

THE RESURRECTION OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Jesus said all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come out. Those who have done good will rise to live, those who have done evil will rise to condemnation (John 5:28-29). Jesus did not specify the time difference; believers are resurrected before the Millennium and unbelievers come to life after the Millennium (Rev 20:5). There is ample evidence to support two resurrections. The first resurrection is of the *righteous* (Luke 14:14), *those who are considered worthy* of taking part in it (Luke 20:35-36), *those who belong to Christ* (1 Cor 15:23), and *those who don't worship the beast* (Rev 20:5).

Those who are resurrected before the Millennium receive rewards for what they have done. Their sins are forgiven; they are not condemned in any way. The wicked dead who are not resurrected at Jesus' return and those who die at that time are herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon (Hades). They will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days. Meanwhile, the Messiah will reign from Mount Zion before his elders in glory (Isa 24:21-23).

After a thousand years, when the Earth is dissolved, the sea gives up its dead, and Death and Hades give up their dead and the wicked are judged according to what they have done. All whose names are not in the Book of Life are consigned to hell. They are not resurrected in bodily form. The resurrection body is a glorified supernatural body, appropriate for the righteous who will rule the renewed Earth. Satan and his demons are also damned and excluded from God's paradise.

Although the physical creation is restored to its original paradisaical condition, it is only redeemed humanity who are resurrected. The creation is liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (Rom 8:21) but irrational creatures are not glorified as redeemed humanity is. It is the survival

of their species that is important, not the resurrection of the individual. On judgment day, Earth and sky flee from God's presence without leaving a trace. What has been made and is transitory will be removed; only what is eternal will remain (Heb 12:27). Then the Messiah will surrender his kingship to God the Father. Paul calls it the end, it is the end of the created universe as we know it (1 Cor 15:24).

The righteous will be resurrected on the last day of this age (John 6:39) when the Messiah returns (Matt 24:30-31, 1 Thess 4:14-17, Rev 1:7, 14.14-16) on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

In Adam, as his descendants, all mankind dies because his sin affects us all. In Christ, in union with him, all are made alive by resurrection because he died for us on the cross. He is the one who raises the dead (John 11:25). Jesus was the first person to be resurrected, then at his coming those who have died 'in Christ' (1 Cor 15:23), and finally, the rest of the dead come alive after the millennium (Rev 20:5).

After the saints are resurrected, the Marriage Feast of the Lamb is celebrated, the union of Christ and his community (Rev 19:6-9). A great multitude in heaven praises God for the Messiah's victory and marriage; both the beginning of his reign and the union of the king and his monarchy. The saints will reign with Christ for 1000 years and they will live in New Jerusalem, the Holy City prepared for the bride and her husband. This is their dwelling place and God himself will be with them and be their God (Rev 21:2-4). The Holy City *comes down* out of heaven from God, so the saints will not live in the traditional heaven having no fixed location, they will be in the heavenly realm near Earth. Its glory will be seen in the sky above Jerusalem during the Millennium (Isa 60:1-3, 19-20). The two Jerusalems may be envisaged as overlapping each other in different realms.

When a believer dies, he is away from the body and home with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8). Now at the resurrection, the Lord brings the souls of the righteous dead with him (1 Thess 4.4) back to the Earth. Clothed with their resurrection bodies, they will reign on Earth (Rev 5:10). Jesus said we should not be afraid of those who kill the body but

cannot kill the soul. He has prepared a kingdom for us since the creation of the world (Matt 25:34).

It is God who raises the dead, but each member of the Trinity has a role. Jesus said he is the resurrection and the life. He it is who comes to raise the dead bodies of believers (John 11:25-26). As he is the Creator (John 1:3-4, 1 Cor 8:6, Col 1:16, Heb 1:2), resurrecting the body will not be difficult for him. He will do it instantaneously, in the twinkling of an eye. The dead saints will be raised, and the living saints will be changed (1 Cor 15:51-52). Paul spoke of the Spirit's role in the resurrection of the living when he said that if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in us, he will also give life to our mortal bodies, through his Spirit who lives in us (Rom 8:11).

Jesus will send out his angels (Matt 13:41, 16:27, 24:31) with a loud trumpet call in all directions to gather the elect, both dead and alive. They will be transformed instantaneously and rise to meet the Lord in the air, the dead saints first and then the living. The angels' role is not explained. Presumably, they are guides leading the resurrected to the Lord.

