

The Resurrection of the Body?

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(Note: All bolding or underlining of Scripture quotations for emphasis has been added by the author.)

Note: This article should be read in conjunction with the following article on this website:

Resurrection in the New Testament.

Introduction

Opponents of preterism often focus on the nature of the Resurrection, on what our new bodies will be like, and on the nature of Jesus' present, glorified body. They make much of the fact that Jesus' physical body was raised, that he ascended physically into heaven, and that he will come again in "like manner" (Acts 1:11).

We should indeed consider the nature of Jesus' present body, since our new bodies will be modelled on his.

To that end we shall allow a theologian with impeccably orthodox credentials to speak.

The following is from Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*.

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988.

Excerpt from page 1199, concerning Jesus' post-Resurrection body:

It is sometimes assumed that our new bodies will be just like that of Jesus in the period immediately following his resurrection. His body apparently bore the physical marks of his crucifixion, and could be seen and touched (John 20:27). Although the Scripture does not explicitly say that Jesus ate, we draw that inference from Luke 24:28-31 and John 21:9-15. It should be borne in mind that there were more steps remaining in Jesus' exaltation. The ascension, involving a transition from this space-time universe to the spiritual realm of heaven, may well have produced yet another transformation. The change which will occur in our bodies at the resurrection (or, in the case of those still alive, at the second coming) occurred in two stages in his case. **Our resurrection body will be like Jesus' present body, not like that body he had between his resurrection and ascension.** We will not have those characteristics of Jesus' post-resurrection earthly body which appear inconsistent with the descriptions of our resurrection bodies (e.g., physical tangibility and the need to eat).

[Emphasis added. End of quote.]

In light of this, we need to consider the nature of Jesus' present, heavenly body.

For what he is now, that is what our new, incorruptible bodies will be like when we die.

1. The disciples saw Jesus enter heaven in a cloud.

This was no ordinary cloud, but rather the Shekinah — the Cloud of God's presence and glory.

They did not see the ascension of any physical body: the cloud concealed him from their sight (Ac 1:9).

And just as well, for no one can see God and live.

Moreover, his return would be "in like manner" (Ac 1:11, KJV): in a cloud (Lk 21:27), or on the clouds.

He would come as God, as King and Judge, with power and great glory (Mt 16:27-28; 24:30; 25:31; Rev 1:7).

2. Even before his ascension, Jesus' resurrection body possessed remarkable new qualities.

He could pass through locked doors and appear/disappear at will.

During his final 40 days Jesus appeared to individuals or groups intermittently, which might suggest that his new body was ordinarily invisible.

See Luke 24; John 20 – 21; Acts 1:3-9; 1 Corinthians 15:5-7.

3. We should also consider later appearances of the ascended and glorified Lord:

To Stephen (Acts 7:55-56), to Paul (Ac 9:3-6; 18:9-10; 22:17-18; 23:11), and to John (Rev 1:13ff.).

Was there any physical manifestation of the Lord in these appearances?

4. The Transfiguration event surely has some bearing on all this:

Beholding Jesus' transfigured form, Peter and his companions were granted a preview of his **heavenly glory** (Lk 9:32). The glory that he had prior to his incarnation was about to be restored in his ascension (Jn 17:5).

And with that same majesty and power and glory he would soon return (1Pet 4:13; 2Pet 1:16-18).

Yes, it was Jesus' physical form that was transfigured.

But at the very least it was greatly changed.

Two important, related points:

1. Jesus' resurrection was altogether unique:

Our bodies in the grave completely decay and their constituent minerals are recycled.

Jesus alone was promised that his body would not undergo decay (Ps 16:10; Ac 2:27).

Jesus had to be raised physically for evidential purposes: he overcame the prison of Hades, and his spirit was reunited with his (undecayed) body.

Not so with us!

2. The saints of old hoped for entry into their heavenly inheritance (Heb 11:10, 16).

They would do so via a "better resurrection" — one involving far more than mere bodily resuscitation.

Hebrews 11:35 (literal translation):

Women received back their dead by resurrection. But others were tortured, not having accepted release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection.

The point being this:

If the saints under the Old Covenant hoped for entry into their heavenly inheritance via a resurrection that was so much "better" than mere bodily resuscitation, then so too should we!

An erroneous concept

The term “resurrection of the body” is not actually found in the Bible.

This erroneous phrase comes from the Apostles’ Creed: “I believe in ... the resurrection of the body.”

Or, as an earlier version of the Creed has it: “I believe in ... the resurrection of the flesh.”

