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# THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

An Exegetical Study of Romans 1:4

S. BURROWS

The phrase *anastasis nekrōn* occurs in the following scriptures: Acts 17:32, 23:6, 24:21, 26:23; Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:12, 13, 21, and Heb. 6:2, and in the A.V. is rendered 'resurrection of the dead' except in Acts 26:23 and Rom. 1:4. The Revisers, in conformity with their rule of consistent rendering, bring these into line with the others (see R.V. preface, N.T. III 2, rule 4); but it must not be supposed that they had not also in view a clearly defined idea as to the meaning of the phrase which they wished to bring out. Most commentators of the period (e.g., Alford and Wordsworth, both members of the N.T. company) took the phrase as referring to the whole resurrection of the dead regarded as accomplished in that of Christ. So Humphry (also a member of the N.T. company) explains the change in his *Commentary on the R. V.* Unfortunately this is not apparent to the ordinary reader, and the meaning of the phrase is consequently left somewhat obscure.

The A.V. here renders 'the resurrection from the dead'. Young, in his literal translation, has 'the rising again from the dead'. Of the free translations, Conybeare has 'His resurrection from the dead,' and Weymouth simply 'the resurrection'. Wicliffe however, translates 'the agenrisynge of deed men;' but as Wicliffe translated from the Latin Vulgate his version cannot be used as evidence for the Greek. The following words in Wicliffe's version must not be overlooked—'of Jhesu Christ oure Lord', the whole passage thus refers to the resurrection of the Lord. Wicliffe's rendering is simply a very literal translation of the Latin *ex resurrectione mortuorum Jesu Christi Domini nostri*, which undoubtedly has the Lord's resurrection in view.

Wicliffe is referred to at some length as his version is sometimes quoted in support of a literal translation of the phrase *anastasis nekrōn*—i.e., 'the resurrection of dead persons', signifying the resurrection of Lazarus and others. This, however, is grammatically and exegetically untenable. Kelly, a Greek scholar of repute,

states that it is impossible to render the phrase literally into English. Furthermore, the phrase is never used of the raising of dead persons to their natural life again; only once is the word *anastasis* so used—Heb. 11:35, and the context here shows it to be used in a lower sense than the ordinary. It is a rhetorical touch which does not affect the main usage of the word for resurrection in the fullest sense, or, as a Greek lexicon puts it, '... a continuance of life on earth, which is spoken of as an *anastasis* by a kind of licence'. Further, in the Scriptures *anastasis* is always used in a passive sense, not a causative—a 'rising', not a 'raising', though there are instances in secular literature of the latter usage. Then, 'if a definite class were intended (i.e., Lazarus and others, or the many saints of Matt. 27:52) the article would be necessary' (Kelly). By the absence of the article, *nekrōn* coalesces closely in meaning with *anastasis* so as to give it very much the force of a compound word 'by a dead-rising' (Sandy and Headlam). *Nekrōn* simply qualifies *anastasis*, and the sense is 'by a resurrection as of dead ones'. 'It is a characteristic description and therefore without the article' (Kelly). As 'resurrection' has come to mean practically all that is included in the longer phrase, something is gained in clearness if we translate simply 'by resurrection', or, as Weymouth, 'by the Resurrection'.

Acts 17:32 confirms, for clearly the phrase cannot here mean 'when they heard of the resurrection of dead persons,' for but One had been mentioned; the sense is 'when they heard of a resurrection as of dead ones,' or better 'when they heard of resurrection'. In Acts 26:23, too, the sense is 'how that He first by resurrection should proclaim'. So also in Corinthians: it was not the resurrection of dead persons merely that was denied; some in Corinth were saying 'There is no such thing as resurrection'.

From our grammatical investigation we conclude both on the authority of scholars of the front rank and from the usage of the phrase in the Scriptures that *anastasis nekron* cannot mean 'the resurrection of dead persons'; that its sense is 'a resurrection such as of dead ones' or 'a dead-rising'; and that in some cases at least there is a gain in clearness without much loss in fullness if we translate simply 'resurrection'.

We now propose to show that in Rom. 1:4, and Acts 26:23, the phrase '*ex anastaseōs nekrōn*' refers to the resurrection of the Lord.

The contrasted statements of Rom. 1:3, 4, should be carefully noted:

His Son who was born of (*ek*) (the) seed of David according to (*kata*) (the) flesh who was declared to be the Son of God with power according to (*kata*) (the) spirit of holiness by (*ek*) (the) resurrection of (the) dead Jesus Christ our Lord.

It will be seen that there are three statements in the first group balanced by three contrasted or antithetical statements in the second group.

