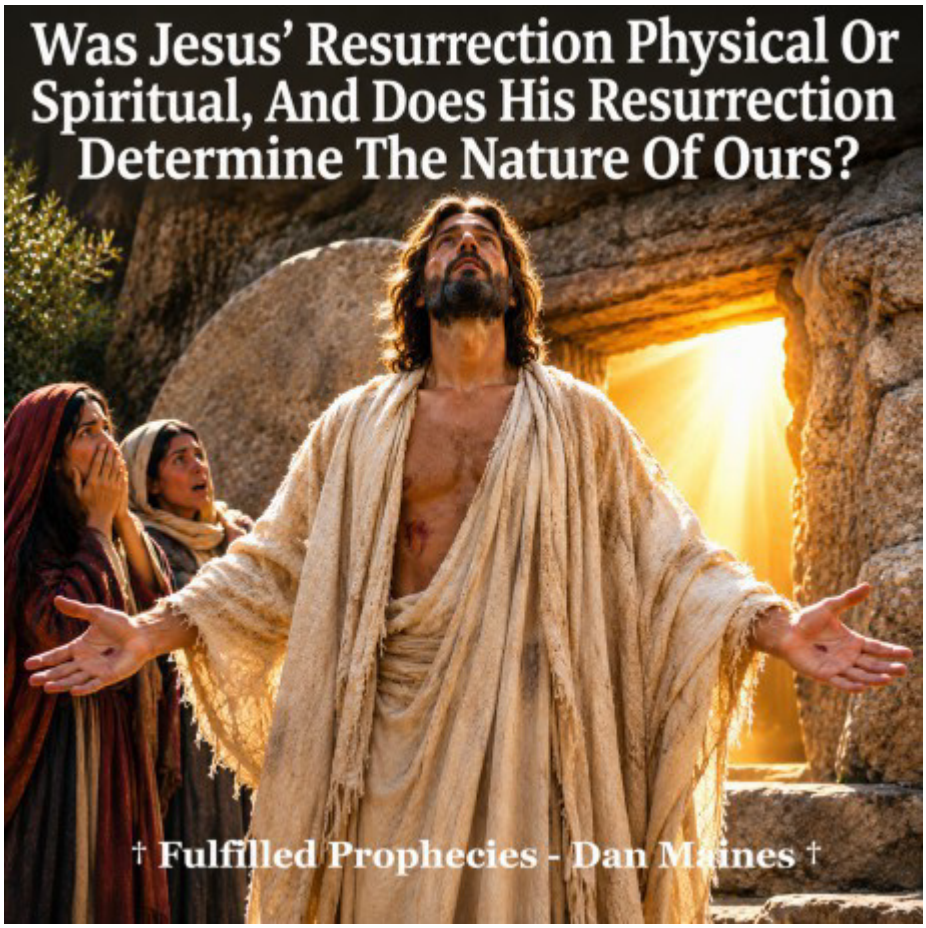
Fulfilled Prophecies

Was Jesus' Resurrection Physical Or Spiritual, And Does His Resurrection Determine The Nature Of Ours?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† One of the most important questions concerning the resurrection is whether Jesus was raised physically or spiritually, and whether His resurrection establishes the exact pattern for the resurrection promised to believers.

† Scripture tells us that Jesus' tomb was empty, His disciples touched Him, He ate food, and Thomas was invited to examine His wounds. Yet Paul also taught that believers would receive a

spiritual body and that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.
† If Jesus was raised physically, how did He leave a sealed tomb? If His resurrection was spiritual, what happened to His physical body? And if Christ is the firstfruits, does that require every believer to experience the same physical resurrection?
† We must also examine Matthew 27:51-53, where saints were raised and appeared in Jerusalem, and determine whether this event fulfilled Ezekiel 37 or served another purpose.
† The answer requires distinguishing Christ's historical resurrection, His victory over covenant death, and the resurrection promised to His first-century people. These events are connected, but Scripture doesn't necessarily describe them as identical in every detail.

Matthew 28:2, 6
And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it.
He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying.
† Matthew establishes that Jesus' tomb was empty. The angel didn't announce that Jesus' spirit had departed while His dead body remained inside. The place where His body had been lying was empty (Luke 24:3).
† Notice that the angel rolled away the stone, but Matthew doesn't say the stone was moved to allow Jesus to escape. Jesus had already risen when the women received the announcement (Mark 16:6).
† The stone was removed so the witnesses could see the empty tomb. Scripture doesn't explain the precise mechanics of how Jesus left the tomb, and we shouldn't invent an explanation (John 20:8-9).
† His resurrection was a supernatural act of God. A sealed entrance couldn't prevent the One whom God raised from the dead from appearing alive (Acts 2:24).