Eager to show their orthodoxy, the various churches that came out of the Reformation uncritically subscribed to the Apostles’ Creed and continued to promote the notion that our physical bodies will be raised up.¹

But the correct, biblical terms are “resurrection of the dead”, and “resurrection from the dead”.²

The underlying Greek phrases are:

- *[anastasis] ek nekrōn*, “resurrection **out from** [the] **dead**”.³
- *[anastasis] tōn nekrōn*, “resurrection **of the dead**”.⁴
- *[anastasis] nekrōn*, “resurrection **of** [the] **dead**”.⁵

Additionally, we have the verb “raised” or “risen from the dead”, or similar.

- *[egeirō] ek nekrōn*, “raised / having been raised **out from** [the] **dead**”.⁶
- *[egeirō] apo tōn nekrōn*, “raised **from the dead**”.⁷
- *[egeirō] auton ek nekrōn*, “having raised **him out from** [the] **dead**”.⁸

Sometimes it is the dead themselves who are raised *[egeirō]*.⁹

Another verb, *anistēmi*, is always conjugated with *ek nekrōn*:

To rise, or raise, “**out from** [the] **dead**”.¹⁰

The term Paul employs in Philippians 3:11 is particularly interesting: *eis tēn exanastasin tēn ek nekrōn*.

The prefix *ex* on *exanastasis* (Strong’s G1815) serves to intensify its meaning:

“a rising up completely out from / thoroughly removed from” the realm of the dead.

And indeed, that is the true meaning of resurrection:

A raising up of those who are dead, from the realm of the dead.

The two go hand-in-hand. As proof, consider 1 Corinthians 15:12:

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

Christ has truly been raised *ek nekrōn* (out from the dead), so one cannot deny *anastasis nekrōn* (resurrection of the dead).

¹ For example, the 1561 Belgic Confession (in Article 37) and the 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith (in Chapter 32; Article 2) both affirm that on the last day the souls of the dead will be reunited with their former bodies, albeit with new qualities.

² In the ESV, the phrase “resurrection of the dead” is found in Paul’s resurrection discourse (in 1 Corinthians 15:12-13, 21, 42) as well as in Matthew 22:31; Acts 17:32; 23:6; 24:21; Hebrews 6:2.

Whereas “resurrection from the dead” is found in Luke 20:35; Acts 4:2; Romans 1:4; Philippians 3:11; 1 Peter 1:3.

³ See: Lk 20:35; Ac 4:2; 1Pet 1:3.

⁴ See: Mt 22:31; 1Cor 15:42.

⁵ See: Ac 17:32; 23:6; 24:21; Rom 1:4; 1Cor 15:12-13, 21; Heb 6:2.

⁶ See: Mt 28:7; Mk 6:14; Lk 9:7; Jn 2:22; 12:1, 9; 21:14; Ac 3:15; 4:10; Rom 4:24; 6:4, 9; 7:4; 8:11; 10:9; 1Cor 15:20; 1Thes 1:10; 2Tim 2:8; Heb 11:19.

⁷ See: Mt 14:2; 27:64; 28:7.

⁸ See: Jn 12:17; Ac 13:30; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20; Col 2:12; 1Pet 1:21.

⁹ See: Mt 10:8; 11:5; Mk 12:26; Lk 7:22; 20:37; Ac 26:8; 1Cor 15:16, 29, 32, 52; 2Cor 1:9.

¹⁰ See: Mk 9:9-10; 12:25; Lk 16:31; 24:46; Jn 20:9; Ac 10:41; 13:34; 17:3, 31.

The notion that our physical bodies will be raised is a distraction from what resurrection actually entails. Concerning this, we should note that the Nicene Creed is more biblically faithful: “We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.”

The true nature of the Resurrection

The apostle John in Revelation 20:11-15 relates what he saw concerning the Resurrection and Final Judgment: He saw Death and Hades being forced to give up their inmates for judgment (20:13). All those whose names were not in the book of life were cast into the lake of fire (20:15; 21:8). Implicitly, those whose names were in the book entered into the heavenly Jerusalem (cf. Rev 21:7).

Three vital points to note:

- Judgment took place, not on earth, but before God’s heavenly throne (20:11).
- No part of what John saw involved physical bodies rising from graves.
- All this took place in the first century, probably in AD 70 (Rev 1:1, 3; 22:6-7, 10-12).

In Revelation 1:18 Jesus declares that, having conquered death, he holds the “keys” of Death and Hades — with the implication that he is about to unlock these realms.

