

The Two Resurrections

by Pastor F. M. Riley



“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 worshiped 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. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years,” Revelation 20:4-6.

Introduction

Most “professing Christians,” while claiming to believe in the resurrection of Christ, have never seriously studied the resurrection in depth. Therefore many of God’s people [those truly saved] do not understand the different aspects of the resurrection as set forth in the Scriptures. My purpose in writing this brief study is to point out some basic truths about the resurrection that are often overlooked or ignored. May God bless His Word as we study together.

Defining Our Subject

The word “resurrection” in the New Testament is translated from the Greek word, *“anastasis.”* This word occurs 42 times in the New Testament. It is translated as “resurrection” 39 times, “rising again” 1 time, “raised to life again” 1 time, and “that should rise” 1 time. The meaning of the Greek word is literally *“a standing up again; a resurrection from death; raised to life again; to rise from the dead.”* See Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, page 41-42, Strong’s No. 386.

The definition of this word might give some people the idea that the word only means *“to restore to life,”* that is, a natural or physical restoration of life to the body. However, it is important to notice that only one time in the New Testament is the word used in that sense, and that one instance is referring to those restored to life during the previous dispensation. See **Hebrews 11:35**. All other references refer to the resurrection of Christ and to His people in the sense of being resurrected to a glorified eternal body. The point I am emphasizing here is that in the New Testament the word “resurrection” is never used in the sense of restoration to physical [natural] life. There was indeed a number of people in both the Old and the New Testaments who were restored to physical [natural] life, but such restoration was not an actual resurrection, and those people obviously died again with the passing of time. The way the word

“resurrection” is used in the New Testament refers only to the resurrection of Christ, never to die again, and the future resurrection of His people to their eternal glorified state, never to die again.

Only Two Resurrections

Most “professing Christians” hold to the concept of one great “general resurrection” of all the dead throughout human history, supposedly to take place at “the end of the world.” Following this supposed “general resurrection,” each individual will be judged “according to their works.” Supposedly, those who have done enough “good works” will then be ushered into Heaven, while those whose works were evil (or not quite sufficient) will be cast into Hell.

This whole concept is wrong! Nothing could be further from the truth set forth in God’s Word. The inspired Word of God no where teaches any “general resurrection” of the dead. And it certainly does not teach that our future eternal destiny is determined by the “good works” that we do during this present life. According to the Scriptures, the works that we do during this present life will determine our rewards [**1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10**] or our wages [**Romans 6:23**]. Our works never determine our salvation or our eternal destiny, **Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:5-7**. If our works could determine our salvation and eternal destiny, then the sacrifice of Christ at Calvary was unnecessary and a total travesty of justice. God forbid! Think about it!

It was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who pointedly stated that there are only two resurrections of the dead. ***“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation,”*** **John 5:28-29**. It is obvious from this statement of the Lord Himself that there are only two resurrections; one for the saved and one for the unsaved. This should settle the question for any real Bible believer. The Lord said that there are two resurrections. The ***“first resurrection”*** [**Revelation 20:4-5**] is then for true believers who are saved by ***“grace through faith”*** in the Lord Jesus Christ. The second resurrection [***“the rest of the dead”...Revelation 20:5***] is for unbelieving lost people who obstinately refuse God’s offer of salvation through Christ during their lifetime.

Two Different Time Periods

Our text in **Revelation 20:4-5** makes it quite clear that the two resurrections set forth by Christ Himself do not take place at the same time. The ***“first resurrection”*** [***“the resurrection of life”...John 5:29***] precedes the thousand years reign of Christ. But the second resurrection [***“the resurrection of damnation”***] occurs at some point after the thousand years reign of Christ has been concluded. See **Revelation 20:5** and **20:11-13**. The two resurrections are then separated by a minimum of 1,000 years. Those who truly want to ***“rightly divide the Word of truth”*** should be careful

to adhere to this division between the two resurrections that is so plainly set forth in the Scriptures.

But this is still not the full story.....

The First Resurrection

We now turn our attention to *"the resurrection of life;"* the resurrection of true believers. One of the first things to be noted about *"the first resurrection"* is that all believers are not resurrected at the same time.

In *1 Corinthians 15:20-23*, in a chapter in God's Word whose context specifically deals with the resurrection of believers, it is clearly stated, *"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man [Adam] came death, by man [Christ] came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming."* The English word *"order,"* in verse **23** is translated from the Greek word, *"tagma."* This word is a military term denoting rank, troop, or order to which each soldier belongs and with which he marches. See Thayer's Greek Lexicon, page 613, Strong's No. 5001. These Scriptures then clearly state that in *"the first resurrection"* each believer will be resurrected according to their rank, and in the order which the Lord Himself has decided upon.

The Scriptural Order

The *"order"* of *"the first resurrection"* is set forth quite clearly in the Scriptures.

Phase One

The Scriptures specifically state that Christ Himself is *"the firstborn from the dead,"* *Colossians 1:18*. This means that Christ was the very first person to be resurrected from the dead with a glorified body; a sinless, perfect, holy, eternal body not even capable of sinning or dying again.

Phase Two

Then immediately after the resurrection of Christ *"the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many,"* *Matthew 27:52-53*.

Many Christians don't know or understand that the resurrection of God's people [true believers] is designed by the Lord to occur in correlation with the Jewish harvest season. Such an analogy is clearly set forth by Paul in *1 Corinthians 15:35-44*.

