

# Resurrections Before *the* Cross



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Jude 9, Luke 9:28–36, 1 Kings 17:8–24, Luke 7:11–17, Mark 5:35–43, John 11:1–44.*

**Memory Text:** “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die forever. Do you believe this?’ ” (*John 11:25, 26, LEB*).

**T**he Old Testament references to the resurrection that we have looked at so far were largely based on personal expectations (*Job 19:25–27, Heb. 11:17–19, Ps. 49:15, Ps. 71:20*) and on future promises (*Dan. 12:1, 2, 13*). However, we also have the inspired records of cases in which people actually were raised from the dead.

The first resurrection was of Moses (*Jude 9, Luke 9:28–36*). During Israel's monarchy, the son of the widow of Zarephath (*1 Kings 17:8–24*) and the Shunammite's son (*2 Kings 4:18–37*) also were resurrected. Christ, when here in the flesh, resurrected the son of the widow of Nain (*Luke 7:11–17*), Jairus's daughter (*Luke 8:40–56*), and then Lazarus (*John 11*). Except for Moses, all these people were raised as mortals who eventually would die again. These cases also confirm the biblical teaching of the unconsciousness of the dead (*Job 3:11–13; Ps. 115:17; Ps. 146:4; Eccles. 9:5, 10*). In none of these accounts, nor in any other biblical resurrection narratives, is there any mention of a supposed afterlife experience.

This week we will reflect more closely on the resurrections that occurred before Christ's own death and resurrection.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 29.

## The Resurrection of Moses

**Read** Jude 9 and Luke 9:28–36. What evidences do you find in these texts for the bodily resurrection of Moses?

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Some Greek Church Fathers from Alexandria argued that, when Moses died, two Moseses were seen: one alive in the spirit, another dead in the body; one Moses ascending to heaven with angels, the other buried in the earth. (See Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 2.1; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 6.15.) This distinction between the assumption of the soul and the burial of the body might make sense to those who believe in the Greek concept of the immortal soul, but the idea is not in the Bible. Jude 9 confirms the biblical teaching of the resurrection of Moses' body, because the dispute was "about the *body* of Moses" and not about any supposed surviving soul.

Deuteronomy 34:5–7 tells us that Moses died at 120 years of age, and the Lord buried him in a hidden place in a valley in the land of Moab. But Moses did not remain for very long in the grave. "Christ Himself, with the angels who had buried Moses, came down from heaven to call forth the sleeping saint. . . . For the first time Christ was about to give life to the dead. As the Prince of life and the shining ones approached the grave, Satan was alarmed for his supremacy. . . . Christ did not stoop to enter into controversy with Satan. . . . But Christ referred all to His Father, saying, 'The Lord rebuke thee.' Jude 9. . . . The resurrection was forever made certain. Satan was despoiled of his prey; the righteous dead would live again."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 478, 479.

A clear evidence of Moses' resurrection is found at the Transfiguration. There Moses appeared with the prophet Elijah, who had been translated without seeing death (*2 Kings 2:1–11*). Moses and Elijah even dialogued with Jesus (*see Luke 9:28–36*). "And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (*Luke 9:30, 31, NKJV*). Moses' appearance, proof of Christ's coming victory over sin and death, is depicted here in unmistakable terms. It was Moses and Elijah, not their "spirits" (after all, Elijah hadn't died), who had appeared to Jesus there.

**Moses was not allowed to enter the earthly Canaan (*Deut. 34:1–4*) but was taken into the heavenly Canaan. What does this teach about how God "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (*Eph. 3:20, NKJV*)?**

## Two Old Testament Cases

**Read** 1 Kings 17:8–24 and 2 Kings 4:18–37. What similarities and differences do you see in these two resurrections?

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In Hebrews 11, we read that by faith “women received back their dead by resurrection” (*Heb. 11:35, NASB*). This was the case in the two resurrections depicted in the texts for today.