Resurrected people are not married (Luke 20:34-36), but there will be continuity between the past and the future and a continuation of our identities. The Bible doesn't focus on relationships in heaven, but Paul's hope in seeing the Thessalonians is an example: "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of the Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? (! Thess 2:19). After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples during 40 days and this gives us a basis to think about our mode of existence during the Millennium. He had a body that his disciples recognized, but at times people doubted (Matt 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20-21). He talked to them, ate with them, and they were invited to touch him. He suddenly appeared to them in a locked room, and he prepared a meal for them by the lake, producing fire and bread and fish from nowhere. They knew him and he knew them. On the other hand, in several appearances, his disciples didn't immediately recognize him. His recognition seemed to be under his control. We can conclude that he had a physical, recognizable body with supernatural powers of appearing and disappearing to another spacetime dimension.

At the resurrection, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:28) descends to Earth as New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2). The spirits of the righteous dead who inhabit the city receive their resurrection bodies and are joined by the living saints as they are transformed and raptured to meet the Lord in the air. The Holy City is the dwelling place of the saints who are now fully united to Christ in body, soul, and spirit. It doesn't need the light of the sun or the moon; it is not part of the physical creation. Its light comes from the glory of God and the Lamb. The nations walk by its light and the kings of the Earth bring their splendor to it (Rev 21:26). There is a close correspondence between Jerusalem and New Jerusalem, so these statements should be interpreted according to Isaiah's prophecies. Isaiah said that in the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple would be established as the highest of mountains. It will be raised above the hills and all nations will stream to it. Many groups will go to the temple of the God of Jacob so that they might learn his ways and walk in his paths (Isa 2:2-3). And to Jerusalem, Isaiah said:

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of *the Lord has risen upon you*. See, darkness covers the Earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you, and *his glory appears over you*. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn (Isa 60:1-30).

He is saying that the Lord's glory will be visible over Jerusalem, and the nations will come to the light and kings will bring their gifts to it (Rev 21:24-27).

The Lord's glory and throne are in New Jerusalem which will, in some intimate way connect Jerusalem, which will be surrounded by its light. The coming of the Lord will produce a significant celestial change over Jerusalem, which will remain for the duration of the Millennium. Isaiah prophesied to Israel about a new sky as well as a new heaven.

The Trumpet Call of God

An OT reference to a great trumpet call in an end-time context refers to the resurrection of Israel's righteous dead and the regathering of Israelis living at that time.

Isa 25:7-8a, 26:19-21, 27:12-13 “On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. ... But your dead will live Lord; their bodies will rise – let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy – your dew is like the dew of the morning; the Earth will give birth to her dead. ... The Earth will disclose the blood shed on it; the Earth will conceal its slain no longer. ... In that day the Lord will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, Israel, will be gathered up one by one. And *in that day a great trumpet will sound*. Those who are perishing in Assyria and those who are exiled in Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.”

Jesus said, when the Son of Man comes on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, he will send his angels with *a loud trumpet call* and they will gather the elect from all directions. That this refers to the resurrection of the righteous is confirmed by Paul. “*For the trumpet will sound*, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (1 Cor 15:52). And, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice the archangel and *with the trumpet call of God*, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess 4:16). John says, “In the days *when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet*, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets” (Rev 10:7). And, “*The seventh angel sounded his trumpet*, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15).

When Ezekiel saw the Lord coming from the East, his voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory. It will be a noisy and brilliant affair with trumpets blowing, the voice of the Lord, and the command of the archangel, calling forth the vast

numbers of the righteous from their graves, and also the living saints, who will all be transformed into immortal, supernatural beings.

The Precise Meaning of Resurrection

Resurrection comes from the Greek word to rise or stand up and when applied to the dead, it means that they are coming back to life, usually referring to the righteous being clothed with immortal bodies. Lazarus was raised from the dead, but it is not said that he was resurrected. The wicked will be raised at the last judgment, but it is not said that they will have immortal bodies; they only rise to be condemned (John 5:29). Resurrection for the saints is their glorification. Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee that his followers will be resurrected to the same supernatural order of being as he. They are united to Christ and when they see him, they will be as he is.

The last three chapters of Revelation are occupied with what happens in the world after Christ's return: Satan is bound, believers are resurrected and reign with Christ during the Millennium, while the rest of the dead rise from Hades on judgment day and are judged according to what they have done.

