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The Resurrection of the Flesh

By

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The resurrection of the dead is a question fraught with difficulty for many. Preterists maintain that the resurrection was and is nonphysical, consisting in the spirit, not the body, of man. Others, including Postmillennialists, believe that the resurrection is essentially fleshly; that there can be no resurrection apart from *physical bodies* rising from their graves. In this article, we want to examine the idea of the “resurrection of the flesh” to see if it accords with the scriptures. We believe a candid study will demonstrate that the resurrection subsists in the immaterial realm of the spirit, not the flesh.

Confusion in the Early Church

Understanding scripture and eschatology can be a great challenge; the meaning often is often elusive, cloaked in metaphors and poetic imagery. Other times it assumes the reader has a familiarity with basic themes of redemption and sanctification, and God’s established methods and manner of bringing his purpose to pass. Language that speaks “everlastingly” may actually mean only “age-long.” Language that says God causes a condition or event, may really mean that he merely allowed it to come about, *etc.* The difficulty in understanding scripture is alluded to by Paul when he said that his preaching was not with words of “man’s wisdom” and that he spoke “not in the words which man’s wisdom

teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.” (I Cor. 2:4, 13)

“Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect; yet not the wisdom of this world...But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory.” (I Cor. 2: 6, 7)

The fact that Paul says the message of the gospel was sometimes communicated “in a mystery” and in terms that were “hidden,” eluding comprehension by those who were not “perfect” (*viz.*, practiced or trained and hence accomplished and complete, *cf.* Heb. 5:12-14) is telling. It means that we cannot always take words at their face value, but must be alert to deeper meanings. In discussing the resurrection, Paul said, “Behold, I shew you a mystery.” (I Cor. 15:51) The term mystery can mean something that is marvelous or wonderful. It can also mean something that is hidden and requires spiritual *discernment* to be correctly understood. Often it means both. The scripture’s teaching about the resurrection, like eschatology in general, is indeed marvelous; it requires a spiritual discernment acquired only by years of study, prayer, and contemplation.

The difficulty in understanding scripture would have been especially true of believers from among the Gentiles who were less familiar with the *usus loquendi* (manner of speech) of the prophets. The language of the prophets evoking images of the heavens on “fire” and earth

“dissolving” under intense heat doubtless presented a great challenge to Gentile believers. How was such language to be taken? Was the physical creation really to be utterly destroyed? What about language that described Christians being “caught up” to meet Christ in the air? Would Christians really be changed and be borne away bodily to heaven at Christ’s return? What interpretive principles were to guide their (and our) understanding?

Evidence of the difficulty the early church had in gaining a command of prophetic writings may be seen in the idea of the “rapture.” The idea of a bodily rapture, a notion strongly connected with a bodily resurrection, gained currency in the early church. The apostle John alludes to this when he reports that the fact he was to live until Christ’s return gave rise to the belief he would be rapturously borne away and never die: “Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?” (Jno. 21:21-23) Having reported the popular misconception among the early brethren, John disallows entirely that his remaining alive until Jesus’ return meant he would not suffer death. In another place, Jesus made the like announcement: “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” (Matt. 16:27, 28) Notice that Jesus did not say death would cease at his coming. He merely said some would not taste death *before* he came. Jesus would come before they tasted death and only *then* would they die. Read together, it is clear that John was to be one of those people. Thus, the idea that Jesus’ coming entailed an end of physical existence in which the righteous would be borne away to heavenly portals was simply without basis and was not the teaching of Christ or the apostles. There was to be no bodily rapture.

Misunderstanding was not limited to the rapture. Some wrestled with the resurrection itself, questioning or denying its very possibility. Questions about the resurrection entailed the sort of body men would receive. (I Cor. 15:35) Questions of this sort occurred also among the

Jews. The Sadducees, although denying the resurrection, clearly conceived that any putative resurrection would occur in the flesh. Because of this conception, the Sadducees believed they had discovered an indissoluble dilemma, refuting the notion of the resurrection, by the question about the seven brothers who had one woman to wife, asking, “Whose wife would she be in the resurrection, since each had her?” (Matt. 22:23-33) The basic assumption is that the resurrection would be *physical* and therefore entail marriage. It is unclear whether this was the popular conception of the resurrection or merely the Sadducees’ idea of it. The better view probably is that it reflected popular belief, for it would hardly make sense for the Sadducees to propound a hypothetical about the fact and nature of the resurrection that was peculiar merely to themselves, and not shared by the community at large. In that case, the question would refute only *their* notion of the resurrection, but not that of the general public, whose belief it was their objective to dislodge. Hence, the necessary and reasonable inference is that it reflected the general understanding of the Jews of Jesus’ day. But, whether it be this or that, one thing is clear: *Jesus disallowed the concept entirely*. First, by proof that the patriarchs had not ceased to exist, but were participants in the first resurrection in hades paradise (vv. 31, 32); second, by showing that in the general resurrection men would subsist in the form of angels. (vv. 29, 30) The resurrection would not be physical; hence there would be no marriage.

