

## ***Bible study***

# **WHAT IS THE “BETTER RESURRECTION” IN THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS?**

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**A theme may be found throughout the letter to the Hebrews which some may not realise. Unlike obvious themes in other Biblical books/letters, the one found in Hebrews is little noticed and virtually hidden. In this article we will briefly explore this particular theme of ‘better’ including what is the ‘better’ resurrection’ that Paul wrote about and how we can prove what we have traditionally believed.**

The epistle to the Hebrews is particularly fascinating and its constant reference to “better” should be explored with the aim of gaining an understanding of what Paul as referring to. But before we explore that side of things, a background to the Holy Day references and themes in the New Testament is required.

### **NEW TESTAMENT HOLY DAY THEMES/INFERENCES**

The entire New Testament is replete with such themes and it appears to be virtually underpinned by the Holy Days. Each of the four Gospels are replete with reference to these important days in God’s calendar. The Gospel according to John in particular seems to make a major issue of the Holy Days. Perhaps, due to the apostasy which was beginning to make inroads within such a short time of the death and resurrection of Christ, it was necessary to give emphasis to them.

Each chapter of **John**, with the exception of chapters one and twenty-one (the first and last), have Holy Day emphases running through them:

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Holy Day Theme</b>	<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Holy Day Theme</b>
Two	Passover and Unleavened Bread	Twelve	Passover and Unleavened Bread
Three	Passover and Unleavened Bread	Thirteen	Passover and Unleavened Bread
Four	Allusion to Pentecost	Fourteen	Passover and Unleavened Bread
Five	Tabernacle theme	Fifteen	Passover and Unleavened

			Bread
Six	Passover and Unleavened Bread	Sixteen	Passover and Unleavened Bread
Seven	Tabernacles theme	Seventeen	Passover and Unleavened Bread
Eight	Last Great Day theme	Eighteen	Passover and Unleavened Bread
Nine	Last Great Day theme	Nineteen	Passover and Unleavened Bread
Ten	Last Great Day theme	Twenty	Passover and Unleavened Bread
Eleven	Allusion to the Last Great Day		

We find a similar underlying structure in the book of Revelation. Dr Samuele Bacchiocchi in his famous *God's Festivals in Scripture and History* (vol 1) page 12 (see footnote on page 30) refers to the allusions to the Feasts in the visions of the book of Revelation. He develops this further in volume 2 on pages 90 – 94. David Hill in his booklet, *The Correlation between God's Holy Feast Days and the Book of Revelation* also provides fascinating insights. The Feast day undergirding of the **Book of Revelation** may be summarised as such:

Chapter	Prophecy/Event	Holy Day
1	Introduction – Christ the Lamb of God	Passover
2-3	Seven Churches – sin in spiritual Israel and examining the self	Seven Days of Unleavened Bread
4-5	Christ the Lamb, Redeemer, worthy to open the scroll	Sheaf of the Firstfruits during the DUB
6 – 8:6	Seven Seals of the Scroll	Pentecost
7:4,9; 14:4	Two Wave Loaves and Two Multitudes – Israel and the Gentiles	Pentecost
8:7 – 11:19	Seven Trumpets	Trumpets
12	INSET	
13 – 19	Great Tribulation	Trumpets
20:1-3	Satan bound	Atonement
20:4-6	Millennial reign of the Messiah	Tabernacles
20:7-15	Judgement	Last Great Day

If one were to undertake a personal study of the above, one would find that some variations are possible. But overall, the above is general proof that the book of Revelation is based upon the Holy Days! In other words the Apostle John clearly had those days in mind when he crafted this book. God inspired John's visions and when John came to write the book, God would have led him to base it upon the Holy Days. There would have been no need to do so if these days were abolished.

## THE HOLY DAYS IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

It is generally accepted that the epistle to the Hebrews was written by the Apostle Paul. As we shall discover, this epistle has an annual sabbath (also known as holy day/feast/festival) theme/inference to it. If one were to read his epistles carefully with that in mind, that would soon become self-evident. Please note, however, the pastoral epistles (ITimothy, IITimothy, Titus, Philemon) do not contain such themes or inferences. Instead, Paul appears to be directing the minds of the general church membership to the annual sabbaths. Indeed we find the following possibilities in the **Pauline epistles**:

Epistle	Holy Day	Approximate Date of the Epistle	Comparison to the 7 doctrines of Heb 6:1-6
Romans	Passover and Pentecost	56-58AD	Perfection & Repentance; Laying on of Hands
ICorinthians	Passover	55AD	Perfection & Repentance
IICorinthians	Passover	56AD	Perfection & Repentance
Galatians	Days of Unleavened Bread	53AD	Faith & Baptism
Ephesians	Pentecost	61-62AD	Laying on of hands
Philippians	Pentecost	53AD	Laying on of hands
Colossians	Pentecost	53AD	Laying on of hands
IThessalonians	Trumpets	50-52AD	Resurrection
IIThessalonians	Trumpets	51-53AD	Resurrection
Hebrews	Atonement, Tabernacles, Last Great Day	62AD	Judgment