Luke 24:39, 42-43
See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.
They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish;
and He took it and ate it before them.
† Jesus specifically denied that He was merely a spirit appearing before His disciples. He invited them to examine His hands and feet because His resurrection involved a real, tangible body (John 20:20).
† His eating wasn't necessary to prove that He needed physical nourishment. It demonstrated that the person standing before them was the same Jesus who had been crucified (Acts 10:40-41).
† This creates a serious problem for the claim that Jesus experienced only a spiritual resurrection. The testimony of the witnesses identifies bodily continuity between the crucified Jesus and the risen Lord (John 2:19-22).
† However, His resurrection body was no longer subject to ordinary mortal limitations. He would never die again, and death no longer had mastery over Him (Romans 6:9).

John 20:19, 27
So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, Peace be with you.
Then He said to Thomas, Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.
† Jesus appeared among His disciples while the doors were shut. John doesn't explain how He entered, but the account demonstrates that His resurrected existence wasn't restricted in the same way as ordinary mortal life (Luke 24:31).
† Thomas was invited to examine the wounds of the crucifixion. Jesus didn't present Himself as an unrelated spiritual replacement for the body that had died (John 20:25-29).

† We shouldn't conclude that His body was imaginary simply because He appeared behind closed doors. The same account emphasizes His physical wounds and personal identity (Luke 24:39).
† The distinction is between a mortal body subject to death and the risen Christ who had conquered death. His resurrection was bodily, but His resurrected life was no longer mortal (Romans 6:9).

Acts 2:31
he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY.
† Peter connected Christ's resurrection with the promise that His flesh wouldn't suffer decay. This confirms that Jesus' resurrection wasn't merely the survival of His spirit after death (Psalm 16:10).
† His body wasn't left to decay in the tomb. God raised the crucified Jesus, and the apostles testified that He was alive (Acts 2:32).
† Christ's resurrection established His victory over death and confirmed that He was the promised Messiah. His bodily resurrection is a historical foundation of the gospel (Romans 1:4).

1 Corinthians 15:20, 44, 50
But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.
it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.
Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.
† Paul identifies Christ as the firstfruits, meaning His resurrection guarantees the promised harvest. The firstfruits establish the certainty and source of the resurrection, but we must examine the surrounding passages to determine its nature

(1 Corinthians 15:21-23).
† Jesus was physically raised and demonstrated His victory through an empty tomb. That doesn't automatically prove every believer must leave an empty grave or return to earthly life in a restored biological body (2 Corinthians 5:1-8).
† Paul distinguished the natural body from the spiritual body. Spiritual doesn't mean unreal or nonexistent. It describes life belonging to the Spirit rather than the mortal order governed by corruption (1 Corinthians 15:42-49).
† The fulfilled perspective understands the corporate resurrection as the completion of the transition from Adamic condemnation and the Old Covenant order into the completed New Covenant life in Christ (Romans 5:17-21).
† Christ's resurrection is the foundation and guarantee of ours, but the firstfruits illustration doesn't require every aspect of His historical resurrection to be reproduced physically in every believer (Colossians 1:18).
† The central question is whether Paul's promised resurrection concerned the restoration of biological bodies or the removal of covenant death and the full inheritance of life in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

Romans 6:4-5
Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,
† Paul connected believers with Christ's death and resurrection without teaching that every believer had to experience crucifixion and physical emergence from a tomb (Galatians 2:20).
† Believers were united with Christ through participation in His death and resurrection. That union brought newness of life while they were still physically alive (Colossians 2:12-13).
† This establishes an important principle. Sharing in Christ's

resurrection doesn't require reproducing every physical detail of His personal resurrection (Ephesians 2:5-6).
† Christ accomplished redemption through historical events. Believers receive the benefits of those events through union with Him (Romans 8:1-2).

Ephesians 2:5-6
even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),
and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,
† Paul described believers as already made alive, raised, and seated with Christ. They hadn't physically died and emerged from graves, yet their resurrection participation was real (Colossians 3:1-3).
† Their former death was connected with transgressions, not merely the cessation of biological life. Their new life was found in Christ (John 5:24).
† This supports understanding the resurrection corporately and covenantally. Christ's physical resurrection made possible the spiritual life and inheritance of His people (Romans 6:11).
† It also explains why the fulfilled resurrection needn't be demonstrated through empty graves across the Roman world (2 Corinthians 5:1).

