# Millennial and Resurrection errors of Irenaeus

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Note: This article should be read in conjunction with other articles on this website:
(1) *Resurrection in the New Testament*, and (2) *The Resurrection of the Body?*

## Introduction

This article examines and critiques the views of Irenaeus, the influential bishop of Lugdunum (now Lyon), who lived ca. 130-202 AD. Irenaeus was possibly born in Smyrna in the province of Asia, for as a boy he encountered bishop Polycarp, the disciple of John. Irenaeus wrote extensively, but only two of his works have survived intact. Irenaeus was a strong advocate of the resurrection of our physical bodies. This was necessitated by his belief in an earthly millennium: the saints will be raised up with their bodies to enjoy the paradisical conditions of the millennium, in preparation for the final, eternal kingdom.

Irenaeus wrote his major work, *Adversus haereses* (= *Against Heresies*, hereafter AH) ca. 180 AD.
As its name suggests, it served as a refutation of the various Gnostic heresies of his day.
The heretics denigrated the physical creation; for them, salvation entailed a release from (and discarding of) the body. This further stirred Irenaeus to advocate for the raising up of our self-same fleshly bodies.
While Irenaeus quotes extensively from Scripture, he also places considerable weight on the teaching of the Church, with its succession of "presbyters" going all the way back to the apostles.
For Irenaeus, this continuity of teaching enjoyed by the Church stood in stark contrast to the *ad hoc* teachings of the heretical groups denounced in his writings. But there were also some separatist orthodox groups that he took aim at — those whom he calls "schismatics".
Irenaeus writes in AH 4.26.2:

> Wherefore it is incumbent to obey **the presbyters who** are in the Church — those who, as I have shown, **possess the succession from the apostles; those who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the certain gift of truth**, according to the good pleasure of the Father. But [it is also incumbent] to hold in suspicion others who depart from the primitive succession, and assemble themselves together in any place whatsoever, [looking upon them] either as heretics of perverse minds, **or as schismatics puffed up and self-pleasing**, or again as hypocrites, …

See also his comments in AH 3.2.2.
Our reason for examining Irenaeus' teaching is the considerable influence he exerted as an author and bishop. Irenaeus was the first important Father of the Western Church. His writings, for better or worse, influenced later Church leaders and their theology. Though at times he acknowledges viewpoints held by orthodox believers that differ from his own, we can probably assume that his views were fairly typical of the Church leaders of his day. Certainly his millennial views were commonplace. And while the Church ultimately rejected chiliasm, belief in the resurrection of the body persisted and was incorporated into two of the Ecumenical Creeds.
It is unfortunate that Irenaeus seldom seriously engages with the alternative (orthodox) viewpoints. Indeed, he is rather disparaging of them, often lumping their views with those of the heretics.

One point I wish to emphasize is this: despite Irenaeus' claim to orthodoxy and continuity with the apostles, it is evident that the Church went off the rails very quickly once those foundational leaders had passed.

Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* is available online via the Internet Archive website:
https://archive.org/details/SaintIrenaeusAgainstHeresiesComplete/mode/2up.
Contributor: New Advent.
All the citations in the following sections are taken from Book 5 of *Against Heresies*.
I use the format: **Book . Chapter . Paragraph** when referencing this work.

In the following:
The italicized introduction to each point summarizes the citation that follows.
Then follows the citation itself (bold emphases added by me).
In some sections, I offer a response from a Scriptural and Preterist perspective.

1. *Against those who would doubt the actual resurrection of the body, Irenaeus affirms that it is much easier for God to reanimate someone than to have originally created him.*

   AH 5.3.2:

   > Those men, therefore, set aside the power of God, and do not consider what the word declares, when they dwell upon the infirmity of the flesh, but do not take into consideration the power of Him who raises it up from the dead. **For if He does not vivify what is mortal**, and does not bring back the corruptible to incorruption, **He is not a God of power**. But that He is powerful in all these respects, we ought to perceive from our origin, inasmuch as God, taking dust from the earth, formed man. And surely **it is much more difficult and incredible, from non-existent bones,** and nerves, and veins, and the rest of man's organization, to bring it about that all this should be, and **to make man an animated and rational creature, than** [it is] **to reintegrate again that which had been created and then afterwards decomposed** into earth …

2. *Irenaeus tries to undercut Paul's declaration in 1 Corinthians 15:50 ("flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God …") by relating this verse to similar Pauline declarations in Galatians 5:19-21 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. He claims that "flesh and blood" refers not to our physicality, but to those people who live fleshly, sensuous lives. He repeats this claim in AH 5.12.3*.

   AH 5.11.1:

   > [The apostle], foreseeing the wicked speeches of unbelievers, has particularized the works which he terms carnal; and he explains himself, lest any room for doubt be left to those who do dishonestly pervert his meaning, thus saying in the Epistle to the Galatians: Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are adulteries, fornications, uncleanness, luxuriousness, … and such like; of which I warn you, as also I have warned you, that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19, etc. **Thus does he point out to his hearers in a more explicit manner what it is [he means when he declares], Flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God. For they who do these things, since they do indeed walk after the flesh, have not the power of living unto God**.

… As, again, the same apostle testifies, saying **to the Corinthians, Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?** Do not err, he says: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, … shall inherit the kingdom of God. And these you indeed have been; but you have been washed, but you have been sanctified, but you have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

AH 5.11.2:

Since, therefore, in that passage he recounts those works of the flesh which are without the Spirit, which bring death [upon their doers], he exclaimed at the end of his Epistle, in accordance with what he had already declared, "And as we have borne the image of him who is of the earth, we shall also bear the image of Him who is from heaven. For this I say, brethren, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**." Now this which he says, "as we have borne the image of him who is of the earth," is analogous to what has been declared, "And such indeed ye were; but ye have been washed, but ye have been sanctified, but ye have been justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God." **When,** therefore, **did we bear the image of him who is of the earth? Doubtless it was when those actions spoken of as "works of the flesh" used to be wrought in us. And then, again, when [do we bear] the image of the heavenly? Doubtless when he says, "Ye have been washed,"** believing in the name of the Lord, **and receiving His Spirit**. Now we have washed away, not the substance of our body, nor the image of our [primary] formation, but the former vain conversation. In these members, therefore, in which we were going to destruction by working the works of corruption, in these very members are we made alive by working the works of the Spirit.

AH 5.12.3:

**For it is not one thing which dies and another which is quickened**, as neither is it one thing which is lost and another which is found, but the Lord came seeking for that same sheep which had been lost. What was it, then, which was dead? Undoubtedly it was the substance of the flesh; the same, too, which had lost the breath of life, and had become breathless and dead. This same, therefore, was what the Lord came to quicken, that as in Adam we do all die, as being of an animal nature, in Christ we may all live, as being spiritual, **not laying aside God's handiwork, but [laying aside] the lusts of the flesh, and receiving the Holy Spirit**; as the apostle says in the Epistle to the Colossians: Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth. And what these are he himself explains: Fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence; and covetousness, which is idolatry. Colossians 3:5. **The laying aside of these is what the apostle preaches; and he declares that those who do such things, as being merely flesh and blood, cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven**. For their soul, tending towards what is worse, and descending to earthly lusts, has become a partaker in the same designation which belongs to these [lusts, viz., earthly], which, when the apostle commands us to lay aside, he says in the same Epistle, Cast off the old man with his deeds. Colossians 3:9. …

Response:

1 Corinthians 15:50 concludes Paul's discussion on the nature of the resurrection body.

Yes, there is a reference to exclusion from God's heavenly kingdom in all three passages (as there is also in Ephesians 5:5), but an altogether different issue is being addressed in 1 Corinthians 15.