Jewish misunderstanding about the nature of the resurrection had its counterpart in the church which Paul labored to correct. He dispensed with the idea of a physical resurrection by his statement “And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be.” (I Cor. 15:37) Could it be any clearer? The body that is sown (buried) is *not* the body that is reaped. A physical body is planted, but a spiritual body is raised up. “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption...It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” (I Cor. 15:42, 43) There is simply no credible way to read physical bodies into the text and spiritual bodies out. The mistake lies in the assumption that the resurrection would occur upon earth and, hence, be earthly. However, a physical grave cannot retain the spirits of the deceased. The grave had an immaterial counterpart called *hades* where the spirits of the departed “slept” pending the second resurrection.

(Lk. 16:19-31; 24:43) Since these souls were not bound to their earthly bodies, it would not be necessary for them to be reunited to their bodies in order to inherit glory. Just the opposite, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.” (I Cor. 15:50) Absent from the body is present with the Lord. (II Cor. 5:8)

Creeds and Confessions Embody Error of Early Church

Notwithstanding the apostle’s labors, error took root; belief in a bodily rapture and resurrection of the dead at Christ’s return gained currency and took up permanent residence in the early church. Both are evidenced by the creeds that grew up among believing Gentiles. For example, the Interrogatory Creed of Hippolytus (c. 215 A.D.) thus asks, “Do you believe...in the resurrection of the body?” Similarly, the Creed of Marcellus (340 A.D.) declares: “I believe in...the resurrection of the body.” The Creed of Rufinus (c. 404 A.D.) is more explicit and declares “I believe in the resurrection of the *flesh*.” The Apostles’ Creed proclaims belief in the resurrection of the body, but the Nicene Creed states only a belief in the resurrection of the “dead.” Other creeds and confessions holding to the resurrection of the flesh include the Athanasian Creed,¹ and the second London Confession of 1689 (Baptist).² Although the term “body” is ambiguous and elastic enough to mean spiritual bodies, we may assume that physical bodies was intended and understood. Thus, the creeds perpetuated the error of the Jews and early church in a physical resurrection. The error reported by John that there was to be a bodily rapture at the Lord’s return also survived and has continued to this day.

The heirs to the creeds were the articles and confessions of faith of later centuries. For example, chapter XXXII of the Westminster Confession - Of the State of Men after Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead - states:

1. The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption: but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave

¹ “At his coming all people shall rise bodily to give an account of their own deeds.”

² “At the last day, such of the saints as are found alive, shall not sleep, but be changed; and all the dead shall be raised up with the selfsame bodies, and none other; although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls forever.”

them: the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. Beside these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none.

2. At the last day, such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed: and all the dead shall be raised up, with the selfsame bodies, and none other (although with different qualities), which shall be united again to their souls for ever.

3. The bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonour: the bodies of the just, by His Spirit, unto honour; and be made conformable to His own glorious body.

Notice the confused eschatology here that has the souls of the dead by-passing hades and going immediately to heaven where they behold the face of God, there awaiting the redemption of their bodies, to which they are subsequently forced to return. What possible purpose could there be in reuniting the spirits of the saints with their earthly bodies? Being in a state suited to behold the face of God in perfect holiness, what is the need to clothe them again with houses of clay? Having begun in the spirit are they made perfect by the flesh? Such is the garbled teaching of the Westminster Confession. Another doctrinal statement holding to the resurrection of the flesh is the Belgic Confession (Reformed Church):

“Finally we believe, according to God’s Word, that when the time appointed by the Lord is come (which is unknown to all creatures) and the number of the elect is complete, our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, bodily and visibly, as he ascended, with great glory and majesty, to declare himself the judge of the living and the dead. He will burn this old world, in fire and flame, in order to cleanse it. Then all human creatures will appear in person before the great judge-- men, women, and children, who have lived from the beginning until the end of the world. They will be summoned there by the voice of the archangel and by the sound of the divine trumpet. For all those who died before that time will be raised from the earth, their spirits being joined and united with their own bodies in which they lived. And as for those who are still alive, they will not die like the others but will be changed ‘in the twinkling of an eye’ from ‘corruptible to incorruptible.’”

