

Theological Implications of Jesus' Resurrection and Christian Life

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Introduction

For all Christians, the single most important event in the history of the world is Jesus' resurrection. So much of the hope of all Christians rests on knowing that Jesus overcame death and therefore believers will also be able to overcome death. The resurrection provides so much more than just hope over death, however. In fact, the theological underpinnings of the resurrection and how they are carried out provides the believer with an unprecedented look at God's divine plan in action throughout all human history. The believer can see the fulfillments of divine promises from centuries in the past, the miraculous interaction between God and the world He created and catch a glimpse into the plan God wants to deliver to His children in the future. The purpose of this paper will be to dive deeply into some key theological tenets that connect God's past and future promises to his creation through the miracle of Jesus' resurrection.

Theology of God's Promise

A promise or oath is something that has been a powerful device for the actions of humans through all history. In the collected tales of ancient civilizations, there are countless stories of people who swore oaths to others in exchange for mutual benefits. In some cases, these might be an oath of fealty sworn between two kingdoms, it may be an oath of combined growth by marrying children from two different families to each other, it may even take the form of a joint sacrifice ceremony where each party brings their portion of the oath agreement and sacrifices them together. No matter what kind of promise or agreement one wishes to use for illustration, there is no question that such things were a part of recorded history (even though the details of these may have been lost to time or exaggerated for legendary purposes).

The History of God's Promises

Even though it may not seem like a valid comparison at first, the way in which God chose to make Himself known to His people in biblical history is closely related to the use of similar promise schema¹. The detail-oriented reader must recall that even though God, the Heavenly Father, is divine, it is necessary to understand the agreement between a lord and their servants is the only method that would make sense to humans. When God was enacting an agreement between Himself and humans, He would have used a promise or oath so that such an agreement could be understood in mortal constructs. For the agreement between God and His people to be tangible in a mortal (if ephemeral) manner, it would require an agreement between two parties that is carried on from descendant to descendants.

Another item that was critical in the formation of the promises and agreements discussed is the importance of terms. When one elects to use a loan to purchase a vehicle, for instance, a contract is entered into between the seller of the car (the lot where it was purchased), the buyer of the car, and the financial institution that is financing the loan. A typical loan agreement states that the seller gives all responsibility for the daily maintenance and use of the car to the buyer and all rights associated if the buyer provides the finance company established payments. If the buyer passes the property on to someone else (say giving it to a child at a certain age), this is both a continuation of the original agreement (if the car is not paid off) and a new agreement (what the original owner expects out of the new owner).

¹ Koert van Bekkum, "Biblical Covenants in Their Ancient Near Eastern Context: A Methodological, Historical, and Theological Reassessment," in *Covenant: A Vital Element of Reformed Theology Biblical, Historical and Systematic-Theological Perspectives*, ed. Hans Burger, Gert Kwakkel & Michael Mulder (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022): 43-78, 44.

Considering the idea of theological covenants, the agreement is far more like a car purchase that one might realize. God agrees to be the caretaker and divine power provider to the people (i.e. Israel) if they do what God tells them to do. In the Bible, there are five such covenants: The Noahic Covenant, The Abrahamic Covenant, The Mosaic Covenant, The Davidic Covenant, and the “New” Covenant. In each of these covenants, God makes an agreement with His people through a particular leader (Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus respectively). In each case, God makes a promise with His creation that will be transferable to each leader’s descendants until all creation ends².

It would be easy to consider these covenants as isolated and separate instances in some transitory passage of time but that does not agree with the personality of God. To understand this, it is important to read a few examples of where God tells the world who He is through His own methods. First, God is not one to change His mind: “Furthermore, the Eternal One of Israel does not lie or change His mind, for He is not man who changes his mind.” (1 Samuel, 15:29, HCSB). Second, God will never leave His beloved, “Look, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” (Genesis 28:15, HCSB). Third, God does not break His promises under any circumstances, “The LORD gave them rest on every side according to all He had sworn to their fathers. None of their enemies were able to stand against them, for the LORD handed over all their enemies to them. None of the good promises the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed. Everything was fulfilled.” (Joshua 21:44-45, HCSB). Since the nature of God’s promises and His heart are good and trustworthy, and God is good and trustworthy, these

² J Julius Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 65.

promises were not just idle agreements, they were binding agreements between God and his people.

