

The Teaching of 2 Timothy 2:16-19

Due to some studies I've done recently, I've determined that practically all the major problems the apostles—especially Paul—had to deal with in the generation between Pentecost of Acts 2 and Holocaust AD 70 were related to one fundamental question: "Who does Jehovah consider His true children?" In one way or another, practically every issue could somehow be linked back to that very—as you can imagine—*touchy* topic. And I'm not talking about Hebrews versus Gentiles: I'm talking about Hebrews versus Christians; even among Christians certain Hebrew people were problematic, either because {1} they were "plants" (i.e. "false brethren" from the start), or (and what I believe to be the case for the most part) {2} they were converts who just couldn't shake off enough Judaism to prevent them from leaving Christianity. I say all this at the outset of this study because I'm convinced that this was very atmosphere which incited Paul to write what he did to Timothy in Second Timothy 2:16-19, our passage for study today. However...

To set the stage a little more precisely, we need to read more than just these four verses; so grab your New Testaments and read the following with me: First Timothy 1:3-8, 18-20, 4:1-2, 5:24-25, 6:3-5, 20-21, Second Timothy 1:13, 2:14-19, 23-26, 3:1-5, Titus 1:10, 13b-14, and 3:9-11. ... Listen, if you'll go back, read, and reread all thirteen short chapters, the atmospheric picture of which I spoke in a general fashion earlier comes more and more into focus: Specifically you'll be able to see plainly that Paul, Titus, and Timothy were battling Judaizers—people who were fighting for the continuance of the Old Covenant, its people, and (at least to some extent) its life (which is obviously why Paul listed the Law and genealogies multiple times in these letters). Most wanted this continuance without the New Covenant, but some would permit it to be mixed with the New Covenant if necessary. These Jews (especially those who weren't plants) were the direct cause of an untold amount of suffering for people like Paul and Timothy. So, in reference to our specific text under consideration—Second Timothy 2:16-19,...

How does Paul's example of Hymenaeus and Philetus (i.e. Hy & Phi)—with their teaching of the resurrection having already transpired—fit into all this? Well firstly, due to Paul's mention in First Timothy 1:19-20 of Hymenaeus as casting away his faith and being excommunicated, I believe Hy & Phi were of the group of Judaizers who had initially accepted Christianity but couldn't quite get it to dovetail with their Judaism. So, secondly, they ended up either believing this bygone-resurrection doctrine, or they invented it in an attempt to make the Old and New Covenants coalesce in such a way that the Old would and/or could survive on into their future. Now...

Allow me to reread the main portion of the text on which we'll focus, viz. 17b-19a: "Hy & Phi are of this sort—men who, concerning the truth, have deviated, saying the resurrection has already occurred; and they're toppling the faith of some. Nevertheless God's solid foundation stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His.'"

As we just casually read this text, the concept that immediately jumps out at us is the concept of "timing"; i.e., the problem the inspired Apostle Paul had with these fellas didn't concern their take on the "nature" of the resurrection—his problem with them concerned what they taught in relation to the "timing" of the resurrection. Don't you think that if Paul had an issue with their take on the nature of the resurrection as well as the timing of it that he would've *at least* mentioned it in passing right along with his problem with their timing of it? It makes no sense to me for Paul to merely mention the timing issue—even emphasizing it to the point that it sounded like it was the only issue had with them—if it *weren't* the only issue he had with them on resurrection; if I'm going to employ an example like these guys in a context like this one over the grandiose topic of resurrection, I assure you I'm going to mention my problem with both of their erroneous takes on resurrection (viz. the timing AND the nature of it)! But Paul didn't do that. Furthermore...

Since Paul's subject-matter regards timing, it's only logical that we quickly note here that this letter was penned ... this year? ... nope ... try nearly 2000 years ago; in fact, historians/scholars are pretty much agreed that this was Paul's last letter, and since he died (probably by beheading under Nero) at least three years prior to the demise of Jerusalem in AD 70, then Second Timothy must have been penned in/before AD 67. This of course means that Hy & Phi were going around in the mid AD 60s (or earlier) teaching that the resurrection had already occurred, even before Judaism was squashed by Jesus via the Roman army, which vindicated Paul's teaching that the Old Covenant wouldn't and couldn't be mixed with the New Covenant, but rather the Old Covenant found its fulfillment in the establishment of the New (consult the entire book of Hebrews). So...