The issue here is the reality of resurrection and the nature of our heavenly bodies.

Irenaeus desperately tries to discredit Paul's clear declaration that mere physical bodies cannot inherit God's heavenly kingdom. He cleverly twists its meaning and misleads his readers.

3. *Jesus healed and made people whole because their physical bodies will be raised up to live forever.*

AH 5:12.6:

> For the Maker of all things, the Word of God, who did also from the beginning form man, when He found His handiwork impaired by wickedness, performed upon it all kinds of healing. At one time [He did so], as regards each separate member, as it is found in His own handiwork; and at another time **He did once for all restore man sound and whole in all points, preparing him perfect for Himself unto the resurrection**. For what was His object in healing [different] portions of the flesh, and restoring them to their original condition, if those parts which had been healed by Him were not in a position to obtain salvation? **For if it was [merely] a temporary benefit which He conferred, He granted nothing of importance to those who were the subjects of His healing**. Or how can they maintain that the flesh is incapable of receiving the life which flows from Him, when it received healing from Him? For life is brought about through healing, and incorruption through life. He, therefore, who confers healing, the same does also confer life; and He [who gives] life, also surrounds His own handiwork with incorruption.

4. *In Chapter 13 Irenaeus continues to insist that our physical bodies will be raised up.*
*After all, Jairus' daughter, the widow's son, and Lazarus all had their self-same bodies raised up.*
*Irenaeus defends his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:50 against the heretics who understood Paul to be saying that our fleshly bodies cannot enter heaven.*

AH 5.13.1:

> Let our opponents — that is, they who speak against their own salvation — inform us [as to this point]: The deceased daughter of the high priest; the widow's dead son, who was being carried out [to burial] near the gate [of the city]; Luke 7:12, and Lazarus, who had lain four days in the tomb, John 9:30 — **in what bodies did they rise again? In those same, no doubt, in which they had also died**. For if it were not in the very same, then certainly those same individuals who had died did not rise again. For [the Scripture] says, The Lord took the hand of the dead man, and said to him, Young man, I say unto you, Arise. And the dead man sat up, and He commanded that something should be given him to eat; and He delivered him to his mother. Again, He called Lazarus with a loud voice, saying, Lazarus, come forth; and he that was dead came forth bound with bandages, feet, and hands. This was symbolic of that man who had been bound in sins. And therefore the Lord said, Loose him, and let him depart. **As, therefore, those who were healed were**

**made whole in those members which had in times past been afflicted; and the dead rose in the identical bodies, their limbs and bodies receiving health**, and that life which was granted by the Lord, who prefigures eternal things by temporal, and shows that it is He who is Himself able to extend both healing and life to His handiwork, that His words concerning its [future] resurrection may also be believed; so also at the end, when the Lord utters His voice by the last trumpet, 1 Corinthians 15:52, the dead shall be raised, as He Himself declares: The hour shall come, in which all the dead which are in the tombs shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth; those that have done good to the resurrection of life, and those that have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. John 5:28.

AH 5.13.2:

Vain, therefore, and truly miserable, are those who do not choose to see what is so manifest and clear, but shun the light of truth, blinding themselves like the tragic Oedipus. … besides falling, [they] become subjects of ridicule; **so is it with respect to that [favorite] expression of the heretics: Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**; while taking two expressions of Paul's, without having perceived the apostle's meaning, or examined critically the force of the terms, but keeping fast hold of the mere expressions by themselves, they die in consequence of their influence (περι αὐτος), overturning as far as in them lies the entire dispensation of God.

AH 5.13.3:

**For thus they will allege that this passage refers to the flesh strictly so called, and not to fleshly works, as I have pointed out, so representing the apostle as contradicting himself**. For immediately following, in the same Epistle, he says conclusively, speaking thus in reference to the flesh: For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So, when this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying which is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your sting? O death, where is your victory? 1 Corinthians 15:53. Now these words shall be appropriately said at the time when this mortal and corruptible flesh, which is subject to death, which also is pressed down by a certain dominion of death, rising up into life, shall put on incorruption and immortality. For then, indeed, shall death be truly vanquished, when that flesh which is held down by it shall go forth from under its dominion. And again, to the Philippians he says: But our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus, **who shall transfigure the body of our humiliation conformable to the body of His glory**, even as He is able (*ita ut possit*) according to the working of His own power. Philippians 3:20, etc. What, then, is this body of humiliation which the Lord shall transfigure, [so as to be] conformed to the body of His glory? Plainly it is this body composed of flesh, which is indeed humbled when it falls into the earth. Now its transformation [takes place thus], that while it is mortal and corruptible, it becomes immortal and incorruptible, not after its own proper substance, but after the mighty working of the Lord, who is able to invest the mortal with immortality, and the corruptible with incorruption. And therefore he says, that mortality

may be swallowed up of life. He who has perfected us for this very thing is God, who also has given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 5:4. He uses these words most manifestly in reference to the flesh; for the soul is not mortal, neither is the spirit. Now, what is mortal shall be swallowed up of life, when the flesh is dead no longer, but remains living and incorruptible, hymning the praises of God, who has perfected us for this very thing. In order, therefore, that we may be perfected for this, aptly does he say to the Corinthians, Glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:20. Now God is He who gives rise to immortality.

AH 5.13.5:

In all these passages, therefore, as I have already said, **these men must either allege that the apostle expresses opinions contradicting himself, with respect to that statement, Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**; or, on the other hand, they will be forced to make perverse and crooked interpretations of all the passages, so as to overturn and alter the sense of the words. For what sensible thing can they say, if they endeavour to interpret otherwise this which he writes: For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality; 1 Corinthians 15:53, and, That the life of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh; 2 Corinthians 4:11, and all the other passages in which the apostle does manifestly and clearly declare the resurrection and incorruption of the flesh? And thus shall they be compelled to put a false interpretation upon passages such as these, they who do not choose to understand one correctly.

Response:

Yes, Jesus raised the dead back into their fleshly bodies.

He did so to display his power over death, and in anticipation of his own resurrection through which death would be utterly defeated.

One should note, however, that the saints of old, anticipating their heavenly inheritance, looked for a "better resurrection" — one that entailed far more than mere physical resuscitation (Heb 11:35).

It seems that these late second-century "heretics" were taking Paul's declaration (in 1 Corinthians 15:50) in the sense that he indeed intended — that is, literally. And Irenaeus did not like that.

Paul's declaration there bears no relationship with what he states in 1 Corinthians 6:10, Galatians 5:21, or Ephesians 5:5. 1 Corinthians 15 is concerned with the fact of resurrection and the nature of our new bodies.

Irenaeus shows his desperation here: he confuses similarity of language with identity of meaning.

With respect to Philippians 3:20: if Paul is referring here to individual bodily resurrection, all he states is that our new bodies will be like Jesus' present glorified body. And there is no guarantee that his heavenly body is still fleshly or physical. (I discuss in other articles on this website.)