The first one (*see 1 Kings 17:8–24*) occurred during the great apostasy in Israel, which happened under the influence of King Ahab and his pagan wife Jezebel. As a severe drought was ravaging the land, God commanded Elijah to go to Zarephath, a town outside of Israel. There he met a poor Phoenician widow who was about to cook a paltry last meal for herself and her son—and then die. But their lives were spared through the miracle of the flour and the oil, which didn’t run out until the drought was over. Sometime later her son became sick and died. In despair, the mother pled with Elijah, who cried out to the Lord. “The LORD listened to the voice of Elijah, and the life of the boy returned to him and he revived” (*1 Kings 17:22, NASB*).

The second resurrection (*see 2 Kings 4:18–37*) took place in Shunem, a small village south of Mount Gilboa. Elisha had helped a poor widow to pay her debts through the miracle of filling many vessels with oil (*2 Kings 4:1–7*). Later, in Shunem, he met a prominent married woman who had no children. The prophet told her that she would have a son, and it happened as predicted. The child grew and was healthy, but one day got sick and died. The Shunammite woman went to Mount Carmel and asked Elisha to come with her to see her son. Elisha prayed persistently to the Lord, and finally the child was alive again.

These women had different backgrounds but the same saving faith. The Phoenician widow hosted the prophet Elijah in an extremely difficult time when there was no safe place for him in Israel. The Shunammite woman and her husband built a special room where the prophet Elisha could stay while passing through their region. When the two children died, their faithful mothers appealed to those prophets of God and had the joy of seeing their children come to life again.

**These are great stories, but for each of these two accounts, how many untold others didn’t end with something so miraculous? What should this sad fact teach us about just how central to our faith is the promised resurrection at the end of time?**

## The Son of the Widow of Nain

The Bible says that Jesus “ ‘went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him’ ” (*Acts 10:38, NASB*). Indeed, all the Gospels are full of accounts of Jesus ministering to many needy and hurting souls, which is why later many Jews came to believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

“There were whole villages where there was not a moan of sickness in any house, for He had passed through them and healed all their sick. His work gave evidence of His divine anointing. Love, mercy, and compassion were revealed in every act of His life; His heart went out in tender sympathy to the children of men. He took man’s nature, that He might reach man’s wants. The poorest and humblest were not afraid to approach Him. Even little children were attracted to Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 11, 12.

**Read** Luke 7:11–17. What important difference is there between what happened in this resurrection and in the ones we looked at yesterday?

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During His ministry in Galilee, Jesus healed the sick and expelled demons. One time, He and His followers were approaching the gates of Nain when a funeral procession was going through those gates. In the open coffin was the only son of a widow, who was weeping inconsolably. Full of compassion for the grieving mother, Jesus said to her, “ ‘Do not weep.’ ” Then Jesus turned to the dead son in the coffin and ordered him, “ ‘Young man, I say to you, arise.’ ” The son came to life, and Jesus “presented him to his mother” (*Luke 7:13–15, NKJV*). The presence of Jesus completely changed the whole scenario, and many people who had witnessed the miracle knew not only that something astonishing had happened but also that someone special (they called Him “a great prophet”) was among them.

Both the Phoenician widow (*1 Kings 17:8–24*) and the Shunammite woman (*2 Kings 4:18–37*) had asked for help—from Elijah and Elisha, respectively. But the widow of Nain was helped without even asking for it. This means that God cares for us even when we are unable or feel unworthy to ask Him for help. Jesus saw the problem and dealt with it—so typical of Jesus through all His ministry.

**True religion involves caring for orphans and widows around us (*James 1:27*). Though, obviously, we won’t be able to do the kind of miracles Jesus did, what can we do to minister to those who are hurting around us?**

## Jairus's Daughter

The resurrections prior to Jesus' own death and resurrection were not limited to any specific ethnic group or social class. Moses was perhaps the greatest human leader of God's people ever (*Deut. 34:10–12*). By contrast, the poor Phoenician widow was not even an Israelite (*1 Kings 17:9*). The Shunammite woman was prominent in her community (*2 Kings 4:8*). The widow of Nain had only one son, upon whom she was probably dependent (*Luke 7:12*). In contrast, Jairus was a ruler of the synagogue, probably in Capernaum (*Mark 5:22*). Regardless of their different cultural backgrounds or social status, all of them were blessed by God's life-giving power.

