best contributions to the Short Studies in Biblical Theology series to date, Mitchell Chase clearly and succinctly presents what is at the heart of hope set before us in the gospel—unending, embodied, glorious resurrection life on a renewed earth—which is so much more than the hope of going to heaven when we die, anticipating a disembodied existence somewhere away from this earth. Significantly, this book shows how New Testament teaching about bodily resurrection is rooted in Old Testament stories and prophecies, helping readers to connect the dots from Genesis to Revelation."

Nancy Guthrie, Bible teacher; author, *Even Better than Eden*

"'The topic of resurrection hope is dear to my heart,' says Mitchell Chase. And so too for me. As I live out my brief life here on earth, as I grapple with sin and temptation, as I endure pain and sickness, as I say farewell to so many I've loved and lost, the hope that sustains me—the only hope, really—is the death of death and the promise of resurrection. This wonderful book shows how the entirety of Scripture teaches that those who are in Christ can have every confidence that they will rise to everlasting life and everlasting joy in his presence. That makes this a book of encouragement, a book of blessing, and a book of hope."

Tim Challies, author, *Seasons of Sorrow: The Pain of Loss and the Comfort of God*

Resurrection Hope and the Death of Death

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Resurrection Hope and the Death of Death

Mitchell L. Chase

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For Andrew Peterson,
whose music and books portray
the beauty and power of resurrection hope

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Series Preface

Most of us tend to approach the Bible early on in our Christian lives as a vast, cavernous, and largely impenetrable book. We read the text piecemeal, finding golden nuggets of inspiration here and there, but remain unable to plug any given text meaningfully into the overarching storyline. Yet one of the great advances in evangelical biblical scholarship over the past few generations has been the recovery of biblical theology—that is, a renewed appreciation for the Bible as a theologically unified, historically rooted, progressively unfolding, and ultimately Christ-centered narrative of God's covenantal work in our world to redeem sinful humanity.

This renaissance of biblical theology is a blessing, yet little of it has been made available to the general Christian population. The purpose of Short Studies in Biblical Theology is to connect the resurgence of biblical theology at the academic level with everyday believers. Each volume is written by a capable scholar or churchman who is consciously writing in a way that requires no prerequisite theological training of the reader. Instead, any thoughtful Christian disciple can track with and benefit from these books.

Each volume in this series takes a whole-Bible theme and traces it through Scripture. In this way readers not only learn about a given theme but also are given a model for how to read the Bible as a coherent whole.

We have launched this series because we love the Bible, we love the church, and we long for the renewal of biblical theology in the academy to enliven the hearts and minds of Christ's disciples all around the world. As editors, we have found few discoveries more thrilling in life than that of seeing the whole Bible as a unified story of God's gracious acts of redemption, and indeed of seeing the whole Bible as ultimately about Jesus, as he himself testified (Luke 24:27; John 5:39).

The ultimate goal of Short Studies in Biblical Theology is to magnify the Savior and to build up his church—magnifying the Savior through showing how the whole Bible points to him and his gracious rescue of helpless sinners; and building up the church by strengthening believers in their grasp of these life-giving truths.

Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt

Preface

The purpose of this book is to stir your hope for the life you were made for in Christ. Outwardly we are wasting away (2 Cor. 4:16), but that is not the last word. The return of Christ will bring about the defeat of death (1 Cor. 15:54–55). Reflecting and writing on the subject of resurrection hope has been personally edifying, and it is a privilege to contribute to the Short Studies in Biblical Theology. I am grateful to Crossway and to the series editors, Dane Ortlund and Miles Van Pelt, for the opportunity. I admire these men, and their encouragement has been a blessing.

My wife Stacie read an early draft of this manuscript, and her feedback and discerning pen instantly improved these chapters. How she set aside time to do this amid schooling and caring for our four boys, I'll never know! I'm grateful that my friends Jonathan Ketcham, Patrick Schreiner, and Samuel Bierig read the manuscript and shared helpful feedback and recommendations that strengthened it. Chris Cowan, my Crossway editor, was great to work with, and his keen eye and skills were a blessing to receive.

The topic of resurrection hope is dear to my heart. I wrote on it for my doctoral work at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and I've enjoyed writing and preaching on it over the years. Our hope

as Christians is great because the Savior we love is great, and our hope in him is sure because he himself is faithful.

I've dedicated *Resurrection Hope and the Death of Death* to Andrew Peterson. I learned about his music nearly twenty years ago, and his albums have meant more to me and our family with each passing year. The songs from his heart are full of hope, and many of his lyrics exult in the power of God over sin and corruption and death. Whether you are listening to his *Resurrection Letters* and *Behold the Lamb of God* albums or reading his Wingfeather Saga books, you are hearing about the power of faith, hope, and love. He writes and sings to light up the dark. Thank you, Andrew, for all that you have offered to the world. Your music and books have made it a better place. Given the reality of the risen Jesus, Paul writes, "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Introduction

What kind of life were you made for? Before you answer that question, here's another: what was life like before the rebellion of our first parents? The state of their existence provides a clue, a pointer, to answering the first question.