The Jewish harvest season begins during the first month [Abib] of the Jewish year, according to the calendar that the Lord Himself gave to Israel, **Exodus 12:1-2**. Note carefully that it is specifically commanded in God's Word that the Jews were to **"bring a sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it," Leviticus 23:10-11**. Folks, this was to be done on the very day that Christ [and the saints of **Matthew 27:52-53**] would rise from the grave 1,520 years later. Coincidence? Not hardly!

Folks, on **"the morrow after the Sabbath"** [Sunday] following the Passover, in the year that Christ died and rose again, at the very time the Jewish priest was standing in the Temple waving **"the sheaf of first fruits"** before the veil [that had been rent wide open, **Matthew 27:51**], the risen Lord was standing before the Father's throne in Heaven presenting His own precious blood, and the "first fruit saints" that He had taken to glory with Him, **"to be accepted for you,"** **Leviticus 23:11**. Glory! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!

If this doesn't make you rejoice in the Spirit, then maybe you should examine your salvation, **2 Corinthians 13:5; 2 Peter 1:10-11**. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, along with the saints that arose after His resurrection, make up the **"first fruits"** of **"the first resurrection,"** **1 Corinthians 15:23**. They have already appeared before the Father's throne, and have been **"accepted"** on the basis of the precious blood of Christ, and on behalf of all of God's people who shall one day soon follow them to glory at the time of the resurrection harvest.

Phase Three

No one has been resurrected since the first two phases of **"the first resurrection"** took place. But very soon now the resurrection and rapture will occur. Involved with the rapture, but actually preceding it, will be the resurrection of **"the dead in Christ,"** **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**. The **"dead in Christ"** are resurrected [**"raised"**] before we [living true believers] are all **"caught up together with them"** to meet the Lord. This is why Paul used "harvest terms" in **1 Corinthians 15** when predicting and describing the resurrection of God's people. Glory!

Folks, in a harvest season some grain ripens early. From that early grain, a sheaf is gathered by the Jews and offered to the Lord, marking the beginning of the "harvest season." But the bulk of the harvest doesn't ripen early and will not be ready until later. The type should be obvious to God's people [true believers]. The soon coming resurrection and rapture of God's people is the main "harvest" that will be gathered and taken up to the **"barn"** of the Lord, while the **"bundles"** of the wicked are left here to **"burn,"** **Matthew 13:30**. The Parables of the Kingdom in **Matthew 13** also correlate with the Jewish harvest season. The first of those parables has to do with The Sower and the seed sown, and others of the parables continue the same theme. This ought to be obvious to anyone who will seriously study them.

Phase Four

But in the Jewish harvest season there were always “gleanings” left in the field [*Matthew 13:38*] that needed to be gathered, *Leviticus 23:22*. So after the main harvest of believers at the time of the rapture, there will be “gleanings” to be gathered during the Tribulation.

It is plainly stated in *Revelation 11:11-12*, ***“And after three days and a half the Spirit of life from God entered into them [the two witnesses], and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.”*** It appears that these ***“two witnesses”*** are the very first “gleanings” of God’s people who are resurrected to life and caught up to glory during the Tribulation. I highly suspect that the ***“144,000”*** will be “gleaned to glory” at the same time, making up the ***“first fruits”*** of the Tribulation saints, *Revelation 14:1-5*.

Phase Five

In *Revelation 20:4* we read about the conclusion of ***“the first resurrection,”*** typified by the conclusion of the Jewish harvest season.

In the first part of *Revelation 20:4* we read, ***“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them:...”*** Notice that there is nothing said in this verse about this group of believers being resurrected. These believers were resurrected at the time of the rapture seven years previously, and they spent the Tribulation in glory with the Lord, and then returned with Him at the end of the Trib as stated in *Revelation 19:14*. This group of believers are they in the Bride of Christ; the church [and the New Testament redeemed of Israel], whom the Lord promised that they should rule and reign with Him during His Kingdom. Read *Matthew 19:27-28*, *Revelation 1:4-6*, *2:10*, *2:26-27*, *3:21*, *4:4*, *4:10-11*, *5:8-10*, and rejoice. Praise the Lord! In this first part of *Revelation 20:4* these New Testament believers are receiving what the Lord has promised, and are beginning their reign. Glory to God! Hallelujah!

But in the rest of *Revelation 20:4* a different group of believers is under consideration. ***“.....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 worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived [were resurrected and glorified] and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”***

This group of believers are the Tribulation saints, all of whom will be martyred during the Trib. John sees them being resurrected and given glorified bodies. They don’t have to be “caught up,” for Christ has returned to the earth to begin His reign as ***“King***

of kings, and Lord of lords," Revelation 19:16. These Tribulation saints will share in His reign right along with the church and redeemed Israel. Glory!

This is the fifth phase of the resurrection of believers. Being the fifth phase, it is the GRACE phase. Five is the Bible number for GRACE. Glory!

The resurrection and glorification of these Tribulation saints is also the last and final phase of *"the first resurrection."* The statement in *Revelation 20:5, "This is the first resurrection,"* is in the arist perfect tense in the Greek text. This means that *"the first resurrection"* is over, done, finished, completed, has been brought to an end, and has ceased. From this point forward no more of God's people will die and then be resurrected to receive a glorified body. With the resurrection of these Tribulation saints, the resurrection-glorification process ceases. The Lord is working out a special purpose in creating "new creations" in Christ Jesus [*2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; James 1:18*] through the "new birth," the resurrection, and glorification, and when that purpose is fulfilled, then this process will cease. But this is a subject for another Bible study.....

May God bless these truths to the heart of every reader.



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