

The Restoration of Sodom

Jesus said the men of Sodom would rise from the dead in a future day of judgment. But for what purpose? Will they again be destroyed by a consuming fire?

In making his defense before Governor Felix, the Apostle Paul stated that he had “hope towards God...that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust” (Acts 24:15). The Greek word translated hope in this verse is *elpis* (Strong’s 1680). According to Unger’s Bible Dictionary, *elpis* “is in the N.T. sense the expectation of good. This original word denotes a joyful and contented expectation of eternal salvation” (article: “Hope”). The Complete Word Study Dictionary has this to say about *elpis*: “*Elpis* may be defined as desire for future good, accompanied by faith in its realization.... In the NT the noun *elpis* and the verb *elpizo* are used always of favorable expectations” (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992, 368. Ed. Spiros Zodhiates, Th.D., pg. 572).

The Apostle Paul proclaimed that he had an expectation of good in the future resurrection of both the just and the unjust. One can certainly understand Paul’s hope in the resurrection of the just. There are many verses in the New Testament holding out great hope for those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. The great resurrection chapter states that those who sleep in Christ shall be raised to immortality at the sound of the trumpet, and their corruptible bodies shall put on incorruption (1 Corinthians 15:51–53). In 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Paul writes that the “dead in Christ” shall rise when the Lord descends from heaven with a great shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with trumpet of God. The resurrected saints will meet the Lord in the air and forever be with Him.

But in what sense did Paul have hope, the favorable expectation of good, in the resurrection of the unjust? Although there are verses clearly demonstrating that the unjust will also rise in a resurrection, there are seemingly few verses that hold out hope in this resurrection. Much of modern Christianity, in fact, has no hope for those who have died without accepting Christ. Relying upon such verses as John 5:28 and Revelation 20:11–15, most of Christianity teaches that the unjust will be raised before the great white throne judgment only to be damned to an ever-burning lake of hell fire. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Paul had hope in the resurrection of the unjust, and this word is always used in the New Testament in the sense of a favorable expectation of good. Thus, in some sense, the traditional understanding of the resurrection of the unjust has not been properly understood.

A Resurrection to Judgment

The Scriptures are clear that the resurrection of the unjust is a resurrection to judgment. In John 5:28, Jesus made the following statement: “Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.” The word translated “damnation” in the KJV is an unfortunate and inaccurate translation. The Greek word is *krisis* (Strong’s 2920), and is more appropriately translated judgment. Some of the misunderstanding concerning the resurrection of the unjust is due to a misunderstanding of the Biblical concept of judgment.

According to Vine’s Expository Dictionary, the Greek word *krisis* “denotes ‘the process of investigation, the act of distinguishing and separating’....it has a variety of meanings, such as judicial authority...justice...a tribunal...a trial...a judgment...by metonymy, the standard of judgment.” Vine’s gives a further definition of *krisis*: “decision (subjectively or objectively, for or against); by extension a tribunal; by implication justice” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985, article “Condemnation”).

Thus, the latter part of John 5:28 could be understood to mean those who have done evil will come forth unto the resurrection of a trial, a resurrection where there will be a process of investigation, a process of distinguishing and separating that will result in a decision either for or against. According to Webster’s New 20th Century Dictionary of the English Language, the English word “crisis” had its origin in the Greek word *krisis*. Webster’s defines crisis, in part, as “a decisive or crucial time, stage, or event.”

This process of judgment at the resurrection of the unjust is dramatically illustrated in Revelation 20:11–15. In this passage, the Apostle John writes that he saw the dead standing before the great white throne, “and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to his works...And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

The Greek word translated “judged” in these scriptures is *krima* (Strong’s 2917). While this word can mean the actual sentence or verdict pronounced, it can also mean “the process of judgment leading to a decision” (Vine’s, article: “Condemnation”). For instance, in 1 Peter 4:17, the Apostle Peter uses the Greek word *krima* when he writes, “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God.” Clearly, Peter is using *krima* here to denote the process of judgment and not the actual sentence pronounced. Likewise, in Revelation 20, the context would suggest that *krima* is used to illustrate the process of judgment that ultimately leads to a decision. Either the names of those being judged are

found written in the book of life, or they are cast into the lake of fire. The point is that there is a process that takes place, an investigation, a trial before the ultimate decision is reached. Thus, a proper understanding of the resurrection to judgment lays the foundation for an understanding of the hope, the expectation of good, that Paul had in the resurrection of the unjust.

The Story of Three Sisters

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are described throughout Scripture as cities of extreme wickedness and immorality. The Book of Genesis records the depth to which Sodom had sunk in wickedness at the time of Abraham. “But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly” (Genesis 13:13). The peculiar sin for which Sodom was renowned was the sin of homosexuality. In Jude 7, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are described as indulging in gross immorality and “going after strange flesh.” The cities were ultimately destroyed by the Eternal through a torrent of fire and brimstone because He could not find even ten righteous men living within them (Genesis 18:32). Sodom’s destruction by fire is an example of the ultimate punishment for unrepentant sinners in the lake of fire (Jude 7).