Embodied life. Adam and Eve experienced life and God's good creation with bodies. From the beginning it was this way. They didn't exist before their bodies. And this pattern is affirmed and vindicated at the end of Holy Scripture, when death is done because the dead have been raised.

Death the Disrupter

Looking at the beginning and the end of divine revelation, we can see that an embodied life is good, desirable, and coming. Death is the disrupter. For now, we experience embodied life temporarily because the effects of sin and the curse will not permit unending life. Outside Eden, we outwardly waste away. Our breath of life will, at some near or distant moment, cease.

Yet the biblical authors essentially say to death, "You shall surely die." Those wrapped in death's cords will be raised, and the saints will dwell in immortal bodies to experience the life they were made for, an existence surpassing even the glories of the garden. We might

consider this world to be the land of the living, but the reality is more complicated than that. We can just as well consider this world to be the land of the dying. We're breathing now in the valley of the shadow of death. Under the sun nothing lasts, not even us.

Risen Hope

The sinner's only hope in life and death is Jesus Christ—a hope that is grounded in his victorious person and work. He is the Savior of sinners because he lives and reigns. He has broken the cords of death, and he lives as the firstfruits of the life that will be fully ours. For Jesus, the valley of death's shadow led to vindication and exaltation, and that is the path we walk.

The good news about Jesus includes his virginal conception, his sinless life, and his sin-bearing death, but the gospel is incomplete without the empty tomb. If Jesus remained defeated by death, his perpetual entombment would call into question everything he said and did before the cross. The resurrection of Jesus on the third day is crucial to the good news, and the good news is emptied of its power without it. Paul says that if Jesus hasn't been raised, then we're still in our sins, our preaching is powerless, and our hope is in vain (1 Cor. 15:12–19).

When Jesus rose from the dead, the perishable put on the imperishable; and because he did, we will. Our hope is risen, so our hope is sure. He died never to die again.

The Biblical Landscape

Jesus's resurrection is announced in the New Testament, but the hope for resurrection is older than the empty tomb. To consider such a vibrant topic as resurrection hope, we will need the whole Bible. All its genres will help us. Many biblical authors will weigh in as we construct a vision of how resurrection hope unfolds across the sweep of Scripture.

When you think of resurrection hope, you might naturally turn to the New Testament. And that's understandable, because that hope is loud and lively there. But the volume was getting loud already in the Old Testament, and we will begin there.

The Old Testament of Jesus's day was divided into three parts: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. This book will treat each part in chapters 1–3. Then chapters 4–7 will investigate the New Testament, treating the Gospels, Acts, the Letters, and Revelation. The biblical landscape is vast, but that's appropriate to the vast nature of resurrection hope.

Resurrection Sightings

The resurrection of Jesus, and the hope for our own liberation from death, is foretold and foreshadowed in the Old Testament. The prophet Daniel says that people will rise from death, some to everlasting life and others to everlasting judgment (Dan. 12:2). The prophet Ezekiel depicts the exile and return of the Israelites as a corporate death and resurrection (Ezek. 37). Jonah descends into the depths in a fish before ascending to the shore after three days (Jonah 2; cf. Matt. 12:40).

The psalm writers sing about being brought out of the pit, about being taken from the clutches of death. They herald their hope to see God and to stand before him. These songs are from the lips of those who live in the land of the dying, and they write with their gazes fixed on the future land of the living. The suffering and sorrowful psalmists write as if death is not the end and something greater than earthly life is on the way.

Pushing deeper into Old Testament history, we remember that the Lord used both Elijah and Elisha to deliver people from death (1 Kings 17; 2 Kings 4). These are historical narratives where the power of death faced the power of God. And let's not forget that

Elijah himself ascended to God without dying first (2 Kings 2). A whirlwind of fire carried him above the earth, and suddenly—as with Enoch many generations earlier—death didn't seem so inevitable.

Even individuals who had not witnessed a physical resurrection could still hold out hope that God's power was greater than death. Two thousand years before Jesus was born, Abraham and Isaac left their traveling companions and climbed a mountain for sacrifice (Gen. 22). Abraham told them that he and the boy were going to worship and would return. The aging patriarch knew he could trust God, that God would keep his promise of bringing offspring through Isaac even though Isaac had not yet fathered a child (21:12). If God's plan was for Abraham to offer Isaac, then God's plan must also be to raise Isaac from the dead. Abraham's resurrection faith was reasonable because he knew from experience that God is serious about promises and has the power to bring them to pass (21:1–2).

An Everlasting Remedy

The Old and New Testaments testify that the solution to the problem of death is resurrection. The storyline of Scripture takes us from the embodied first couple in Genesis to the glorified saints in the new creation. But we do not raise ourselves. The victor over death is the one who has command of death. The tombs will open when he says so (John 5:28–29).

In the Old Testament, no one experienced an immortal existence. What Jesus accomplished through his resurrection was something new, as well as a kind of life that earlier biblical authors only anticipated. The accounts of resurrections were stories of people brought back to earthly life only to die at a later date. Stepping out of the empty tomb on the third day, Jesus embodied the everlasting remedy to the problem of death: glorified immortality.

