

The Nature of the Resurrection

By [Michael Krall](#)

The enemies of fulfilled eschatology (commonly called preterism or hyperpreterism or full preterism) make their biggest attacks in this very area—resurrection of the dead and the nature of it. It doesn't seem to bother the proponents of this view that the term "resurrection of the flesh" or "resurrection of the body" never appears in the bible. Nonetheless they make this a point of fellowship and attack us on this ground believing that this is our weakest point and most dangerous area.

We believe that this topic as well as any other issue regarding fulfilled eschatology can easily be defended from Scriptures. Some time back on an internet forum there was a debate that was taking place between Preterist Dr. Kelly Birks and Amillennialist Gene Cook where it was agreed upon by both sides as to the topic which was how the Lord viewed the timing of his parousia. Little into the debate Mr. Cook took it upon himself to change the topic to the nature of the resurrection if somehow that would be how he would defend his view of the timing texts. It was because Mr. Cook thought that this would be our weak point and his strong point that he diverted the issue. He made it sound as though it was necessary to talk nature regarding the resurrection to show how Jesus viewed the timing of his coming.

It is true that timing and nature are related and that how one views one of these reflects how one interprets the other. We aim to show in this article that the nature of the resurrection must be subjugated to the timing texts as we will give biblical support for this. We will also show that despite the opposition in their attempts to divert all discussion to this topic, it is not our weak point and is actually the very heart of what we believe to be the support of our position.

The question that we need to ask when looking at the resurrection of the dead and its nature is this.

Is there a biblical basis to interpret passages that speak of life from the dead or resurrection as something other than being raised physically from biological death?

We are fully aware that some passages could mean nothing else but a coming to life back from biological death such as the resurrection of our Lord. But what about the examples in the rest of Scripture?

There is one verse that is overlooked by those on both sides of this issue regarding how the disciples would have viewed the phrase "resurrection of the dead" or "rise from the dead."

The passage is in Mark 9:9-10. After the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus comes down and says this:

And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead

And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.

Now what was in the minds of the disciples that would make them even wonder what rise from the dead could mean? Would anyone today have a problem understanding the phrase if someone told them they would rise from the dead? We don't know what they were thinking but we do know they must have had understood the phrase as meaning more than one thing else why ask the question. Could they be thinking of a passage in the Old Testament that clearly taught something else? Are there any Old Testament examples that speak of a resurrection that the meaning is quite otherwise? This is important if we are to let Scripture interpret scripture as well as harmonize the timing texts on both the second coming and the related resurrection of the dead.

The answer is an obvious yes and one such example is Ezekiel 37. Here is a description of bones rising up and flesh and sinew coming upon them as their spirit is put into them. But what does this speak of? Its first application is Israel coming back to the land after the Babylonian captivity. The New Testament application of this varies depending upon one's eschatological view. Some would say this secondary application is an actual physical resurrection such as will be experienced by God's people in the so called rapture. Others see the application of this as spiritual which is describing the regeneration of the sinner via the Holy Spirit under the preaching of the gospel. And some even say it is Israel coming back into the land in 1948.

Whatever one's view is on this, the fact remains of its first application and that should be enough to see that there is at least one such example of a resurrection described with a much deeper meaning. Lets look at a few New Testament passages.

Luke 15:24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

Here is an example of the prodigal son that shows a restoration to a former place that is described as being brought back from the dead.

Romans 11: 15 For if the casting away of them *be* the reconciling of the world, what *shall* the receiving *of them be*, but life from the dead?

Without getting into an exegesis of Romans 11 at this point we just want to point out that this example of Paul's here has nothing to do with physical bodily resurrection but a restoration of some kind to unbelieving Jews coming back into the olive tree.

Romans 6:4-5 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

Here is a passage that speaks of the believers being raised in the likeness of Christ's resurrection. This corresponds with such passages as Ephesians 2 and Colossians 3 where we are said to have been raised with Christ. This resurrection is obviously a spiritual one since it is clear to all that at the time of Paul writing these things no one had as yet been resurrected physically with Christ.

Then there is this one that needs to be mentioned:

Phil 3:11 *If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.*

¹² *Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.*

¹³ *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,*

¹⁴ *I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

¹⁵ ¶ *Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.*

¹⁶ *Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.*

In this passage as the underscored words will point out, Paul is not speaking of attaining to a bodily resurrection for if that was the case he had attained to it to some degree as verse 16 points out. We will not take the time to exegete this passage and speak specifically of what Paul was speaking of we only want to show what he was NOT speaking of. It is clear that it was not a resurrection of the physical flesh and blood body out of biological death.