The notion that Christ would return “bodily and visibly” is closely related to the idea of a bodily rapture and a fleshly resurrection. Hence, the Belgic Confession weaves all three of these concepts together. Bodies, by definition, are confined by time and space. But Jesus is “ascended far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.” (Eph. 4:10) Only spirit is unbound by time and space and can fill all things. Hence, Jesus is no longer in bodily form, at least in any

earthly meaning and conception of that term. Rather, he is Spirit. (I Cor. 15:45; II Cor. 3:17)³ Colossians is not to the contrary. When Col. 2:9 states that in Christ “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,” the apostle is *not* referring to Christ’s form or appearance. He is referring to fulness of divine authority and God’s redemptive purpose that the Father embodied in Christ. Under the Mosaic law man was incomplete; “for the law made nothing perfect.” (Heb. 7:19) But “ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.” (Col. 2:10) The law was wistful, “a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” (Col. 2:17) The “body” here speaks to the *tangible* nature of things to come, the *substance* and *reality* of the promises embodied in Christ of which the law was but a shadow and type. Because Christ is not in bodily form he is invisible to human eye. After his ascension, visions of Jesus required special revelation of the Spirit. (Rev. 1:10 *et seq*; *cf.* Acts 9:7) The doctrine of Christ’s bodily and visible return is erroneous. His coming would not be bodily, it would be *providential*; it would not be visible, it would be historically *discernable*. In Matt. 24:30, Jesus said there would “appear” the sign of the Son of man ruling in heaven in the events marking the destruction of the city and temple. Speaking to his coming in wrath and vengeance upon the nation of the Jews, Jesus told the Sanhedrin, “I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” (Mk. 14:62; *cf.* Matt. 24:30) This is the same coming “in his kingdom” Jesus told the apostles would transpire while some of them were still alive. (Matt. 16:27, 28; Mk. 8:38-9:1)

The idea that the “self-same” physical bodies are to be raised up at the last day is every bit as erroneous as the “visible, bodily” return of Christ. Not one verse of scripture can be marshaled to establish such claim. Jesus’ statement that all who are in the graves would hear his voice and come forth (Jno. 5:25-29) neither says nor implies the resurrection of physical bodies. The redemption of men’s bodies is no part of the

³ Gentry believes Christ is still beset by the humility of a human body: “In the Second Person of the Trinity, God took upon Himself a true human body and soul (which He still possesses, Col. 2:9) and entered history for the purpose of redeeming men back to a right relationship with Him (Rom. 1:3; 9:5; Heb. 2:14).” Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Christ's Resurrection and Ours*, (Chalcedon, April 2003).

redemptive work of Christ.⁴ Those holding this view place the resurrection on the *wrong* side of eternity. They place the resurrection in the temporal realm of the flesh, rather than the eternal realm of the spirit where it should be.

Modern Apologists

Modern apologists are not wanting for these ancient errors. One prominent member of this description is Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. Gentry, who has done a good deal of valuable work in other areas, is sorely wanting in this particular area of endeavor. He is a vociferous defender of a resurrection of the flesh, denouncing as heterodox all who venture to disagree. Taking cheap shots at Preterists from the safety of his ivory tower, he refuses to do battle in public debate. Gentry asserts that “If Christ was physically raised from the dead, then so shall we, for He is the “first-fruits” of our resurrection. The only way around our physical resurrection is to deny Christ’s physical resurrection.”⁵ This is poor argumentation. Reduced to a syllogism, Gentry’s argument looks like this:

Major premise: Christ was raised physically.

Minor premise: Christ was the “first-fruits” of our resurrection; therefore

Conclusion: Our resurrection will be physical like Christ’s.

It does not take a logician to see that the conclusion does not follow from the premises. Furthermore, Gentry’s conclusion is based upon an unproved premise: there is no evidence that the term “first-fruits” applies to man’s body and much against it. Like virtually every other bodily resurrection recorded in scripture, Jesus’ resurrection first and foremost was *evidentiary*; it was intended to serve as a demonstration of God’s power and work among his people. Rom.

⁴ Romans 8:23 mentions the redemption of the Jews’ and Gentiles’ collective *body* (singular), the church, from the bondage of corruption (sin and death) at the close of the Mosaic age, but nowhere is the redemption of men’s physical bodies taught in scripture.

⁵ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Christ's Resurrection and Ours*, (Chalcedon, April 2003).