While the first Adam did not exist as a glorified image bearer, the last Adam does. We may be image-bearers who are born in Adam, but we will be raised in Christ because we are alive in Christ by faith already. Because he lives, we live and will live.

Why Resurrection Hope Matters

There are many worthy books to read and worthy topics to consider. Why should you read about resurrection hope? Here are five reasons.

1. Individual: you are going to die. I know this isn't news to you, but you might not ponder it often enough. Resurrection hope affords you the opportunity to think about death clearly and without delusion. You are not invincible. As you age, you will face the aches and afflictions associated with getting older in a fallen world. And since you are going to die, shouldn't you have a clear understanding of your hope in the face of death?

2. Relational: people you know are going to die. You may even be at their bedside when it happens. You will know people who die old and others who die young. The healthy and the sick will die. The wise and the fool will die. All in all, we should count it a great privilege to point others to truth and hope in Christ. And resurrection hope is part of what we should share. The more we know about it, the more sound and helpful our instruction will be.

3. Christological: Jesus has been raised from the dead. He is the object of our faith and hope, so we must commit ourselves to learn about what he has accomplished. His victorious resurrection and glorified body are not bonus facts for an otherwise solid faith. If you negate the resurrection hope that Jesus embodies and promises, there is no gospel worth preserving or preaching.

4. Theological: resurrection hope intersects with other biblical doctrines. In thinking about resurrection hope, we must think about—for example—the goodness of creation, the nature of man,

the problem of sin, and the final state of all things. As we strive to understand the Bible and to hold together its many teachings, a study of resurrection hope will prove necessary and profitable.

5. *Doxological*: the hope of resurrection should stir joy and praise to God. The promise of resurrection extols the power of God and showcases the faithfulness of God, all to the glory of his name. Since Christians want to be those whose hearts are aflame with worship, we should delight in whatever stokes and feeds that flame. Gaining greater clarity about resurrection hope will help us exalt the Lord with greater zeal and joy.

1

Resurrection Hope in the Law

The roots of resurrection hope run deep. Long before prophets like Isaiah and Daniel shouted the news of future life over death, the seeds of this hope were growing in fertile soil. This chapter will explore ways in which the Law—Genesis through Deuteronomy—stimulates and lays the foundation for resurrection hope.[1]

As we walk through the Law, or the Torah, we will begin in the garden of Eden. Then we will go through the flood and into the lives of the patriarchs. We will follow the Israelites to Egypt and then leave with them through the mighty exodus. The redeemed people must live set apart to their holy God, so we will behold how the God of life dwells with sinners. They can count on his power and faithfulness, and these characteristics—divine power and faithfulness—are central to the hope that death will die.

1. Some scholars are reluctant to find instances of resurrection hope earlier than Dan. 12:2 (or perhaps Isa. 26:19). T. D. Alexander summarizes critical scholarship on the subject: "It is not uncommon to encounter statements which suggest that the Old Testament has almost nothing to say on the subject of life after death; and what little it does report is usually assessed in quite negative terms" ("The Old Testament View of Life After Death," *Themelios* 11, no. 2 [1986]: 41).

Take and Eat and Live Forever

In the beginning, God made embodied image bearers. From the ground he made Adam, and from Adam he made Eve (Gen. 2:7, 21–22). This first couple didn't exist before their physical forms. God breathed life into their bodies, and these bodies—like everything else God had made—were good (1:31).[2]

Adam and Eve lived in the abundance of God's blessing. Sources of food were plentiful, and the couple could fulfill the divine commission to be fruitful, multiply, and exercise dominion over God's creation (1:28). They would be God's viceregents, representing the King of creation as his agents, his royal ambassadors. Their physical bodies were integral to how they would rule and fulfill their commission.

But the bodies of God's image bearers were not immortal. He had warned Adam about eating from the forbidden tree: "In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (2:17). In those words, the notion of death occurs for the first time in Scripture. God is the God of life, and his ways are the ways of life; therefore, to reject God and his ways is to embrace death.

Another special tree was in the garden of Eden: the tree of life (2:9). This tree represented more than sustenance. The fruit of this tree enabled one to live forever. We know this because of God's words when he expelled the rebellious image bearers from Eden: "lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever" (3:22). Adam and Eve left the garden in their perishable bodies, and they would experience what God promised:

2. According to Kelly Kapic, "Unlike Plato's philosophy, the biblical presentation frames original human goodness within bodily existence, not apart from it. Our physicality was not a problem to be overcome but a gift essential to our existence. . . . Put differently, communion with God and others was always meant to take place in and through the body, not apart from it. This was our created state; this will be our ultimate hope" (*Embodied Hope: A Theological Meditation on Pain and Suffering* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017], 46).

for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return. (3:19)

The tree of life held out the hope of physical immortality, which was something Adam and Eve didn't have but were made for.[3] The problem of sin corrupts God's good design, so they died outside of Eden. Barred from access to that tree, their bodies eventually returned to the dust. The question for sinners, then, is this: will the perishable ever put on imperishable, so that the hope of immortal bodily life might be attained after all?

