

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

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Jehovah's Witnesses and their official organization, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, have historically denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and have maintained that His was raised as a non-human "spirit creature" or He had a non-physical "spiritual" resurrection. To quote the Watchtower:

"The King, Christ Jesus, was put to death in the flesh and was resurrected an invisible spirit creature.¹

Further developing their teaching, the Witnesses proclaim: "In His resurrection He was no more human. He was raised as a spirit creature."²

In addition to this, to account for His missing body, the Watchtower has suggested that Christ's body was "dissolved into gases" or "preserved somewhere as the grand memorial of God's love."³

In order to understand the true teaching of the resurrection, it is necessary to review briefly the Biblical position, which is at considerable odds with the Watchtower.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is quite literally the historical bedrock upon which the Christian faith rests. The Apostle Paul indeed tells us that "if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14). He also declares, "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins" (verse 17).

From these two statements in the Word of God, we can see the resurrection of our Lord determines the validity of our faith and even our salvation, for without His resurrection our faith is "vain" and we are "yet in our sins."

In this connection, it must also be remembered that every verse in the Bible which deals with the resurrection of the dead, and of our Lord particularly, refers exclusively to the human body; *i.e.*, a bodily resuscitation; never a spirit alone, spirit creature, or spiritual resurrection. In fact, the word "resurrection" is never applied to the soul or spirit of man. This fact is born out in the original Hebrew and Greek. Beyond this, our Lord specifically prophesied that His resurrection would be bodily; that is, in a glorified form of the human body He then possessed. When speaking to the unbelieving Jews, as recorded in the second chapter of John's Gospel, Christ stated:

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (verse 19).

The Jews, however, thought he was referring to the temple in Jerusalem but the Apostle John clearly declares our Lord's meaning:

"But he spake of the temple of his body" (verse 21).

The Greek work *soma* is translated "body" throughout the New Testament, so it is an inescapable fact that Christ was referring to his own physical form—hence a bodily resurrection.

Two classic New Testament references which corroborate our Lord's prophecy of His bodily resurrection are in the 20th chapter of John and the 24th chapter of Luke. In John 20 when our Lord appeared to the doubting Thomas, the same body in which He died upon the cross is evidenced by His own words:

"Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing" (verse 27).

In Luke 24, we again see how the words of Christ refute the spiritual resurrection idea of Jehovah's Witnesses.

"Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, 'Peace to you.' But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, 'Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.' When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His

feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, 'Have you any food here?' So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence" (verses 36-43).

Not only, then, did our Lord have "flesh and bones," but He showed them the same hands and feet which bore the wounds of Calvary (verses 39,40). The fact that He also ate broiled fish and a honeycomb (verses 42 and 43) proves that He was not a "spirit creature" as Jehovah's Witnesses contend. Moreover our Lord's words, **"it is I myself . . . a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have"** (verse 39) was uttered according to verses 37 and 38 because the disciples thought He was a spirit. Jesus, however, absolutely disproved that by offering His body as tangible evidence (verses 39 and 40).

Sometimes Jehovah's Witnesses attempt to explain away these appearances of Christ by asserting that He had a "spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:44) or that He merely assumed different bodies to encourage His disciples. They claim that this is why his disciples, who knew Him the best in life, did not recognize Him after His resurrection (John 20:11-16; Luke 24:15-30), but had Jesus manifested a body that was not real, then He would have been a deceiver.

The Jehovah's Witnesses also argue that 1 Peter 3:18, which refers to Christ's resurrection and states that He was "Made alive in spirit" (literal Greek), establishes their theory, but they are in error.

While it is true that Paul speaks of "a spiritual body" he nevertheless calls it a "body" (Greek *soma*) and we have already seen how Christ possessed "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39). A spiritual body then is not "a spirit" as the Witnesses make out, but a glorified, immortal, physical form possessing certain spiritual characteristics or attributes (*i.e.*, the ability to pass through locked doors, vanish at will, or eat food. John 20:19,26; Luke 24:31).

Again, Jehovah's Witnesses' idea that because Mary Magdalene and the disciples could not recognize Christ on three occasions "proves" that He had assumed "different bodies" other than the one in which He died upon the cross, is disposed of by Luke 24:16. Luke there tells us that when the disciples encountered Jesus their eyes were kept from recognizing Him as a direct act of Christ's will. When He finished His conversation, He allowed their sense of vision to perceive who He really was; thus **"then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight"** (Luke 24:31).

Finally, 1 Peter 3:18, far from "proving" that Jesus was raised a spirit as the Witnesses insist, only proves that He was raised in or by the Spirit of God as the Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8:11. The main objections, then, that Jehovah's Witnesses raise against the bodily resurrection of our Lord are all thoroughly answered by the Scriptures themselves and represent no real threat to the historic Christian doctrine of the resurrection.

The Bible, therefore, does have much to say about the resurrection of Christ as we have seen, and nowhere supports the spirit-resurrection theory of Jehovah's Witnesses. In fact, all of it flatly contradicts their teaching.

To the sincere, zealous, yet misled members of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Christian church must repeat the statement of our Lord Himself: **"Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have"** (Luke 24:38-39).

The true teaching concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ does indeed determine a person's eternal destiny (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17). For **"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved"** (Romans 10:9).

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1 *Let God Be True*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, p. 122, Edition 1946.

2 *The Kingdom is at Hand*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, p. 258.

3 *Studies in the Scripture*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, p. 129, Vol. 2.