5. *Moving ahead to Chapter 31 of Book 5:*
*Irenaeus denies that the saints enter heaven when they die. Some orthodox Christians agree with the heretics on this point — that the saints enter heaven directly when they die (5:31.1).*
*But just as Jesus himself went to where the souls of the dead resided and only later rose bodily, so also do the souls of the saints (5:31.2).*

AH 5:31.1:

> Since, again, **some who are reckoned among the orthodox go beyond the pre-arranged plan for the exaltation of the just**, and are ignorant of the methods by which they are disciplined beforehand for incorruption, **they thus entertain heretical opinions**. For the heretics, despising the handiwork of God, and not admitting the salvation of their flesh, while they also treat the promise of God contemptuously, and pass beyond God altogether in the sentiments they form, affirm that immediately upon their death they shall pass above the heavens and the Demiurge, and go to the Mother (Achamoth) or to that Father whom they have feigned. …

AH 5:31.2:

> If, then, the Lord observed the law of the dead, that He might become the first-begotten from the dead, and tarried until the third day in the lower parts of the earth; Ephesians 4:9, then afterwards rising in the flesh, so that He even showed the print of the nails to His disciples, He thus ascended to the Father; — [if all these things occurred, I say], how must these men not be put to confusion, who allege that the lower parts refer to this world of ours, but **that their inner man, leaving the body here, ascends into the super-celestial place?** For as the Lord went away in the midst of the shadow of death, where the souls of the dead were, yet afterwards arose in the body, and after the resurrection was taken up [into heaven], it is manifest that **the souls of His disciples also, upon whose account the Lord underwent these things, shall go away into the invisible place allotted to them by God, and there remain until the resurrection, awaiting that event; then receiving their bodies, and rising in their entirety, that is bodily, just as the Lord arose, they shall come thus into the presence of God**. For no disciple is above the Master, but every one that is perfect shall be as his Master. Luke 6:40. **As our Master, therefore, did not at once depart, taking flight [to heaven], but awaited the time of His resurrection prescribed by the Father**, which had been also shown forth through Jonas, and rising again after three days was taken up [to heaven]; **so ought we also to await the time of our resurrection prescribed by God** and foretold by the prophets, and so, rising, be taken up, as many as the Lord shall account worthy of this [privilege].

Response:

As late as Irenaeus' time, some orthodox Christians still believed in direct entry into heaven at death.
And he is clearly bothered by their beliefs.
He regards such Christians as being ignorant of the way they are prepared or disciplined for eternity.
(Presumably he means disciplined in the millennial kingdom.)
Irenaeus considers such a view to be heretical. The matter-denigrating Gnostics held the same view.

Note that Irenaeus has entirely missed the fact that Jesus has opened up heaven for us.

Yes, Jesus entered Hades-Paradise when he died (Lk 23:43), and only six weeks later did he ascend into heaven. But in the Apocalypse (ca. 64 AD), Jesus declares to John and to the churches that he holds the keys of Death and of Hades (Rev 1:18) — with the implication that he is about to unlock these realms and release their inmates. John sees these realms giving up their inmates in Revelation 20:11-15.

Our great privilege under the New Covenant is access to God in this life and direct entry into heaven when we die. The saints who died under the Old Covenant could not enter heaven because Jesus had not yet died. Effectively they were still in exile, excluded from "Jerusalem". They had to wait in Hades-Paradise pending the final Resurrection and Judgment which took place in (or by) AD 70. Only after Jesus had dealt with sin could they enter heaven — together with New Covenant believers (Hebrews 11:39-40).[1]

6. *The "first resurrection" of Revelation 20:4-6 is the resurrection of the just, wherein the saints rise to reign with Christ for 1000 years over the renewed earth.*
*In the same world that the saints suffered in, so must they receive their rewards. This (millennial) renewal of creation is described in Romans 8:19.*

AH 5.32.1:

> Inasmuch, therefore, as **the opinions of certain [orthodox persons] are derived from heretical discourses**, **they are both ignorant of God's dispensations, and of the mystery of the resurrection of the just, and of the [earthly] kingdom which is the commencement of incorruption, by means of which kingdom those who shall be worthy are accustomed gradually to partake of the divine nature** (*capere Deum*); and it is necessary to tell them respecting those things, that **it behooves the righteous first to receive the promise of the inheritance which God promised to the fathers, and to reign in it, when they rise again to behold God in this creation which is renovated, and that the judgment should take place afterwards. For it is just that in that very creation in which they toiled or were afflicted, being proved in every way by suffering, they should receive the reward of their suffering; and that in the creation in which they were slain because of their love to God, in that they should be revived again; and that in the creation in which they endured servitude, in that they should reign**. For God is rich in all things, and all things are His. It is fitting, therefore, that the creation itself, being restored to its primeval condition, should without restraint be under the dominion of the righteous; and the apostle has made this plain in the Epistle to the Romans, when he thus speaks: For the expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature has been subjected to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who has subjected the same in hope; since the creature itself shall also be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Romans 8:19, etc.

Response:

Irenaeus again acknowledges certain orthodox Christians who do not accept his understanding of the first resurrection (i.e., that of the saints only) or of the millennial kingdom.

Clearly, the chiliastic view was not held by all.

[1] Irenaeus, like virtually all other exegetes both ancient and modern, failed to deal with the imminence statements of Revelation. Christ's coming, and the Judgment of both the living the dead, were about to take place when John wrote.
See Revelation 1:1, 3; 2:25; 3:11; 11:18; 22:6-7, 12, 20. Cf. Matthew 16:27-28; 24:34; Hebrews 10:25, 37; 1 Peter 4:5, 7, 17.

7. *The promises made to Abraham, and the promises concerning the saints' reign, will be fulfilled in the millennial kingdom.*

AH 5:32.2:

> … If, then, God promised him [Abraham] the inheritance of the land, yet he did not receive it during all the time of his sojourn there, it must be, that together with his seed, that is, those who fear God and believe in Him, he shall receive it at the resurrection of the just. For his seed is the Church, …
>
> Now God made promise of the earth to Abraham and his seed; **yet neither Abraham nor his seed, that is, those who are justified by faith, do now receive any inheritance in it; but they shall receive it at the resurrection of the just**. For God is true and faithful; and on this account He said, Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Matthew 5:5.

Response:

Irenaeus regards the land promises given to the patriarchs as requiring fulfilment in the future millennium. But this is patently wrong: the promises to Abraham and Israel far transcended mere earthly real estate. The promises are fulfilled in the following ways:

- Abraham would receive the land promises through his descendants (Gen 15:18-21; Dt 1:8; 34:1-4). These promises were fulfilled literally (Jos 21:43-45; 1Kgs 4:21, 24).
- Abraham and other Old Testament saints looked beyond mere earthly real estate to a heavenly inheritance, to be entered into through resurrection (Heb 11:10, 16, 35).
- The promises anticipated the salvation-rest and heavenly inheritance that are ours in Christ (Heb 4:1-11).
- Christ, the true Seed of Abraham, inherits the whole world as his reward (Gal 3:16; Rom 4:13; Psalm 2). Through the gospel he wins the nations to himself, so that the blessings promised through Abrahm are realized (Gal 3:8-9, 14; cf. Gen 12:3; 22:18).
- Under the New Covenant, believers even now are citizens of the heavenly city (Gal 4:26-27; Php 3:20; Heb 12:22; Rev 22:14), so that we now enter heaven directly when we die.
- Believers, even now, reign with Christ from "Jerusalem" (Rev 5:10; 22:5; Dan 7:27).