In the fullness of God's Word, resurrection life is how sinners will experience the fruit from that Edenic tree. The hope of immortal bodily life was not lost forever.[4]

The Forces of Death

When you think of death, do you think exclusively about the stopping of the heart and breath? The ending of breath and heartbeats is most surely death, but in the Bible death is more than this. The forces of death are visible and active in this fallen world.

We should allow the Bible's depictions of death to influence how we think about the problem of death in this world. Interpreters may not see how resurrection hope is present in some passages if they haven't noticed how death is present in other passages.

The outworking of death takes manifold forms. Whatever inhibits, harms, or destroys life is a kind of death.[5] When the biblical

3. Bruce Waltke says, "This highest potency of life was available in the garden and . . . will be experienced consummately in the resurrection of our bodies" (*An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007], 257).

4. L. Michael Morales writes, "The end of redemption is not to live a bodiless, ethereal existence in the afterlife of heaven but rather to be raised up in glory with a real, new-creation body for a life of unending joy with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (*Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020], 3).

5. Morales says, "The path of exile through Eden's gates was, therefore, a path from life to death, from light to darkness, from harmony to dysfunction and strife, from health to sickness,

authors tell of God's power that restores, frees, heals, or raises, you are reading about the power of life overcoming the forces of death.[6] The reason resurrection hope is more prevalent in Scripture than it may first seem is because the promises and actions of the God of life pervade the testimony of the biblical authors.

Death through Exile

Although God warned that eating from the forbidden tree would bring death (Gen. 2:17), Adam and Eve did not immediately die physically. But their disobedience corrupted their relationship with God (3:7–13). Sin brought alienation and shame. The blessings of marriage and childbearing would be affected (3:16), and the privilege of labor and vocation would be affected as well (3:17–19).

We shouldn't read God's warning in Genesis 2:17 as a threat unfulfilled. Adam and Eve sinned and fell short of the glory of God. There is more to dying than physical death. Eden was the realm of God's presence and bountiful provision; it was the realm of life. Exile from Eden meant separation from where God had placed them. Since God barred reentry to the garden and access to the tree of life, their exile was a kind of death. The separation from sacred space meant a move away from life.[7]

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from security to violence, from compassion to inhumanity, from wholeness to brokenness, from peace with God to enmity—from a life of friendship with God to alienation" (*Exodus Old and New*, 9).

6. Jon Levenson explains, "Death and life in the Hebrew Bible are often best seen as relational events and are for the selfsame reason inseparable from the personal circumstances of those described as living or as dead. To be alive in this frequent biblical sense of the word inevitably entailed more than merely existing in a certain physical state. It also entailed having one's being within a flourishing and continuing kin group that dwelt in a productive and secure association with its land. Conversely, to be widowed, bereaved of children, or in exile was necessarily to experience death. Indeed, each of these states (even death) and others (notably, health or illness) could serve as a synecdoche for the condition brought about by any of the others" (*Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006], 154–55).

7. This concept would be applied later to the tabernacle in the middle of Israel's encampment and also to the nation of Israel going into Babylonian captivity during their exile.

When we see a reversal of this direction, when a figure moves from the realm of death into sacred space, we are watching the power of life at work. The exile of Adam—and thus of all people—from sacred space leads to this question: will the God of life bring his people out of the realm of the dead? Returning from exile, moving from death to life, would be resurrection.[8]

The Taking of Enoch

Outside Eden, the generations die. The widespread reality of death is clear in the genealogy of Genesis 5. The rhythm of death is in verse after verse. The pattern consists of a person's name, a descendant, the total years of life, and then the report that "he died." The repetition builds such an expectation of death that the words about Enoch jolt the reader: "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him" (Gen. 5:24).

The taking of Enoch did not involve death. Since the onset of human death in a post-Genesis-3 world, every person had died. Then suddenly and mysteriously, Enoch was taken after walking with God for hundreds of years. Enoch did not return to the dust from which he had come. Instead, God delivered him from death. This rapturous report is a light of hope against the dark backdrop of the dead.

If God could deliver someone *before* death, could he deliver someone *after* death? If the God of life could disrupt the rhythm of death that permeated the generations in Genesis 5, what else could he do? The example of Enoch isn't meant to provide any guarantee that the faithful will be delivered before earthly death, but his example does show that God is greater than death. Death wasn't so invincible after all. Its claim on sinners could be overruled.

8. According to Morales, "Separated from Yahweh God, the fountain of life and being, humanity's condition is one of death. As such, the return to God—the exodus—can only be life from the dead, deliverance from death" (*Exodus Old and New*, 7).

Decreation and Recreation of the Earth

The genealogy of Genesis 5 ends with the family of Noah (Gen. 5:32). And it is during the days of Noah that the effects of sin reach a horrific scale and scope. God announces judgment (6:13). The deluge on the earth in Genesis 6–7 is a watery death for creation, yet creation emerges from judgment in Genesis 8.

The words *decreation* and *recreation* can be used to interpret God's judgment in light of the imagery in Genesis 1. God brought land from the waters and then later filled that land with animals and people (1:9–10, 24–31). When God covered people, animals, and land with the floodwaters, the reader is to picture a decreation.