Matthew 27:51-53
And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.
The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised;
and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.
† Matthew describes an extraordinary event associated with Jesus' death and resurrection. The temple veil was torn, the earth shook, and tombs were opened (Hebrews 10:19-20).
† Matthew explicitly says many bodies of the saints were raised. We shouldn't dismiss that statement or replace it with an

exclusively invisible spiritual event without textual evidence (John 11:43-44).
† Notice the distinction in timing. The tombs were opened in connection with Jesus' death, but the saints came out and appeared after His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20).
† Their appearance demonstrated that Christ's victory over death had consequences beyond Himself. However, Matthew doesn't identify these saints, describe their subsequent lives, or explain whether they later died again (John 5:28-29).
† Matthew also doesn't identify this event as the completed resurrection promised in Daniel 12. It occurred around AD 30, while Daniel connected the completion of his resurrection prophecy with the shattering of the holy people's power (Daniel 12:2, 7).
† Therefore, Matthew 27 can be understood as a historical sign anticipating the greater covenantal resurrection without requiring that the entire resurrection promise was completed at the cross (Hebrews 9:26-28).

Ezekiel 37:11-12, 14
Then He said to me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.'
Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel.
I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it, declares the LORD.'
† God Himself identifies the dry bones as the whole house of Israel. The vision concerns a people who believed their hope had perished and that they had been completely cut off (Ezekiel 37:11).
† The opening of graves symbolizes God's restoration of His covenant people. The promise includes the Spirit, renewed life, and restoration to their land (Ezekiel 37:21-27).

† Ezekiel's prophecy originally addressed Israel's national restoration from exile. Its imagery also provides a theological background for understanding spiritual restoration and resurrection life under the New Covenant (John 5:24-25).
† Matthew 27 uses related grave-opening imagery, but Matthew never explicitly says that Ezekiel 37 was fulfilled by the saints who appeared in Jerusalem (Matthew 27:52-53).
† The connection is meaningful, but it shouldn't be presented as a direct quotation or explicit fulfillment statement. Ezekiel describes corporate restoration, while Matthew reports a particular resurrection event (Romans 11:15).
† Both passages demonstrate God's authority to bring life where death and hopelessness had prevailed, but they must be interpreted according to their individual contexts (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Daniel 12:2, 7
Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.
I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time; and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed.
† Daniel describes the resurrection and then provides the time marker for the completion of the events in his prophecy (Daniel 12:1-7).
† The resurrection was connected with the period when the power of the holy people would be completely shattered. From the fulfilled perspective, this points to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 (Luke 21:20-22).
† Jesus' bodily resurrection around AD 30 was the foundation of redemption. The resurrection promised to the covenant people reached its prophetic completion with the passing of the Old Covenant order in AD 70 (Hebrews 8:13).
† This distinction allows us to affirm Jesus' literal bodily

resurrection without requiring a worldwide resurrection of biological corpses in AD 70 (1 Corinthians 15:50).
† Christ was raised from the dead as the victorious Messiah. His people received the completed inheritance of resurrection life through the New Covenant (Hebrews 12:22-24).

2 Corinthians 5:1, 8
For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.
we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.
† Paul contrasted the earthly tent with an eternal dwelling from God. His hope wasn't expressed as returning to another temporary existence in a mortal body (Philippians 1:23).
† The fulfilled perspective understands the completed resurrection as opening the way into God's presence, so believers who die are immediately with Christ (Revelation 14:13).
† This doesn't mean Jesus' physical resurrection was unnecessary. His victory over death established the life and inheritance His people now possess (John 11:25-26).
† We must distinguish the bodily resurrection of Christ, the corporate resurrection of His covenant people, and the believer's immediate presence with the Lord after physical death (Colossians 3:3-4).

Historical References
† Josephus, writing in The Jewish War, Books 6-7, described the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70. His historical account establishes the catastrophic end of the temple system, which the fulfilled perspective connects with Daniel's prophecy.
† Eusebius, in Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5, recorded the tradition that Christians departed Jerusalem and settled in Pella before the city's destruction. This provides historical context for Jesus' warning concerning Jerusalem

(Luke 21:20-22).
† Ignatius of Antioch, in his Letter to the Smyrnaeans, Chapter 3, emphasized that the risen Jesus possessed flesh and was not merely a disembodied spirit. This demonstrates that early Christians strongly affirmed Christ's bodily resurrection.
† Irenaeus, in Against Heresies, Book 5, defended bodily resurrection. His testimony demonstrates that early Christian writers didn't universally interpret the resurrection in the covenantal manner presented in this study.
† These historical writers help establish the setting and early interpretations, but Scripture remains the authority for determining the nature and timing of the resurrection.