- 1 born (*lit.* became, as in John 1:14)  
determined or designated Son of God in power;
- 2 according to flesh  
according to spirit of holiness;  
out of seed of David,
- 3 out of resurrection of (the) dead.

It is not necessary for our present purpose to attempt any detailed exegesis of these statements. It is with the last that we are more particularly concerned, and we shall therefore deal very briefly with the others. 'His Son' applies to all the statements: That the Lord never ceased to be. 'Became' suggests a change of condition—the assumption of a condition of weakness as distinct from the power in which He was designated or marked out Son of God. The one is the earthly condition—'the days of His flesh'; the other the heavenly condition in resurrection. 2 Cor. 13:4 gives a close parallel: 'He was crucified through weakness, yet He liveth through the power of God'.

The statements of the next pair marked out by the preposition *kata* are so clearly contrasts, whatever significance we attach to 'spirit of holiness', that for our present purpose no more need be said.

But if we accept the contrast here we must surely allow that the statements of the last pair—'out of seed of David' and 'out of resurrection of (the) dead,' both introduced by the preposition *ek*—are contrasts also. That a contrast was intended there can

be little doubt. What is the contrast to 'out of seed of David'? Not surely the raising of dead persons to life. It can only be the Lord's own resurrection. The seed of David, the door by which He entered on His humiliation; resurrection, the portal to His exaltation.

Paul's words to Timothy confirm in a very remarkable way what we have said. 'Remember', he said, 'Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, of the seed of David' (2 Tim. 2:8). Plainly these two facts had a place together in the Apostle's mind. He sets them down in antithetical form just as he had done when writing to Rome; he then adds the words 'according to my gospel'. Now this phrase occurs nowhere else but in the letter to Rome—once at the beginning, again at the end. By the combination 'remember . . . according to my gospel' Paul would appear to be actually reminding Timothy of what he had written to the saints in Rome! But whether this be so or not there can be no reasonable doubt that when Paul wrote to Timothy he had before his mind what he had written to Rome.

Then, further, the letter to the Galatians has many parallels with the letter to the Romans, so much so that many have thought they were written almost together. This similarity of thought is seen very clearly in the opening paragraphs: there is the same emphasis on his apostleship—on the fact that he had received his commission direct from the Lord—and on the resurrection. This creates a strong presumption, which only compelling evidence to the contrary—lexical, grammatical, or contextual—could upset, that our Lord's own resurrection is in view in Rom. 1:4.

Returning now to Rom. 1, verses 3 and 4 form a carefully balanced statement on the subject of the Gospel. We may be sure that in such a statement Paul will state only essential truth. The Incarnation is essential to the Gospel; so also is the Resurrection. It is to the risen exalted Lord that Paul ascribes his own grace and apostleship; verse 5 thus flows naturally from verse 4. No lesser truth than the resurrection is in place here. Again and again in his letters, his speeches and addresses, the Apostle refers to the resurrection—never once to the rising of dead persons to life. There is no Gospel apart from the resurrection.

Acts 26:33, the only other occurrence of the exact phrase, now claims attention: 'how that He first by the resurrection of the dead should proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles'. Does the meaning we have given to the phrase '*ex anastaseōs nekrōn*' fit this context?—'how that He first out of (as the issue of) resurrection should proclaim . . .' There is no difficulty here; Acts and epistles testify that the Lord, though risen from the dead and seated at the right hand of God, is no mere interested spectator of the labours of His servants—He is working with them, directing them, encouraging and strengthening them. As the issue of resurrection, the worldwide Gospel of light and life first speeds on its way. 'Go!' is His command, but the power is in His 'Lo!'

On the other hand what have we? Light proclaimed to Jews and Gentiles by two or three dead ones raised again to a few more years of natural life! Is this the climax of Paul's defence before Agrippa? Then why, we may well ask, is it never once referred to (leaving out of account, of course, the passages under discussion)? The theory refutes itself, for it is incredible that the Lord's raising of dead ones should have held such an important place in the message of the Gospel as its inclusion in two such passages would imply and yet find no place elsewhere in Acts or epistles. There is, however, one truth which is so woven into the warp and woof of the N.T. Scriptures that it is impossible to miss it or to deny its importance—the truth of the resurrection, the central truth of the Faith, a truth which held such a place in Paul's mind, as shown by his epistles and addresses, that we should almost count it strange if it had not a place in such a statement of the Gospel as Rom. 1:1-5.

We may therefore conclude that in a translation 'to be understood of the people' the main consideration in Rom. 1:4 is that it shall clearly make the phrase '*ex anastaseōs nekrōn*' refer to the resurrection of the Lord; other considerations are secondary. In this connection it is remarkable that the American Standard Version, which reflects the continued labours of the American Revision Company, reverts to the A.V. rendering and relegates 'of the dead' to the margin.