The final text we want to look at is in Revelation 20:4-5

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

Now the first resurrection mentioned here to many amillennialists is the spiritual resurrection the same one they believe is described in John 5:25. What is interesting about this passage is that those that hold to the premillennial position use this passage as the basis to call those holding to the amillennial position Hymanaeus heretics the same thing many amillennialists call us. We have experienced this as an amillennialist for over 20 years and ironically am now called it by those holding to our former position. The fact is that 2 Timothy 2:18 does not mention which resurrection that was being said was “past already.” For those that hold to a past fulfillment of Revelation 20:4-5 to call us Hymanaeus heretics would be comical if it was not such a serious charge. When one looks at the text in 2 Timothy it would not be evident at first glance what resurrection is being referred to whether the one amills says is past being spiritual resurrection at regeneration or the so called future resurrection of the flesh and blood body at the end of the cosmological world.

But there is one thing that our opponents have overlooked in trying to decipher what resurrection is being spoken of in the text. It is quite easy to discern by asking this question.

What type of resurrection would more likely be possible to fool someone into thinking has happened before its time- one that is spiritual and comes without observation or one that is a grave splitting, cosmological world ending event in which every grave in the world will open up?

We will let the reader ask in the theater of their own conscience what is more likely to be the case.

We are well aware that the above examples by themselves do not conclusively prove that the “resurrection of the dead” does not mean resurrection of the same body that went in the grave. But

when the above examples are considered in a study of this topic along with 3 additional passages we will now look at- the conclusion, we believe, is obvious.

The first verses in 1Corinthians 15:35-37

³⁵ ¶ *But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?*

³⁶ *Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die:*

³⁷ *And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain:*

The part we would like the reader to consider is what we have underscored. Those holding to a future bodily resurrection believe that the body spoken of in these verses is the physical flesh and blood body that went in the grave. But notice what is said in verse 37. The body sown (physical death?) is NOT the body that shall be. Could anything be plainer if the body in the text is the physical body of the believer that went into the grave?

Note our next verse to consider which is a few verses down from this one -verse 44

It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

Is it not quite clear that there this is a spiritual body that is different from the natural body? Can one deny that in this text there is clearly a distinction from what is sown and what is raised? We have often asked those that hold to the same body being raised if the exact same body comes out of the grave that went in? Such as an aborted baby in the womb or Siamese twins joined at the head or a person deformed from birth. The problem is if it is a bodily resurrection exactly the same as His resurrection –in the likeness of his resurrection- then it must come out as laid in the grave as His was. The ceases to be a problem when we realize that His body was the only one promising not to see corruption. Our body is raised a spiritual body so as our text above states is not the body that was sown.

The third verse we want to quickly look at to show the distinction from what is put off and what is put on is 2 Corinthians 5:1-2.

¹ ¶ *For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

² *For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:*

Now if Paul is talking about putting off of the physical body, which is what those holding to a future resurrection of the body believe this is talking about, then we ask this simple question:

Where does the new body that Paul was waiting anticipating come from? The ground where the other was sown or from heaven?

When one considers these three verses and the examples given above regarding how the bible uses the terms raised from the dead and resurrection of the dead what conclusion can one come to

regarding the body that shall be? Again we leave it to the reader to a answer in their own conscience without prejudice.

In the light of what we have just seen we now need to ask another question.

Is there biblical examples in the OT that give lay the framework for a hermeneutic that does not take the timing passages seriously and gives us liberty to stretch them to the point of no relevance to those to whom it was originally said?

When we read in the Old Testament that something was “nigh at hand” was there any reason that those to whom it was said would not take it to mean just that? There is no example in the OT where something was said to be near or nigh at hand that was not at least in some form or another fulfilled in the lifetime of those to whom it was said. One such passages that some might like to use is Joel 2 where it says judgment was “nigh at hand.” Now since later in Joel 2 it is clearly talking about the time recorded in Acts 2 and then later to AD 70 some like to point out that this is an example of a timing passage not to be taken literally. But this passage’s first fulfillment was when God brought the Assyrians against Israel. This is a common thing we see in the OT where a passage has a historical fulfillment and an application to find its fulfillment in the New Testament. If there is such a passage that cannot be applied to some imminent event then it is an exception to the general pattern in the unfolding of redemptive history.

In the light of that there is a passage that really needs to be looked at and it is Ezekiel 7 –12. We will look at sections of this and try to show what happens and how God responds to those that do not take timing texts seriously.