There appears to be a general progressive discussion in Paul's letters (as canonised) which more-or-less follows the Holy Day Plan and culminates with his fascinating letter to the Hebrews in which we may find further inferences to the Holy Days. Because the New Testament has so much to say about the Holy Days, it stands to reason that they were kept by all early Christians both Jew and gentile. If so, it may be able to assist us in pinpointing exactly what the "better resurrection" is. If one were to read carefully through **Hebrews**, one would find Holy Day inferences as well:

Chapter	Holy Day
Two	Tabernacles
Four	Tabernacles
Six	Final Judgement & Last Great Day

Eight	Atonement
Nine	Atonement
Ten	Atonement
Twelve	Final Judgement

With the above in mind, let us now explore what the word "better" means in the book of Hebrews.

- **Heb 1:4** Christ Who is the image of the Father (Greek means to be an exact replica or impression as when metal is pressed into a die) is made better than the angels "for unto which of the angels said He at any time, "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten you"?" Bullinger notes: "begotten, &c. = brought Thee to the birth. I.e. at resurrection, when the Son became the glorified federal Head of a new order of beings ... Quoted from Ps. 2:7, which, with Acts 13:33, tells us that this day was the day of His resurrection". See further information on this in my paper on the born again doctrine.
- **chapter 6:9** speaking of the second death, Paul writes "But beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak". In other words, Paul was saying that their future is eternal life, not eternal death.
- **chapter 7:7** in discussing Abraham and Melchizedek, "And without all contradiction, the less (Abraham) is blessed of the better (Melchizedek)". The discussion continues about the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood over the Levitical priesthood. The discussion is not over whether the law or tithing is abolished, but concerning the better Melchizedek priesthood.
- **Chapter 7:19** Christians today have a better hope than the Israelites who did not have God's Spirit to keep the Law (cp Rom 8:3; Heb 8:8, 10)
- **Chapter 7:22** in addition we have a better covenant than the old
- **Chapter 8:6** here Paul emphasises again how we have a better covenant and better promises than given to Israel
- **Chapter 9:23** Christ's sacrifice was (infinitely) better than those found in the book of Moses
- **Chapter 10:34** we have better possessions kept in heaven for us
- **Chapter 11:16** we also have a better country promised us, than the land of Canaan given to Israel

- **Chapter 11:40** God has promised us better things so that the Old Testament people of God could not be perfected without us
- **Chapter 12:24** Christ and the new covenant speak better things than that of Abel
- **Chapter 11:35** Christians are destined for a better resurrection. But what exactly is it better than?

### THE CHRISTIAN "BETTER RESURRECTION"

Upon examination of the above references to 'better', it is apparent that most of the comparisons that Paul uses is between the old covenant and the new; between physical and spiritual Israel. Logically, given this theme, it would likely follow that the old covenant Israelites will be resurrected to temporary, physical life. While spiritual Israelites will be resurrected to eternal, immortal, spirit life. But by and large, the promises to Israel were futuristic only insofar as they applied to the well-being of their descendants and promises to those righteous amongst Israel generally related to the present. Other promises refer to the future reward or restoration of the nation. While the promises to spiritual Israelites were for spiritual blessings.

Eternal life was not promised to those under the old covenant, nor were they to be denied a chance for eternal life under the new or renewing covenant. During their life on earth, they were promised immense physical blessings which would last even to many generations extending to the return of the Messiah. At the completion of their physical life upon the earth, they go the way of all men with inevitable death and burial – their physical being disintegrating and their very molecules and atoms disappearing into the earth from whence we all originate.

They would have been aware of the possibility of eternal life, as it is clear that the saints of the Old Testament knew that this was God's purpose for man (cp Gen 3:22; Heb 11:8-11). It is also clear from several Old Testament scriptures that a future resurrection was commonly known (ISam 2:6; Job 14:14-15; 19:25-27; Ps 16:10; Is 26:19; Dan 12:2-3).

The Bible also speaks of a future physical resurrection of Israel. Hos 6:1-2 and Ezekiel 37:1-14 are clear: a physical resurrection of Israel will occur. Will this be at the return of Christ when the saints will be resurrected to spirit life; during the Millennium; or at the Last Great Day? Do Dan 12:1-3 and Is 26:19-16; 27:6 reveal a resurrection of physical Israelites at the time of the first resurrection? The Bible gives us some clues.

Ezekiel 37 compares resurrected Israel to a great army (verse 10); similarly in the famous resurrection chapter, Paul states:

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive,

But every man in his own order [**Gr for 'order' means army or body of soldiers in succession**]:

Christ the firstfruit [hence reference to Him as the firstborn in Col 1:18];

Afterward they that are Christ's, at His coming,

Then cometh the end when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and authority and power.

For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet.

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1Cor 15:22-26).