The Messiah will raise the righteous dead on the last day of this age when he returns on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. All mankind dies because of the sin of Adam. All in Christ will be made alive because of Christ's victory (1Cor 15:22). Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." In other words, he is the one who raises the dead and gives them eternal life (John 11:25).

How Many Resurrections are There?

As far as we have been told, resurrections occur on only three occasions. Jesus was the first person to be resurrected after the crucifixion. At his coming those who belong to him will be resurrected. Finally, after the millennium, the rest of the dead will

come to life, including all Israel who are converted at the beginning of the Millennium, and other millennial converts.

Jesus did not say there would be two resurrections in John 5:28-29, but there is ample evidence to support the idea. “Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection!” (Rev 20:6). Jesus told some people that they would be repaid at *the resurrection of the righteous* (Luke 14:14). He also spoke of those who will be considered worthy of taking part in *the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead* (Luke 20:35–36). Only those who are ‘in Christ’ are resurrected at his return (1 Cor 15:23), and only those who do not worship the Antichrist or receive his mark on their foreheads reign with Christ (Rev 20:4-5).

Those resurrected before the Millennium receive rewards for what they have done that are to be exercised during the Millennium. See the parable about the kingdom of God in Matthew 25:21. “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness.” By contrast, the wicked dead are raised a thousand years later (Rev 20:5).

Resurrection implies that the body comes back to life in a supernatural form. The spirit or soul does not die, so what does that mean for the wicked? Glorified, supernatural, immortal bodies are a nice reward for the righteous, but the unrighteous cannot expect bodies like that. Their resurrection, or awakening, is to shame and everlasting contempt (Dan 12:2). Their destiny is outside, in the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels (Matt 25:41). They are unable to enjoy life in New Jerusalem and the renewed creation.

The Time of the Resurrection

“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we

who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thess 4:16-17).

Could anything be clearer? Paul is very careful to state that the resurrection of the dead precedes the rapture of the living, and yet, it is the same event. We all meet the Lord in the clouds in the sky. There is no mention of being taken to heaven. This resurrection, described as the first resurrection (Rev 20:4-6), includes those who were beheaded by the beast, evidence enough that it takes place at Jesus’ coming *after* the Antichrist wages war on the Church. Therefore, there is no pre-tribulation resurrection or rapture. It is false interpretation!

Paul confirms this when he teaches the Thessalonians about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him. He says, “That day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed” (2 Thess 2:1, 3). The rebellion may be what is referred to in Daniel 8. “Because of *rebellion*, the Lord’s people and the daily sacrifice were given over to it (the horn) (Dan 8:12). “The *rebellion* that causes desolation” (Dan 8:13). “In the latter part of their reign (in the time of wrath at the appointed time of the end), when *rebels* have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue will arise (Dan 8:19-23).

The coming of the Lord Jesus is a very public event, a noisy, visible spectacle: “a loud command,” “the voice of the archangel” and “the trumpet call of God.” “The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels ... on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people” (1 Thess 1:7, 10). “We who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord (and those who have died in Christ) in the air.” So, the tribulation saints will meet with those who have died in the Lord, who have been brought from heaven (4:14), because the Holy City is descending from heaven, their future home in the air!

In Revelation 3:10 Jesus tells the overcomers at Philadelphia that he will keep them from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the Earth.” In 1 Thessalonians 1:10 Paul

commends the Thessalonians who turned from idols to serve the living God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.” These verses teach us that the second coming and our resurrection and rapture occur before the tribulation period finishes. Looking carefully at Revelation 6-18, we can see that this event is described in Revelation 14:14-16. He looks like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head, in other words, the Son of Man, the Messiah, will swing his sickle over the Earth and harvest it. He gathers the righteous into his barn. In the following verses an angel swings his sickle, harvests the grapes, and throws them into the great winepress of God’s wrath. This is the great slaughter that will take place at the battle of Armageddon, following Jesus’ return.

What about the Rest of Creation?

Although the physical creation will be restored to its original condition, which Jesus calls ‘the renewal of all things,’ (Mat 19:28) it is only redeemed humanity that will enjoy a glorious resurrection. Paul said, “The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:20-21). For irrational creatures, it is the survival and health of the species that is important, not the resurrection of the individual. The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. Nature’s God-appointed destiny is its expectation, and it is bound up with the public display of God’s children. When they are resurrected and their identity made public, all nature will be restored to its original state. The redeemed will inherit the Earth and assume their role as rulers as God originally intended:

“What is mankind that you are mindful of them,
a son of man that you care for him?
You made them a little lower than the angels,
you crowned them with glory and honor,
and put everything under their feet”

(Hebrews 2:6-8a, quoting Psalm 8:4-6).