Sometimes in the New Testament (NT) *Hades* is the abode of the damned (e.g. Luke 16:23), but it can also be the generic name for the realm of the dead — the equivalent to *Sheol* (e.g., Acts 2:27 = Ps 16:10).

Jesus entered Paradise when he died (Luke 23:43), also called Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:22).

The rich man in the parable entered Hades — the section reserved for the wicked.

Death and Hades in Revelation 20 are clearly the intermediate abodes of all who died pre-AD 70.

Whether they denote one and the same place, or whether they correspond with the separate sections of Hades (i.e., Paradise and the abode of the wicked), is unimportant.¹¹

In summary, the Resurrection was a one-off release of those in Hades (both sections thereof) so as to face judgment and enter into their final rewards.

Today when we die, each of us is immediately judged and clothed with his new body (Heb 9:27; 2Cor 5:1-10).¹²

Direct entry into heaven is our great privilege under the New Covenant, because Jesus has restored us to God’s presence and favor (Mt 27:51; Heb 10:19-22; 11:39-40). He has opened up heaven for us.

¹¹ That Death and Hades do indeed represent the separate sections or abodes could be inferred from Revelation 1:18 (BSB): Jesus possessed “the keys (plural) of Death and of Hades”; from Revelation 6:8 (BSB): “Its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed close behind”; and from Revelation 20:13 (ESV): “Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, ...”

¹² Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 concerning this “new norm” for believers under the New Covenant:

- Our earthly body (“tent”) will be replaced with an eternal heavenly body (5:1).
- In the meantime, we groan while we long to be clothed with this heavenly body (5:2-4).
- In our (present) bodies we are away from the Lord (5:6).
But we would rather be away from this body and at home with him (5:8).
- Judgment follows immediately after death (5:10; cf. Heb 9:27).

1 Corinthians 15: Heavenly Bodies

This section considers Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 15.

By way of introduction, we should note that Paul NEVER refers to the "resurrection of the body".

Rather, he employs the phrase "raised from the dead", or "resurrection of (or from) the dead".

Resurrection **of the dead** denotes the raising up of dead persons.

Resurrection **from the dead** denotes being raised up from the realm of the dead.

These two go hand-in-hand:

The raising **of** a dead person necessarily means that he has been raised **from** the realm of the dead.

Conversely, the raising of Christ **from** the dead means that there can be a raising **of** others who are dead as well — see 15:12-13, 16, 20.

Paul discusses the nature of our new bodies in 1 Corinthians 15:35-50.

He indicates that we receive a NEW body, one suited to the heavenly realm.

We are born, live, and die in one kind of body, and we come to life in a different type of body.

Note that cosmic objects such as the sun, moon and stars were, in the ancient world, termed "heavenly bodies", just as they are today.

1. The seed analogy (15:36-37, cf. vs. 42).

The seed is our present body — our life in this world.

You "sow" the seed in the ground at death and it becomes a new plant that arises from the inner germ of the seed. The old seed-body dies and dissolves in the ground.

15:37:

*And **what you sow is not the body that is to be**, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.*

2. The great diversity of bodies (15:38-39).

a) 15:38: Of seeds, just as God has determined:

*But God gives it a **body** (sōma) as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own **body**.*

b) 15:39: Of animals:

Paul lists a descending hierarchy of "fleshly" bodies:

*All **flesh** (sarx) is not the same **flesh**, but [one kind is] indeed of men, and another **flesh** of animals, and another **flesh** of birds, and another of fishes. (literal translation.)*

IMPLICATION:

Each creature in this world (including man) has a fleshly body appropriate to its own unique realm of land or air/trees or water, and which is composed of substances derived from that realm.

3. Different realms have bodies of differing "glory" (BSB: *splendor*).

The heavenly bodies (sun, moon, and stars) differ greatly from earthly bodies and even from each other.

a) 15:40: There are heavenly bodies (*sōmata epourania*) and there are earthly bodies (*sōmata epigeia*).

One type of body has *epouraniōn doxa* ("heavenly glory").

The other has *hē tōn epigeiōn* ("the [glory] of the earthly").

b) 15:41: The heavenly bodies themselves have different glories.

NOTE:

- The glory (splendor) of heavenly bodies is of a different order to that of earthly bodies (vs. 40).
- The term *sōma* (body) is rightly employed for these heavenly lights; the use of *sarx* (flesh) would be inappropriate. The latter term is suitable for creatures of this world only.

IMPLICATION:

15:40-41 prepares for what Paul is about to say about our resurrection bodies:

Just as the heavenly lights far surpass the glory of anything on earth, so also our heavenly bodies (received in the Resurrection) will be far more glorious than our earthly bodies of flesh (*sarx*).