From the above one gets the impression that there will be successive resurrections or successive parts to resurrections. For instance, in 1Thess 4:16-17 two parts to the resurrection of the saints is revealed: first those that are dead and a little later, those that are alive at His coming. Whether this be in a matter of seconds, minutes or hours of each other is not known. Similarly, at the resurrection of Christ to spirit, eternal life, there was also a resurrection to physical life of certain saints (Matt 27:51-53). These saints may have either had a premature death and were given some years to finish their natural lives; or they lived out their normal lives and God raised them to a short life as a witness to His might and glory which will be demonstrated at the time of Christ's resurrection.

Take a look at Matt 12:41-42 (also 10:12-15). Here we are told about what appears to be one successive generation rising up after another at the Last Great Day. If this be so, then it may be that the second resurrection may consist of successive generations rising up, overlapping with each other, over a period of time. Could this be for 1,000 years (an eighth day, so to speak) after the millennium? The 100 years mentioned in Is 65:20 refers to the life span of humans, not only to a 100 year period. In fact, looking at the context of that scripture through to verse 25, it appears millennial and thus could be a reference to persons living for 100 years either during the millennium or during the Last Great Day period. When we take into account that perhaps up to 40 billion or more humans have been on this earth since Adam and Eve, it is obvious that they cannot all be resurrected at the same time. An orderly approach of "every man in his own order" in overlapping generations starting with Adam, would seem to be a sensible approach.

So, Israel was promised a resurrection to physical life (Ezek 37) after which they will be offered eternal life.

Belief in 3 (instead of 2) resurrections is virtually unheard of in christian theology. However, history records that some sabbatarians believed in 3 resurrections in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century:

"These Jewish Christian groups, referred to by Epiphanius (Williams, 1987) as Nazarenes or Elkasaites, professed the following beliefs: They proclaimed Jesus as prophet-Messiah; insisted upon the validity of the Torah & laws of ritual purity; spoke of three resurrections; professed a millennarian eschatology; looked forward to the restoration of the Temple; observed the feast of Sukkoth (Tabernacles), celebrated Easter at Passover, & observed the Sabbath; affirmed the primacy of James, brother of Jesus, over Peter in the leadership of the church; & preferred the designation "Nazarene" over

"Christian." ("Early Judaism" by Eric Meyers) (emphasis mine).

If it is indeed true that the Nazarenes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century are our spiritual ancestors, it would appear from the above quote that they believed in 3 resurrections. One can assume that they believed in 3 resurrections in similitude to what the old WCG taught (viz 1<sup>st</sup> resurrection of the saints; 2<sup>nd</sup> resurrection of the majority of mankind who were not 'called' to salvation in this life; 3<sup>rd</sup> resurrection to eternal death of the wicked). Alternatively, they may have meant that Christ's resurrection was the 1<sup>st</sup>, the resurrection of the saints was the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the resurrection at the end of the millenium was the 3<sup>rd</sup>. More investigation is required in this regard to ascertain with certainty exactly what they believed pertaining to the 3<sup>rd</sup> resurrection.

It may be more than passing interest that there were 3 resurrections performed in the Old Testament (IKings 17:17-25; IIKings 4:32-37; 13:20-21); 3 by Christ (Luke 7:11-18; Mark 5:35; John 11); and 3 after Christ's death (Matt 27:51-53; Acts 9; 20). Bullinger in his superb *Number in Scripture* goes so far as to state that : "three is the number of resurrection" (page 111) because Christ rose the 3<sup>rd</sup> day; he was perfected on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, he was crucified at the 3<sup>rd</sup> hour; for 3 hours darkness shrouded the region at the time of His crucifixion; he raised 3 persons from the dead; and it was on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day that the earth was caused to rise up out of the waters in Genesis.

## CONCLUSION

From the above, we can rationally deduce the following: The New Testament is replete with Holy Day undertones and inferences. The epistles to the churches by Paul indicate a more-or-less sequential approach to the holy days, generally following them in order from Passover to the Last Great Day. The letter to the Hebrews, the final one in sequences of epistles, clearly has Atonement, Tabernacles and Last Great Day themes running through it. It is in this context that Paul repeatedly utilises the word "better" in reference to comparing the Christian inheritance with that offered physical Israel. One of these is the "better resurrection" (Heb 11:35).

Given that he compares the physical Israelite inheritances and blessings with spiritual Israel's it must follow that the "better resurrection" refers to the first resurrection to eternal (Rev 20:5-6) compared with that of physical Israel cited in Ezek 37 which, in turn, must refer to the second resurrection to mortal life (Rev 20:5, 11-13). It is thus a resurrection to live out a normal life to enable one to qualify to inherit eternal life. Ezekiel 37 does not refer to a resurrection to eternal death in the lake of fire which chronologically follows the second resurrection (Rev 20: 14-15). Ezekiel quotes God Himself "I ... shall put My spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it" (37:13-14). It must therefore be reference to the second resurrection!

There can be no doubt about it. Herbert W Armstrong was correct once again! There are 3 resurrections. All we have to do is fill in the details of what he researched and found clearly to be the case. Instead of destroying precious truths, let us build upon them, using them as a foundation for our doctrines and a framework in which to add further detail to them.

Instead of watering-down some of these truths, let us build solidly up!

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