God remembered Noah and the ark's other occupants (8:1). His wind blew over the earth, and the waters subsided.[9] Land appeared once more, and the ark emptied to fill the land. God brought life through death, deliverance through judgment.

The association of the deluge with death and resurrection is confirmed by later Scripture. Peter says baptism corresponds to the deliverance of people through the waters of judgment (1 Pet. 3:20–21). Baptism is a new covenant ordinance that pictures death to sin and new life in Christ (Rom. 6:3–4). In union with the redeeming King, we have come alive out of the deadness of our trespasses (Eph. 2:4–6).

The imagery of recreation in Genesis 8 does not suggest a return to a pre-fall state. But the episode of the deluge does confirm for readers that God is serious about sin, he is a righteous Judge, and the wicked will not endure forever in their rebellion. The return of Christ will mean a new heavens and new earth (2 Pet. 3:8–13; Rev. 21:1–5). Making all things new will be, on a cosmic scale, resurrecting creation to a glorified and everlasting state.

9. The word *wind* in Gen. 8:1 can be translated "Spirit." Language about the Spirit over the waters is another link to creation (see 1:2).

The Barren Womb

Moving from the global canvas of the great deluge, let's focus on the individual obstacle of childlessness. The multiplying of generations meant the advance of life, but a barren womb meant the death of the family line.[10] When Rachel said to her husband Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" (Gen. 30:1), her statement was more than a cry of desperation. Before Jacob and Rachel, Isaac and Rebekah faced barrenness (25:21). And before Isaac and Rebekah, Abraham was married to Sarah who was barren (11:30).

The biblical author highlights the reality of barrenness in the wives of the patriarchs in order to exalt the power of God that overcomes even this obstacle. God brings life to the dead womb. Abraham and Sarah conceive, as do Isaac and Rebekah, as do Jacob and Rachel. Conception for a barren womb is the triumph of life over death.[11] Not only is the woman no longer barren, the vitality of the family line continues through the descendant that will be born.

When Sarah conceives in Genesis 21, the biblical author emphasizes God's power: "the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised" (21:1). Pressed together in this verse is the notion of God's power (what the Lord "did") and the notion of God's promise ("as he had promised"). God once asked Abraham, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (18:14). That question is key to the whole discussion of resurrection. Death is strong; the grave seems so inevitable and invincible. Our days are numbered. But God is the God of life, and he has the ability to fulfill what he has promised.

10. Levenson says, "Given the construction of personal identity in the Hebrew Bible, infertility and the loss of children serve as the functional equivalent of death. Striking at each generation of the patriarchs of Genesis, and then at Judah in the next, childlessness in one or both of these modes threatens to terminate the family, thus evoking the terror that later generations (including our own) feel in the face of their personal deaths" (*Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 119–20).

11. See Stephen G. Dempster, "From Slight Peg to Cornerstone to Capstone: The Resurrection of Christ on 'The Third Day' According to the Scriptures," *Westminster Theological Journal* 76 (2014): 386–87.

The Deliverance of Isaac

God had told Abraham that his offspring would come "through Isaac" (Gen. 21:12), but before Isaac had any descendants, God told Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice on a mountain (22:2). Abraham journeyed in obedience, taking his son and some men with him. Arriving at the place, Abraham told the men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you" (22:5).

Abraham's words evidence a resurrection faith. He used plural verbs for going, worshiping, and returning. He wasn't misleading the men lest they stop him from taking Isaac. He knew God had said to offer Isaac, yet he also knew that God had promised descendants through Isaac. If Isaac was going to be killed on the mountain, he was also going to be raised on the mountain. At the last moment before the sacrifice, the angel of the Lord told Abraham to stop (22:11–12). Isaac would be delivered. As the first installment of a larger pattern that will be established with later deliverances, Isaac is saved on the "third day" (22:4).

When the author of Hebrews reflects on the mountain experience of Genesis 22, he says that Abraham "considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back" (Heb. 11:19). Abraham believed God's promise, and he was confident in God's power. God would not tell Abraham to sacrifice Isaac unless God planned to raise Isaac so that offspring could come through him. Otherwise, God would be a promise breaker. Resurrection would prove God a promise keeper.

Surely part of Abraham's confidence in God's power was due to his own experience with Isaac's conception. God had brought life to a dead womb. Isaac was proof! And if God could bring life to a dead womb, he could bring life to a dead boy. One thing Abraham

knew for certain was that God wouldn't break the divine promise of offspring through Isaac. He and Isaac would walk up the mountain together, and they would walk down the mountain too.

As Hebrews 11:19 alludes to the near-sacrifice of Isaac, the author says that Abraham received his son back from the dead "figuratively speaking." This language confirms that the threat and imminence of death is a real manifestation of the forces of death in this world.[12] A figurative resurrection took place on one of the mountains in Moriah. Even though Isaac did not physically die on the mountain, he was delivered from death nevertheless. And deliverance from death is resurrection.

The Rise of Joseph

Readers can discern a figurative resurrection in the story of Joseph. His life is an arc of descent and ascent. Joseph's brothers were ready to abandon him in a pit until the option of selling him to traders surfaced (Gen. 37:19–20, 26–28). While he served in an Egyptian household, Joseph's restraint and godliness provoked accusations of misconduct (39:7–19), and his master placed him in prison (39:20). The pit and the prison represent Joseph's descent. But wherever Joseph was and whatever Joseph did, God was with him (39:21–23).