Let's consider a few problems with the position that the resurrection occurred before AD 67:

Firstly, the resurrection was always associated with the establishment of the Eternal New Covenant Kingdom at the Lord's return; i.e., the resurrection was divinely scheduled to occur at Christ's second coming, even in this very letter of Paul to Timothy.

In 4:1 Paul wrote of "Christ who will judge the living *and the dead* at His appearing and kingdom"; since judgment of the dead implies that the dead would be raised to face that judgment, then that corresponds with Daniel 12:2 in which, speaking of the dead, we read that "some [would awaken] to everlasting life, and some [would awaken] to shame and everlasting contempt." So...

If the resurrection had already taken place by AD 67, then that would also imply that the Lord had already returned; and this must have been an obvious deduction even to them at that time for Paul had to deal with that very thing relative to the Christians of Thessalonica: In Second Thessalonians 2:1-2 Paul wrote, "Concerning the coming of our Lord ... we ask you to not be troubled or suddenly shaken in mind by word or letter as if from us to the effect that the day of the Lord has come."

This should remind us of Jesus' own prophecy when He warned folks to beware of those who would claim "'Look, here is the Christ!' Or 'Look, there is the Christ!' Do not believe them [Jesus said], for false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders in order to deceive the elect" (Mat. 24:23-24). And why do I bring this Matthew-24 statement of Jesus into the picture here? Because it was something Jesus predicted would happen before the end of that generation (v. 34) which would be ca. AD 70 when Judaism with its city, temple, priesthood, sacrifices, genealogies, etc. were completely destroyed. So...

All this begs the following question: IF what our first-generation Christian brethren believed were what most Christians today are taught and believe concerning a yet future return of Jesus with the resurrection of His saints, then why would folks believe Hy & Phi to the point of losing their faith in Christ? And why would the Thessalonians get all stressed out? I.e., if the resurrection and the Lord's return were taught to them and believed by them to be a grave-emptying, globally-catastrophic, fire-consuming event as depicted by modern-day Christian preachers/teachers—if that really were what Jesus, Paul, and other inspired men taught and wrote, then how in the name of reason could our first-generation brethren get all stressed out over someone telling them that the resurrection and second coming had already happened? Well...

As implied a moment ago in regard to Matthew 24:34, these things would happen soon for them, but they hadn't happened yet. One reason (besides Matthew 24) that I say this is because Paul even encouraged Timothy to keep himself blameless ... until death? ... nope ... rather until the Lord's return (1 Tim. 6:14).

Secondly, while the resurrection was always associated with the establishment of the Eternal New Covenant Kingdom, it was therefore also always and logically associated with the DE-establishment of the Old Covenant Kingdom of National Israel via the destruction of her city, temple, priesthood, sacrifices, etc. Well, actually, perhaps I should put this another way: Since the OC found its purpose/fulfillment in the NC (the idea behind Rom. 10:5 & Gal. 3–4), then the OC Kingdom also found its purpose/fulfillment in the New (*kainos* not *neos*) Covenant Kingdom, implying that the two aren't totally exclusive of one another. E.g....

In Matthew 13:40 & 47-49a Jesus spoke of how that at His coming there'd be a cleansing of the kingdom, removing from it things/people that offend God, specifically stating the timing of that event as "at the end of this age"; and obviously "this" age would've been "His" age, the OC age into which He was born and died (Gal. 4:4 & Heb. 9:26). Then later in Matthew 21:43, speaking to a group of Israelites, He said, "the kingdom of God will be taken from you" (and by "you" He was referring to a single, earthly family of people who were INvoluntarily born into the OC kingdom); then He went on to tell them, "and it will be given to another nation" (i.e., it would be given to people of every race to be voluntarily born into it, making it a spiritual kingdom in its nature). And...