How will the Righteous be Resurrected?

What happens when Jesus returns, and the dead are resurrected? The souls of Christians who have already died are with Jesus in the heavenly Jerusalem. They are presently away from the body and home with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8). Their bodies have decayed in their graves, and their souls are no longer there, they are in heaven. Resurrection means ‘rising.’ When Jesus returns, the bodies of the Christian dead will come to life and *rise* out of the grave. The body cannot rise without its soul, so when Jesus returns, he brings the souls of the righteous dead with him (1 Thess 4:14). The verb ‘bring’ shows us that Jesus will continue to descend to Earth; he is not taking the resurrected saints back to heaven. Resurrected bodies are spiritual bodies (1 Cor 15:44), supernatural bodies that are capable of living in heaven or on Earth. Their immediate home is New Jerusalem.

The soul will return to the body at this time in the same way that it departed the body at death. Angels and resurrected people can move from one place to another instantaneously. Jesus will send his angels with a loud trumpet call (1 Cor 15:52, 1 Thess 4:17), and they will gather his elect from one end of heaven to another, and then guide hundreds of millions of resurrected and raptured saints to meet the Lord in the air (sky).

Where will the Resurrection Happen?

The resurrection happens everywhere on Earth at the same time. Wherever there are dead bodies or remains of believers, Christ, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform whatever is left of these lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Php 3:21). If scientists can recreate extinct animals with a little DNA, it will be no problem for God.

When the rest of the dead come alive at the end of the world, millennial believers, including Israel, will be resurrected and join their brethren in paradise, while unbelievers will come alive and be judged according to what they have done.

The Significance of the Resurrection Body

It is important to believe that our bodies will be resurrected; our future existence is not as bodiless souls or spirits. It is our Christian hope. We are told to eagerly await our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies, for in this hope we were saved (Rom 8:23-24). We became children of God at conversion when we were redeemed by the blood of Christ but our salvation is not complete until the body is redeemed and we are resurrected. To be genuine sons of God, we need to have supernatural, immortal bodies like the one Christ now possesses.

Christians are not saved to float about in heaven; that is not their destiny. Clothed with resurrection bodies, they will rule the renewed Earth (Rev 5:9-10). Jesus said they should not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Since the creation of the world, God prepared a kingdom for them to inherit and possess (Matt 25:34). “Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the Earth!”

There is evidence that resurrection bodies shine with light. “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Dan 12:3). “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt 13:43). When Jesus was transfigured in the presence of Peter, James and John, his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light. However, there is no evidence that he shone like that when he made post-resurrection appearances to his disciples over 40 days.

Resurrection is glorification

The Lord will return to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at by them (2 Thess 1:10). Jesus said that he is glorified in them (John 17:10). They will enhance his glory, as millions of saints, maybe a billion, the Lord knows those who are his, are glorified by their resurrection and their redeemed state in New Jerusalem.

There are two bodies, the natural and the spiritual. The natural body is suited to the physical creation of planet Earth. The spiritual body is suited for life in any sphere or dimension, whether heaven or Earth. The future destination of the righteous is New Jerusalem, which is presently in heaven (Hebrews 12:22) but will come down out of heaven to Earth. The elect will live in New Jerusalem in the sky, and reign on Earth as rulers and priests for God in the Messiah's kingdom. Just as Jesus was exalted and glorified by resurrection, so will we. We will be like seeds that are planted in the ground. The seed emerges as a glorious plant or tree. Just as an oak tree is far more glorious than the acorn from which it sprouted, so our resurrection bodies will be more glorious than our present bodies. We will bear the image of the man from heaven (1Cor 15:48-49).

There will be continuity from seed to plant. Continuity is carried by our DNA, the carrier of genetic information, the fundamental and distinctive characteristics of a person. The resurrected form of a person will be recognizable by his or her appearance and by their personality and memory, just as Jesus was. We will bear the image of the man from heaven (1 Cor 15:48–49). Resurrection bodies will be youthful, because aging is related to death, for which there is no place in an immortal body. The resurrection body is immortal, imperishable, spiritual, powerful, and supernatural. Different from angels because we will be glorified humans, and different from each other because each one will be rewarded for what they have done during their lifetime.