While Sodom was renowned for its wickedness, Scripture records a city that acted more wickedly than the Sodomites. That city was none other than the city of Jerusalem, the place where the Eternal set His name. In Ezekiel 16, the Eternal directs a prophecy against the city of Jerusalem, the capital of the House of Judah. The opening verses of Ezekiel 16 describe how the Eternal God figuratively took the nation of Judah as His own wife, and made her His special covenant nation. “Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine, declares the Lord God” (Ezekiel 16:8).

In the succeeding verses, the prophecy describes Judah’s subsequent apostasy from her covenant with the Eternal. This apostasy is described in terms of Judah “playing the harlot” by worshiping false gods and burning her children in the fire to idols (Ezekiel 16:17–21). The prophecy then describes Judah becoming more corrupted than her “sisters”— Samaria and Sodom.

“And thine elder sister is Samaria, she and her daughters that dwell at thy left hand; and thy younger sister, that dwelleth at thy right hand, is Sodom and her daughters. Yet has thou not walked after their ways, nor done after their abominations: but if that were a very little thing, thou wast corrupted more than they in all thy ways. As I live, saith the Lord God, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters” (Ezekiel 16:46–48).

The Eternal God then states that Judah’s depravity actually made Sodom and Samaria appear righteous by comparison. “Neither hath Samaria committed half of thy sins; but thou has

multiplied thine abominations more than they, and hast justified thy sisters in all thine abominations which thou hast done. Thou also, which has judged thy sisters, bear thine own shame for thy sins that thou has committed more abominable than they; they are more righteous than thou; yea, be thou confounded also, and bear thy shame, in that thou hast justified thy sisters” (Ezekiel 16:51–52).

As the Eternal destroyed Sodom and its inhabitants because of their abominations (Ezekiel 16:50), so He promised to judge Judah as an adulterous woman, and bring on her “the blood of wrath and jealousy” (Ezekiel 16:38). Judah’s idolatrous shrines would be torn down, she would be left naked and bare, and a crowd will “stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords” (Ezekiel 16:39–40). The Eternal is here describing the national destruction of the House of Judah.

It is perhaps somewhat surprising, then, that in the midst of this dire prophecy of the destruction of God’s covenant nation for her sins, there is a promise of her future restoration. This promise of restoration, however, extends beyond Judah and Samaria. It encompasses also the future restoration of Sodom, the less-wicked sister. The concluding verses of Ezekiel 16, then, give us a glimpse of the hope the Apostle Paul had in the resurrection of the unjust.

The Restoration of Sodom

The prophecy of Ezekiel continues, “When I shall bring again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, then will I bring again the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them” (Ezekiel 16:53).

The phrase “bring again their captivity” comes from a Hebrew phrase including the words *shuw* (Strong’s 7725) and *shuw* (Strong’s 7622). This phrase is described as follows in The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: “The phrase...occurs frequently, usually with God as its subject, and means to bring an end to captivity or imprisonment for debt, and thus to turn one’s fortune for the better. Israel’s fortunes will be restored (i.e., Israel will have material prosperity and forgiveness of sins) when the Lord brings the Israelites back from captivity to their homeland (e.g. Ezekiel 39:25–29)” (Vol. II, Geoffrey B. Bromiley, published Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995, pg. 335, article “Fortunes”).

This same phrase is used in Deuteronomy 30:3, where the Eternal states that He will turn the captivity of Israel “and have compassion on thee,” and gather them from all the nations where He scattered them. This turning of the captivity of Israel contains a promise that the Eternal will circumcise the hearts of all Israel “to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live” (Deuteronomy 30:6). The use of the phrase

“circumcision of the heart” is interesting because such language is used in the New Testament as a reference to spiritual conversion in Christ (Romans 2:29; Colossians 2:11).

The phrase “bring again the captivity” is used again in Ezekiel 39:25 in reference to the Eternal having mercy upon the whole house of Israel and restoring them again to their land. This encompasses a promise that the Eternal will pour out His Spirit upon the House of Israel (Ezekiel 39:29).

Thus, when used in reference to the future restoration of Israel, the phrase “bring again the captivity” suggests forgiveness of sin, spiritual conversion, and reception of the Spirit of God. This same phrase is used in Ezekiel 16:53 in prophesying of the future restoration of Sodom and her daughters. The question naturally arises: Since Sodom was completely destroyed by the Eternal in the time of Abraham, how may the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters be restored?

The prophecy of Ezekiel 16 elaborates on the restoration of Sodom in verse 55: “When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate, then thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate.”

What does this prophecy mean when it says that Sodom and her daughters will return to their former estate? The Greek Septuagint translation of Ezekiel 16:55 throws light upon this phrase. It uses the word *apokathistemi* (Strong’s 600). The Word Study Dictionary has this to say about this Greek word: “from *apo* (575), back again, and *kathistemi* (2525), to constitute. To restore, e.g., to health or soundness.... To put back into a former state, restore, reform” (page 224).

The Word Study further states that *apokathistemi* is derived from *apokatastasis* (Strong’s 605), which means “restitution of a thing to its former condition.” It is fascinating to note that the Apostle Peter uses this very word *apokatastasis* in Acts 3:21, where he states that the Father will send Jesus “whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” It would appear, based on Ezekiel 16:55, that Sodom will be a part of the “restitution of all things.”