8. *In chapter 33, Irenaeus offers further support for the notion of a millennial kingdom.*

AH 5.33.1:

> [In Matthew 26:27, Christ] promised to drink of the fruit of the vine with His disciples, thus indicating both these points: **the inheritance of the earth in which the new fruit of the vine is drunk, and the resurrection of His disciples in the flesh**. For the new flesh which rises again is the same which also received the new cup. And He cannot by any means be understood as drinking of the fruit of the vine when settled down with his [disciples] above in a super-celestial place; **nor, again, are they who drink it devoid of flesh, for to drink of that which flows from the vine pertains to flesh, and not spirit**.

9. *The saints receive their rewards, and enjoy Sabbath rest, in this millennial kingdom*.

AH 5.33.2:

> And for this reason the Lord declared, When you make a dinner or a supper, do not call your friends, ... lest they ask you in return, and so repay you. But call the lame, the blind, and the poor, and you shall be blessed, since they cannot recompense you, but a recompense shall be made you at **the resurrection of the just**. Luke 14:12-13. And again He says, Whosoever shall have left lands, or houses, or parents, ... because of Me, he shall receive in this world an hundred-fold, and in that to come he shall inherit eternal life. Matthew 19:29; Luke 18:29-30. **For what are the hundred-fold [rewards] in this world**, the entertainments given to the poor, and the suppers for which a return is made? **These are [to take place] in the times of the kingdom, that is, upon the seventh day**, which has been sanctified, in which God rested from all the works which He created, **which is the true Sabbath of the righteous**, which they shall not be engaged in any earthly occupation; **but shall have a table at hand prepared for them by God, supplying them with all sorts of dishes**.

10. *The blessings promised to Jacob (e.g., Genesis 27:27-29) also demand this millennial kingdom. Irenaeus goes on to cite a tradition from a book written by Papias about the millennial kingdom: The Apostle John supposedly passed on something that Jesus taught concerning productive grapevines and talking grapes in the kingdom*:

AH 5.33.3:

> The predicted blessing, therefore, belongs unquestionably to the times of the kingdom, when the righteous shall bear rule upon their rising from the dead; when also **the creation, having been renovated and set free, shall fructify with an abundance of all kinds of food**, from the dew of heaven, and from the fertility of the earth: **as the elders who saw John, the disciple of the Lord, related that they had heard from him how the Lord used to teach in regard to these times, and say: The days will come, in which vines shall grow, each having ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each true twig ten thousand shoots, and in each one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give five and twenty metretes of wine. And when any one of the saints shall lay hold of a cluster, another shall cry out, I am a better cluster, take me; bless the Lord through me**. In like manner [the Lord declared] that a grain of wheat would produce ten thousand ears, and that every ear should have ten thousand grains, and every grain would yield ten pounds (*quinque bilibres*) of clear, pure, fine flour; and that all other fruit-bearing trees, and seeds and grass, would produce in similar proportions (*secundum congruentiam iis consequentem*); and that all animals feeding [only] on the productions of the earth, should [in those days] become peaceful and harmonious among each other, and be in perfect subjection to man.

Response:

First, there is no separate resurrection of the just, distinct from the General Resurrection of all men.

In Revelation 20:11-15, all those in the intermediate state (i.e., in Death and Hades) are raised together to face judgment and enter into their final reward.

That all are raised together is also affirmed in John 5:28-29; Daniel 12:2.

The notion of separate resurrections and judgments for the good and bad directly contradicts the three Ecumenical Creeds — the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian — all of which declare that Jesus will return to judge both the living and the dead.

Second, Papias' fabulous story, that Irenaeus cites and clearly agrees with, comes not from the Lord via the apostle John, but from the Jewish apocalyptic work 2 Baruch.

11. *Irenaeus claims support from Papias for his interpretation of Isaiah 11:6-9: the conditions to be found in the millennial kingdom*.

AH 5.33.4:

> And these things are borne witness to in writing by Papias, the hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp, in his fourth book; for there were five books compiled by him. ... And again he [Papias] says, in recapitulation, Wolves and lambs shall then browse together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and the serpent [eat] earth as if it were bread; and they shall neither hurt nor annoy anything in my holy mountain, says the Lord. Isaiah 11:6, etc. I am quite aware that **some persons endeavour to refer these words to the case of savage men**, both of different nations and various habits, **who come to believe, and when they have believed, act in harmony with the righteous**. But although this is [true] now with regard to some men coming from various nations to the harmony of the faith, **nevertheless in the resurrection of the just [the words shall also apply] to those animals mentioned**. For God is rich in all things. And it is right that when the creation is restored, all the animals should obey and be in subjection to man, and revert to the food originally given by God (for they had been originally subjected in obedience to Adam), that is, the productions of the earth. But some other occasion, and not the present, is [to be sought] for showing that the lion shall [then] feed on straw. And this indicates the large size and rich quality of the fruits. For if that animal, the lion, feeds upon straw [at that period], of what a quality must the wheat itself be whose straw shall serve as suitable food for lions?

Response:

As with talking grapes (5.33.3), so also lions eating straw is the stuff of fairytales.

The Old Testament prophets spoke not of some still-future millennial kingdom, but of the first-century coming of Christ and the inauguration of his eternal kingdom (Acts 3:24; 1 Peter 1:10-12).

Irenaeus here opposes those of his contemporaries who interpret Isaiah 11:6-9 in a spiritual sense — who apply it to the newfound "harmony" enjoyed by diverse groups of people united in Christ.

But that is precisely how Paul understood Isaiah:

The apostle cites Isaiah 11:10 (LXX) in Romans 15:12 to support his assertion that Gentile salvation was God's intention all along (Rom 15:9-12). In context, Paul is urging Jews and Gentiles to accept each other — to show love and forbearance; to have a spirit of unity and harmony (Romans 14:1 – 15:13).

Isaiah 11 is a prophecy about Messiah's reign and kingdom (cf. 11:1-5), and 11:10 anticipates the Gentiles rallying to, and seeking out, this king.

Paul viewed these prophecies as being fulfilled in his day via the gospel, as the "knowledge of the LORD" (Isa 11:9) spread throughout the Roman world and beyond. Diverse groups were becoming united under the lordship of Christ. In church life, the natural hostility between Jews and Gentiles was being eroded as they worshipped God together (Rom 15:5-7; Eph 2:14-15).[2]

12. *In chapter 34, Irenaeus draws further support for his millennial kingdom from the prophecies of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Daniel.*

*Daniel's prophecy of the saints' reign (in chap. 7) relates to the millennial kingdom.*

5.34.2:

> That the whole creation shall, according to God's will, obtain a vast increase, that it may bring forth and sustain fruits such [as we have mentioned], Isaiah declares: And there shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every prominent hill, water running everywhere in that day, when many shall perish, when walls shall fall. And the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, seven times that of the day, when He shall heal the anguish of His people, and do away with the pain of His stroke. Isaiah 30:25-26. Now the pain of the stroke means that inflicted at the beginning upon disobedient man in Adam, that is, death; which [stroke] the Lord will heal when He raises us from the dead, and restores the inheritance of the fathers, as Isaiah again says: And you shall be confident in the Lord, and He will cause you to pass over the whole earth, and feed you with the inheritance of Jacob your father. Isaiah 58:14. This is what the Lord declared: Happy are those servants whom the Lord when He comes shall find watching. Verily I say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down [to meat], and will come forth and serve them. And if He shall come in the evening watch, and find them so, blessed are they, because He shall make them sit down, and minister to them; or if this be in the second, or it be in the third, blessed are they. Luke 12:37-38. **Again John also says the very same in the Apocalypse: Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Revelation 20:6**. Then, too, Isaiah has declared the time when these events shall occur; he says: And I said, Lord, how long? Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses be without men, and the earth be left a desert. And after these things the Lord shall remove us men far away (*longe nos faciet Deus homines*), and those who shall remain shall multiply upon the earth. Isaiah 6:11. Then Daniel also says this very thing: And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of those under the heaven, is given to the saints of the Most High God, whose kingdom is everlasting, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him. Daniel 7:27. **And lest the promise named should be understood as referring to this time, it was declared to the prophet: And come, and stand in your lot at the consummation of the days**. Daniel 12:13.

