The Resurrection in the Old Testament

The New Testament clearly presents the doctrine of the resurrection. But do you know any clear references to the doctrine of resurrection in the Old Testament?

It is important to know these verses, because Jesus expected his original disciples to know these things (Luke 24:25-27).

Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

And even in the moments following the resurrection, when some of the disciples had seen the empty tomb, they surprisingly still did not understand the Old Testament teaching about the necessity of the resurrection (John 20:9).

For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.

Here is a basic list of some key verses, among my personal favorites. Feel free to contribute others, because my list is not exhaustive.

References to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Jude 1:14-15

And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all.

Here you have a reference to the future return of Jesus Christ to judge the world. How does this prophecy the resurrection of Jesus? Well, once you take into consideration the prophecies that the Jesus, the Messiah, must die, then you must embrace the fact that Jesus must raise from the dead to come in judgment. How can Jesus come with ten thousand of his saints if he would die first?

Gen. 22:5 (cf. Heb. 11:19)

And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide you here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.

According to Hebrews 11:19, Abraham believed that God was able to resurrect his only son, Isaac, from the dead. He lived as early as 1500 B.C. But where does this belief appear in the Old Testament? In Genesis 22:5, Abraham tells some men that he and Isaac would return to them after they worship God on Mt. Moriah. This is most remarkable, since he expected to sacrifice Isaac. Though he had never witnessed a resurrection, he believed that God would resurrect Isaac if he died as a sacrifice. It seems that Abraham believed in the Messiah, but also wondered if Isaac was this Messiah or not. And if he was, he believed he would resurrect after being sacrificed.
Psalm 2:7 (cf. Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:4)

I will declare the decree: The LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; This day have I begotten thee.

In a sermon to a Jewish audience, Paul quoted from Psalm 2:7 as prophecy that foretold the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And this appears to be a favorite reference for him, because he also alludes to it in Romans 1:4. How should we understand this? It is God (beginning in v.6) who is speaking – not about King David, but about one who would come from the line of King David. And God would, on a certain future day, establish or declare a person as his Son, the promised Son of God. **Jesus was eternally and always the Son of God. But God made this clear to the world when he emerged from death victorious through the resurrection (Rom. 1:4).**

Jonah 1:17 (cf. Matt. 12:40)

Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Now, this may not necessarily be a prophecy of the resurrection of Jesus – not one that could be previously known at least, though perhaps it was. What we know is that Jesus pointed to this miracle of creating the massive fish and arranging for it to swallow Jonah and carry him for three days as a picture of what would occur to him. Since he claimed this was a sign, he was claiming not only to be the one who prepared that fish and so on, but also to foreshadow that his coming death would last only three days – as Jonah’s time in the large fish lasted three days.


For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

This was another favorite passage for Peter and Paul to use, when showing people that the resurrection was prophesied in the Old Testament. **This Psalm expresses the confidence that David had in his own future resurrection, based upon his faith in the Holy One of God**, the Messiah who would come, die for sins and yet not decay in the grave like everyone else who dies.

Hosea 6:2 (cf. 1 Cor. 15:4)

After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.

On the surface, this appears be a prophecy of restoring the nation of Israel to its land and kingdom. And though the New Testament nowhere explicitly says that this verse prophesies the resurrection of Jesus, this is the only OT text that speaks of the third day in this way. So, **it appears that God foreshadowed through Hosea that Israel would not fully be restored as God had promised until they resurrected with Christ.** And
this leads to another fuller theological discussion which we cannot have today, that of us raising from the dead when Christ rose from the dead in fact, but not actually, physically raising from the dead until he returns to set up his kingdom (cf. Rom. 6:3-11).

References to the Resurrection of Believers

Job 19:26-27

And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, And mine eyes shall behold, and not another; Though my reins be consumed within me.

This appears to be the oldest recorded Bible reference to the resurrection, written perhaps as early at 2000 B.C. The patriarch Job declares in plain language that though his body would decay in the grave, he would stand before God, His Redeemer, with the same body resurrected, redeemed and renewed.

Daniel 12:2-3

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

Daniel foretells the end of all things. Those people throughout history who died apart from the redemption of God will enter eternity in bodily form, plagued by sin and conscious torment forever. Those who died as redeemed children of God will enter eternity with resurrected, renewed bodies, free from sin, death and decay, living triumphantly in the presence of God forever.

Psalm 49:15

But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah.

David contrasts the death of those who die, trusting in themselves and their material possessions. These will die and decay without hope. But those who die trusting in the redemption of God will not be consigned to hopeless decay. They will be delivered out from the grave into the presence of God.