1:4 says Jesus was “declared to the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” In the resurrection, God declared Jesus to be his Son, vindicating Jesus’ claims during his life. But this could not be accomplished without the resurrection of Jesus’ body. Had God merely wafted Jesus’ spirit to heaven, there would have been no objective proof of Christ’s Sonship. To the contrary, the continuing presence of the body in the tomb would have shown Jesus a fraud and a liar. In fact, the very purpose behind the open tomb was so that man could go in and see the Lord was risen indeed, not so Jesus could come out. The bodily resurrection of the Lord provided empirical evidence that Jesus was the Son of God, of which the apostles were made witnesses. (Mk. Lk. 24:48; Acts 1:8) The bodily resurrection of Christ thus served a unique purpose that makes Jesus’ resurrection unlike our own. The Hebrew writer speaks to the resurrection of Christ when he states that Jesus “in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.” (Heb. 5:7) Notice that “the days of his flesh” are set over against Jesus’ *present* form when he is ascended into heaven and set down at the right hand of God. Jesus is no longer in fleshly form and it is unto *this* hope that believers aspire, not the reunion of their spirits with their earthly bodies.

Another argument by Gentry is that the “spiritual (pneumatikos) body” of I Cor. 15:44 is no more immaterial than the “natural (psuchikos) body.”⁶ This rather startling assertion is based upon use of the terms *pneumatikos* (spiritual) and *psuchikos* (natural) to describe the Christian over against the unbeliever:

“But the natural (psuchikos) man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual (pneumatikos) judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.” (I Cor. 2:14, 15)

The terms “natural” and “spiritual” in this context speak to the “driving force” or controlling principle in the individuals’ lives, not their material or immaterial state. Hence, Gentry argues, the “spiritual body” of I Cor. 15:44 speaks only to its *controlling principle*, not its material or

⁶ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Christ's Resurrection and Ours*, (Chalcedon, April 2003).

immaterial form. Therefore, although in the resurrection the body will actually be physical, it will *qualitatively* be “spiritual.” Or, so at least Gentry would have us believe. The better view, however, is that the term “spiritual” in I Cor. 15:44 is substantive, not qualitative, and that the body of the resurrection will be intangible, immaterial, and eternal. The spiritual man has a physical body only because he has not yet put it off in death. Upon the death of the body, the inner man lives on, clothed upon with a spiritual body of life. “But though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.” (II Cor. 4:16) “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, and house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, made without hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.” (II Cor. 5:1) The “earthly house” is the fleshly body of this material realm. Upon death, it is replaced by a spiritual and immaterial house *from* heaven. Since it is from heaven, it clearly is not the “self same” earthly body put off in death. In the resurrection we will be spirit beings with spiritual bodies. (Heb. 12:23; I Cor. 5:5) We will be as the angels (Matt. 22:30): Intangible, immaterial, imperishable, and eternal.

Scriptures for the Resurrection of the Flesh

The reason Gentry argues for the resurrection of the flesh, is that he believes the saints’ eternal reward is in the material realm upon a new earth! “His elect people will inherit the eternal estate in resurrected, physical bodies (Jn. 5:28-29; 1 Cor. 15:20-28) so that we might dwell in a material New Creation order (2 Pet. 3:8-13).”⁷ This belief is utterly fantastic coming from someone of Gentry’s talent and ability. It stems from his belief in Postmillennialism, which holds that God’s redemptive purpose culminates in a redeemed, material creation.⁸ Never mind countless statements in scripture pointing to the

⁷ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Christ's Resurrection and Ours*, (Chalcedon, April 2003).

⁸ “God seeks the redemption of the world as a created system of men and things...Christ’s labors will eventually effect the redemption of the created system of humanity and things.” Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Three Views of the Millennium and Beyond* (Zondervan, 1999), p. 43. Cf. Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism, An Eschatology of Hope* (P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg NJ, 1999), p. 107: “Christ’s atonement lays the foundation for the work of restoring all of man and all of creation.”

fact that the saints inheritance is *in heaven* (Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:1-3; I Thess. 4:17; I Tim. 6:7; II Tim. 2:11; Heb. 11:13, 16; I Pet. 1:4) we are now to believe that our eternal state is upon earth. Little wonder Postmillennialists argue for the resurrection of the flesh! Language mentioning a “new heaven and earth” (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; II Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1) is symbolic of the Messianic age, the regeneration and restitution of all things in Christ. (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21) These came in fulness at the end of the Mosaic age and destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. (Matt. 24:1-3, 34; *cf.* Eph. 1:21; Heb. 2:5; 6:5) They were the “good things to come” of the law (Col. 2:17; Heb. 10:1) and Christ’s High Priesthood (Heb. 9:11), which early Christians groaned for and were in earnest expectation. (Rom. 8:19-23) Since references to the new heaven and earth are symbolic, they must be interpreted and brought into harmony with plain passages of scripture elsewhere, not *vice versa*. Simply put, the idea that our eternal state is on a redeemed earth is *frivolous*. It is the stuff we have come to associate with Premillennialism, not serious scholarship. The spiritually discerning will reject it out of hand.