The resurrection life – New Jerusalem

No details are given on how the resurrected will reign on Earth, except that their home will be in New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven and rests in the sky above earthly Jerusalem (Rev 21:10-11). John saw it in a vision shining with the glory of God, its brilliance like that of a very precious jewel. Ezekiel saw the glory of the God of Israel in a vision of Jesus' return, as he (Jesus) came from the East with a great noise like rushing water, lighting up the Earth with his splendor

(Ezek 43:2). The glory of God will appear above Jerusalem during the Millennium and nations will come to her light (Isa 60:1-3, Rev 21:24). A city is a large community of people, the holy city is a huge community of maybe a billion people. We don't know what that city is like. John saw the city as a 2200-kilometre cube which would cover most of the Middle East and in addition, it was 2200 km high! He saw walls, gates, foundations, a street of pure gold, the River of the Water of Life, and the Tree of Life. The glorious vision symbolizes our future. We don't know what shape it will take, because it is in the spiritual or heavenly realm.

The Kingdom of God

Unless a person is born again, he will not see or enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). Unless a person is resurrected, he cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50). This verse proves that God's children are not yet reigning; they are only heirs. Both amillennialism and premillennialism will fail to interpret 1 Cor 15:50 correctly, until they accept the truth that entering the kingdom means entering *kingship*, becoming part of the Messiah's monarchy. Subjects of the Messianic kingdom will be flesh and blood people because they will live in the physical creation, but the monarchy will have supernatural bodies because they will live in New Jerusalem. Flesh and blood people cannot live in the heavenly realm.

Daniel prophesied that the saints would possess the kingdom after the Antichrist was defeated (Dan 7:21-22, 25-27). Entering the kingdom is entering the messianic kingship. Inheriting it is taking possession of it and starting to reign. People with natural bodies will be in the messianic kingdom but they are subjects, not the monarchy. The resurrected monarchy have supernatural bodies which enable them to exist in a spiritual state in New Jerusalem or a natural state on Earth.

Heaven with a new perspective

“Away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8) implies that Christians go to heaven when they die. But how can we envisage heaven apart from it being out there in the blue? In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, when Lazarus died, Jesus said he was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side - a reunion with other believers already in heaven. In the book of Hebrews, we are told that the destiny of believers who die is Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God (Heb 12:22-24). There they are in the company of God and Jesus and angels and the righteous from all ages, saved by the death of Jesus. However, it is not their final destination, they are *waiting* with Jesus (Heb 10:13) for that day when his enemies are defeated and the heavenly Jerusalem comes down to Earth.

The Millennium

John saw the Lord descending from heaven on a white horse and the armies of heaven following him (Rev 19:11-14). They are the resurrected saints, the bride of the Lamb, arrayed in fine linen, the righteous deeds of the saints. The Messiah will rule the survivors of the defeated nations with a rod of iron and the resurrected saints will reign with him *over* the Earth (Rev 5:10). ‘Over’ is a better translation than ‘on’ after verbs of authority (BAG Greek lexicon). They will be priests of God and Christ and he will give them authority over the nations and they will rule them with a rod of iron (Rev 2:26). There is no mention of going back to heaven. The destiny of the righteous is to live together with God and Jesus and innumerable angels in New Jerusalem. That is their heaven.

At the institution of the Lord’s supper, Jesus said he would not drink from the fruit of the vine again until he drinks it new with his disciples in his Father’s kingdom (Mat 26:29) which he will establish on Earth with Jesus as his regent and the saints as his government. Jesus and his government will enjoy the messianic banquet, a celebration of their union as king and monarchy. The wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev

19:9) is the initial celebration. As far as we know, there is no food and drink in the heavenly realm, which is not part of the physical creation. Jesus is referring to a banquet on Earth in his Messianic kingdom. His disciples would have interpreted it as such and Isaiah prophesied about this banquet, which was for all peoples, as they celebrate with their Saviour their victory over death:

“On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the Earth. The LORD has spoken (Isa 25:6-8).

It is tempting to interpret the feast figuratively of the joys to be experienced by those who rule during the Messianic era, but it is amazing how many times Jesus emphasizes the presence of rich food and quality wine in the Messianic banquet (Matt 8:11, 22:2-4, 26:29. Luke 13:29, 14:15-17, 21).