[2] The lasting peace to be enjoyed in the messianic age is a prominent theme in Isaiah: International relations will be transformed (2:1-4); foreign oppression will cease (9:1-7); former enemies (Egyptians, Assyrians, Israelites) will be reconciled as they worship God together (19:23-25); nothing will threaten God's people gathered to Jerusalem (Isa 35:9-10; 65:19-25). So also, Isaiah 11:6-9 pictures perfect harmony between natural enemies — predators and prey.

Response:

Irenaeus acknowledges that some of his contemporaries apply Daniel's prophecies of the saints' reign to the present gospel era.

And that view is correct: Daniel's "consummation" or "end of the days" (12:13) relates, among other things, to the coming of the messianic kingdom in the time of the fourth empire — see Daniel 2:44-45; 7:13-27.

And also to Israel's fate in the latter days (10:14): the nation's destruction (9:26b; 12:7).

Daniel is foretelling events to transpire in the first century AD, under the Roman empire — events which we see fulfilled in the book of Revelation.[3]

13. *In the millennial kingdom, Christ will reign over the world from Jerusalem*.

AH 5.34.4:

> Then again, speaking of Jerusalem, and of Him reigning there, Isaiah declares, Thus says the Lord, Happy is he who has seed in Zion, and servants in Jerusalem. Behold, a righteous king shall reign, and princes shall rule with judgment. Isaiah 31:9, Isaiah 32:1. And with regard to the foundation on which it shall be rebuilt, he says: Behold, I will lay in order for you a carbuncle stone, and sapphire for your foundations; and I will lay your ramparts with jasper, and your gates with crystal, and your wall with choice stones: and all your children shall be taught of God, and great shall be the peace of your children; and in righteousness shall you be built up. Isaiah 54:11-14. And yet again does he say the same thing: Behold, I make Jerusalem a rejoicing, and my people [a joy]; for the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. Also there shall not be there any immature [one], nor an old man who does not fulfil his time: for the youth shall be of a hundred years; and the sinner shall die a hundred years old, yet shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them themselves; and shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them themselves, and shall drink wine. And they shall not build, and others inhabit; neither shall they prepare the vineyard, and others eat. For as the days of the tree of life shall be the days of the people in you; for the works of their hands shall endure. Isaiah 65:18.

Response:

Irenaeus interprets Isaiah's prophecies far too literally.

14. *The blessings promised in Isaiah cannot be allegorized away by saying they speak of celestial blessings*.

AH 5.35.1:

> If, however, any shall endeavour to allegorize [prophecies] of this kind, they shall not be found consistent with themselves in all points, and shall be confuted by the teaching of the very expressions [in question]. ...

[3] See my article on this website: *The book of Revelation shows the (first-century) fulfillment of Daniel's prophecies*.

15. *Irenaeus initially describes Jerusalem during the millennial kingdom*.

*He goes on to describe the Final Resurrection and Judgment shown in Revelation 20:11-15, which in his scheme takes place at the end of the millennial kingdom.*

*Thus, the millennial kingdom (for Irenaeus) is sandwiched between the First Resurrection (of the saints) and the second, General Resurrection.*

*The Jerusalem of the millennial kingdom is an image of the final Jerusalem that descends to earth; in the former, the saints are disciplined and prepared for eternity.*

5.35.2:

> Now all these things being such as they are, cannot be understood in reference to super-celestial matters; for God, it is said, will show to the whole earth that is under heaven your glory. **But in the times of the kingdom**, the earth has been called again by Christ [to its pristine condition], **and Jerusalem** [has been] **rebuilt after the pattern of the Jerusalem above**, of which the prophet Isaiah says, Behold, I have depicted your walls upon my hands, and you are always in my sight. Isaiah 49:16. And the apostle, too, writing to the Galatians, says in like manner, But the Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. Galatians 4:26. ...
>
> [On the eternal state]:
>
> And in the Apocalypse John saw this new [Jerusalem] descending upon the new earth. Revelation 21:2. **For after the times of the kingdom**, he says, I saw a great white throne, and Him who sat upon it, from whose face the earth fled away, and the heavens; and there was no more place for them. Revelation 20:11. And he sets forth, too, **the things connected with the general resurrection and the judgment, mentioning the dead, great and small**. The sea, he says, gave up the dead which it had in it, and death and hell delivered up the dead that they contained; and the books were opened. Moreover, he says, the book of life was opened, and the dead were judged out of those things that were written in the books, according to their works; and death and hell were sent into the lake of fire, the second death. Revelation 20:12-14. Now this is what is called Gehenna, which the Lord styled eternal fire. Matthew 25:41. And if any one, it is said, was not found written in the book of life, he was sent into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:15. And after this, he says, I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and earth have passed away; also there was no more sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard, it is said, a great voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them; and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them as their God. And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, because the former things have passed away. Revelation 21:1-4. Isaiah also declares the very same: For there shall be a new heaven and a new earth; and there shall be no remembrance of the former, neither shall the heart think about them, but they shall find in it joy and exultation. Isaiah 65:17-18. ... To the same purpose did the Lord also declare, Heaven and earth shall pass away. Matthew 24:35. When these things, therefore, pass away above the earth, John, the Lord's disciple, says that the new Jerusalem above shall [then] descend, as a bride adorned for her husband; and that this is the tabernacle of God, in which God will dwell with men.

**Of this Jerusalem the former one is an image — that Jerusalem of the former earth in which the righteous are disciplined beforehand for incorruption and prepared for salvation**. ... For as it is God truly who raises up man, so also does man truly rise from the dead, and not allegorically, as I have shown repeatedly. **And as he rises actually, so also shall he be actually disciplined beforehand for incorruption, and shall go forwards and flourish in the times of the kingdom, in order that he may be capable of receiving the glory of the Father**. Then, when all things are made new, he shall truly dwell in the city of God. For it is said, He that sits on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. ... And this is the truth of the matter.

Response:

All of Isaiah's prophecies relate to the present gospel/kingdom/Church age.

The Church is the "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16).

The New Jerusalem — the bride of Christ (Rev 21:2, 9) — is a present reality.

See my article on this website: *The New Jerusalem — a Present Reality*.