What about the resurrection of the flesh? Do advocates of this school have any verses plainly making this claim? Here are the verses cited by Gentry,⁹ our comments follow.

Job 19:25, 26: “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.”

This is the *only* verse in the Bible that makes reference to the flesh in apparent connection with the resurrection. “Apparent,” I say, because the verse does not actually mention the resurrection. It is entirely possible that Job looked to “see God” in this life time, as in fact he did. “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.” (Job 42:5) However, even assuming that the text posits a resurrection context, the Hebrew of this verse is so ambiguous that scholars cannot decide how it is to be translated. Hence, the marginal reading gives the rendering, “After I shall awake, though this body be destroyed, yet out of my flesh...” *etc.* Thus, it is

⁹ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr, *Three Views of the Millennium and Beyond* (Zondervan, 1999), p. 55.

unclear what Job actually stated or said. Furthermore, the book of Job is *highly* poetic; it is very possible that his use of the term “flesh” was not intended to be taken literally at all. Given that this is the only place in scripture referring to the flesh in the context of the resurrection, we would be well advised to opt for the alternate rendering. At the very least, standing as it does alone, no doctrine of scripture can be built upon it.

Isa. 26:19: “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.”

The historical context of this verse spoke to the restoration of Israel to its land after the captivity. The Jews were like “dead men” in the grave of captivity in Babylon. “My dead body” refers to the Jews collectively. This same image is given by Ezekiel in the prophecy of the valley full of dry bones. (Ezek. 27:1-14) This is the standard interpretation, almost universally acknowledged by the commentators. However, that there is also a Messianic dimension to the passage that looks to the resurrection of Christ and the salvation of believers cannot be denied. Even so, other than Christ’s, the resurrection of physical bodies is not mentioned. But, even if they were, the text is couched in poetic terms, hence we would not want to overly press the literalness of the passage in any event. The bottom line: Physical bodies are nowhere set out.

Jno. 5:28, 29: “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.”

As with Isa. 26:19, no physical bodies are mentioned. All Jesus says is that those in the graves will come forth. Contrary to Gentry’s assumption, Jesus did not say they would come forth on *this* side of eternity. Daniel made the like statement, saying, “many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Dan. 12:2) This language is obviously poetic: The dead do not “sleep” in the earth; their spirits go to hades. Hence, the idea of “waking” from the dust is merely accommodative; it points to a coming day

of salvation when the death would be vanquished and man go to his long home with God and Christ in heaven.

Rom. 8:11: “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

“Quickening” our mortal bodies does *not* refer to the resurrection of the body, but the regenerative effects of God’s spirit in man by the mortification of the flesh. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” (Rom. 8:13; *cf.* Gal. 5:24) This is the more apparent in that the immediately preceding verse Paul says “the body is dead because of sin.” (Rom. 8:10) The saints at Rome were not dead and their bodies were not dead either; the apostle is merely using a figure of speech. As the source of fleshly lusts, the body is spiritually “dead.” But by being brought into subjection to the Spirit the body is figuratively quickened and made an instrument of righteousness. Peter says substantially the same thing: “For he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.” (I Pet. 4:1) In other words, just as man’s spirit is quickened and made alive by the new birth (Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13), so the body is “quickened” as it is brought into subjection to God’s spirit and its lusts mortified.

Rom. 8:23: “And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”

“They” are the Gentiles, “we ourselves” refers to the Jews; the Jews had the firstfruits of the Spirit: “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” (Jm. 1:18) The gospel message began at Jerusalem and was preached first to the Jews. Hence they were the firstfruits unto God and the Lamb. (Rev. 14:4; *cf.* Acts 3:26; 13:46; Eph. 1:12, 13) Both Jews and Gentiles groaned, looking for the adoption of their collective body, the church. This occurred at the consummation in A.D. 70 when and the church was manifested as the sons of God and received the decree of adoption by the destruction of the Jewish state, and removal of the Mosaic system and temple.

Nowhere does the text mention either the resurrection or physical bodies.

Phil. 3:20, 21: “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence 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.”

