

With What Body Do They Come?

In our last article, Jesus' promise to raise the dead at the last day was considered. It was proposed that the last day was the time of his "parousia," his second coming, in the last days of the Jewish era. At that time he brought vengeful judgment of destruction against the nation of Israel, brought all individuals into judgment, and gave life to the righteous who slept in the hades/sheol.

I am not surprised if you dismissed all that as preposterous. It is so obviously and patently erroneous. Other preterist (already fulfilled) interpretations may meet the same rejection. I know, for that was my initial reaction. When I finally began to investigate beyond my usual prooftexts, however, surprising viewpoints opened up. I do not claim to have found all the answers, but neither did I have them all while holding the traditional futuristic mindset. So I continue to review, and I am pleased if you study with me.

When we propose that Jesus really did raise the dead in the "parousia," a very formidable objection is raised immediately. If the resurrection was accomplished at that time, the bones of those long dead would be gone. Ancient mummies would no longer exist. All tombs and graves would have been disturbed and emptied.

One of the first evasive tactics of the objector is to classify anyone who teaches a past resurrection with the two bad fellows, Hymanaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:16-19). They were upsetting the faith of some in teaching that the resurrection was past. Quite surprisingly, however, their mention gives us a sun-burst of enlightenment.

Why didn't Paul suggest that Timothy gather some witnesses and take those two men on a field trip. They could look into some tombs to see that the bones or corpses were yet undisturbed. They could examine the cemetery to see that graves had not been opened. Going to a museum, they might see skulls or skeletons on display. It would have been so easy to prove them wrong and make them look foolish. Again, why was such proof not demonstrated?

The answer to that question is simple, undeniable, and irrefutable. That was not the kind of resurrection they were expecting! The

hope of resurrection was not for the physical body but the giving of new life to the spiritual being. It was hope for reconciliation to God from whom sin had separated man (Isa. 59:2). When his physical body died, his spirit returned to God who consigned it to hades/sheol because his sins were not yet atoned. “And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Ecc. 12:7).

The Thessalonians certainly did not believe that the “day of the Lord” would involve the burning up of the earth, the dissolution of the universe, and the end of time. With those views that most people hold today, how could they have believed that the day of the Lord had come and that they had missed out on the resurrection and the assembling to meet him? The fact that they were still living on earth would have been proof that their ideas were totally erroneous. They held no such ideas. That was not the kind of coming and resurrection that Paul had taught them to expect. (See 1 Thes. 4:13-18; 2 Thes. 2:1-12)

Jesus told Nicodemus, “Unless one is born anew, he cannot SEE the kingdom of God.” Yet, Jesus also declared, “The kingdom of God does NOT COME VISIBLY” (Luke 17:20 NIV). Man is both earthly and spiritual at the same time. Since all our perceptions come through physical senses like sight, we cannot comprehend the spiritual without giving it some physical dimension as a frame of reference. Bible literature is filled with such accommodative language by giving physical imagery to the spiritual.

Jesus was telling Nicodemus that he could not rely on his physical Jewish lineage to give him inheritance in the spiritual kingdom. “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable,” Paul adds (1 Cor. 15:50). So Nicodemus would have to give up any fleshly claim and be born again figuratively, not into fleshly Israel but into the unseen world of the spirit.

The wider application applies to all of us. This body of dust does not inherit the kingdom. In this life we serve God in the spirit which, in turn, rules the fleshly body. We recognize each other by fleshly characteristics. We have no real CONCEPT of -- cannot SEE -- the real, spiritual identity of our closest acquaintance.

How could God, who is Spirit, reveal himself to man? Since a spirit is INVISIBLE, “No one has ever SEEN God; only the Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him KNOWN”

(John 1:18). Yet, he has spoken of himself as having hands, eyes, ears, etc. like man in making himself manifest, or comprehended. The Eternal Word accommodated man's physical limitations by taking the nature of a body of dust. Being manifested in the form of a man, Jesus told Philip, "He who has SEEN me has SEEN the Father" (John 14:9). The reference to physical sight has the meaning of discerning, comprehending, or understanding -- like we kids used to say, "'I see,' said the blind man."

Sin is spiritual, not a visible physical defect. Likewise, spiritual death resulting from sin is invisible and beyond or comprehension. Jesus died spiritually the way we were condemned to die because of sin. How could that be demonstrated? Jesus died physically to accommodate our limited perception. How could man believe that he overcame spiritual death except through the physical manifestation of his bodily resurrection? Yet the bodily resurrection was important mainly because it convinced us of his overcoming and conquering of spiritual death.

Since flesh and blood cannot inherit the spiritual kingdom, a reconstitution of our disintegrated fleshly body would serve no purpose. The promise is not to the physical man but to the spiritual. How hard it is for the man of dust to comprehend this. Many disciples expect an earthly kingdom yet. Many think of heaven being a renewed planet in which we still have bodies of earthly elements somehow immortalized. They think of restoration of physical existence in sensuous bliss rather than restoration to spiritual fellowship with God, the Eternal Spirit. I have very little concept of heaven, for very little is revealed. The concepts I have are clothed in fleshly imagery for my comprehension is limited to the senses.