16. *In Chapter 36 Irenaeus describes the eternal state and the rewards of the saints*. *Christians will receive different eternal rewards, depending on their worthiness.*

5.36.1:

... But when this [present] fashion [of things] passes away, and man has been renewed, and flourishes in an incorruptible state, so as to preclude the possibility of becoming old, [then] there shall be the new heaven and the new earth, in which the new man shall remain [continually], always holding fresh converse with God . And since (or, that) these things shall ever continue without end, Isaiah declares, For as the new heavens and the new earth which I do make, continue in my sight, says the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. Isaiah 66:22. And as the presbyters say, Then those who are deemed worthy of an abode in heaven shall go there, others shall enjoy the delights of paradise, and others shall possess the splendor of the city; for everywhere the Savior shall be seen according as they who see Him shall be worthy.

5.36.2:

[The presbyters say, moreover], that **there is this distinction between the habitation of those who produce an hundred-fold, and that of those who produce sixty-fold, and that of those who produce thirty-fold: for the first will be taken up into the heavens, the second will dwell in paradise, the last will inhabit the city; and that was on this account the Lord declared, In My Father's house are many mansions**. John 14:2. For all things belong to God, who supplies all with a suitable dwelling-place; even as His Word says, that a share is allotted to all by the Father, according as each person is or shall be worthy. And this is the couch on which the guests shall recline, having been invited to the wedding. Matthew 22:10. The presbyters, the disciples of the apostles, affirm that this is the gradation and arrangement of those who are saved, and that they advance through steps of this nature; also that they ascend through the Spirit to the Son, and through the Son to the Father, and that in due time the Son will yield up His work to the Father, even

as it is said by the apostle, For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. 1 Corinthians 15:25-26. For in the times of the kingdom, the righteous man who is upon the earth shall then forget to die. But when He says, All things shall be subdued unto Him, it is manifest that He is excepted who did put all things under Him. And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all. 1 Corinthians 15:27-28.

AH 5.36.3:

**John**, therefore, **did distinctly foresee the first resurrection of the just**, Luke 14:14, and the inheritance in the kingdom of the earth; and **what the prophets have prophesied concerning it harmonize [with his vision]**. For the Lord also taught these things, when He promised that He would have the mixed cup new with His disciples in the kingdom. The apostle, too, has confessed that the creation shall be free from the bondage of corruption, [so as to pass] into the liberty of the sons of God. Romans 8:21. And in all these things, and by them all, the same God the Father is manifested, who fashioned man, and gave promise of the inheritance of the earth to the fathers, who brought it (the creature) forth [from bondage] at the resurrection of the just, and fulfils the promises for the kingdom of His Son; subsequently bestowing in a paternal manner those things which neither the eye has seen, nor the ear has heard, nor has [thought concerning them] arisen within the heart of man, 1 Corinthians 2:9; Isaiah 64:4. For there is the one Son, who accomplished His Father's will; and one human race also in which the mysteries of God are wrought, which the angels desire to look into; 1 Peter 1:12, and they are not able to search out the wisdom of God, by means of which His handiwork, confirmed and incorporated with His Son, is brought to perfection; that His offspring, the First-begotten Word, should descend to the creature (*facturam*), that is, to what had been molded (*plasma*), and that it should be contained by Him; and, on the other hand, the creature should contain the Word, and ascend to Him, passing beyond the angels, and be made after the image and likeness of God.

Response:

There is no separate resurrection of the just, distinct from the General Resurrection of all men. See my response to AH 5.33.3, on page 11.

## Assessment of Irenaeus' views

Here is a brief recap of Irenaeus' views:

- 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.

Irenaeus' commitment to an earthly millennium, in which the resurrected saints reign, necessitates a physical resurrection. Similar to contemporary premillennialism, Irenaeus interprets most Old Testament prophecies as applying, not to Christ's present reign and kingdom, but to his (supposed) future reign on earth.
This is the cardinal error of Irenaeus.
A second reason he advocates physical resurrection is his opposition to the anti-physical Gnostics of his day.

Answering Irenaeus:

1. There is no separate resurrection of the just, distinct from the General Resurrection of all men.
   That all are raised together is also affirmed in John 5:28-29; Daniel 12:2.
   In Revelation 20:11-15, all those in the intermediate state (i.e., in Death and Hades) are raised together to face judgment and enter into their final reward.
   The notion of separate resurrections and judgments for the good and bad directly contradicts the three Ecumenical Creeds — the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian — all of which declare that Jesus will return to judge both the living and the dead.
2. The prophets of old spoke of the first-century coming of Christ and his kingdom, not of an as-yet-future millennium (Acts 3:24; 1 Peter 1:10-12).
3. The millennial reign of the martyrs involves their coming to life as SOULS in Paradise (Rev 20:4).
   In other words, their "first resurrection" (Rev 20:5) does not entail physical resurrection at all:
   The martyrs in Paradise are spirits or souls who are awaiting their final embodiment.
   (So too were the martyrs of Revelation 6:9-11 who cry out to God for vindication.)
4. Irenaeus views the land promises given to the patriarchs as requiring fulfilment in the future millennium (5.32.2). He failed to understand that these promises anticipated the salvation-rest and heavenly inheritance that are ours in Christ (Heb 4:1-11).
   Abraham and the saints of old recognized that God's promises related to far more than mere earthly real estate. They anticipated a heavenly inheritance (Heb 11:10, 16). And they knew that entry into the heavenly city required a resurrection far "better" than mere physical resuscitation (Heb 11:35).
   Today, under the New Covenant, we are citizens of the heavenly city (Gal 4:26-27; Php 3:20; Heb 12:22; Rev 22:14), and we now enter heaven directly when we die.

5. In 5.33.4 (point 11 above), Irenaeus opposes those of his contemporaries who interpret Isaiah 11:6-9 in a spiritual sense — to the newfound unity enjoyed by diverse groups of people united in Christ.
   But this is precisely how Paul understood Isaiah.
   For Isaiah 11:10 (LXX) is cited by the apostle in Romans 15:12 to support his assertion that Gentile salvation was God's intention all along (Rom 15:9-12). In context, Paul is urging Jews and Gentiles to accept each other — to show love and forbearance; to have a spirit of unity and harmony (Romans 14:1 – 15:13).
   Isaiah 11 is a prophecy about Messiah's reign and kingdom (cf. 11:1-5), and 11:10 anticipates the Gentiles rallying to, and seeking out, this king.
   Paul viewed these prophecies as being fulfilled in his day via the gospel, as the "knowledge of the LORD" (Isa 11:9) spread throughout the Roman world and beyond. Diverse groups were becoming united under the lordship of Christ. In church life, the natural hostility between Jews and Gentiles was being eroded as they worshipped God together (Rom 15:5-7; Eph 2:14-15).[4]

**Alternative second-century viewpoints mentioned (but rejected) by Irenaeus**

1. AH 5.31.1:
   "Since, again, **some who are reckoned among the orthodox go beyond the pre-arranged plan for the exaltation of the just**, and are ignorant of the methods by which they are disciplined beforehand for incorruption, **they thus entertain heretical opinions**."
   Certain orthodox Christians believed (as did the heretics) that they would enter heaven directly at death. And therefore that the fleshly body is not raised up.

2. AH 5.32.1:
   "Inasmuch, therefore, as **the opinions of certain [orthodox persons] are derived from heretical discourses**, they are both ignorant of God's dispensations, and of the mystery of the resurrection of the just, and of the [earthly] kingdom which is the commencement of incorruption, ..."
   Certain orthodox Christians agreed with (some of) the heretics in claiming that there is no future millennial kingdom where the resurrected saints reign over the renewed earth.
   (Some heretical groups did believe in a future earthly kingdom.)

