

**Spring 2018 Newsletter**  
**Detroit Bible Students Ecclesia**  
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## **GOD'S ETERNAL SPRING**

**“Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection not in books alone,  
but in every leaf in springtime.”  
Martin Luther**

We live in an age when it is very difficult to be a Christian. You might ask, “What do you mean? We are not being thrown to the lions or being burned at the stake for our beliefs.” Yes, this is true, but our challenge is the very ease and comfort of our lives, and the general circulation of “higher criticism” and pseudo-science. Today our lives are consumed with a proliferation of electronic media: Facebook, Twitter, email, and any number of other apps we not only have in our homes, but also carry about in our pockets ready for instant access. Today we are so accepting of every faith and lifestyle that the only thing banned from our schools is the Bible. With so much “noise,” can anyone find time to appreciate the goodness of God and his promises or to consider the importance of Jesus to salvation?

Easter has just passed. Like Christmas, this holiday has become more about egg hunts, bunnies, and baskets of goodies than about reflection on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Because America has been a Christian nation from the time of its founding, most Americans know something about the Bible and, at the very least, are aware of Jesus’ birth in a stable and his death on a cross. It is likely they also know that Jesus was resurrected from the dead on that first Easter morning. But, is that just ancient history or is there relevance in that event today?

Resurrection ... the bringing back to life of someone who was dead. What an incredible thought! How appropriate that Jesus’ resurrection occurred in the spring of the year when all of nature is reawakening from the dormancy of winter. It is as though God

made all of nature his witnesses to the truth of his power to restore life. In fact, we live with miracles every day. Everyone takes the miracle of birth for granted. No-one even thinks about the miracle of the exact positioning of our planet so that it is not too hot, so all the water would boil off, nor too cold, so water would be perpetually frozen. Miracles happen all around us. The national resurrection of the Jews from the lands into which they had been scattered is a modern-day miracle. But the resurrection of the dead? That is too incredible!

Today people seem to find it easier to believe the dead continue to live in some unknown, far-off place, than that they will be restored to life. Yet, resurrection is the consistent teaching of the Bible—in fact, it is the only hope for man contained in the Bible. Paul preached about the resurrection to the Greeks on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-32). On another occasion he asked king Agrippa, “*Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?*” (Acts 26:8) That same question might be asked of people today. Why is the concept too incredible to believe?

On January 31, 2000, *U.S. News and World Report* ran a cover story on hell. As a part of their research they conducted a poll asking people what they believed about heaven, hell, and what they thought happened when someone died.

Here’s question #8:

Which of the following statements comes closest to your view about life after death?

The results that they obtained were:

- Certain there is life after death: 52%
- Hope there is life after death but not sure: 26%
- Seriously doubt there is life after death: 15%
- Don't know: 6%
- Refused: 1%

The same sort of difficulty afflicted Peter when Jesus tried to tell the disciples of his coming death. (Matthew 16:21,22) It was just too incredible for him to believe that Jesus would be brought back to life if he were killed. It was not that he had not seen someone resurrected. He had. He had seen Jesus raise the daughter of Jairus from the dead. (Luke 8:51-55) He had also seen Lazarus raised to life after having been dead for four days. (John 11:1-44) Of course it was one thing for the disciples to believe Jesus had the power to bring others back to life, but who would raise him? Such an idea was beyond their human understanding. (1 Corinthians 2:14; Acts 1:8) That's why they wanted to do everything they could to keep him from heedlessly putting himself in a dangerous situation.

What they did not understand was that Jesus did not raise the dead by his own power (John 11:40-43) and he would not bring himself back to life after he died. The miracle of the resurrection was a direct result of the power of God. Paul explained: *"Though they [the*



*Jews] found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, and they [ie. Joseph of Arimathea] took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. But **God raised him from the dead.**" (Acts 13:26-30 NIV)*

Throughout the Bible death is called a sleep. (John 11:11-14; Acts 7:60) Why does it use this word? We all know that when people are sleeping, we expect that they will eventually awake. "Sleep" is a wonderful way to describe death because death is a temporary condition of unconsciousness that will end one day. Yes, the Bible promises that a day will come when all who are in the sleep of death will *"hear his voice and shall come forth."* (John 5:28,29)

In fear that the followers of Jesus would steal his body to make it appear that he had risen from the dead, the chief priests asked that the tomb be sealed with a heavy stone and guards be stationed to watch it. Satan, the great adversary of God imagines that he can thwart God's plan, but he made it more credible. The chief priests' safeguards made it clear that no human agency removed Jesus' body. The disciples were made witnesses to his resurrection—they would later give their lives for it. Therefore, Jesus appeared to them in locked rooms, on the road to Emmaus, and near the garden tomb to Mary. (Mark 16:1-13; Luke 24; John 20, 21) Finally, the disciples witnessed Jesus' ascension into heaven. (Acts 1:6-11)

The apostle Paul was not an eye-witness to this miracle, but he talked with others who were. Paul knew that this was the most

important event: *"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep [have died]. After that, he was*



*seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also [on the road to Damascus, Acts 9:3-9], as of one born out of due time."* (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

What Paul found so hard to understand was that some Christians in Corinth had stopped believing in the resurrection. He says, *"Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?"* ... *"And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished."* (vs12,17) The phrase *"they which are fallen asleep in Christ"* refers to those who have followed Christ when they were alive but were now dead. If Christ is not raised, Paul says, we must conclude that no-one else will be raised either which would make the sleep of death permanent. Those in that "sleep" will have "perished."