4. **There are two types of body** (15:42-49):

a) Paul returns to the seed analogy:

15:42-43: The seed sown in death rises into a new, imperishable, and glorious body.

15:44a: Our resurrection body will be “spiritual” — different from our current “natural” body.

b) 15:44b-46: The order is first the natural body, then the spiritual.

15:47-49: We all have a natural body inherited from Adam, made of dust.

Our new body will resemble the heavenly body of Jesus, not the earthly body of Adam.

5. **Paul’s conclusion** (15:50):

*I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,
nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*

Paul’s emphatic declaration here concludes his discussion:

It is impossible for physical (flesh-and-blood) bodies to inherit God’s heavenly kingdom.

Of course, our personal identity is maintained even as we receive our new body.

And there is undoubtedly some continuity of form with our earthly body to allow for recognition of loved ones.

Paul’s whole argument in 1 Corinthians 15:35-50 is that we get new bodies suited to the heavenly realm.

Our bodies will be like Christ’s present, glorified body.

And just as the heavenly bodies (sun, moon and stars) are more glorious than earthly (*sarx*) bodies, so our own heavenly bodies be far more glorious than our natural, Adamic bodies made of dust.

Note that for Paul the Resurrection of the Dead was yet future:

He is anticipating that great event, which was still some years off.

But for us today, post AD 70, we receive our new, heavenly body immediately at death.

Whence the belief in physical resurrection?

The notion that our bodies are to be raised physically arose very early.

Such belief was likely a consequence of the chiliastic (millennial) beliefs of second century Church leaders.

Chiliasm is the ancient name for what today is known as premillennialism — the belief that when Christ returns he will not execute the Last Judgment all at once, but will first set up on earth a temporary kingdom, where the **resurrected saints will rule with him over non-resurrected subjects for a thousand years** of peace and justice.

The church historian Philip Schaff summarizes this early millennial belief as follows:

The most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age is the prominent chiliasm, or millenarianism, that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment. It was indeed not the doctrine of the church embodied in any creed or form of devotion, but a widely current opinion of distinguished teachers, such as Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, and Lactantius; while Caius, Origen, Dionysius the Great, Eusebius (as afterwards Jerome and Augustin) opposed. ... It distinguishes, moreover, two resurrections, one before and another after the millennium, and makes the millennial reign of Christ only a prelude to his eternal reign in heaven, from which it is separated by a short interregnum of Satan.¹³

The Christian Church ultimately repudiated millennialism, but not before the notion of physical resurrection had become firmly entrenched. As a hangover from earlier times, the latter concept came to be incorporated into two of the three Ecumenical Creeds:

Apostles Creed (300s AD):

From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in ... The resurrection of the body; And the life everlasting. Amen.

Nicene Creed (381/451 AD):

And he shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead. ...

And I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Athanasian Creed (ca. 500 AD):

From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies; And shall give account of their own works.

And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

According to the Creeds, Christ will return to judge both the living and the dead, and the eternal state will follow immediately thereafter.

There is no place in the Creeds for any 1000-year earthly kingdom, nor are there multiple resurrections and multiple judgments. Millennialism was soundly rejected by the time the Creeds were formulated.

However there appears to have been some confusion over the precise nature of resurrection:

The Apostles' and Athanasian Creeds uphold the notion of physical resurrection, perhaps based on the pattern of Jesus' own resurrection. The Nicene Creed has the correct concept: resurrection of those who are dead.

¹³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church. Volume 2: Ante-Nicene Christianity 100-325 AD*. Chapter 12; Section 158. 5th Edition, 1889. Via the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/historyofchris02scha/page/614/mode/2up> [page 614].

Historic Premillennialism vs. the contemporary Dispensational view

Here is as good a place as any to compare modern (dispensational) premillennialism with that of the second and third centuries. Modern premillennialism involves a tortuous system of multiple resurrections and multiple judgments, and requires the physical raising of all those who will reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom. Allowing for some minor variations,¹⁴ the following summarizes the contemporary millennial scheme:

1. At the Rapture, all Christians who have died since the Church began at Pentecost are resurrected.
This is **resurrection #1** out of 3.
The living saints are caught up together with them to be with Christ **in heaven** (1Thes 4:16-17).
Both groups are judged at **the judgment seat of Christ** (1Cor 3:12-15; 2Cor 5:10).
This is judgment #1 out of 3.
2. The marriage supper of the Lamb takes place in heaven (Rev 19:7-9).
3. With the Church whisked away, God's purposes again center on Israel.
A seven-year period begins.
For the first 3½ years Israel lives in peace in their land (Eze 38:8); the temple is rebuilt and animal sacrifices are reinstituted (Rev 11:1-2).
After 3½ years Gog and his allies invade Israel from the north but are supernaturally destroyed (Ezekiel 38).
The final 3½ years involves the Great Tribulation (Mt 24:21; Rev 7:14; Dan 12:1; Jer 30:7):
Antichrist becomes the world ruler (Rev 6:1-2).
War brings famine and death (Rev 6:3-8), and natural disasters overtake the world.
Multitudes of new converts are martyred (Rev 6:9-11; 7:9-14; Mt 24:9).
Worship of the Antichrist is enforced via the 666-mark (Rev 13:16-18).
4. The Second Coming:
At the end of the seven years Christ returns with the armies of heaven (Mt 24:27-31; Rev 19:11-16).
Antichrist's forces engage them at Armageddon but are utterly defeated (Joel 3:9-11; Rev 16:16; 19:17-21).
The judgment of living Gentiles and Israel now takes place (Mt 25:31-46). This is **judgment #2**.
Satan is bound and cast into the Abyss (Rev 20:1-3).
Old Testament saints, along with the martyrs of the Tribulation period, are physically resurrected.
These will reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom (Isa 26:19; Dan 12:1-3; Rev 20:4-5).
This is **resurrection #2**. (But called "the first resurrection" in Revelation 20:5.)
5. The Millennial Kingdom:
Messiah's kingdom is now properly established (Ps 72:8; Isa 9:6-7; Dan 2:44; Zec 9:10).
Christ and the resurrected saints reign for 1000 years (Isa 11:3-5; Mt 19:28; 2Tim 2:12; Rev 5:10; 20:6).
A millennial temple is built (Eze 40:5 – 43:27), and animal sacrifices are instituted as memorials.¹⁵
The Davidic Covenant (2Sam 7:11-16) now finds fulfillment:
Christ sits on "David's throne" in Jerusalem (Isa 9:6-7; Jer 33:17-26; Am 9:11-12; Lk 1:32-33).
He rules over Israel (Isa 40:11; Mic 4:7; 5:2b).

¹⁴ Differences exist amongst premillennialists concerning the timing of the Rapture (pre-Trib vs. mid-Trib vs. post-Trib), and in relation to the raising up of the Old Testament saints: will these be raised up with the NT saints, or only after the Tribulation ends?

¹⁵ Additionally, the Jewish Feasts of New Year, Passover, and Tabernacles will be reinstituted (Eze 45:18-25; Zec 14:16-21). Israel will be exalted above the nations (Isa 14:1-2; 49:22-23; 60:14-17; 61:5-9). Earth's topography and geography will be changed (Isa 2:2; Eze 47:1-12; 48:8-20; Zec 14:4, 8, 10). Wild animals will be tamed (Isa 11:6-9; 35:9; Eze 34:25) and crops will be abundant (Isa 27:6; 35:1-2, 6-7; Am 9:13; Zec 14:8). Humans will live longer (Isa 65:20-23). Knowledge of the Lord will be universal (Isa 11:9; Jer 31:34; Mic; Zec 14:8; 4:5).

The New Covenant with Israel is now also fulfilled (Jer 31:31-34; Eze 11:19-20; 36:25-32).

The land is extended to include all that was promised to Abraham (Gen 15:18-21; Eze 47:13 – 48:8, 23-27).

Jesus rules over and judges the nations too (Isa 11:3-5; Mic 4:2-3a; Zec 14:9; Rev 19:15).¹⁶

The nations come to worship in Jerusalem (Isa 2:2-4; Mic 4:2; 7:12; Zec 8:20-23; 14:16-21).

Righteousness and justice prevail throughout the whole world (Isa 9:7; 11:4; 42:1-4; Jer 23:5).

6. At the end of the 1000 years Satan is released from his prison and leads a final rebellion.

The world's armies besiege Jerusalem, but Satan and his hordes are defeated (Rev 20:7-10).

The Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20:11-15 now transpires:

The wicked dead of all time are resurrected and judged. This is **resurrection and judgment #3**.

7. The universe is burned up (2Pet 3:7, 10).

The eternal state is inaugurated: the new heavens and earth (2Pet 3:10; Rev 21:1).

The new Jerusalem descends to earth (Rev 21:2, 10-27).

Christ rules forever in the eternal kingdom (Lk 1:32-33; Rev 11:15).