3. AH 5.33.4:
   "And again he [Papias] says, in recapitulation, Wolves and lambs shall then browse together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and the serpent [eat] earth as if it were bread; and they shall neither hurt nor annoy anything in my holy mountain, says the Lord. Isaiah 11:6, etc. I am quite aware that **some persons endeavour to refer these words to the case of savage men**, both of different nations and various habits, **who come to believe, and when they have believed, act in harmony with the righteous**. But although this is [true] now with regard to some men coming from various nations to the harmony of the faith, nevertheless in the resurrection of the just [the words shall also apply] to those animals mentioned."
   Some of Irenaeus' contemporaries correctly understood the promise of Isaiah 11:6-9 as referring to the present gospel/church/kingdom age.

[4] The lasting peace to be enjoyed in the messianic age is a prominent theme in Isaiah: International relations will be transformed (2:1-4); foreign oppression will cease (9:1-7); former enemies (Egyptians, Assyrians, Israelites) will be reconciled as they worship God together (19:23-25); nothing will threaten God's people gathered to Jerusalem (Isa 35:9-10; 65:19-25). So also, Isaiah 11:6-9 pictures perfect harmony between natural enemies — predators and prey.

4. AH 5.34.2:

   "**And lest the promise named** [of the saints' reign in Daniel 7:27] **should be understood as referring to this time**, ..."

   Some of Irenaeus' contemporaries correctly understood Daniel's promise as relating to the present gospel / church / kingdom age.

It is indeed tragic that Irenaeus rejected the sensible views of his contemporaries, labelling them "heretical".
Lots of Christian leaders followed his errors over the next few centuries.
Even today, scholars blindly follow Irenaeus — for example, in his assertion of a Domitianic (late-date) composition of Revelation.

**Eusebius' Critique of the Millennial Views of Papias**

Papias (ca. 60-130 AD) was bishop of Hierapolis in the province of Asia.
Eusebius (ca. 260-340 AD), bishop of Caesarea, wrote *The Ecclesiastical History* — a history of the Church from the time of the Apostles to his own era.

In the citation below we have one bishop critiquing the views of a former bishop.
As we have seen, Papias and Irenaeus had bizarre views, to put it mildly.
What Eusebius says is quite unkind — hopefully he is referring to Papias' beliefs rather than his person.
But Eusebius is clearly concerned at the widespread influence Papias' had on later Church leaders.
For the views of Papias and Irenaeus on the millennium, see AH 5.33.3 and 5.33.4:

Here is Eusebius' critique of Papias:

> The same writer [i.e., Papias] adduces other accounts, as though they came to him from unwritten tradition, and some strange parables and teachings of the Savior, and some other more mythical accounts. Among them he says that there will be a millennium after the resurrection of the dead, when the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this earth. I suppose that he got these notions by a perverse reading of the apostolic accounts, not realizing that they had spoken mystically and symbolically. For he was a man of very little intelligence, as is clear from his books. But **he is responsible for the fact that so many Christian writers after him held the same opinion, relying on his antiquity, for instance Irenaeus** and whoever else appears to have held the same views.[5]

"Relying on his antiquity" no doubt refers to Papias' proximity in time to the apostles.
Irenaeus often appeals to the continuity of teaching passed on by the succession of Church leaders.
Thus, according to Irenaeus, Papias was "the hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp" (AH 5.33.4).
And Polycarp was taught by the apostles, and by them was ordained bishop of Smyrna (AH 3.3.4).
Claims such as these should probably be taken *cum grano salis*.
In any case, what is painfully clear is that Church leaders went horribly astray immediately upon the passing of the apostles.

[5] Source: Eusebius' *The Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3; Chapter 39 (sections 11-13 in the Greek text).
Translated from the Greek by Kirsopp Lake and J.E.L. Oulton (New York, 1926, 1932).
Via the Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/eusebius-ecclesiastical-history-loeb/page/n347/mode/2up?q=millennium.
(Uploaded by Robert Bedrosian.)

## The Church's ultimate repudiation of Chiliasm

Adherence to chiliasm / premillennialism was widespread but far from universal in the early centuries.
What follows is an example of differences of opinion in the 3rd century:
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.[6]

The following is from an online article titled: *Why the Early Church Finally Rejected Premillennialism*.
Author: Charles E. Hill.

> It may seem curious to us today, but the ancient Christian chiliasts defended a view of the afterlife in which the souls of the righteous did not go immediately to God's presence in heaven at the time of death, but went instead to a subterranean Hades. Here souls, in refreshment and joyful contemplation, waited for the resurrection and the earthly kingdom before they could enter the presence of God. ... This view of the afterlife on the part of the chiliasts Papias, Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Victorinus, and Lactantius was connected directly to their chiliasm. We know this both from the coexistence of these beliefs in Jewish sources (*2 Baruch, 4 Ezra,* Ps. Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, and some rabbinic traditions) and from the internal connection between the doctrines drawn by Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 5:31.1; 32.1).[7]

According to Hill, the view of the early Fathers — their belief that the saints at death entered Hades where they awaited their resurrection to an earthly (millennial) kingdom — is derived from Jewish belief.
This is true, but it is hardly surprising really, for (a) the Jews have always longed for a physical and political kingdom, like that under David and Solomon, and (b) under the Old Covenant and up to AD 70 the saints did indeed enter the intermediate abode of Hades (aka Paradise/Abraham's bosom) when they died.
There they awaited final resurrection and judgment.
We see this, for example with the martyrs in Revelation 6:9-11:
They reside as SOULS under the altar (in Paradise) awaiting vindication and release and final embodiment.
The same is true of the millennial reign of the martyrs in Revelation 20:4-6.
However, what Revelation 20:11-15 shows is the termination of Death and Hades. These intermediate abodes are no more. Final judgment and resurrection took place in or around AD 70. We today have direct entry into heaven when we die. No more waiting in Paradise. Why? Because Jesus, having dealt with our sins, has restored access to the Father. He has opened up heaven for us! This is the great blessing of the New Covenant which the Old Testament saints could only anticipate. See Hebrews 11:10, 16, 35, 39-40.

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[6] 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.
[7] Charles E. Hill. *Why the Early Church Finally Rejected Premillennialism*. Via the Modern Reformation website: https://www.modernreformation.org/resources/articles/why-the-early-church-finally-rejected-premillennialism.

## Appendix: Justin Martyr on the Resurrection and Millennial Kingdom

Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165 AD) wrote his *Dialogue with Trypho* to show that Christianity is the true religion, and to prove from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah.
Trypho is perhaps a fictional character, but the arguments presented probably came from real discussions.
The setting is presented as a chance encounter between Justin and Trypho in Ephesus:
Justin had recently converted to Christianity from a background in philosophy. And Trypho had just fled the troubles in Judea — the failed attempt by Bar Kokhba to wrest Jerusalem back from the Romans (132-135 AD).
Trypho gives a summary of the many Jewish difficulties in accepting Christianity (chap. 10),
Discussion ensues about the Law, about Jesus as the promised Messiah, his pre-existence and divine nature, his life on earth, and so forth.
Justin then discusses certain beliefs held by Christians: The Millennium is dealt with in chapters 80 and 81.
The following citations from *Dialogue* are from the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (1885), Volume 1, by Philip Schaff.

