THE DOUBTERS

In the final days of Christ’s ministry, a group of Sadducees came to Him intending to ridicule the doctrine of the resurrection. According to the apostle Paul, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection (Acts 23:7, 8; Acts 4:1–3). The “Sadducees denied the existence of angels, the resurrection of the dead, and the doctrine of a future life, with its rewards and punishments.” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 603.)

The Sadducees rejected the resurrection on two grounds. First, in their estimation, resurrections were contrary to observable scientific principles. (see White, *The Desire of Ages*, 538.) Historical-critical theologians use the same argument to discard miracles today. Appealing to what they call the principle of analogy, they claim that because there are no resurrections today, we cannot believe that they occurred in the past either. Thus, neither the Sadducees nor liberal theologians believe in the power of God.

The second reason the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection is that they could not find support for it in the Pentateuch, and for them, only the Pentateuch had unquestionable authority. Jesus could have quoted many OT verses that teach the resurrection in response to the Sadducees (cf. 1 Kings 17:17–22; Dan. 12:2; Job 19:25–27). Because the Sadducees brought forth an example from the Pentateuch, however, Jesus responded from the same source, for they believed that only the writings of Moses were fully authoritative.
Write out Luke 20:27–40 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Luke 20:34–38. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
GOD’S TIMEFRAME AND OURS

These enemies of Jesus ridiculed the doctrine of the resurrection with the preposterous hypothetical case of the seven brothers who married the same woman (Luke 20:27–33). As expected, they quoted the Mosaic legislation as the foundation for their example (cf. Deut. 25:5). After telling their fictitious story, they asked Jesus whose wife the woman would be in the resurrection. Jesus responded that they were mistaken on three counts. First, their example was irrelevant because in the world to come there will be no marriage. Second, they did not know the Scriptures because the Torah itself—which the Sadducees claimed to revere—teaches the resurrection of the dead (Luke 22:29, 30). Third, God does indeed have the omnipotent power to raise the dead.

In His rebuttal Jesus quoted Exodus 3:6, where God said to Moses, “I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (emphasis supplied). When God spoke these words to Moses, these three patriarchs were dead; and yet God did not say, “I was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” while they were alive, but rather “I am.” Some Protestant interpreters assume that Jesus meant that the disembodied souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were alive at that moment, though their bodies were still in the grave. The expression “all live unto Him” in Luke 20:38 (emphasis supplied) proves otherwise, however. According to Jesus, all live unto God, not unto us!

God counts the things that are not as though they were. He sees the end from the beginning, and beholds the result of His work as though it were now accomplished. The precious dead, from Adam down to the last saint who dies, will hear the voice of the Son of God, and will come forth from the grave to immortal life. God will be their God, and they shall be His people. . . . This condition, which is anticipated in His purpose, He beholds as if it were already existing. The dead live unto Him. (Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898], 606, emphasis supplied.)

For us time-bound creatures, the past and the future are separated by time. God is not time bound as we are. That which for us is potential and future is, for God, actual and present. In the mind of God, things exist before they come into actual existence! Although time is important to God, in contrast to us He lives in an eternal present. After all, He is the great “I AM” (Ex. 3:14)! “I AM means an eternal presence; the past, present, and future are alike to God. He sees the most remote events of past history and the far distant future with as clear a vision as we do those things that are transpiring daily” (Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases, vol. 14 [Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990], 21).
A DONE DEAL

The idea of God living in an eternal present seems puzzling to us because we are captives of time and He is not. Let’s take a biblical example that will help us understand the difference between God’s relationship to time and ours. Before the birth of Isaac, God told Abram that He would be the father of many nations: “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations” (Gen. 17:4, emphasis supplied). In this verse, God was speaking from Abram’s timeframe because Abraham was not yet the father of many nations. In the very next verse, however, God told him that He had made him the father of many nations, which was from God’s timeframe: “No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations” (v. 5, emphasis supplied).

From Abraham’s perspective the promise was yet future, but from God’s perspective it was already a done deal! The apostle Paul confirms that this assessment of the text is correct. In the book of Romans, the apostle referred to these verses in Genesis: “(as it is written, ‘I have made you the father of many nations’). He is our father in the presence of God whom he believed—the God who makes the dead alive and summons the things that do not yet exist as though they already do” (Rom. 4:17, NET Bible, emphasis supplied).