This all fits perfectly with Daniel 12 where God prophesied of the resurrection (v. 2) and the bright/shiny kingdom (v. 3, echoed by Jesus in Mat. 13:43, btw), both of which were predicted by Him to be fulfilled at the time of the demise of Jerusalem (v. 7). So the point—which is very logical, btw—is that...

The resurrection (the provision of reconciliation life, if you will) occurred simultaneously with the time when the OC Kingdom of God comprised of National Israel found its purpose/fulfillment in the establishment of the NC Kingdom of God, which was the plan by means of the Last Adam ever since before the creation of the First Adam. And...

Thirdly, while guys like Hy & Phi were teaching that the resurrection had already occurred, inspired apostles like Paul were teaching that it (or at the very least the culmination of it, i.e. the harvest resurrection) was yet future.

It isn't possible to know precisely when guys like Hy & Phi started preaching their inaccurate timetable related to the resurrection and return of Christ, but since the two are linked and since the Thessalonian letters were apparently penned in the early to mid AD 50s and are believed to be Paul's first letters (like his Timothy letters were considered his last letters), I think we can rest assured that it had been floatin' around for quite a few years by the time Paul wrote Second Timothy, which I indicated earlier was likely written ca. AD 67. So, that being the case...

Any letter we have by Paul in which he referred to resurrection as still being future to his writing of that letter is fair game here; but since we don't have time to read them all (for there are a LOT of them), let's just read some of what he authored in Philippians 3:8-16: "I count all things loss for ... Jesus Christ my Lord ... and the power of His resurrection ... if by any means I may attain to the resurrection.... Not that I have already attained or am already perfected, but I press on that I may laid hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of me.... Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us ... be of the same mind," etc. See...

Just in this one passage, it seems very clear that Paul was having to deal with this doctrine that had been floatin' around. So here to the Philippian brethren...

Paul made it clear that they had *somewhat* resurrected. How's that? Did one Christian have a resurrected arm and another a resurrected leg? Certainly not, but that's what one would think to be the logical conclusion relative to those who believe the resurrection is about physical bodies coming to life eternal. So what did Paul mean about how that they had—to a degree—attained to the resurrection? Well...

Because they were part of the first-generation, corporate, bride-church that was being given life a person at a time in preparation for her wedding when her Lord returned around the time of the events of AD 70, they had, in that sense, *somewhat* made it to the time of THE (harvest) resurrection. So...

When Paul taught resurrection-life to Christians of that time in passages like Ephesians 2:1 (and Timothy worked in Ephesus, btw), he was talking about their being part of the firstfruits resurrection (cf. Jas. 1:18), a resurrection which would of necessity lead to the harvest resurrection at which time salvation would be completely accomplished (Heb. 9:28); so, no harvest, no salvation. Speaking of physical resurrection...

Some think it's possible that guys like Hy & Phi were teaching that the resurrection of Matthew 27:50-54 was the resurrection they were preaching as the resurrection that fulfilled prophecy expectation. Well...

Firstly, as I indicated earlier, I don't believe that's the case because I'm fully convinced that Paul, who didn't believe in and teach biological resurrection, wouldn't let that major difference slide completely by, focusing only on and emphasizing merely the error of their teaching in regard to the timetable.

Secondly, regardless if one believes Paul taught organic resurrection or not, as we already discussed, he and other inspired writers still placed the resurrection at the time of Jerusalem's destruction in their future; in fact, Jesus Himself, in His *Olivet Discourse* in Matthew 24:15 brought up Daniel's prophecy in chapter 12 that we've already considered: In Daniel 12 it speaks of the great tribulation (v. 1), the abomination of desolation (v. 11), the kingdom (v. 3), AND the resurrection (v. 2) all being fulfilled around the time of the events of AD 70 (v. 7). So no wonder Jesus not only spoke in His *Olivet Discourse* about the great tribulation and the abomination of desolation, but He also in Luke's account brought up that the time of Jerusalem's demise (which was evidence of God's rejection of National Israel who killed His Son) was the time of the redemptive kingdom of God (vv. 28 & 31-32). And...

