

The Question about the Resurrection
(Mt 22.23—33; Mk 12.18—27)

²⁷ Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him ²⁸ and asked him a question, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man^b shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; ³⁰ then the second ³¹ and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. ³² Finally the woman also died. ³³ In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.”

³⁴ Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; ³⁵ but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. ³⁶ Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. ³⁷ And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. ³⁸ Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.” ³⁹ Then some of the scribes answered, “Teacher, you have spoken well.” ⁴⁰ For they no longer dared to ask him another question. ¹

Today we continue our lessons from the Gospel of Luke on “Kingdom Living.” Can you believe it? Jesus has finally arrived in Jerusalem, but instead of being received with the honor and respect of the long awaited Messiah, he is questioned by the religious authorities, not to prove his authenticity, but to try to trick him into saying something that could be used to discredit him! The events surrounding this scripture are that Jesus has been greeted as the Messiah and king by the common people as he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey; has been questioned about who gave him authority to do his ministry; questioned about whether it was correct to pay one’s taxes to the occupying Roman government...and now he is questioned about the resurrection of the dead.

The group questioning him was the Sadducees, and they came with a hypothetical question based on the Jewish law of “levirate marriage.” An example of levirate marriage is found in Genesis 38; and an explanation is given in Deuteronomy 25:5–10. The word *levirate* comes from the Latin *levir*, which means

^b Gk *his brother*

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Lk 20:27-40

“a husband’s brother.” The Sadducees only accepted as Scripture the Five Books of Moses, and they did not believe in any supernatural occurrences, which included angels, spirits, or the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:8). They claimed that Moses did not write about any of these doctrines. The priestly party in Israel was composed of Sadducees, which explains why the priests later opposed the Apostles’ preaching of the Resurrection (Acts 4:1–2) and why they wanted to kill Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead (John 12:10–11).

Their question on resurrection, therefore, was not to elicit information but to find a way to make Jesus look foolish by presenting an extreme hypothetical case. They posited a situation in which a woman married each of seven brothers after each previous brother had died. Then the Sadducees asked, “At the resurrection whose wife will she be?”

But to understand the question we need to know who these Sadducees were? There were only a few Sadducees, but they were very wealthy. The priests and the aristocrats were nearly all Sadducees. They were the governing class; and they collaborated with Rome, because they were unwilling to risk losing their wealth, their comfort and their place. The Sadducees accepted only the written law of the Old Testament; and in the Old Testament they stressed only the law of Moses and usually disregarded the prophetic books. The Sadducees believed that there was no resurrection from the dead and that there were no angels or spirits. The Sadducees believed in unrestricted free-will. There was no belief that a person’s life was planned and ordered by God. Nor did the Sadducees believe in the coming of the Messiah. For them the coming of the Messiah would have been a disturbance of their carefully ordered lives. They remind us of many in our society today who depend on their position and power and do not have faith in God, nor do they believe or have a need for an after life.

The Sadducees, then, came with this question about who would be the husband in heaven of the woman who was married to seven different men. They regarded such a question as the kind of thing that made belief in the resurrection of the body ridiculous. But Jesus did not ridicule them for their question; rather Jesus gave them an answer which has a permanently valid truth in it. He said that we must not think of heaven in terms of this earth. Life there will be quite different, because we will be quite different.

Jesus pointed out that His opponents were wrong and that their question revealed assumptions that limited God's power and denied God's Word. Resurrection is not reconstruction; it is the miraculous granting of a new body that has continuity with the old body but not identity with it. Paul later compared our present body to a planted seed and the future resurrection body to the glorious flower and fruit that grows from the seed (1 Cor. 15:35–50).

The future life with God is not a mere continuation of the present life only on “a higher scale.” We will maintain our identities and know each other, but there will be no more death—therefore there will be no need for marriage and procreation. Christians do not become angels. In heaven we will share the image of Jesus Christ and be much higher than the angels (1 John 3:2). Angels appear in Scripture as men, but they are spirit beings without sexuality. In this way we will be like them; there will be no marriage or childbearing in heaven.

Isn't God powerful enough to raise the dead and give them new bodies suited to their new environment? If today He can give different bodies to caterpillars, tadpoles and other species in creation, why can't God give people new bodies at the resurrection? (1 Cor. 15:35–44) In their attempt to be “rational,” the Sadducees denied the very power of God!

But Jesus went beyond logic and referred them to the Word of God, particularly what happened to Moses as recorded in Exodus 3, the very scriptures they taught

as truth. There God identified Himself with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and thus affirmed that these three patriarchs were very much alive. But if they were alive, then they were “out of the body,” because we know they had died (James 2:26). There must be a real world of spirit beings or Moses would not have written these words.

Jesus said that Exodus 3:6, 15–16 taught not only the truth of life after death but also the reality of the resurrection. Not by direct statement but by inference. God is the God of the whole person—spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23)—because God created the whole person. God does not simply “save our souls” and ignore the rest of our being. Inherent in the very nature of God’s creative act is God’s concern for the total person. So, God will not keep us disembodied spirits forever but will give us glorious bodies to match our heavenly perfection.

Another factor is God’s covenantal relationship with the patriarchs. God made promises of earthly blessing to them and their descendants, but He cannot fulfill these promises if His people are going to live forever only as disembodied spirits. Can there be a glorious new heaven and earth but no corporeal glory for the people of God?

Jesus affirmed what the Sadducees denied: the existence of angels, the reality of life after death, and the hope of a future resurrection—and He did it with only one passage from Moses! Of course, He could have referred to other passages that teach a future resurrection, but He met His enemies on their own ground, the books of Moses (see Job 14:14; 19:25–27; Pss. 16:9–10; 17:15; Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37; Dan. 12:2).²

The teachers of the Law, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees were at odds with each other because of conflicting beliefs. The former applauded Jesus’ refuting the

²Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Lk 20:27

Sadducees' doctrine (Luke 20:39). The result of the conversation was that both Pharisees and Sadducees were afraid to ask Jesus any more questions.³

So we learn from Jesus' teaching that physical death does not terminate the self-conscious existence of the individual. God is the God of the long dead Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For this to be true, the dead must exist now. What a comfort as we think of our own loved ones who have passed away and our own departure from this life.

In the resurrection there is no marriage. But this does not mean husbands and wives are separated. It means that the intimacy we experience here on earth is a symbol of a reality we will experience in glory. The joy a married couple finds in their union will not be taken away, but will be multiplied, as we experience a closeness with others that is beyond us here and now.^{4 5 6}

We have no reason to fear death. Jesus has assured us that God will resurrect us at the appointed time and we will live for eternity. God is our God when we live. God is our God when we depart this earthly life. God has promised that we will live in eternity with Him! Thanks be unto God!

³Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:255

⁴Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Bible Readers Companion*. electronic ed. Wheaton : Victor Books, 1991; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996, S. 671

⁵Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Luke*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 249

⁶Elwell, Walter A. ; Comfort, Philip Wesley: *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (Tyndale Reference Library), S. 1121