Ezek 7:

⁵ *Thus saith the Lord GOD; An evil, an only evil, behold, is come.*

⁶ *An end is come, the end is come: it watcheth for thee; behold, it is come.*

⁷ *The morning is come unto thee, O thou that dwellest in the land: the time is come, the day of trouble is near, and not the sounding again of the mountains.*

⁸ *Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee: and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations.*

⁹ *And mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: I will recompense thee according to thy ways and thine abominations that are in the midst of thee; and ye shall know that I am the LORD that smiteth.*

¹⁰ *Behold the day, behold, it is come: the morning is gone forth; the rod hath blossomed, pride hath budded.*

¹¹ *Violence is risen up into a rod of wickedness: none of them shall remain, nor of their multitude, nor of any of theirs: neither shall there be wailing for them.*

¹² *The time is come, the day draweth near: let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn: for wrath is upon all the multitude thereof.*

Now this theme goes right through to chapter 12 of Ezekiel but we will first look at chapter 11 and see how they viewed this impending judgment.

¹ ¶ *Moreover the spirit lifted me up, and brought me unto the east gate of the LORD'S house, which looketh eastward: and behold at the door of the gate five and twenty men; among whom I saw Jaazaniah the son of Azur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people.*

² *Then said he unto me, Son of man, these are the men that devise mischief, and give wicked counsel in this city:*

³ *Which say, **It is not near**; let us build houses: this city is the caldron, and we be the flesh*

We see here that the warning of impending judgment was not taken seriously by Israel and God calls those doing so as giving wicked counsel. They insisted that it was not near and what did God then say to them. Here are the words that God spoke concerning this issue as recorded in chapter 12.

²¹ ¶ *And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,*

²² *Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, **The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth?***

²³ *Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, **The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision.***

²⁴ *For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel.*

²⁵ *For I am the LORD: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak **shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged**: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and **will perform it**, saith the Lord GOD.*

²⁶ *Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying,*

²⁷ *Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times **that are far off**.*

²⁸ *Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; **There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord GOD.***

This passage alone should be enough to make any serious bible student look soberly at the timing texts of soon judgment in the days of the New Testament. Can we still in a good conscience stretch the timing texts to over 2000 years in the light of Ezekiel 12:28? This will even become more serious when one looks at those passages that speak of judgment and resurrection in the Greek and see that the word mello in some form or another is used and is more accurately interpreted as “about to be.” (see such passages as Matt 16:27; Acts 24:15 and 2Tim 4:1 in Jay P Green’s Interlinear Greek-English New Testament)

That brings us to the third question that needs to be addressed then we can see the only biblical conclusion we can come to regarding the nature of the resurrection and its timing. That is this:

Is there any Old Testament examples of language used of God coming down in judgment when a physical appearance was not what was meant?

We will just quote 4 passages from the Old Testament that prove that there is such examples set forth in the Word of God.

Isaiah 13 :9 *Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.*

Isaiah 26:21 *For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain*

Isaiah 30:27 ¶ *Behold, the name of the LORD cometh from far, burning with his anger, and the burden thereof is heavy: his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire:*

Micah 1:3 *For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth*

In the 4 above examples we see a coming of the LORD in judgment that was not a bodily coming. All of these above examples have a historical context that was fulfilled when God came in judgment against a nation be it Babylon as stated in Isaiah 13 or Israel as the other passages speak of.

In the light of such passages what are we to think of a passage like Matt 16:27-28; and 24:30 where Jesus comes in the GLORY OF THE FATHER? Since the Father's coming many times in the OT was not a physical coming but a coming down in judgment does not that warrant the same for Jesus' coming? After all did he not say that the kingdom of God comes not with observation Luke 17:20? Did he not say that the when you see the signs of his coming know that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand Luke 21:27-30?

What conclusion can we draw from all this? Lets first state what we have shown from Scripture.

First, that there are examples of life from the dead and/or resurrection from the dead being used in Scripture that does not always mean a bodily physical resurrection but can mean a change from one mode of existence to another or a restoration to a former mode of existence.

Second the Old Testament specifically Ezekiel 7-12 clearly warn us against not taking the nearness passages at face value.

Third the comings of God in the Old Testament are never a bodily visible coming but a coming in judgment to a nation.

Now what does this bring us to as a conclusion?

First—the kingdom comes without observation when Jesus comes in power and great glory in the glory of the Father whose comings in the Old Testament were also not with observation.

Secondly the New Testament speaks of Jesus' coming as soon, near, at hand, in that generation; and before some standing there would taste death; and that the resurrection of the dead would accompany that coming.

Thirdly since the resurrection does not necessarily have to be a world ending grave opening cataclysmic event- how can we deny that all these things did not happen as predicted by our Lord and his apostles and be faithful to the Word of God?