The rise of Joseph began in prison. Pharaoh became aware of Joseph's ability to interpret dreams, and Joseph aided the Egyptian king (41:1–36). As a result, Pharaoh wanted Joseph to serve in his administration. Joseph became head of all Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself (41:40–44).

12. Byron Wheaton says that Hebrews 11:19 "provides us with several clues for reading other narratives of the OT for their allusion to the resurrection. First, the 'victim' is under some sort of sentence of death. Second, the process of execution is in progress. Third, there is no human possibility of rescue; the end is imminent. Fourth, the dying process is miraculously overcome so that the victim is restored to life. Fifth, the 'resurrection' issues in a new future for the victim and those associated with him" ("As It Is Written: Old Testament Foundations for Jesus' Expectation of Resurrection," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70 [2008]: 248).

God vindicated Joseph out of the forces of oppression and servitude. Figuratively speaking (see Heb. 11:19), God raised Joseph from the dead. And his vindication brought blessing and life to others. His brothers came to Egypt needing food, and he provided for them. When Jacob's whole family relocated from Canaan to the land of Goshen, Joseph saw to their flourishing (Gen. 46–47). The rise of Joseph meant life and blessing for everyone united to him.

Burying Bones in Canaan

Though the end of Genesis tells of the Israelites dwelling in a foreign land, the story is unfinished. God had promised that Abraham and his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:7; 15:18–20; 17:8). God reiterated this promise to Isaac and to Jacob (26:3–5; 28:13–15). It is noteworthy, however, that these three patriarchs died before possessing the land. They died in faith, looking toward the fulfillment of God's promises.

The faith of the patriarchs is demonstrated by their burial decisions. Abraham was buried in the cave of Machpelah, which he had purchased in Canaan for Sarah's burial years earlier (25:9–10). Isaac was buried in the same place, and Jacob asked to be buried there as well (49:29–31). At the end of Genesis, as Joseph neared death, he told his brothers, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here" (50:25). That request confirms that Joseph wanted his bones buried in Canaan too (see Josh. 24:32).

The desire for burial in Canaan signaled a faith in God's promise that they would inherit the land as an everlasting possession. If they hadn't received the land before they died, they believed they would receive it in the future. The bones in the cave at Machpelah would be raised. Resurrection from the dead would be the way these patriarchs could receive all that God had promised them. They died in faith and would rise in glory. They died as heirs and would rise as possessors.

They wanted their bones buried in Canaan because death, somehow, would not prevent God's promises from coming to pass. Is anything too hard for the Lord?

The Rescue of Baby Moses

If resurrection can be pictured by deliverance from imminent threat and death, then the rescue of baby Moses qualifies as an example of this. The Nile River was to receive all the newborn Hebrew males unto death (Ex. 1:22). But Moses's mother placed him in a basket, a little ark, and she put it by the riverbank (2:3).[13] Like Noah's large ark that kept those inside from the watery death (Gen. 6–7), this small basket protected baby Moses from watery death.[14]

The rescue of Moses led to his incorporation into Pharaoh's household (Ex. 2:10). Decades after fleeing Egypt for Midian as an adult (2:15), Moses encountered the Lord on Mount Sinai (3:1–6). The one who had been rescued would become the rescuer. God said, "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (3:10).

The Exodus of the Israelites

The land of Goshen was filled with Israelites, but that land wasn't the one promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The right people were in the wrong place. Egyptian leaders had become oppressors. A new pharaoh wanted the Israelites enslaved in bitter and hard service (Ex. 1:8–14). Lives of flourishing became lives of hardship and subjection. The Israelites were the corporate son of God (4:22), and God's son needed deliverance.

13. The "ark" in Gen. 6:14 is the same word as the "basket" in Ex. 2:3.

14. Wheaton comments on Moses's name, which is mentioned in Ex. 2:10 after the servant girl raised him from the riverbank: "His name attests to his being delivered/resurrected from the waters" ("As It Is Written," 250). "Moses" sounds like the Hebrew word for "draw out."

The exodus of the Israelites occurred against the backdrop of the death of the firstborn sons in Egypt during the tenth and final plague (12:29–30). With the cries of their captors hanging in the air, the Israelites emerged from their captivity and left under the leadership of Moses. As Morales explains, "The exodus pattern is nothing less than the reversal of exile, nothing less than resurrection from the dead."[15]

From the corporate death of slavery, the Israelites rose to embrace their heaven-wrought liberation. They had been exiles in the foreign land of Egypt, but now they were pressing toward the land of promise. Their return to Canaan, hundreds of years after they left it through their ancestor Jacob, was a corporate resurrection. The God of life had been mightily at work and now would lead them with cloud and fire. Liberation from Egypt is a picture of future life from the dead, for "resurrection is the ultimate and final liberation."[16]

With the Egyptians pursuing the Israelites, Moses led them as he followed the cloud of God, and they came to the shore of the Red Sea. Despite the fearful and faltering Israelites, Moses followed the Lord's instructions and stretched out his hand over the sea, so that the waters divided (Ex. 14:21). The waters, which could have been Israel's destruction, stood as walls on their right and left as they passed through to the other side on dry ground (14:29).