Theology and the Covenants

Now that it is understood that God uses covenants to forge agreements between Himself and His people, it is also clear that with each covenant, God did not change – only the people changed. In the case of Noah, God agreed to care for Noah's family and his descendants and that He would never again destroy the world in a flood (cf. Genesis 9:1-11). Then, when God elected Abraham to be the forebearer of the nation of Israel, He agreed to care for Abraham and make his family carry on the original promise made to Noah (cf. Genesis 12:1-3) so that the Abrahamic Covenant did not nullify the Noachic Covenant, it simply added more promises (make a nation, provide a land, etc.) that the first did not.

For much of the early story of the nation of Israel, it was the Abrahamic covenant that guided them – they are God's people and God will give them a land and care for them in that land. However, as the people headed towards this future, they were captured by Egypt and thrown into slavery. God used various descendants of Abraham to continue His promise (i.e. Jacob) but the suffering of the people was not accounted for in the two previous covenants. To this end, God elected to bring Moses forth and create an agreement with his family. But this agreement was more specific about what was expected out of God's people to remain within God's graces (cf. Exodus 19:4-5). Once again, none of the previous covenants were ever broken by God (though the people did a fine job of it plenty of times). Even still, God's plan was only partially revealed to believers.

Many years after the Mosaic covenant had been in place and the people had finally made it to their land, Caanan, the people asked God to provide them a king even though God was the

only king in the original agreement. To make the agreement acceptable, the original covenants had to be upheld but now the lineage of kings in Israel would be linked to one bloodline – David (cf. 2 Samuel 7:8-16). God maintained His promises to Israel despite each of these new changes and until the end of the original kingdom of Israel, the kings all came from David’s bloodline³. In fact, it was one from the house of David that allowed for God’s final covenant.

Jesus Fulfills the “New Covenant”

Now, the final connection can be made to understand the theological significance of God’s promises throughout the biblical record. As has been illustrated, in each phase of God’s plan with His creation there is a promise and a benefactor. Yet, when God decided to make His “New” promise with His creation, He decided to create it *through* someone rather than with *someone* as was previously the case⁴. A minor change in the wording of the promise now makes a major change in its context. Jesus was born to a human but was not, himself, fully human and birthed no human children. Had this new covenant followed the original lineage requirements, there would be no hope for humans outside of Jerusalem (those born through David’s house), but God chose to make the new covenant with Himself and all humanity.

When Christians say they are covered in Christ’s blood, this can likewise be understood that the spiritual covering of oneself in the blood of Jesus means they are heirs in the covenant

³ Jaap Dekker, “What Does David Have to Do with It? The Promise of a New Covenant in the Book of Isaiah,” in *Covenant: A Vital Element of Reformed Theology Biblical, Historical and Systematic-Theological Perspectives*, ed. Hans Burger, Gert Kwakkel & Michael Mulder (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022): 101-123, 116.

⁴ Daniel I Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God’s Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 354.

with Jesus, “The Spirit Himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children, and if children, also heirs – heirs of God and coheirs with Christ – seeing that we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.” (Romans 8:16-17, HCSB). The enormity of this agreement is something that is easily forgotten by modern Christians yet has such far reaching impacts on our faith. Jesus died and rose again for the sake of all mankind. This means that all who accept Christ are now likewise joined into the entirety of God’s covenants from Noah to David and beyond.

From a theological perspective, all Christians have been buried with Christ and raised to new life. This symbolic statement is proof that from the beginning of mankind to the current day, God has kept an unbroken list of promises with all who seek Him. Even though the sin of man was great, mankind has been saved by God’s promises. So, when a believer is asked how they know that they can trust God, may they think back on the many promises God made with His people and how He has not yet broken any of them.

