

The Order of the Resurrections

Introduction: Today, Dispensationalism has fallen into ill-repute including the teachings of Premillennialism and a Pretribulation Rapture. Confusion abounds in “Christendom” on end times events largely due to poor hermeneutical practices. Many today follow or are influenced by the teachings of Amillennialism which mostly hold to one general resurrection. Others, like Posttribulationists, believe in only two resurrections.

John 5:28-29 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, (29) 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.

This verse simply declares the fact of resurrection. Now, some argue from here one general resurrection with two classes of people and two destinies, but we have other Scriptures to reveal to us that there are several resurrections. The same goes for **Daniel 12:2**.

TWO FOUNDATIONAL TEXTS: **1COR.15:20-24**; **REV.20:4-6**

A. **1Corinthians 15:23 Resurrection Phases:**

Our first text presents a definite order to the resurrections. **V.22** says that *παντες ζωοποιηθησονται- all shall be made alive*- all will be restored to physical life- resurrected, but not all will be raised at the same time.

V.23- Future resurrections will not encompass a single event. *But each in his own Order, ταγματι-* from *tássō*, to arrange in an orderly manner. So, we have a definition that includes that which is ordered, arrangement, anything arranged in order or in array such as a body of troops. The word was used of troops of soldiers marching in sequence with one soldier following the other or one detachment following another one. **The word strongly suggests sequence or phases.** According to the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (BAGD)* “*the gift of life is given to various ones in turn and at various times.*” Taken with the word *afterward/then, ἔπειτα* (meaning time and order- a compound word including a particle of succession) we have a succession. John Whitcomb defines the whole thought here as “*Chronological sequence.*”

Paul gives at least two groups and maybe three. *Christ*, the first fruits, then afterward *they that are Christ's*- The body of Christ- the church, then possibly in **v.24a then the end**- after the Millennium, the second resurrection of all the unrighteous (**Rev.20:5, 11-15**). Others believe that **v.24a** is simply referring to the end of the world order.

The point here in this passage is that we find a sequence or phases of people who are resurrected.

B. **Revelation 20:4-6 Resurrection Categories:**

This passage reveals at least two resurrections: A first, and by implication, a second (**v.25a**). But is the emphasis here on the number of resurrections or on categories of resurrections?

First Resurrection:

V.4- John saw the *souls* (*ψυχή*- the immaterial part of man, bodiless) of the *beheaded*- those martyred during the Tribulation. Then John says that *they lived* or *came to life, ἐζησαν*- to live, have life, to be among the living, to live again, and here to be physically resurrected. This same verb is used of Christ's physical resurrection in **Rev.1:18; 2:8**. This word is also used of physical resurrection in **Matt.9:18; John 4:25; Acts 1:3, 9-11; Romans 14:9**.

V.5b- *This is the First Resurrection, ἀνάστασις*- a raising up, rising, a rising from the dead. This noun is used 42 times in the New Testament and only once in **Luke 2:34** does it refer to something other than physical resurrection.

Now, what does John mean by *first, πρῶτος*? This word can mean first in time, chronological order, but it also means first in rank, honor, foremost, chief, most important. This verse is describing kinds of or categories of resurrections. It is making a distinction between groups. **John Walvoord** states that “*they are ‘first’ in contrast to those who are raised last, after the millennium, when the wicked dead are raised and judged.*” The first resurrection is the better one because it leads to eternal life in God’s presence- **a resurrection of the righteous**. It has **priority or honor** over the **second** resurrection.

This resurrection cannot truly be the first, because Jesus along with some Old Testament saints were already resurrected. Again, **1Cor.15:23** points to phases or stages of resurrections.

Second Resurrection:

Refers to **the rest of the dead (v.5a)** that are resurrected after the one-thousand-year millennial reign of Christ (**vv.11-15**). These are the unrighteous of all time who will experience the **second death (v.6)** that leads to eternity of damnation and suffering- This is the **resurrection of the unrighteous** who will be fitted with a body perfectly designed for Hell.

Posttribulationists claim that this is proof that the church is not raptured before the Tribulation. They argue for only two resurrections: one for the righteous and one for the unrighteous.

Amillennialists teach that there is only one resurrection at the Great White Throne (**Rev.20:11-15**). Here they spiritualize the first resurrection and say that it refers to the new birth of believers- a spiritual resurrection.

Answer:

- 1) Plain language, a literal understanding of the text, and context all demand that the 1st resurrection must be a physical one just like the 2nd resurrection.
- 2) A spiritual resurrection here does not align well with the Scriptural usage of *ἀνάστασις* as mostly referring to a physical resurrection.
- 3) Most commentators agree that those in **v.5a** are physically raised. Therefore, even common sense would tell us that the 1st resurrection must also be bodily. God is not the author of confusion!
- 4) In the context of **v.6** those of the 1st resurrection will reign and serve with Christ. Therefore, they will have to be alive in the same sense as Jesus is with a resurrected body.

ORDER OF THE RESURRECTIONS:

A. Phases of the 1st Resurrection- The Righteous:

1) **The Resurrection of Jesus:** The 1st fruits- Jesus’ resurrection guaranteed the believer’s resurrection (**1Corinthians 15:20-23**).