The singular “our vile body” refers to the collective body of Jews and Gentiles waiting for the redemption and adoption of the church. (*Cf.* Rom. 8:19-23) Until the consummation in A.D. 70, the church was still under bondage of corruption to sin and death was in earnest expectation of the promised redemption. (Eph. 1:13, 14) The change referred to here is best understood as legal and soteriological, not bodily or physical; it is the sanctification and cleansing of the church by Christ, “that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” (Eph. 5:26, 27) The glorious *church* answers to the glorious *body* of the Lord. The presentment of the church to himself came at the consummation of the nuptials in A.D. 70. (Rev. 19:7; 21:9, 10) Notwithstanding the collective nature of this passage, by analogy we believe the body of sin which is put off in death is replaced by a glorious body in the resurrection of life. The glorified body is not physical, but spiritual, unbounded by time and space.

I Thess. 4:16: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.”

We need only note that physical bodies are not mentioned. The very next verse says that those living would be caught up with them in the air “and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (v. 17) Unless the Lord is going to remain on earth forever, this verse cannot be reconciled with the idea of our eternal state being on a material new earth. Clearly, the language is accommodative and not to be taken literally. It is descriptive of the victory of the saints and their translation to heaven *as a matter of law* at the consummation. (Col. 1:13, 3:1; Eph. 2:1, 6) Their final translation to heaven *as a matter of fact* comes only upon the death of the body. To be absent

from the body is to be present with the Lord. (II Cor. 5: 6, 8)

Scriptures against the Resurrection of the Flesh

These above verses are relied upon by advocates of a resurrection of the flesh. As we have seen, the idea of a physical resurrection is completely away from virtually every scripture cited; the notion has no more basis than the fanciful notion of man's eternal state subsisting in a "material New Created order." Let us now look at a few verses pointing to the resurrection of the spirit and the inheritance of the saints in the immaterial realm of heaven. Although dozens of verses might be marshaled, space does not allow us to consider more than a few.

Lk. 23:43: "Verily I say unto thee, This day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

These words, spoken by the Lord in the immediate reaches of death, bore the promise of the first resurrection of the spirit in hades paradise. Since physical bodies are no part of the first resurrection, what basis is there to believe they will be part of the second resurrection of the soul in heaven? To the contrary, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." (I Cor. 15:50)

Jno. 3:5-7: "Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."

This verse shows that there are two natures: one belonging to the kingdom of *heaven*, one belonging to the *earth*. The earthly nature and body do not enter the kingdom of God, the spirit does.

Jno. 4:24: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

This verse is dispositive of the idea that physical bodies have any part of the heavenly kingdom. In Lk. 24:38, Jesus said "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." Since God is a Spirit, and spirits do not

have flesh and bones, it is axiomatic that God does not have flesh and bone. Christ is now a Spirit. (I Cor. 15:45; II Cor. 3:17) In the resurrection, Christians are to be made like unto Christ and God. (Ps. 17:15; Rom. 8:29; I Cor. 15:49) Hence, we will be spirit-beings without flesh and bone.

Jno. 6:63: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing."

The flesh profits nothing in terms of man's redemption, sanctification, and salvation. It is suitable only for dwelling upon earth where life is bounded by time and space and consigned to corruption. It is the spirit that is quickened and receives eternal life, not the flesh.

Rom. 8:10: "And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness."

The body is the source of sin and temptation. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other." (Gal. 5:17) If the flesh is contrary to the Spirit, it is hardly possible that it will be saved. If men are to be restored to the original state of the creation before the fall as Postmillennialists assert, like Adam they will be susceptible to sin and temptation arising in the flesh. Unless we are prepared to believe the whole race is to be exposed to the risk of a second fall, we must reject this fanciful scheme.

I Cor. 5:5: "Deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

"Destruction" of the flesh here is best understood in terms of its mortification by denying its affections and lusts. By excommunicating those overtaken in sin, they are brought to shame and repentance, leading to the denial and destruction of the flesh. By thus "crucifying the flesh" (Gal. 5:24), the spirit is restored to purity, suitable unto salvation. The flesh expressly excluded from the spirit's salvation.

I Cor. 15:44, 49, 50: "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body...As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear

the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.”

Here are several plain statements that set the earthly and fleshly body over against the spiritual and heavenly body. The image of the earthy consists in a natural, fleshly body and carnal mind. The image of the heavenly consists in a regenerated mind and an immaterial body. The natural and material body of earth is corruptible; the heavenly and immaterial body of the spirit is incorruptible. The promise of the resurrection is of an immaterial body, like unto Christ and the angels of God in heaven. (Matt. 22:25)

II Cor. 4:16-18: “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

The material is visible and temporal; the immaterial is invisible and eternal. Although the outward and material man perish, the inward, immaterial man is renewed day by day. The body will perish, but the spirit will inherit eternal life.