Albert Barnes explained Paul’s argument in Romans 4: “That is, those things which he foretells and promises are so certain, that he may speak of them as already in existence. Thus, in relation to Abraham, God, instead of simply promising that he would make him the father of many nations, speaks of it as already done, ‘I have made thee,’ etc. In his own mind, or purpose, he had so constituted him, and it was so certain that it would take place, that he might speak of it as already done.”¹

This concept helps us understand in what sense Jesus is the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). From our perspective, Jesus died on a Friday afternoon in the year A.D. 31. From God’s perspective, however, it was an accomplished fact from before the foundation of the world. The idea of a God who lives in an eternal present also helps us understand how the names of God’s faithful children were written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, before they existed, while the names of the wicked were not (Rev. 17:8). God knew who would choose to be saved and who would not, but He did not predetermine it.

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What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Acts 23:7–9
Matthew 22:29
Exodus 3:6, 13, 14
Genesis 17:4, 5
Romans 4:17
Titus 1:2, 3
Revelation 17:8

What other verses come to mind in connection with Luke 20:27–40?

A RESPONSE TO NATURALISM

As we have seen, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead for two reasons. First, in their minds it was scientifically untenable, and second, they did not believe it could be found in the Torah.

The world of secularism today is just as unbelieving as the Sadducees. Naturalism does not admit the possibility that decomposed bodies can miraculously come forth from the ground perfect, immortal, and incorruptible; therefore, the intelligentsia of the world also rejects the Scriptures. On the other hand, Christians believe in both the Scriptures and the power of God. They believe that the God who can metamorphose a caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly can also transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21). In the New Testament we have even greater scriptural evidence for the resurrection than those who lived in the days of Christ. The New Testament promises: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51, 52).

Although nature (for example, the death and “resurrection” of a seed in John 12:24 and the miracle of metamorphosis) and Scripture support the resurrection, absolute certainty ultimately depends on faith, and faith comes only when we personally know Jesus. Thus, Paul wrote, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:10, 11, emphasis supplied).

How certain can we be that God will resurrect those who died in Christ? Without the slightest doubt, because for God it is already an accomplished fact! “In the mind of God, the ministry of men and women existed before the world was created” (Ellen G. White, Sons and Daughters of God [Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1955], 101). Ellen White did not write that the ministry of men and women would exist when Adam and Eve were created. It already existed in the mind of God from eternity past, and likewise, the resurrection of His precious saints. Psalm 116:15 assures us that “precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” From the perspective of the Sadducees in Christ’s day, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were dead, but from God’s perspective, they lived. In the mind of God, the resurrection of the righteous is an accomplished fact. For Him they live! “Therefore, comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18).
FROM THE BEGINNING

The Sadducees reasoned that if the body is to be composed of the same particles of matter in its immortal as in its mortal state, then when raised from the dead it must have flesh and blood, and must resume in the eternal world the life interrupted on earth. In that case they concluded that earthly relationships would be resumed, husband and wife would be reunited, marriages consummated, and all things go on the same as before death, the frailties and passions of this life being perpetuated in the life beyond. . . .

God counts the things that are not as though they were. He sees the end from the beginning, and beholds the result of His work as though it were now accomplished. The precious dead, from Adam down to the last saint who dies, will hear the voice of the Son of God, and will come forth from the grave to immortal life. God will be their God, and they shall be His people. There will be a close and tender relationship between God and the risen saints. This condition, which is anticipated in His purpose, He beholds as if it were already existing. The dead live unto Him. (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898], 605, 606.)

I AM means an eternal presence; the past, present, and future are alike to God. He sees the most remote events of past history and the far distant future with as clear a vision as we do those things that are transpiring daily. (Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 14 [Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990], 21.)

If you have given yourself to God, to do His work, you have no need to be anxious for tomorrow. He whose servant you are, knows the end from the beginning. The events of tomorrow, which are hidden from your view, are open to the eyes of Him who is omnipotent. (Ellen G. White, *Prayer* [Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2002], 226, 227.)

God knows the end from the beginning. He is acquainted with the hearts of all men. He reads every secret of the soul. He knows whether those for whom prayer is offered would or would not be able to endure the trials that would come upon them should they live. He knows whether their lives would be a blessing or a curse to themselves and to the world. This is one reason why, while presenting our petitions with earnestness, we should say, “Nevertheless not my will, but Thine, be done.” Luke 22:42. (Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church* [Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1991], 305.)
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Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

Where does the Sadducean disbelief exist today?

What does Jesus’ choice of a passage from the writings of Moses reveal about Him?

How does the apostle Paul in Romans 4:17 interpret the meaning of Genesis 17:4, 5?

How does the phrase “all live to Him” bring comfort to those who lose loved ones today?

How does this concept help us understand that Jesus was slain from the foundation of the world?

According to Romans 8:29, how does the foreknowledge of God relate to predestination? Does the foreknowledge of God annul our free will? Why or why not?

How can we live unto Him?

Can you honestly say that you live unto Him, past, present, and future? Why or why not?