God’s Supernatural Involvement with His Creation

In the previous section of this paper, the theological underpinnings that link all of God’s promises from the early days to the present day have been examined. The next area of concern is in the execution of God’s promises. For one to be able to interpret God’s action within His creation to carry out His promises, some consideration to the methods God chooses must be discussed. With each event that occurred in the theological journey of the covenants, they required God to interact in new and different ways with His creation. Furthermore, with each interaction, God chose to do things in a different way than the previous time as a testament to finding new ways to interact with his children. Few verses explain this as succinctly as God’s message to Jacob found in the book of Isaiah: “Do not remember the past events, pay no

attention to things of old. Look, I am about to do something new; even now it is coming. Do you not see it?" (Isaiah 43:18-19a, HCSB).

The Miraculous Tools of God

The theology understood by Christians is that we serve an all-powerful, omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal God. There is no way that a human can fathom the great power of such an entity just as paint cannot understand the ways in which the painter may mix it, techniques used for certain brush strokes, and so on. The only things that humans can understand about the nature of God is based upon how He chooses to reveal Himself⁵. Just as a person can enjoy a movie being streamed over the internet without understanding how the movie is recorded, what methods are used to make the audio fill in or what mechanisms are required for the stream to be generated, so can a person understand that God does what He feels is needed to make things happen. But what does God do? This lies in the realm of miracles.

A miracle is not something that can occur naturally in the world, this means that the very presence of a miracle requires something to be supernatural. The belief that the world is natural and nothing else is from the mind of David Hume who is known as the main supporter of the Naturalist worldview. To exemplify this worldview, one must think of nature as a closed box and that the entirety of the world exists solely in the box. In this view, there is no room for God to interact with His creation⁶. Hume could not contend with a world that could be interacted with from an external force, but Christians know that God acts outside of the normal world but has complete control of the box and its pieces.

⁵ Douglas Geivett and Gary Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 149.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

Throughout biblical history, there are miraculous things occurring in tandem with the actions of God in the world. In fact, in each instance of the covenants mentioned previously, God chose to interact with the covenant recipients in a supernatural way. Prior to the covenant with Noah, God sent a massive flood to cover the earth with only Noah and his family aware of the situation. In Abraham's case, God sent Abraham a son despite he and his wife being well beyond childbearing years. For Moses, God sent plagues to Egypt and parted the Red Sea so the Israelites could escape their pursuers. Finally, before David became king of the Jews, God used a sling and a stone to bring a giant to the ground. In all these circumstances, God used His supernatural control over His creation to cause amazing things to happen with those whom He made His promises.

Jesus Fulfills Many Miracles

When one considers what miracles God has used in His story, it is easy to focus considerable attention on the resurrection of Jesus as the master miracle. While there is no doubt that the resurrection is a key miracle of importance, it is also important to note just how many miracles Jesus' very existence answered⁷. Certainly, the miracles that Jesus performed such as the healing of the sick, the raising of the dead, etc. are not to be overlooked. However, the fact that Jesus was born of the house of David, that his family fled to Egypt, that he was a Nazarene, that he was born in Bethlehem, the list can continue for some time. Although the numbers vary,

⁷ Joshua W Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2021), 58.

it has been argued that Jesus fulfilled over 332 Messianic prophecies in his lifetime⁸. This does not even include all the miracles that Jesus performed during his ministry. Upon further analyzing the messianic claims Jesus fulfilled, Josh and Sean McDowell report that the potential for one single person (i.e. Jesus) to fulfill the 332 prophecies is something likened to a 1 in 10¹⁷ chance and one might have better luck winning the lottery – twice⁹