God thus brought them through death, consummating their deliverance which would reverberate through future songs and prophecies for generations.[17]

15. Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 16.

16. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 28.

17. Morales says, "Even Israel's historical exodus out of Egypt is portrayed as a symbolic resurrection through the waters of death, out of Egypt as a figurative Sheol inhabited by the sea dragon, Pharaoh. The return of Jews from exile too is likened to a resurrection out of death and the grave, a prophesied second exodus. Time and again the concepts of exodus and resurrection are united deeply" (*Exodus Old and New*, 185).

The Tabernacle within the Camp

After their deliverance through the Red Sea, the Israelites journeyed to Mount Sinai. And there the Lord made known, through Moses, the instructions about his portable dwelling place. The people constructed this tabernacle, and it would go with them as they traveled.

The encampment of the Israelites had several realms, and their progression is noteworthy. While traveling from Mount Sinai to the promised land, the Israelites camped around the tabernacle (Ex. 40; Num. 2). The tabernacle—or tent of meeting—represented the life and glory of God dwelling in the midst of his redeemed people.

To approach the tabernacle for offerings at the sacrificial altar, the Israelites needed to be "clean," or ritually fit. Only the priests could enter the large room, the Holy Place. And only the high priest, once a year on the Day of Atonement, had access to the cube-shaped room behind the veil known as the Most Holy Place (Lev. 16). There, the glory of God was manifest over the lid of the golden ark (Ex. 25:10–22).

A move away from the tabernacle was movement away from life. Beyond the tabernacle courtyard was the encampment of the Israelites. Those who were unclean could not approach the tabernacle until their uncleanness was resolved and they were once more fit for ritual acts. Those who were perpetually unclean had to dwell outside the Israelite camp. Outside the camp was the realm of exile, far from the life of God and the community of God's people. Exile was like death. And ritual uncleanness was a move toward the direction of death. Restoration to the status of clean was a move toward life.

Viewed as a whole, the tabernacle, the encampment, and the area beyond the camp are realms reminiscent of the garden of Eden, Eden itself, and the land beyond Eden. Exile was a move toward death. Entering the tabernacle courtyard, and entering the tabernacle itself

through priestly representatives, was entering the realm of life. With God dwelling in the midst of his people, the power of life had come to push back against impurity and uncleanness and against the forces of death.

Unresolved Skin Disease

Any skin disease rendered someone ritually unfit to approach the tabernacle, but an unresolved skin disease meant that the afflicted person had to dwell outside the camp. God told Moses,

> The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, "Unclean, unclean." He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp. (Lev. 13:45–46)

The exiled state of the perpetually diseased person signals unfitness for the realm of life. Lepers were the walking dead. Their clothes and hair were disheveled, and they dwelled outside the camp. A leper's physical appearance was like a person outwardly wasting away.

Should a leper be healed, the power of life has conquered the forces of death at work on the body. The restoration of disease-ridden skin means vitality and flourishing, the return to community and family and—most importantly—tabernacle worship. If lepers are like the walking dead, then a healed leper has conquered death.

Dying and Rising in the Wilderness

Bearing the tabernacle and the regulations to approach it, the Israelites continued their trek to the promised land by crossing the

wilderness. But the Israel that emerged from the wilderness at the end of Numbers was not the same Israel that entered it. The older generation of Israelites had, by and large, rebelled against Moses and declared their desire for Egypt (Num. 14:1–4). For forty years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness until the last of that generation died, as judgment from the Lord (14:33–35).

The children of the wilderness generation grew up during those forty years, and they were the new Israel to cross the Jordan River and inherit the promised land. During the wilderness decades, then, some Israelites would fall while others would rise. The rebels against Moses had been purged through death, and rising in their place was the group who would follow Joshua's lead into Canaan.

Raising Up a Prophet Like Moses

Before Moses died and Joshua led the people to their inheritance, a word about the future was necessary. The prophet Moses told the Israelites that God would bring a mighty prophet into the midst of his people sometime in the future: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen" (Deut. 18:15). God said of this future figure, "I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him" (18:18–19).

It is possible that God's promise to "raise up" a prophet like Moses meant only to bring such a figure onto the stage of history, but more may be intended. The promise to "raise up" sounds like resurrection. Will this future figure come not only into human history but up from the grave itself? Will this future figure, whose mouth speaks God's words, be vindicated with authority in a way that far surpasses the prophet Moses? In the book of Acts, Peter interprets Deuteronomy 18 this way. In Acts 3:22, Peter cites Moses's words about

the Lord raising up a prophet. And in 3:26, Peter says, "God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

In the context of Peter's words in Acts 3, the resurrection of Jesus is in view. There were people who "killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead" (Acts 3:15). God had told Moses that a future prophet would be raised up, and Peter pronounced the fulfillment of that prophecy. God had raised up Jesus from death.

