

The Resurrection

Opening Argument

Tim Warner - 08-24-03

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Because preterists insist that Jesus' coming (parousia) occurred in AD70 in some mystical way, they must also deny the nature of the resurrection of the saints. The resurrection of believers is closely tied to Jesus' second coming (I Thess. 4:13-18). If the "resurrection" occurred in AD70, it follows that it too is something mystical, and not the literal resurrection of the body, because no such visible "resurrection" was experienced or observed by the Church in AD70. Therefore, the central issue of contention between futurists and preterists is the NATURE of the resurrection of the dead, and the NATURE of the coming of Christ, either tangible or mystical. It is therefore necessary to examine the biblical data regarding these, to see if a literal or mystical fulfillment was intended.

The Resurrection in the Old Testament

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"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; And **after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.** How my heart yearns within me!" (Job 19:25-27 NKJV)

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"**Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise.** Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and **the earth shall cast out the dead.** Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain." (Isa 26:19-21)

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"Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, **I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves,** and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have **opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves,** And 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, saith the LORD." (Ezek 37:12-14)

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"And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. **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. ... But go thou thy way till the end be: for **thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.**" (Dan 12:1-2,13)

In all four of these Old Testament "resurrection" prophecies, the text is clear that the physical body is raised from the grave. It takes a total disregard for the normal use of language to dismiss Job's *"in my flesh,"* Isaiah's *"my dead body,"* Ezekiel's *"come up out of your graves,"* and Daniel's *"them that sleep in the dust of the earth."* The reanimation of the dead corpse is clearly in view.

The Resurrection According to Jesus

In the New Testament, the issue of physical resurrection was confronted by Jesus. The biblical writers were careful to note the fact that the Sadducees denied the literal resurrection of the body (cf. Matt. 22:23, Mark 12:18, Acts 23:8). Some of the Sadducees tried to trip Jesus up with what seemed to them a paradox for those who believed in the resurrection of the body. In their smug philosophical thinking, their no-resurrection position was bullet-proof, because accepting a literal resurrection would present a certain absurdity. They illustrated this paradox with a hypothetical scenario. *"The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her"* (Matt 22:23). The basis of their argument seems on the surface to be legitimate. The Law of Moses commanded the brother of a deceased Jew, who had no children, to take his wife and raise up children for his dead brother. Their argument rightly assumed that a godly Jewish woman COULD have had several husbands while living perfectly within the Law of Moses. But, underlying their philosophy was the presupposition that the "resurrection" was merely a restoring to life, and the natural order under the Law of Moses. That is, they assumed that the Law of Moses would continue forever, and that the "resurrection," if it did occur, would merely restore the former order. Jesus' response to them challenged their presuppositions. *"Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine"* (vss. 29-33). The resurrected state of man is not merely to his former life. It is to a new and better life, not bound by the Law, or marriage, or copulation and procreation. Notice Jesus did not deny the resurrection of the body, only that in the resurrected state there is no more marriage according to the Law. This passage is very problematic for preterists, because Christians living after AD70 are still married, and getting married every day. If the resurrection is really past, then there should be no more marriage, at least among God's people.

Notice that after Jesus demolished their presuppositions, He affirmed the resurrection with a very simple observation of Scripture. He cited Exodus 3:6 where God first appeared to Moses in the burning bush. God introduced Himself for the first time as *"the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."* All three of these men

were dead and buried. Yet, these are the three men to whom God confirmed His oath — the Abrahamic Covenant. These are the three men whom Hebrews 11 says dwelled in the land of promise as strangers and pilgrims, looking toward the future fulfillment of God's promise to give them and their descendants all the land from the Nile to the Euphrates river, as an everlasting inheritance. All three died in faith, not yet receiving the promise, but looking toward its future fulfillment. The Sadducees were well aware of God's promise to these three men. Jesus' appeal to the statement in Exodus completely demolished their denial of the resurrection. If God was the "*God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*," yet these men were dead, His being their God implied that they would indeed fully realize the promise to inherit the land. That is only possible IF they are resurrected from the dead in order to inherit it. God's promise to Abraham and his seed to inherit the land forever absolutely demands a resurrection of the body if these patriarchs are to ever see the fulfillment of the promise! Therefore, with Jesus' simple statement, "*God is not the God of the dead, but of the living*," he put them to silence and in effect affirmed the future resurrection of these men to inherit the promise.