II Cor. 5:1: “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

Our “earthly house” refers to our mortal bodies of flesh; “this tabernacle” refers to this temporal realm, the tabernacle of the material heavens and earth. Dissolution of our earthly house speaks to putting off the body in death. The “building of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” speaks to our immortal, immaterial, and spiritual bodies.

II Cor. 5:2, 3: “For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven. If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.”

In the resurrection, we are clothed with our immaterial and immortal house *from* heaven, not

our fleshly, mortal bodies of earth. “Naked” speaks to putting off the body of flesh in death; “clothed” speaks to putting on the spiritual body in the resurrection of life.

II Cor. 5:6-8: “Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”

Could the apostle have made it more plain? We would be absent from the body of flesh that we might be at home with the Lord. If, in the resurrection we are reunited with the body, we will again be at home in the body and absent from the Lord. Clearly, that is no part of the Christian’s hope.

Gal. 3:3: “Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?”

Those who hold that the “spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb. 12:23) must be reunited with the flesh to be complete and inherit eternal life, fall under the like condemnation Paul reproaches the Galatians with. The completion of man’s salvation is the union of spirit with God in heaven, not being newly clothed upon with bodies of clay.

Heb. 11:13, 17: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth...But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.”

Note that the patriarchs and great men of faith were strangers upon earth and looked for an heavenly city and country. The notion that man’s eternal state is in a material new earth is irresponsible and borders on heretical. It is an express denial of the scripture.

Heb. 12:23: “To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.”

The spirits of the righteous who died before Christ were not wanting bodies, but *atonement*. With the “blood of sprinkling” (v. 22) they were made wholly perfect and the way into heaven opened to them. What need have they of fleshly bodies seeing they are already perfect? Moreover, the general assembly of the firstborn (the church) are written *in heaven*, not a new earth. Our conversation is in heaven (Phil. 3:20); we are to set our affections there (Col. 3:1) because that is the place of our eternal abode. (Heb. 12:10, 13, 16)

I Pet. 4:6: “For for this cause was the gospel preached also unto them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.”

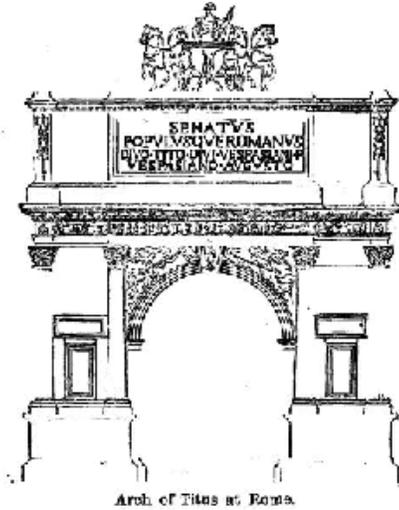
This verse likely speaks to the saints of prior ages who had the gospel preached to them in the types and similitudes of the Old Law. Although condemned by the law according to men in the flesh, they were justified by the atoning blood of Christ that they might live according to God *in the spirit*. To be reunited with bodies of clay is no part of the divine purpose.

Rev. 20:12, 13: “And I saw the dead, small and great stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.”

Here is imagery portraying judgment day. We note that physical bodies are conspicuously absent. The dead stand before God. That they are “dead,” signifies they are on the *other side* of eternity in the realm of the spirit, not upon earth. The “sea” is symbolic of tartarus, the place of the lost dead; “hell” (hades) speaks to paradise, the place of the saints and martyrs. The dead come forth from hades tartarus and paradise to receive their respective rewards. The whole transaction is portrayed as occurring in the realm of the spirit, not the flesh, in the immaterial realm of eternity, and not time.

Conclusion

The error of the Jews and early church has been kept alive by those today who look for a fleshly resurrection upon *earth*. The earthly resurrection of the believer is related to the error of the bodily, visible return of Christ and the bodily rapture of the saints. By very definition, the spiritual realm is eternal and immaterial. Flesh and blood bodies are bounded by time and space and therefore cannot inherit incorruption. Let us hold fast to our hope for we will reap in due time.