The God Who Makes Alive

Near the end of Deuteronomy, Moses recites the words of a song in the hearing of the Israelites. Included is this bold divine assertion:

> See now that I, even I, am he,
> and there is no god beside me;
> I kill and I make alive;
> I wound and I heal;
> and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.
> (Deut. 32:39)

To this point in the Torah narrative, there is no report of someone being raised physically from death. But there have been multiple instances of God's power bringing life and restoration. The forces of death are no match for the power of life. God asserts the ability to "kill" and "make alive," to "wound" and "heal." At first glance, perhaps the first pair of words is only a claim to have the ability to end the lives of the living. But that interpretation is insufficient.

The words in Moses's song are arranged with synonymous parallelism in Deuteronomy 32:39. The claim "I kill and I make alive" is parallel in the next line with "I wound and I heal." In the second

pair, wounding and healing must refer to the same person and in that order. The one wounded is the one who needs healing. When we understand the second pair of terms this way, the meaning of the first pair becomes clearer. God asserts his power to end life ("I kill") and to restore life ("I make alive"), in that order and for the same person.[18] God himself claims the power to raise the dead.[19]

A Word from Paul

Fifteen hundred years after Moses's song, the apostle Paul stood before Felix at Caesarea. And in that trial setting, Paul made a statement that we need to incorporate into our exploration of the Law. Some Jews were charging Paul with instigating riots and trying to profane the temple (Acts 24:5–6). Paul's response included this claim:

> But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust (24:14–15).

Let's consider what Paul said. He believed in a coming resurrection, and both the just and the unjust—believers and unbelievers—will be raised from death. Why did Paul believe this? Because he believed what earlier Scripture teaches. Which part of Scripture?

18. Leila Bronner contends, "The arrangement of the key words . . . suggests that they are dealing with a resurrection motif" ("The Resurrection Motif in the Hebrew Bible: Allusions or Illusions?" *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 30, no. 3 [2002]: 145).

19. According to Leonard Greenspoon, "Since there is perhaps no other action of God's which displays the totality and uniqueness of His power more forcefully than the process by which He restores His dead to life, a reference to bodily resurrection is surely in keeping with the context at this point" ("The Origin of the Idea of Resurrection," in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith*, ed. Baruch Halpern and Jon D. Levenson [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981], 312).

He identified the Prophets but also the *Law*. Paul's belief in a future resurrection was rooted, ultimately, in the Pentateuch. While Paul did not identify which passages in the Pentateuch support the hope of God's power over the forces of death, the preceding sections of this chapter are examples of how to discern and affirm such a hope.

A Word from Jesus

While Paul believed both the Law and the Prophets were foundational for resurrection hope, the Sadducees held a different view. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, the Sadducees questioned him about resurrection. Their aim was to make resurrection seem absurd. They told a story about a childless couple. The man died and his widow married his brother, though still no offspring was born (Matt. 22:25). When that second man died, the woman married a third brother, and this pattern repeated through all seven brothers (22:26). The Sadducees asked, "In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her" (22:28).

The Sadducees affirmed only the Torah to be authoritative Scripture, and they didn't believe the Torah held out hope for a future resurrection. No doubt their confidence was strengthened by the fact that nowhere in the Torah is someone raised physically from the dead, nor is the word "resurrection" used anywhere from Genesis through Deuteronomy. But Jesus brought a strong word of correction: "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matt. 22:29–30).

Not only had the Sadducees misunderstood the nature of resurrection life (by supposing that earthly marriage was something that continued after the resurrection), but they also failed to understand the Scriptures and God's power.

If the Sadducees truly understood what the Torah teaches, they would have affirmed resurrection hope.[20] If they truly understood the reality and implications of God's power, they would have affirmed resurrection hope. Since the Sadducees affirmed the Torah, Jesus referred to it when he said, "And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. 22:31–32, citing Ex. 3:6).

It is common for scholars to interpret the statement "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" as meaning that the present-though-disembodied life of the patriarchs holds out hope for their resurrection as well.[21] This view may be correct, but perhaps the power of God is being invoked through the names Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These three patriarchs had all been married to barren women whose wombs experienced God's power enabling conception and life. The fictional story of the Sadducees was about marriages in which no offspring was conceived (Matt. 22:24–28), yet Jesus referred to real people for whom the power of life had overcome what was dead, in the families of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.[22]

Because the Sadducees didn't truly understand their Scriptures or the power of God, they couldn't discern God's lifegiving power over death.[23] When they read the Torah, resurrection hope wasn't clear.

20. Richard Hays explains, "Presumably, in fact, their rejection of the resurrection rests precisely on appeals to the authority of Scripture: no such belief was taught by Moses, so it should not be accepted. By challenging them at this point, Jesus creates the expectation that he will produce scriptural evidence to discredit their skepticism" ("Reading Scripture in Light of the Resurrection," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003], 226).

21. See, for example, Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 642; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 561.

22. See this argument fleshed out in J. Gerald Janzen, "Resurrection and Hermeneutics: On Exodus 3.6 in Mark 12.26," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 23 (1985): 46–55.

23. Levenson says, "Levirate marriage is a mode of redemption of the dead" (*Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 121).