**Chapter 80**.
**The opinion of Justin with regard to the reign of a thousand years. Several Catholics reject it**.

And Trypho to this replied, "I remarked to you sir, that you are very anxious to be safe in all respects, since you cling to the Scriptures. But tell me, **do you really admit that this place, Jerusalem, shall be rebuilt; and do you expect your people to be gathered together, and made joyful with Christ and the patriarchs, and the prophets, both the men of our nation, and other proselytes who joined them before your Christ came**? or have you given way, and admitted this in order to have the appearance of worsting us in the controversies?"

Then I answered, "I am not so miserable a fellow, Trypho, as to say one thing and think another. I admitted to you formerly, that **I and many others are of this opinion**, and [believe] that such will take place, as you assuredly are aware; but, on the other hand, I signified to you that **many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise**. Moreover, I pointed out to you that some who are called Christians, but are godless, impious heretics, teach doctrines that are in every way blasphemous, atheistical, and foolish. But that you may know that I do not say this before you alone, I shall draw up a statement, so far as I can, of all the arguments which have passed between us; in which I shall record myself as admitting the very same things which I admit to you. For I choose to follow not men or men's doctrines, but God and the doctrines [delivered] by Him. For if you have fallen in with **some who are called Christians**, but who do not admit this [truth], and venture to blaspheme the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; **who say there is no resurrection of the dead, and that their souls, when they die, are taken to heaven**; do not imagine that they are Christians, even as one, if he would rightly consider it, would not admit that the Sadducees, or similar sects of Genistae, Meristae, Galileans, Hellenists, Pharisees, Baptists, are Jews (do not hear me impatiently when I tell you what I think), but are [only] called Jews and children of Abraham, worshipping God with the lips, as God Himself declared, but the heart was far from Him. **But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, [as] the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare**.

**Chapter 81. He endeavours to prove this opinion from Isaiah and the Apocalypse**.

"For Isaiah spake thus concerning this space of a thousand years:
'For there shall be the new heaven and the new earth, and the former shall not be remembered, or come into their heart; but they shall find joy and gladness in it, which things I create. For, Behold, I make Jerusalem a rejoicing, and My people a joy; and I shall rejoice over Jerusalem, and be glad over My people. And the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, or the voice of crying. And there shall be no more there a person of immature years, or an old man who shall not fulfil his days. For the young man shall be an hundred years old; but the sinner who dies an hundred years old, he shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and shall themselves inhabit them; and they shall plant vines, and shall themselves eat the produce of them, and drink the wine. They shall not build, and others inhabit; they shall not plant, and others eat. For according to the days of the tree of life shall be the days of my people; the works of their toil shall abound. Mine elect shall not toil fruitlessly, or beget children to be cursed; for they shall be a seed righteous and blessed by the Lord, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call I will hear; while they are still speaking, I shall say, What is it? Then shall the wolves and the lambs feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent [shall eat] earth as bread. They shall not hurt or maltreat each other on the holy mountain, saith the Lord.' Now we have understood that the expression used among these words, 'According to the days of the tree [of life] shall be the days of my people; the works of their toil shall abound' obscurely predicts a thousand years. **For as Adam was told that in the day he ate of the tree he would die, we know that he did not complete a thousand years**. We have perceived, moreover, that the expression, '**The day of the Lord is as a thousand years**,' is connected with this subject. And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that **those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place**. Just as our Lord also said, 'They shall neither marry nor be given in marriage, but shall be equal to the angels, the children of the God of the resurrection.'[8]

[Emphasis added.]

**Evaluation**

Justin Martyr openly derived his views about the millennial kingdom from the Old Testament — not from the Apocalypse. In chapters 80 and 81 of *Dialogue* 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.

[8] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*. From the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 1, by Philip Schaff. Originally published in 1885. Taken from the HolyBooks.com website: https://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/Ante-Nicene-Fathers-Vol-1.pdf. Pages 385-387. Accessed 31-July-2025. Originally from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001 Reprint).

Justin goes on to assure Trypho that all "right-minded" Christians (such as himself) believe in the resurrection, wherein the patriarchs and believing Jews of the Old Covenant and all Christians will be raised up to inhabit Jerusalem for 1000 years. However, many true Christians think otherwise.
But note this crucial point:
Justin warns Trypho about some in his day who claim to be Christians but "who say there is no resurrection of the dead, and [who affirm] that their souls, when they die, are taken to heaven."

This is an astonishing admission indeed! What precisely did these "heretics" teach?
Did they go so far as to teach that the soul alone is immortal — that heavenly life involves the disembodied soul only, without a new body? A sort of Gnostic denial of Paul's teaching about the (heavenly) body we receive?
Opposition to such a Gnostic view would be okay, for it is clear that we do receive a new body of some sort.
But Justin seems to be principally upset by two things, and he is himself wrong on both counts:
First, he denies the Bible's clear teaching that we do indeed enter heaven directly at death.
Justin (like Irenaeus and other chiliasts) believed that Christians who die enter Hades where they rest and wait for the (still) future resurrection. No different to the situation faced by the Old Testament saints!
Justin (and Irenaeus) **denied that Jesus has opened heaven for us** — a most serious error.
Second, Justin seems upset that these people deny the sort of resurrection he believed in — that of the flesh.
Physical bodies are, of course, necessary to inhabit the earthly millennial kingdom that Justin anticipated.
Never mind the fact that our inheritance is heavenly, not earthly (1Pet 1:4; Heb 11:16; 12:22; Php 3:20).[9]

Internet Archive has an earlier edition of *Dialogue with Trypho*, along with some commentary.[10]
Comments on chapter 80 (page 170):

> *some so-called Christians*. — Justin distinguishes between Christian and Jewish heretics. Under the first head he opposes (a) such Gnostics as Marcion, who distinguished between the cruel God of the Jews and the supreme and loving Father; (b) **those who denied the resurrection of the flesh**, attributing immortality to the soul alone. **Justin thought that the soul of a believer had to wait till the resurrection of the body before it entered heaven**. **Irenaeus agrees with Justin**.
>
> *as Jews*. — Justin enumerates seven heretical Jewish sects which orthodox Jews would not acknowledge. …
>
> The remaining two are the well-known Sadducees and Pharisees, but it is uncomprehensible how Justin can have denied the orthodoxy of the latter, when almost all the post-Biblical Jewish literature that has come down to us represents their teaching.

Note that the charge Justin leveled at these "heretics" is the very one leveled by opponents of preterism.
Because we affirm that the Resurrection is a one-off past event, and because we believe that we (now) enter heaven directly when we die, being immediately clothed with our new bodies, we supposedly do not believe in the Resurrection at all. Bizarre logic!
Is not Justin's statement a tacit admission that there were still some (full) preterists around in his day?
It seems so! And they were regarded as heretics.
We see here, too, the source of Justin's chiliastic errors: his interpreting the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel and other prophets far too literally.

[9] Justin's claim that our physical bodies are raised is probably the earliest explicit reference to this doctrine.
[10] Justin Martyr, *The Dialogue with Trypho*. Translation, Introduction, and Notes by A. Lukyn Williams, D.D.
Published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 1930.
Via the Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/SPCKJustinMartyr/page/n215/mode/2up. Accessed 31-July-2025.