The above points have been adapted from John Walvoord. They show what traditional dispensationalists affirm. However, since 1990 a more progressive form of dispensationalism has been promoted, with adherents even at Dallas Theological Seminary. This view regards the Davidic throne as having been (to some extent) inaugurated or restored with Jesus' present reign from heaven. The New Covenant has been similarly inaugurated, although its blessings will not be fully realized until the millennium.

Comparison with the Historic Premillennial view.

In contrast to the three resurrections and judgments of contemporary dispensational premillennialism, the millennialism of the early centuries was more straightforward, having just two resurrections:

1. The saints of all history are raised in **a resurrection of the just** — the first resurrection.
These reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom on earth (Lk 14:14; Rev 20:4-6).
2. At the end of the millennium **the wicked of all time are raised** from Hades — this is the second and final resurrection (Rev 20:11-15). Hades is terminated.

Clearly the older scheme was much simpler!

And here is further point of difference:

Historic premillennialism saw the Christian Church as the fulfillment of God's Old Testament purposes.

The replacement theology of modern dispensational premillennialism — the notion that Israel will displace the Church and once again become centerstage in God's purposes — finds little or no place in the historic view.

¹⁶ According to Jack Van Impe, procreation still takes place during this millennial kingdom because those who survive the Tribulation enter into that kingdom with their ordinary bodies. Believers who reign with Christ possess resurrected bodies and do not bear children, but the others do. Consequently, the children born during the millennium are born with their old Adamic, sinful nature. See Jack Van Impe, *Revelation Revealed*, p. 239.

[Note: Presumably the existence of unregenerate people in the millennial kingdom explains how Satan is able to trigger widespread rebellion towards the end of the 1000 years.]

Two further points:

1. Both premillennial views — the historic and the contemporary — are 100% incompatible with the three Ecumenical Creeds.¹⁷

For all three Creeds state (a) that Christ will come again to judge both the living and the dead, and (b) there is but one judgment and one resurrection.

And the eternal state immediately follows, with no intervening millennial kingdom.

2. Both the historic and the contemporary views require the saints who rule with Christ in the millennial kingdom to be raised up physically.

Many Church Fathers held to the notion of a millennial reign of Christ on earth.¹⁸

Some did so, in part, to counter the anti-physical notions of the various Gnostic heresies.

For God is indeed good, and so is his creation. And in the future millennium creation itself will be radically renewed. Old Testament prophecies will be fulfilled literally. For example, Isaiah 11:6-9 (Papias, Irenaeus).

Despite widespread support, belief in a literal millennium was far from universal.

Dionysius (ca. 190-265 AD), bishop of Alexandria, opposed the chiliasm promoted by another Egyptian bishop named Nepos. Nepos wrote the *Refutation of the Allegorists*, which became very popular in the diocese of Alexandria. This work argued against allegorical interpretations, advocating instead for a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecies and of the book of Revelation — including the millennial reign of Christ on earth.

After the death of Nepos, Dionysius wrote the *Treatise on the Promises*, in two books, for the purpose of refuting Nepos' teaching. The chiliastic error was very prevalent in the Arsinoite nome (district) of the diocese.

Dionysius went there in person and called together the presbyters and teachers of the villages.

For three days he instructed them, refuting the arguments they drew from Nepos. The meeting concluded with a renunciation of millennial belief.¹⁹

A brief examination of Irenaeus' view

As its title suggests, Irenaeus wrote his *Against Heresies* to counter the Gnostic heresies of his day.

This work reveals what he and many of his contemporaries believed about the future:

- The saints will be physically raised in a resurrection of the just — the first resurrection (Rev 20:4-6).
- They will reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom on earth.
- In this way they will be prepared gradually for their eternal heavenly abode.
- At the end of the millennium the wicked will be raised and judged; Hades will be no more (Rev 20:11-15).
- At the present time the deceased saints are in Hades, resting and being refreshed.

For all must follow Christ's example, who first went to Hades, from whence he was raised physically to earthly life again before finally ascending to the Father. He is our forerunner in all these respects.

- There will be great prosperity in the millennium. The land promises to Abraham will be fulfilled literally.
- Yet Christians comprise the new Israel. God's promises are fulfilled in the Church.

¹⁷ Both views are every bit as heretical as other views commonly regarded as such, like full preterism.