Jesus also indicated that the rewards of the righteous will be received at the time of **the resurrection of the just**. "*But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just*" (Luke 14:13-14). "*Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation*" (John 5:28-29). If the "resurrection of life" is some mystical thing that happened in AD70, then we who live many centuries afterward have simply missed the resurrection! And what is the "resurrection of damnation?" Notice that the resurrection is a collective event. All who are in the graves shall hear His voice. There are only TWO resurrections — the "*resurrection of life*" and the "*resurrection of damnation*." You may have noticed in the quote from Daniel in the table above, that he too mentioned two resurrections. "*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace {and} everlasting contempt*" (Dan. 12:2 NASB cf. Rev. 20:2-6).

Jesus' Resurrection Defines "Resurrection"

Paul preached that "*the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles*" (Acts 26:23). **First to rise** implies that others will rise **in like manner**. Whatever "rise" means for those who follow after, is also what "rise" means in relation to Jesus' resurrection. In the Greek text, Paul said, "πρωτος εξ αναστασεως νεκρων" (lit. - "first from the resurrection of the dead"). What is interesting about this phrase is that Paul used nearly the identical phrase in Phil. 3:11. "*If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead*." The Greek reads, "εξ αναστασιν τηω νεκρων" (lit. - "from the resurrection from among the dead"). It is obvious that **Paul saw Christ's resurrection as the prototype of the resurrection that he hoped to attain**. Paul confirmed this later in the same chapter. "*For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to*

the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. 3:20-21). Christ's resurrected body was shown to the disciples for forty days so that they could be His witnesses of "resurrection." Jesus went out of His way to prove to them that His resurrection was tangible. He told them, *"handle me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have"* (Luke 24:39). Jesus showed them his hands and side which still bore the holes from His crucifixion, (John 20:20). Jesus' body that suffered on the cross and was buried, was also raised and changed. There is a definite continuity between Jesus' incarnation (God coming in the flesh, born of the virgin), and His resurrected body of flesh and bones. When Thomas doubted that Jesus had risen from the grave, Jesus said to him, *"Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing"* (John 20:27). Jesus' resurrected body, albeit changed into something far more glorious than before, and while exhibiting some properties never before seen in a human being of flesh and bones, still bore the marks of His crucifixion in his physical flesh. Paul expected his lowly body of flesh to be transformed into a body like Christ's resurrected body. Therefore, the "resurrection" of Christ is the prototype of our resurrection. It is a physical resurrection of the body of flesh into an incorruptible state, yet remaining tangible and recognizable as the same person with distinguishing marks or features.

The most extensive treatment of the nature of the resurrection is certainly 1 Corinthians 15. Paul began this chapter by reminding the Corinthians of the Gospel he preached to them. *"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain"* (vss. 1-2). Cloaked within this statement is a subtle warning, *"unless you have believed in vain."* He acknowledged that the Corinthians had received the Gospel he preached, and were currently remaining within the sphere of salvation by adhering to this Gospel. But, Paul also included a conditional clause. You (Corinthians) are in a state of being saved IF you maintain the Gospel as it was preached to you. Otherwise, you will have *"believed in vain."*

In verses 3-4 Paul made it very clear that a part of the Gospel he preached to them included the physical death and resurrection of Christ. In essence, any departure from these well established facts was a departure from the Gospel, and would result in their having *"believed in vain."* Paul then began to line up his eyewitnesses for the resurrection of Jesus in verses 5-11. His point is quite clear. The eyewitnesses were unanimous that Jesus had indeed raised bodily from the grave, and this was a part of the Gospel preached not only by him, but also of the other Apostles of Jesus Christ.