If one evaluates the facts of Jesus' life, there is little room to argue about just how supernatural his very existence is. God does not care what feeble human minds think about His plans. Hume's sealed box mentality may hold up to some scrutiny about the scarcity of miracles, but this implies that a human mind has the capability to put some sort of formula around the Almighty God that He would allow Himself to be held to and God just does not work like that. God's universe is built exactly as He wanted it built and all things happen in the way that He decides they should happen. To quote J Vernon McGee, "This is God's universe and God does things His way. You may have a better way, but you don't have a universe."¹⁰

From a theological perspective, God's power extends far beyond the structures and frameworks humans can devise. The plans and designs God chooses are on a level that no human can comprehend, 'For as heaven is higher than earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.' (Isaiah 55:9, HCSB). The only thing that the believer can be

⁸ Nick Cady, "The Statistical Probability of Jesus Fulfilling the Messianic Prophecies," *Theology for the People*, February 18, 2020, <https://nickcady.org/2020/02/18/the-statistical-probability-of-jesus-fulfilling-the-messianic-prophecies/>.

⁹ Josh and Sean McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Life-Changing Truth for a Skeptical World* (Nashville, TN: HarperCollins, 2017). 235.

¹⁰ J Vernon McGee, "Vernon McGee Quotes", Goodreads Quotable Quotes, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/8284138-this-is-god-s-universe-and-god-does-things-his-way>

certain about the way God interacts with His creation is that it is a supernatural method of His own design¹¹. For the final stage of this paper, the focus will now turn to the greatest miracle of all – Jesus’ resurrection.

The Resurrection and Hope of the Believer

In the previous sections of this paper, much attention has been given to the theological implications of Jesus’ existence and pre-existence as a fulfillment of God’s miraculous plan. Now, the focus of the conversation turns to the most critical theological argument in this entire paper – the theology and impact of Jesus’ resurrection. As Paul explains in his first letter to the church at Corinth, life would be a very painful and arduous thing if Christ’s power ended at his death, ‘And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Therefore, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished. If we have put our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone.’ (1 Corinthians 15:17-19., HCSB). Anyone who has read the writings of Paul will be quick to express that Paul was not a weak man who sought the pity of others. In fact, the opposite is true, because Paul would rarely ask for support from anyone and encouraged believers to do the same. That is to say that if Paul expresses something should cause someone to take pity on Christians, it is a very lowly place to be. Thankfully, the resurrection of Christ allows believers to embrace the truth and face all opposition.

¹¹ Gary Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 23.

Theological Implications of the Resurrection

There is a considerable amount of evidence in biblical history and some well-supported presuppositions that show Jesus' resurrection is more plausible than not¹². What this means to the believer is that the faith that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians is absolutely founded on something easier to explain and support than not. Based on the Minimal Facts argument of Gary Habermas, there are 12 irreducible facts about the resurrection that believers and non-believers can agree upon and one of those items is that the tomb of Jesus was discovered empty just a few days after his death¹³. Another of the minimal facts that follows the empty tomb is the fact that Jesus did appear to too many people for it to be just a mass hallucination as the numbers for a mass hallucination falls apart at a much smaller number than the number of those who saw Jesus after his burial and resurrection¹⁴. There are many other facts in Habermas' list that are well supported but this alone does not illustrate the theological implications of this miraculous event.

Noted atheist-turned-Christian, C.S. Lewis had a prolific writing career in which he brought an intellectual grasp and scientific curiosity to spiritual things. Among his most seminal works is the book, *Mere Christianity*. One of the most simplistic yet realistic arguments that Lewis makes has been deemed the "Mad, Bad, or God" argument and reads simply, 'We are faced, then, with a frightening alternative. This man we are talking about either was (or is) just what He said or else a lunatic, or something worse. Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic or a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may

¹² Geivett and Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles*, 147.