¹⁸ Among these were Papias (ca. 60-130 AD), Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165), Theophilus (died ca. 184), Irenaeus (ca. 130-202), Tertullian (ca. 155-220), Hippolytus (ca. 170-235), Julius Africanus (ca. 180-250), Nepos (before 250), Victorinus (ca. 250-304), Methodius (died ca. 311), and Lactantius (ca. 250-325).

¹⁹ Dionysius relates all this in his *Treatise on the Promises*. See the New Advent website: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0612.htm> (paragraph 2).

In subsequent paragraphs Dionysius defends the book of Revelation against those who rejected it. Some rejectors alleged that the Jewish heretic Cerinthus had authored Revelation. The Cerinthians believed in an earthly reign of Christ — one that would entail incessant sensual indulgence. Dionysius defends Revelation, even as he denies that the apostle John was its author.

Paul's clear declaration (in 1 Corinthians 15:50) about physical bodies being unable to inherit God's heavenly kingdom is necessarily reinterpreted (i.e., negated) by Irenaeus.

Irenaeus relates this verse to similar Pauline declarations in Galatians 5:19-21 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10: "flesh and blood" (supposedly) refers not to our physicality, but to those people who, devoid of the Spirit, live fleshly, sensuous lives. See *Against Heresies* 5.11.1-2 and 5.12.3.

The Church's ultimate repudiation of millennialism

Much of the following is based on an article by Charles E. Hill on the Modern Reformation website:

Why the Early Church Finally Rejected Premillennialism:

<https://www.modernreformation.org/resources/articles/why-the-early-church-finally-rejected-premillennialism>.

We earlier noted that many early Church leaders were chiliasts. Ultimately the Church repudiated such notions. Modern premillennialists suggests that chiliasm was rejected for the following (wrong) reasons:

- The allegorical interpretations of the prophets and of the Apocalypse that were developed by Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215 AD) and Origen (ca. 185-253 AD).
- Opponents tended to lump chiliasm with the prophetic excesses of Montanism.
- The peace of Constantine, along with the downfall of paganism, led many to conclude that the millennium had arrived.
- Augustine, who had himself earlier entertained chiliastic hopes, wrote persuasively against it.

However, there are other, more significant reasons for its ultimate rejection.

Church leaders woke up to the fact that chiliastic notions derive from Jewish, not Christian, sources.

1. Irenaeus cites a tradition from a book written by Papias about the millennial kingdom:
The Apostle John supposedly passed on something that Jesus taught about productive grapevines and talking grapes in the kingdom.
But this fabulous tale actually comes from the Jewish apocalyptic work 2 Baruch.
2. Justin Martyr openly derived his views about the millennial kingdom from the Old Testament — not from the Apocalypse. In his *Dialogue with Trypho* he tries to overcome the objections of his Jewish interlocutor by interpreting Isaiah 65:17-25 the same way that Trypho himself would. But, insists Justin, these Jewish hopes of blessing and glory now belong to the Church, which inherits all of God's promises.
In this way, Justin made the future Millennium serve as an apologetic against the Jewish objection that Jesus failed to bring about the promised kingdom.
3. The millennial hope was tied up with faulty (Jewish) notions about the afterlife and the nature of the Resurrection — the latter involving the raising up of physical bodies.
To be fair, Irenaeus and later chiliasts were battling Gnostic heresies that denigrated the physical realm. Irenaeus stresses the goodness of creation and its future restoration in the millennial kingdom.
When Jesus returns, the saints will be raised physically to inhabit this new kingdom.
But in the meantime the deceased saints are in the subterranean Hades, resting and being refreshed.
For whereas the heretics claimed that their souls would immediately enter heaven at death, the true believer will instead follow the course of his Lord and remain in Hades until his soul is reunited with his body in the Resurrection.

These views of the afterlife, defended also by Papias, Justin, Victorinus, and Lactantius, were based on pre-Christian, Jewish views, as found in 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, and other writings.

However, not everyone at the time accepted these views. Some orthodox Christians understood that Jesus has opened heaven for us, so that we enjoy direct entry into heaven at death.

Cyprian (ca. 200-258 AD), for example, comforted his congregations, in the face of a raging plague, with the Christian hope of the heavenly kingdom when they died.

Eventually the truth won out.

With Lactantius (in the early 4th century) we see a last-ditch attempt to revive a form of chiliasm.

The works of Tyconius (died in 390), Jerome (ca. 347-420), and Augustine (354-430) ensured its burial.²⁰

4. The realization also grew that the Jewish (literal) approach to prophecy is what led that nation to crucify the Son of God. He failed to fulfill their carnal, nationalistic aspirations. Whereas Irenaeus had insisted that Isaiah 11:6-9 (the wolf, lamb, leopard, goat, etc. dwelling together) would be literally fulfilled in the Millennium, Origen mentions this passage as misinterpreted by the Jews: since Jesus did not fulfill this prophecy literally, they crucified him for his false messianic claims. Even Tertullian recognized that the Jewish approach to Old Testament prophecies played a significant role in their rejection of him.