Thirdly, Matthew 27:50-54 is believed by some scholars to be an uninspired passage in the sense that not only may it be an interpolation (something added into the text not mentioned by any other inspired writer/speaker anywhere), but also because it had multiple issues with grammar: for example, verses 52 and 54 indicate folks were raised while Jesus was still on the cross, while verse 53 says they came out of their graves either with/after (*meta*) Jesus' resurrection. Which was it? Besides, how could the guards way out on Golgatha outside Jerusalem see the veil of the city's temple tear from top to bottom (especially since that veil was inside the temple)? Since this incident was never even hinted at by any other inspired writer, I personally for sure wouldn't want to base a resurrection theory on it. In fact, let's discuss a couple more things:

If, as the confusing passage states, those people were raised at the time of the earthquake while Jesus was on the cross (vv. 51-52), but then came out of their graves with/after Jesus' resurrection (v. 53), what were they doing in the meantime? Why were they raised from death on Friday only to have to wait until Sunday to climb out of their graves and go into the city? More importantly though,...

If we ignore verse 53a and say (as it seems most commentators say) that those people actually arose and went into the city while Jesus was still on the cross, then we can with certainty say that they were NOT the fulfillment of the general, prophesied, harvest resurrection, because they, like Lazarus, definitely died again. How do I know? Because the Bible tells us that Jesus was the very firstfruit of the resurrection to immortality (1 Cor. 15:20, 23, & 51ff), meaning that the resurrection of those Matthew-27 folks wasn't a resurrection to immortality; it was merely a resuscitation. Well, let's consider one last issue:

We need to touch on an important point Paul made to Timothy in our text-verse 19, something bringing us full-circle to the introductory remarks about the problem of Judaism: In the first part of verse 19, he wrote, "Nevertheless God's solid foundation stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His.'" It's agreed by scholars that Paul was quoting from Numbers 16:5; in fact, in the margin of my Bible next to Numbers 16:5 it lists 2 Timothy 2:19. The question is, "What was Paul's point in bringing up the account of Korah's rebellion against the authority of Moses?" Well, see...

As I implied in the introduction, Paul—who was considered a traitor to the Sanhedrin and Moses—was constantly battling those who taught what they did in large part as attempts to discredit his apostolic authority. Why? Because he was blatantly proclaiming that the Law of Moses, the Old Covenant, was in the process of being fulfilled and passing away (e.g. 2 Cor. 3), something that was a threat to those in power in Jerusalem. If the Judaizers were teaching something truthful to hurt Paul in the eyes of Jewish audiences, that was no big deal to him (Php 1:12-18); but if they were teaching something false to Christian audiences, then you can bet he was going to be in their faces over it! Think about it:

Paul was THE (God's) primary proponent of salvation by grace as opposed to works of law, even the God-given Old Covenant Law; so he suffered immensely in his ministry (2 Cor. 11). Whether they had never been Christians or had actually accepted Christianity and misunderstood and left it, Judaizers felt they had no choice but to defend the Law of Jehovah and/or (depending on their integrity) their positions in the world that Paul was condemning and warning of impending destruction. And what better way to do that than to twist Paul's own words about resurrection in attempts to convince people that either he was inconsistent or that the resurrection took place while the Old Covenant and its temple and city were still in (what they thought was) an unthreatened existence, implying that the fulfillment of Old Covenant prophecies did NOT require the passing away of that revered covenant? So...

Paul told Timothy that this situation of "competing ministries," as it were, was reminiscent of the Korah story in which God demonstrated beyond doubt who belonged to Him and were holy in His sight. How? By causing the ground to open up in judgment, swallowing Korah and his disciples (v. 32). I.e., when Jesus returned in Jerusalem's destruction, He clearly demonstrated who belonged to God and were the true holy ones (cf. Dan. 7:21-22 w/ Mat. 25:31-34).