It is further interesting to note that *apokathistemi* is also derived from the Greek word *histemi* (2476), which means “to cause to stand, to set or place.” This very word is used in Revelation 20:12, when John sees “the dead, small and great, stand before God,” at the great white throne judgment. The word *histemi* in turn is derived from *anistemi* (Strong’s 450), which means, “Spoken...of the dead, meaning to raise up, recall to life” (page 184). For instance, *anistemi* is used in Matthew 12:41, where Jesus says, “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this resurrection.” It is also used in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, where Paul states that the “dead in Christ shall rise first.”

The prophecy in Ezekiel 16:55 prophesies of a time when Sodom and her daughters will be restored to health and soundness, a time when they will be put back to their former state or

condition. The word translated daughters in the Septuagint comes from the Greek word *thugater* (Strong's 2364). According to Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon, when *thugater* is used "with the name of a place, city or region, it denotes collectively all its inhabitants and citizens" (page 292). This prophecy is stating that all the inhabitants and citizens of Sodom will be restored to their original or former estate. They will live again in the resurrection of judgment with Samaria and all her inhabitants and Judah and all her inhabitants. Indeed, the very word used in the Greek Septuagint suggests that all the inhabitants of Sodom, Samaria, and Judah will be caused to stand up, to rise up from the dead!

C.F. Keil in his commentary on Ezekiel 16 comes to a similar conclusion. He writes, "The turning of the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, i.e., the forgiveness of the inhabitants of Sodom and the other cities of the plain, points beyond the present aeon, and the realization can only take place on the great day of the resurrection of the dead in the persons of the former inhabitants of Sodom and the neighboring cities" (Vol. 9 Commentary on the Old Testament, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001, pg. 134).

Not only is Ezekiel 16 a prophecy of the future resurrection of the inhabitants of Sodom, but it is also a prophecy that holds out hope in that resurrection.

Ezekiel 16 goes on to state: "Nevertheless, I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee as daughters, but not by thy covenant. And I will establish and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God" (Ezekiel 16:60–63).

There is only one covenant that is everlasting. That is the New Covenant which is established upon the blood of our Messiah and Savior, Jesus Christ. That is the only covenant that can provide for the complete forgiveness of sins. That is the only covenant that holds out to those who accept it the promise of receiving the eternal inheritance in the Kingdom of God (Hebrews 10:10–18; 9:15).

The prophecy in Ezekiel 16 provides the hope that Sodom will be joined as a daughter with Samaria and Judah in the everlasting covenant, the New Covenant, and will have the opportunity to enter into the Kingdom of God.

Keil notes in his commentary, "[T]he prophecy before us goes beyond Rom. 11:25ff, inasmuch as it presents, not to the covenant nation only, but, in Samaria and Sodom, to all the larger and smaller heathen nations also, the prospect of being eventually received into the everlasting kingdom of God" (page 134).

The Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol. 6, pg. 151, comments on these verses: "Verses 59–63. The New Covenant. The thoughts here remind one of Jeremiah 31:31–34, but there are two noticeable differences. First, while Jeremiah looks only for 'a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah,' Ezekiel includes within it both Sodom and

Samaria. It is true that they benefit only indirectly, as necessary to the full restoration of Judah. Nevertheless, there is a suggestion here that the mercy of God is for all mankind, since who need despair if Sodom may hope for reinstatement?"

This prophecy in Ezekiel throws light on some statements Jesus made in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus upbraided the cities where most of his mighty miracles were performed because "they repented not" (Matthew 11:20). Jesus said, "And thou Capernaum, which art exalted into heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee." In Matthew 11:23–24, Jesus said it would be "more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment" than for a city that would not receive His disciples nor hear the good news of the Kingdom. The implication of these verses is that if Sodom would have heard the gospel and seen the mighty works of Christ, they would have repented and would have "remained to this day." Ezekiel 16 holds out the hope that Sodom will indeed have the opportunity to hear the gospel and receive the forgiveness of sins in the resurrection of judgment.

Keil comments on this as follows: "The words of our Lord in Matt. 10:15 and 11:24, to the effect that it will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom than for Capernaum and every other city that shall have rejected the preaching of the gospel, teach most indisputably that the way of mercy stands open still even for Sodom itself, and the judgment which has fallen upon it does not carry with it the final decision with regard to its inhabitants. For Sodom did not put away the perfect revelation of mercy and salvation. If the mighty works which were done in Capernaum had been done in Sodom, it would have stood to the present day (Matt. 11:23). And from this it clearly follows that all the judgments which fell before the time of Christ, instead of carrying with them the final decision, and involving eternal damnation, leave the possibility of eventual pardon open still."

This is the hope that Paul had in the resurrection of the unjust. The hope is this: that the way of mercy is still open to all those who have perished without receiving the knowledge of Christ and the opportunity for salvation. In the resurrection of judgment, these individuals will be given the opportunity of joining in the everlasting covenant with the Eternal God, and the opportunity of hearing the Son of Man say to them: "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

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