In verse 12, Paul began to directly address the problem at Corinth. *"Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, **how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?**"* In plain English, Paul said, *"If I and the other Apostles, as eyewitnesses of the risen Christ, have preached that He rose from the dead, how can some of you claim that there is no such thing as 'resurrection?'"* The word "resurrection" is in the present tense because the problem at Corinth was not eschatological in nature, but philosophical. Some of them objected to the whole concept of "resurrection" of the body. Corinth and Athens were sister cities, and the center of

Greek philosophy. The Greek philosophers, particularly Plato, taught that matter and flesh were inherently corrupt, and that salvation was attained by escaping the creation and attaining some kind of mystical non-material existence and cosmic reality. That the concept of "resurrection" of the material body was alien to the Greek mind is illustrated for us by Paul's address to the philosophers of Athens, just down the road from Corinth. In his sermon on Mars' Hill, Paul declared, "*[He] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; **as certain also of your own poets have said**, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that **he hath raised him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter**" (Acts 17:26-32). While Paul acknowledged that the Greek philosophers had gotten some things right (even quoting them), the concept of "resurrection of the dead" was absolutely absurd to the Greek philosophical mind. The Greek philosophers mocked Paul's witness to the resurrection of Christ's body.*

This is the same mindset that was plaguing the church at Corinth. Some of the more philosophically minded Greeks who had professed faith in Christ were still clinging to the Platonic thinking, that matter was corrupt, and "resurrection" is therefore absurd — certainly not something to be sought after or hoped for. So, when Paul addressed this problem at Corinth, he appealed to the eyewitness accounts of Jesus' own resurrection as the prototype. His argument was very simple. If there is no such thing as "resurrection," then Christ could not have raised from the dead. Thus, all the eyewitnesses were either mistaken or were liars. And if their testimony regarding the resurrection of Christ is not true, the entire Gospel message preached by the same Apostles must not be true. Consequently, all the Corinthians were still lost and in sin. That is the logical conclusion to the Greek philosophy that was plaguing the church at Corinth. And Paul drove his point home by taking this philosophy to its logical outcome.

In contrast to this, Paul began to reassert that Christ has indeed risen from the dead, and became "*the firstfruits of them that sleep*" (v. 20). The term "firstfruits" is a reference to a part of the Passover festival of the Jews. On the Sunday after Passover, all the Jewish males were to appear at the Temple with a "firstfruits" offering. This was a small bundle of wheat gathered from their fields just prior to harvest. It was a token gift representing the larger offering of the harvest to be brought to the Temple seven weeks later on Pentecost. The term "firstfruits" became a Jewish idiom with a meaning similar to our English word "prototype." When a new model car or airplane is introduced, the manufacturer builds ONE only, for the purpose of display, testing, advertisement, etc. It is the prototype of what will follow when that model is put into full production. So it is with "firstfruits." The token sheaf of wheat was taken from the fields before the main

harvest, presented to the Lord with the promise of what would follow, when tithes of the entire harvest would be given to the Lord. This is the imagery Paul used of Christ's resurrection. Christ's resurrection being the "firstfruits" of them who are asleep means that He is the prototype and guarantee of their resurrection yet to come.

Paul continued by telling the Corinthians WHEN the remainder will be raised as Christ was raised. *"For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own **order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming**"* (vss. 21-23). Paul continued to contrast Adam and Christ in vss. 47-49. He wrote, *"as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly"* (v. 49). By "heavenly" he meant Jesus Christ, which in the previous verse he identified as the one from heaven. That is, we will have a body like His resurrected body. He goes on to state that this will occur *"at the last trumpet"* (v. 52).

In opposition to the Greek Platonic (and preterist) thinking, Paul points to Jesus' resurrection in an incorruptible body of flesh and bones, still bearing scars of His crucifixion. This is the same Jesus who led the disciples out as far as Bethany on the Mt. of Olives, lifted up those same nail scarred hands, and blessed them. And who was immediately taken up bodily from them into heaven until the clouds obscured their view. And it is *"this same Jesus"* that was taken up into heaven who will come again *"in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven"* according to the angels present at that event (Acts 1:11). Preterism is wrong because Christ has indeed risen from the grave, and become *"the firstfruits of those who sleep."*