How It Applies To Us Today
† We don't have to deny Jesus' physical resurrection to affirm the fulfilled resurrection of His people. His empty tomb, His wounds, and His appearances demonstrate that God truly raised Him from the dead (Luke 24:39).
† We also don't have to insist that our resurrection must reproduce every physical detail of His resurrection. Believers participate in His death and resurrection through union with Him (Romans 6:4-5).
† Jesus' resurrection established the foundation of redemption, and the completed New Covenant brought His people into the inheritance He secured (Ephesians 2:5-6).
† We shouldn't confuse the saints raised in Matthew 27 with the completed resurrection of Daniel 12. The two events belong to the same redemptive story, but Scripture doesn't identify them as the same event (Matthew 27:52-53; Daniel 12:2, 7).
† We can rejoice that Christ has conquered death and that believers who depart this earthly life are at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).
† Our hope isn't another future destruction of the world or a future resurrection of biological bodies. Our hope rests in the finished work of Jesus Christ and the eternal life already available through Him (John 5:24).

Q & A Appendix

Q: Was Jesus raised physically or spiritually?
A: Jesus was bodily raised from the dead. He had flesh and bones, displayed His wounds, and ate before His disciples. His resurrected body was no longer subject to death (Luke 24:39-43; Romans 6:9).
Q: How did Jesus leave the sealed tomb?
A: Scripture doesn't explain the exact mechanism. It tells us that the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty. The stone's removal allowed witnesses to examine the tomb, but the text doesn't say Jesus needed the entrance opened to leave (Matthew 28:2, 6).
Q: Did Jesus pass through solid stone?
A: Scripture doesn't explicitly say that. His appearance behind shut doors demonstrates supernatural ability, but it doesn't establish precisely how He left the tomb (John 20:19).
Q: Does firstfruits mean our resurrection must be physically identical to His?
A: Firstfruits establishes Christ as the foundation and guarantee of the resurrection harvest. The fulfilled perspective distinguishes His bodily resurrection from the corporate covenantal resurrection of His people (1 Corinthians 15:20, 44, 50).
Q: Why did Jesus have a physical body after His resurrection?
A: His bodily appearances demonstrated that the crucified Jesus had truly been raised. His wounds confirmed His identity, and His resurrection established His victory over death (John 20:27; Acts 2:31).
Q: What happened to Jesus' physical body?
A: Scripture teaches that His flesh didn't suffer decay and that He was raised from the dead. It doesn't describe His physical body being abandoned while only His spirit departed (Acts 2:31).
Q: Were the saints in Matthew 27 physically raised?
A: Matthew says many bodies of the saints were raised, came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection, and appeared to many. The passage doesn't explain what happened to them

afterward (Matthew 27:52-53).
Q: Did Matthew 27 fulfill Ezekiel 37?
A: Both passages contain resurrection imagery, but Ezekiel identifies the dry bones as the whole house of Israel and describes restoration. Matthew doesn't explicitly identify the raised saints as the fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 37:11-14; Matthew 27:52-53).
Q: When was the resurrection promised in Daniel 12 fulfilled?
A: The fulfilled perspective connects its completion with the shattering of the holy people's covenantal power in AD 70, when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed (Daniel 12:2, 7; Luke 21:20-22).
Q: What happens to believers when they physically die today?
A: Believers are immediately at home with the Lord. They don't need to wait for another future resurrection event to enter His presence (2 Corinthians 5:1, 8; Philippians 1:23).
Q: Can we affirm Christ's bodily resurrection while understanding our resurrection covenantally?
A: Yes, within the fulfilled perspective, because Christ's historical bodily resurrection and the covenantal resurrection of His people are distinguished while remaining inseparably connected through His victory over death (Romans 6:4-5; Ephesians 2:5-6).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Matthew 28:2, 6; Luke 24:39, 42-43; John 20:19, 27; Acts 2:31; 1 Corinthians 15:20, 44, 50; Romans 6:4-5; Ephesians 2:5-6; Matthew 27:51-53; Ezekiel 37:11-12, 14; Daniel 12:2, 7; 2 Corinthians 5:1, 8.
† Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, Books 6-7; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5; Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Smyrnaeans, Chapter 3; Irenaeus, Against

Heresies, Book 5.

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