¹³ David Baggett, *Did the Resurrection Happen? A Conversation with Gary Habermas and Anthony Flew* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.”¹⁵ Every time Jesus spoke to people ranging from the uneducated field worker to the deeply intellectual Pharisee, Jesus’ teaching amazed them. So before one even addresses the miracles of Jesus, it is clear that he is no lunatic. Lunatics may have some jumbled thoughts that, when organized, can sometimes make sense, but the vast majority of the things a lunatic speaks are incoherent and maniacal. However, even non-biblical sources expressed that Jesus was a great teacher so, it follows that a good teacher is highly unlikely to be a lunatic.

Second, Jesus is the Son of God and the only being to ever bear both human and divine traits together and all the miracles Jesus performed while in the world were completed using divine power, not evil power, ‘When the Pharisees heard this, they said, “The man drives out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of demons.” Knowing their thoughts, He told them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is headed for destruction, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?’ (Matthew 12:24-26, HCSB). By his own statement, there is no way Jesus could do something evil for evil’s sake so the believer can confirm that Jesus is, in fact, who he says he is - the Son of God.

Jesus’ Resurrection Fulfills God’s Promise

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s famed sleuth, Sherlock Holmes, is known for his powerful deduction skills and logical approach to challenges. Yet the method used is relatively simple, “When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the

¹⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2009), 53.

truth¹⁶.” With this logic in mind, it seems that this study has alleviated two of the three potential options of C.S. Lewis’ “Mad, Bad, or God” – Jesus was neither Mad, nor Bad, ere go, he must be God. It might have taken some time to finally land on this ideal, but it is the most important and salient point in all of Christianity. All the things that happened in Jesus’ life are nigh unimportant to the faith of Christians if he never rose from the dead. Thankfully, the reader can surmise that this was the case. But this statement means much more than just that Jesus rose from the dead, but that his act of rising from the dead is the final step needed to fulfill God’s promise once and for all – the famous “New Covenant.”

From a theological viewpoint, Jesus being able to fulfill the covenant shows that even though history took a long and winding road, the promise God made has never wavered. This means that not only did God complete the promise He made to Noah thousands of years ago, but that same promise is available to all humans in the modern day. Not only did God fulfill His promises, but there are also things in Jesus’ ministry that showed that God approved of and chose Jesus. One can read about God stating His pleasure with Jesus at his baptism (cf. Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22). Later, at Jesus’ transfiguration, God once again expressed His pleasure with Jesus (cf. Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7). Then, of course, God allowed Jesus to raise from the dead and overcome death (cf. Matthew 28:5-6, Mark 16:6, Luke 24:6).

The thread that ties all these resurrection stories together, is God’s choice to raise Jesus from the dead. He could have chosen to let Jesus simply disappear before the crucifixion, or He could have let Jesus ascend immediately after the work was finished. But God did not choose these methods, He allowed Jesus to die and to rise again three days later. In Habermas’

¹⁶ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *Sherlock Holmes and the Sign of the Four* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1890),

assumption, God's decision to allow Jesus to produce miracles and to allow him to be resurrected proves Jesus' divinity as God would not raise a heretic from the dead¹⁷. The best conclusion one can draw from the evidence presented is that God used His supernatural force to insert Jesus into His creation, imbued Jesus with the divine powers needed, and served him as a ransom for many. The promises from all the covenants, then, can be connected directly to the person of Jesus.

Conclusion

The intention of this document was to provide a deep dive into the theological implications of the resurrection of Jesus and what it means for God's creation. We have followed God's varying covenants from Noah to David in the Old Testament and have connected it all to the New Testament promise of Jesus. This work has also considered the supernatural methods used by God to act on His creation in the way He sees fit. Finally, we landed on the last piece of the puzzle – Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises. This document was not intended to structure an entire review of systematic theology but rather to serve as a review of the material that supports God's action throughout history and ultimately arrives at the conclusion that Jesus was the method used by God to fulfill His plans in humanity. Even though few modern churches address the matters of the Old Testament God, the author hopes that this will encourage believers to read the past and connect it to the future.

¹⁷ Habermas, *The Risen Jesus*, 131.

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