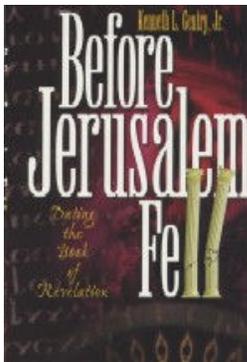
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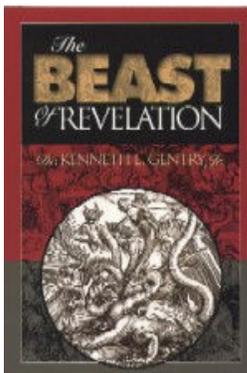
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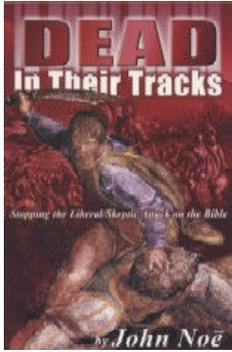
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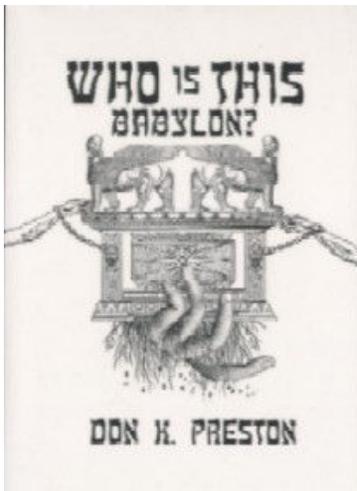


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Dead In Their Tracks,

EIGHT COMPELLING REASONS WHY: CHRIST IS COMING “VERY VERY SOON” #4

Don K. Preston

(Don is minister of the church of Christ in Ardmore, OK)

The article we are reviewing claims that one of the proofs that Christ’s coming is at hand is because of the current, “Explosion of travel and education.” An appeal is made to the Living Bible translation of Daniel 12:4, “travel and education shall be vastly increased.” It is lamentable that the current ability to travel so freely is offered as proof of the end of the world! I am sure all of the travel agents will be glad to know they are a sign of the end! Maybe we have a new candidate for the mark of the beast! (That’s a *joke!*)

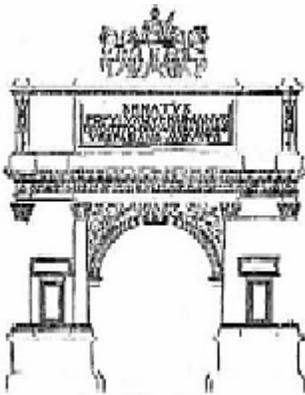
It needs to be understood that the Living Bible is not a true translation, it is more of a commentary than anything else. As far as being reliable and true to the original text it leaves more than a little to be desired. Thus, to try to prove that the end is at hand based on a highly suspect “translation” is dubious at very best. I have examined all of the translations in my library, and have not been able to find one that agrees with the Living Bible rendition. The LXX (*The Septuagint*, the Greek version of the Hebrews Old Covenant scriptures. This is the version that Jesus quoted from very often) renders the verse, “until many are taught, and knowledge is increased,” not a word about the so-called explosion of travel!

In Matthew 24 Jesus alludes to Daniel 12 no less than three times. He predicted the time of the end (Daniel 12:4, 9/ Matthew 24:2-3, 14). He alludes to the unparalleled time of tribulation (Daniel 12:1/ Matthew 24:21). He speaks of the Abomination of Desolation (Daniel 12:11/ Matthew 24:15). There is no doubt therefore, that in Matthew 24, Jesus was drawing on Daniel’s prediction. And significantly, Jesus said all of these things would be fulfilled *in His generation* (Matthew 24:34)!

The author of the article also failed to notice that Daniel was told when his prediction would be fulfilled, and it was not to be in the twentieth century! In Daniel 12:6-7 Daniel records the following words, “One (angel, DKP) said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, ‘How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?’ (These *wonders* include *the time of the end* in verse 4, DKP) Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.”

The holy people was the nation of Israel. Daniel was told that the time of the end, when “many shall run to and fro” would be when Israel was completely shattered! There is only one time in history that qualifies as the time of the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Daniel was written after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B. C.. Yet he foresaw a time when Israel would be completely decimated. *That can only be the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.* This agrees perfectly with Matthew 24. Jesus said of Jerusalem’s fate, “The time is coming in which not one stone shall be left standing on top of another” (Matthew 24:2). That sounds like a complete destruction, does it not? Daniel and Jesus agree. The time of the end was to arrive with the fall of Jerusalem, and that happened in A.D. 70. To apply Daniel 12 to any other event yet future is a denial of what he and Jesus said. All the travel agents can rest easy!



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