**Read** *Mark 5:21–24, 35–43*. What can we learn about death from Christ's words “The child is not dead, but sleeping”? (*Mark 5:39, NKJV*).

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Jairus's 12-year-old daughter was lying deathly sick at home. So, he went to Jesus and begged Him to come to his home and lay His healing hands on her. But before they could get there, someone already brought the sad news “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?” (*Mark 5:35, NKJV*).

Then Jesus said to the grieving father, “Do not fear, only believe” (*Mark 5:36, NRSV*). Indeed, all the father could do was trust totally in God's intervention.

Arriving at the house, Jesus said to those who gathered there, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping” (*Mark 5:39, NRSV*). They ridiculed Him because (1) they knew that she was dead, and (2) they did not grasp the meaning of His words. “The comforting metaphor by which ‘sleep’ stands for ‘death’ seems to have been Christ's favorite way of referring to this experience (*[Matt. 9:24; Luke 8:52;]* see on John 11:11–15). Death is a sleep, but it is a deep sleep from which only the great Life-giver can awaken one, for He alone has the keys to the tomb (see Rev. 1:18; cf. John 3:16; Rom. 6:23).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 609.

After the resurrection of this girl, those who saw it were “overcome with amazement” (*Mark 5:42, NRSV*). No wonder. For now, death is final, absolute, and seemingly irreversible. To have seen something like this with their own eyes surely must have been an amazing, life-changing experience.

**Jesus' words, “Do not fear, only believe” (*Mark 5:36, NRSV*), are still meaningful for us today. How can we learn to do that, even amid fearful situations, which are the most important times to keep believing?**

## Lazarus

**Read** John 11:1–44. In what sense was Jesus “glorified” by the sickness and death of Lazarus (*John 11:4*)?

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Here, too, Jesus uses the metaphor for sleep in talking about death. “ ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up’ ” (*John 11:11, NIV*). When some thought He was talking about literal sleep (*John 11:11–13*), Jesus clearly stated what He meant: “ ‘Lazarus is dead’ ” (*John 11:12–14, NIV*). Actually, when Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead four days; his corpse already was rotting (*John 11:17, 39*). By the time a body starts decomposing badly enough to smell, there’s no question: *the person is dead*.

In this context, when Jesus told Martha, “ ‘Your brother will rise from the dead’ ” (*John 11:23, NASB*), she reaffirmed her belief in the final resurrection. But Jesus declared, “ ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die forever. Do you believe this?’ ” (*John 11:23–26, LEB*). And Jesus added, “ ‘If you believe, you will see the glory of God’ ” (*John 11:40, NASB*). Martha believed, and she saw the glory of God in the resurrection of her brother.

The Bible says that by God’s word life was created (*Gen, 1:20–30, Ps. 33:6*), and by His word life can be re-created, as in the case of Lazarus. After a short prayer, Jesus ordered, “ ‘Lazarus, come forth!’ ” (*John 11:43, NKJV*). Right then and there these people saw the life-giving power of God, the same power that spoke our world into existence, and the same power that at the end of the age will call the dead back to life in the resurrection.

By raising Lazarus, Jesus proved that He had the power to defeat death, which, for beings like us, who inevitably die—what greater manifestation of God’s glory could there be?

**Read** John 11:25, 26. In one line Jesus talks about believers dying, and in the next He talks about believers *never* dying. What is Jesus teaching us here, and why is the understanding that death is an unconscious sleep so crucial in understanding Christ’s words? And why do His words offer us, as beings destined to the grave, so much hope?