After extensive comments on the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians, Bible Commentator Adam Clarke, wrote: *"The doctrine of the resurrection appears to have been thought of much more consequence among the [early] Christians than it is now. How is this? The apostles were continually insisting on it, and exciting the followers of God to diligence, obedience, and cheerfulness through it. And their successors in the present day seldom mention it! So the apostles preached, and so [the early] Christians believed; so we preach, and so our hearers believe. There is not a doctrine in the Gospel on which more stress is laid; and there is not a doctrine in the present system of preaching which is treated with more neglect!"* (Adam Clarke, endnote #3, 1 Cor. 15)

Essentially the resurrection of Christ, which the Christian world celebrates every Easter, is the guarantee that one day *"all that are in their graves shall come forth."* If God's mighty power can raise just one person from the dead, it surely is able to raise two people, or a thousand, or a million, or countless billions. We know there are many more stars in the entire universe than there are human beings who have ever lived. Their creation has not been difficult for God. Why should anyone think the re-creation of several billion human beings is hard? It may be hard for us, but it is easy for God.

The resurrection is the first event in a future period the Bible calls "the kingdom." Christians have been praying for this kingdom for 2000 years when they repeat the words, *"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven."* It is then that the dead will be brought back to life—when families and friends will be reunited **on earth**. It will be a time when everyone will reach the perfection enjoyed by our first parents in the garden of Eden—the same perfection possessed by Jesus when he lived among men.

We read of the time of the kingdom in Revelation: *“And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.”* (Rev. 21:2-5) This is a marvelous promise, one that thrills the hearts of all who read it.

But too many restrict the blessings of the kingdom to those who have named the name of Christ now. What happens to those who either have not heard of Christ, or who have heard but do not believe? About 48% of those who answered the *U.S. News and World Report* poll fall into this category, and these were from a “Christian” nation. Don’t be too quick to say, “They’ve had their chance and with God there are no second chances.” If that were true, why did Jesus speak to the people in riddles? His disciples certainly did not understand why, so they asked him about it: *“He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.... And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:... But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”* (Matthew 13:10-17)

If those who don’t see or don’t hear are “lost,” why didn’t Jesus open their eyes and ears? Did he want them to be lost? Surely not! The obvious answer is that he knew there was a future time for them. Of all the nations of the earth, the one that had been favored above all others was Israel. Yet most of Israel did not accept Jesus; did not have the faith to believe that he was the son of God. The leaders of Israel lobbied for his death. Yet despite the murder of their Messiah, they will come back in the kingdom. *“This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: ... For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and **their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.**”* (Hebrews 8:10-12)

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are the epitomes of evil. They were destroyed by fire from God because of their wickedness. (Genesis 19:24) Yet, their restoration is prophesied in Ezekiel 16. Jesus also compared their condition in the day of Judgment to that of the more favored cities where his miracles had been performed saying it will be easier for them in the day of judgment than for those. (Matthew 11:23,24; Isaiah 35:8)

All humankind dies because our first parents were sentenced to death as a result of their disobedience. They could only pass a dying condition on to their progeny. [Satan has sought to turn mankind from God through various no-death philosophies and the theory of evolution—an unproven, unscientific philosophy that is in opposition to the Bible’s teaching of man’s original perfection.] Jesus changed all that. *“Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. ...The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”* (1 Corinthians 15:21-26) What a wonderful promise! Because of Adam’s sin, all die. Because of Christ’s faithfulness, all will eventually be made alive. *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12)

The Psalmist has written: *“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.”* (Psalm 89:14) In his wisdom, God foresaw that man would disobey and learn the sorrows of evil. In his justice, God was bound to invoke the penalty he had specified. (Genesis 2:16,17) However, in his love, God provided the way for man’s recovery by the provision of Jesus as his ransom, (1 Timothy 2:5,6) and by his power he will bring back from the prison house of death all mankind. (1 John 2:2) This is exactly the kind of plan a righteous, just, and loving Creator (1 John 4:7) would devise for those he created in his own image. (Genesis 1:26) This was his plan from before the foundation of the world, (Revelation 13:8) and it shines forth from the pages of the Bible, the revealed word of God.

### IN GOD’S ETERNAL SPRING

The petals of a lovely rose,  
May fall and fade at summer’s close,  
And grief we feel for that brief hour,  
For it had been a lovely flower.  
It lies at rest on dewy grass;  
So fragrant still to all who pass.  
Even though it dies, our Father knows that  
Spring will resurrect the rose.  
And so when death makes all seem vain,  
Mankind like flowers will rise again.  
All in their graves shall hear their King  
And rise in God’s eternal spring.

Alice Ripper

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