We can summarize the theological case against chiliasm in the following points:

1. The Jewish origins of the doctrine are obvious:
Many Jews held to a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophets, whereby Messiah's rule was viewed in terms of an earthly kingdom, with the Jewish people and the holy city being at the center. These notions had been developed in the Book of Enoch and other apocalyptic writings. Christians came to realize that it was this longing for an earthly kingdom that led the Jews to crucify Jesus. Jesus himself utterly repudiated the nationalistic ambitions of his contemporaries.
2. Old Testament promises and prophecies are fulfilled in the present age — the gospel (or Church or kingdom) age. See Acts 3:24; 1 Peter 1:10.
The spiritual fulfillment of promises such as Isaiah 11:6-9 — an interpretation that Irenaeus acknowledged some of his contemporaries held to — came to be better appreciated.
The book of Hebrews teaches that Abraham looked for a heavenly inheritance.
The Promised Land (Canaan) anticipated the (present) salvation-rest and the (future) heavenly inheritance that Christ has won for us. See Hebrews 4:1-11; 12:22.
3. The NT teaches that believers enter Christ's presence in heaven directly when they die.²¹
The notion that we enter an intermediate abode pending the final resurrection is a pre-Christian, Jewish concept. For Christ, by his death and resurrection, has truly opened up heaven for us. (Contemporary Christians believe that only later, when the world ends or is renewed, do our souls leave the bliss of heaven to be reunited with our bodies.)
4. The NT teaches just one resurrection event.
Revelation 20:11-15 depicts not just the resurrection of the wicked, but of all those in the intermediate realms — the righteous as well as the wicked. This is evident from the fact that of those raised, only those not found in the book of life are consigned to the lake of fire (20:15). The implication being that at least some, probably many, will avoid that dreadful fate.

²⁰ Tyconius, in his *Exposition of the Apocalypse* (ca. 380 AD), promoted the view that the 1000 years of Revelation 20:4-6 comprises the remaining part of the sixth millennium of world history since the time of Christ's advent. This notion, accepted by Augustine, put an end to the chiliastic expectations of the Latin Church.

²¹ See 2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:23; 2 Timothy 4:18; John 14:2-3.

John's vision therefore shows the final raising up and judgment of all men — the good and the bad alike. It depicts the General Resurrection and Judgment.²²

So whatever the "first resurrection" of Revelation 20:4-5 entails, it clearly is not the (final) judgment of the saints.

The growing belief that the NT affirms just one Resurrection of all men — one that transpires when Christ returns at the end of the world — came to be incorporated into the Church's Creeds. However, the notion of physical resurrection lingered on and persists to this day, as a hangover from the earliest centuries.

Preterism vs. Premillennialism

To the above we should add that the Preterist view of prophecy represents the death knell for all shades of Premillennialism:

Imminence statements in Revelation show that the Resurrection and Judgment have already transpired.

The intermediate realm of Hades is no more (Rev 20:14).

The Old Testament and early Christian saints have been resurrected and judged and have entered into their heavenly inheritance. For Christ, by his death and resurrection, has opened heaven for us.

Today when we die we are immediately judged and enter into our final reward (Heb 9:27).

Nor is there any final departure from heaven to return to a (renewed) physical realm.

The millennial reign (and "first resurrection") of the martyrs has been and gone.

The martyrs "beheaded" under Nero reigned as disembodied SOULS in Hades-Paradise (Rev 20:4-6; cf. 6:9-11) prior to their final Resurrection.

Furthermore, God's kingdom has come:

The throne of David has been fully restored in Christ's ascension and in his present reign from the right hand of God. (Psalm 110 is the Old Testament passage most frequently cited by New Testament authors, all of who regard it as having been fulfilled in Christ's ascension and present reign.)

All nations belong to Jesus, and through the gospel he will win them to himself (Rom 4:13; Gal 3:8, 14).

And as long as planet Earth continues, God's kingdom will advance — to all intents forever (Ps 72:17; Isa 9:7; Dan 2:44; 7:14; Lk 1:32-33; Rev 11:15).

²² The resurrection (and judgment) of both the saved and the lost together is affirmed in Daniel 12:2; John 5:27-29; Acts 24:15.