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**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Death of Moses,” pp. 469–480, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Voice of Stern Rebuke,” pp. 129–142; “A Prophet of Peace,” pp. 237–243, in *Prophets and Kings*; “The Centurion,” pp. 318, 319; “The Touch of Faith,” pp. 342, 343; “‘Lazarus, Come Forth,’ ” pp. 524–536, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. ‘He that hath the Son hath life.’ 1 John 5:12. The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life. ‘He that believeth in Me,’ said Jesus, ‘though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?’ Christ here [in John 11:25, 26] looks forward to the time of His second coming. Then the righteous dead shall be raised incorruptible, and the living righteous shall be translated to heaven without seeing death. The miracle which Christ was about to perform, in raising Lazarus from the dead, would represent the resurrection of all the righteous dead. By His word and His works He declared Himself the Author of the resurrection. He who Himself was soon to die upon the cross stood with the keys of death, a conqueror of the grave, and asserted His right and power to give eternal life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Many people died during the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha, as well as during Christ’s own earthly ministry. Only a few were resurrected. (See *Luke 4:24–27*.) Thinking, too, about the experience of all of the dead, whether resurrected in the past or at the Second Coming, what difference does it make, at least in regard to what it was like to be dead?
- 2 Many writers over the centuries have written about the futility of a life that ends always in death. Along with other living creatures—chickens, beavers, oysters, et cetera—we all die. However, for humans, in a sense our predicament is worse than for the animals, because we know that we are going to die. (See *Eccles. 9:5*.) Chickens, beavers, and oysters don’t. Why, then, is the promise of the resurrection so crucial to us?
- 3 If you think that the soul is immortal and that the dead, especially the righteous dead, live on in heaven after they die, what need is there for the resurrection at the end of time?
- 4 If someone called and asked, “Is Sally there?” you might answer, “Yes, but she’s sleeping.” If, however, someone called and asked, “Is Sally there?” you are not going to answer, “Yes, but she’s dead.” Why not? What does this teach us about the nature of death?

## Christ's Ambassador

By BENJIE LEACH

One of my goals as chaplain of Forest Lake Academy in Orlando, Florida, was to become acquainted with each student. It was a challenge in a school with 450 students in the mid-1970s.

At the beginning of the school year, a student came up to me and asked, "Have you had a chance to become acquainted with Paul yet?" I had not.

"You need to get acquainted," the student said. "Just ask where he is from."

My curiosity was aroused, so I invited Paul to my office. He turned out to be a rather shy 16-year-old. "So, Paul," I asked, "where are you from?"

"I'm from a little town in Georgia called Plains," he said.

My mouth dropped open. "What?" I said. "That is where the president of the United States—Jimmy Carter—lives!"

I had to ask. "Paul," I said, "do you know the president?"

"Oh, yes," he said.

Early that summer, he had needed a job to pay for his tuition at Forest Lake Academy, and he had gotten a job at a peanut warehouse, the main industry, in Plains. He was excited about finding work and thought that he had made it clear about taking Sabbaths off. But his work supervisor stopped him when he left on Friday with a promise to return on Monday.

"No," the supervisor said. "You come tomorrow. We are open Saturday."

"But, you see, I'm a Seventh-day Adventist," Paul said.

"Come tomorrow, or you won't have a job anymore," the supervisor said.

Paul thought for a moment. "Can I speak to the owner?"

"But that's the president!" the supervisor exclaimed.

"Is he in town?" Paul asked.

"Yes, but I don't think that it's going to make any difference."

Paul went to the Carter home. He had to go through the Secret Service, but he was able to sit down with the president. Jimmy Carter listened attentively as he explained the situation and his observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. "I respect any young person who has convictions and stands up for what he believes," the president said. "You can have your Sabbaths off."

And the soft-spoken, 16-year-old teen became Christ's ambassador to the U.S. president.

You and I also are ambassadors for Christ. "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20, NKJV). Let us, with Christ's help, be faithful ambassadors.




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*This mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 1 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan, "To revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life." Read more: IWillGo2020.org.*