Although this is not the point of discussion here, we must interpret the promise of a visible return of Christ in the "parousia" as accommodative language also. Disciples would SEE / DISCERN his Presence manifested when his predictions were being fulfilled. Notable would be the takeover of the temple by a lawless person, his inciting the political revolt/falling away of the Jews against Rome, the profaning of the temple, the besieging armies surrounding Jerusalem, the unexplained temporary withdrawal permitting believers to escape, the great tribulation within the city, and the destruction of their city and temple.

Such visible manifestations in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies in Matthew 24 would establish credibility so that they would trust

that the invisible fulfillment of the raising and judging of the dead also took place. Because it was a spiritual renewal of life for the ancient dead, their literal tombs would show no evidence.

Perhaps, you are not yet convinced that the raising to life was not literal. Evidently disciples at Corinth and Thessalonica had similar doubts prior to the event. Paul explained that the fleshly body would be changed and left behind in 1 Corinthians 15. Strangely, because of pre-set ideas, for most of my life I thought he was saying the body would be immortalized and taken to heaven. Here I will quote some from that chapter inserting comments in parenthesis.

“But some one will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow IS NOT THE BODY WHICH IS TO BE, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. (You have planted many seed, but never has another seed come up, but a green plant. The seed remains in the ground. The plant, though related to the seed, has no resemblance to it.) But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.” (God “gives it a body,” not “retains the old body.” It may be a stalk, vine, or blade, but it is not the seed itself.)

“So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. (The two bodies are not the same. The physical was temporary housing for the spiritual. In death the spirit is released to heaven.) “The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven.” (The dust returns to the dust; the spirit returns to God.)

“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does this perishable inherit the imperishable.” (How could Paul have stated the case more plainly? The flesh cannot enter the spirit world, and to speak of “spiritualized flesh” is to coin an oxymoron and contradict what Paul was teaching .)

What of those persons to whom Paul was addressing his letter (It was not written to us!)? The “ekklesia,” unfortunately translated the “church,” means “called out.” The emphasis is not what or where they were called out from but that they were called into assembly. The saved are God’s assembly of saints. Trumpets called persons into assemblies. First, God’s messengers called sinners into the earthly assembly through the gospel. Then the trumpet calls us through physical death into the final assembly. That will be “the last trumpet.” How many “last trumpets” can there be? We have generally interpreted that there was one last universal call, but let’s consider another viewpoint. All the dead had a last birthday, for example, but they were not all the same day. They came to each individually. Now, let us think of those living persons to whom Paul was writing in that light. And this procedure would apply for all time thereafter.

“Lo! I tell you a mystery. WE shall not all sleep (in death in hades), but WE shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.” (This does not refer to a universal trumpet call in the distant future, but to each person’s death, immediate change, and joining those previously raised into heaven-- the so-called “rapture” individualized. By the use of “we” Paul indicates the possibility that he might be alive at the coming of the Lord even as some of his readers would.) “For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and WE shall be changed.” (But not necessarily all at the same time.)

There are other credible explanations of this accomplished event. Some are very involved. An alternate viewpoint has been offered in a note by Gregg Rasaka, of neighboring Newberg, Oregon <logos@ViaFamily.com>. Gregg suggests the view expressed below, not dogmatically, but for consideration concerning the change Paul anticipated.

“The change or ‘rapture’ is spiritual in nature. I believe that change is from perishable to imperishable, mortal changed to immortal. In other words they would never die---that is what immortality means. So, on the last day, the trumpet sounded, the dead were raised imperishable, and the living put on immortality as well. I think this all fits very neatly with John 11:25-26. So in this way death is swallowed up in victory. No separation from God, no waiting in the Hadean world. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on, (Rev. 14:13). Death was the last

enemy to be abolished and then came the end. At that point Christ handed the kingdom over to the Father so that God would be all in all.

“So up until that time all men bore the image of the first Adam, the earthly man, or the man of dust. But after that those who believe bear the image of the second Adam, the heavenly man, the life giving spirit. We are back to the image of God, the presence of God, partaking of the tree of life, and the river of living water. We find the same figurative symbols used in Genesis 2 & 3 and Revelation 22. God’s plan for man was completed.”

The views expressed in these essays concerning fulfilled prophecies are tentative, awaiting revision as I learn more. I trust that you read with that same purpose of exploration. Added thoughts may be found in my book, *Free To Speak*, Chapter 3. “Physical Reinforcements of Faith”; also Chapter 4, “Jesus’ Physical and Spiritual Death.” More is planned concerning the nature of Jesus’ and our risen bodies, but we stop here now for the sake of brevity. (Cecil Hook, May 2001) []