2) **The Resurrection of Some Old Testament Saints:** Shortly after Christ’s resurrection (**Matthew 27:50-53**). When Christ died on the cross the earth quaked, rocks were split open, and rock tombs shaken opened. Since there were no punctuation marks in the original Greek, a case could be made that **v.51** ends in the beginning of **v.52** after **and the graves were opened**.

Then, the rest of **v.52-v.53** reveals a “mysterious” resurrection of some O.T. saints. They did not arise when the tombs were shaken open at Jesus’ death or they would have risen before Jesus. Again, **1Cor.15:20** tells us that Jesus is **the firstfruits of them that slept**. **Henry Alford** (in his *Greek Testament- e-sword* addition) comments: “‘Arose’ (ἠγέρθησαν) is the result—not the immediate accompaniment, of the opening of the tombs.” These old

testament saints arose from the grave after Jesus was first resurrected. It seems best to see these people as resurrected with glorified bodies and taken to heaven at some point. These resurrected saints are proof that Jesus conquered and has all authority over death. Their resurrection reassures all believers that they will one day in the future truly be resurrected with glorified bodies. God keeps His Word!

3) The Resurrection of The Body of Christ- Church Age Believers: Resurrected before the Tribulation. (1Corinthians 15:50-53; 1Thessalonians 4:13-18; John 14:3)

The Rapture of the church:

a) This resurrection/translation is for those *in Christ*, not all the saved of all ages. (1Thess.4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the *dead in Christ* shall rise first:). Paul, throughout his writings, uses the terminology *in Christ* as a technical term for the church- the body of Christ. This is a phrase of limitation. The phrase is not used of Saints before Pentecost. Old Testament saints are not included here for this would confuse God's programs for Israel and for the church. Some dispensationalists have confused the two programs by including O.T. saints in the rapture. Men like William Kelley, A.C. Gaebelein, C.I. Scofield, Harry Ironsides just to name a few.

b) Technically, two groups are involved here: Those who are alive when Jesus comes will be translated- transformed/conversion of something from one form or medium into another- here, receiving of glorified bodies without dying. And then we also have those who are technically resurrected from the dead and given glorified bodies.

c) The translation of those alive at the time of the Rapture is the "mystery" of 1Corinthians 15:51 where Paul writes "Behold, I shew you a *mystery*; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed," To the best of my knowledge, no O.T. prophet or passage teaches about translation. Old Testament saints, along with tribulation saints are not promised the mystery of translation. The prophets do teach that anyone alive on the earth at the 2nd coming will enter the millennial kingdom in the flesh where children will be born and death still exists (Isaiah 65:20). (ESV) **Isaiah 65:20** No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

The point is that the teaching of this "mystery of translation/change" by Paul separates this event from the resurrection of the O.T. and Tribulation martyrs after the Tribulation.

4) The Resurrection of God's Two Witnesses Killed by The Beast:

They will be resurrected around the middle of the Tribulation.

Revelation 11:11-12 And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. (12) 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.

The danger of spiritualizing passages of Scripture always abounds. We must seek to be careful exegetes. With this said:

- This is **NOT** a Mid-Tribulation Rapture.

- Even **Harry Ironsides** spiritualizes this passage: "I do not know that we need limit the witnesses to two individuals. Two is the number of testimony, and we need to remember that we are dealing here with symbols, not necessarily with the literal personalities. Therefore the two witnesses might well symbolize the witnessing remnant of Judah as a whole. But I would not be dogmatic as to this, for it might be the mind of God to send two individuals, as here described, to herald the near coming of His Son."

5) The Resurrection of The Old Testament Saints:

They will be resurrected at the end of the Tribulation in order to enter the Millennial Kingdom. ([Daniel 12:1-2, 13](#); [Isaiah 26:19](#); [John 11:24](#))

[John 11:24](#) Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection *at the last day*. The *last day* for Martha referred to that time just before the Messianic Kingdom. That is what most Jewish teachers taught with the exception of the Sadducees.

[Daniel 12:1-2](#)- places a resurrection of two groups of Jewish people (**v.1- thy people**) with contrasting destinies after the Tribulation. [Ch.11:36-45](#) refers to the work of the Antichrist during the Tribulation period. Then in [12:1](#) we have the phrase *and at that time*. What time? The time mentioned at the end of chapter 11, a time of Jacob's trouble ([Jer.30:7](#)).

V.2- And *many*, not all, but less than all. There is another clearer Hebrew word (kā) that could have been used if *all* was meant. This is not a general resurrection referring to all who died throughout history. Interestingly enough, Dr. Keil and even Edward J. Young, both Amillennialists, argue against the meaning of *all* here. Young says that "all" is forced and unnatural." He is right, *all* is not meant here but *many* in the sense that there are others who will experience resurrection at other times in history.

Now, the context of this verse clearly refers *awake* to physical resurrection, rather than a spiritual resurrection.

We have two Jewish groups (righteous & unrighteous) with two different destinies (everlasting life & everlasting contempt) and two different times. Now, some say that this verse only predicts the resurrection of the dead, but does not clearly reveal a difference in timing. Therefore, we bring in other verses to show that there are two different timings. But, some claim that two different timings can be understood in the Hebrew text.

Samuel P. Tregelles translates [Daniel 12:2](#) as follows: "*And many from among the sleepers of the dust of the earth shall awake; these shall be unto everlasting life; but those [the rest of the sleepers, those who do not awake at this time] shall be unto shame and everlasting contempt.*" [S. P. Tregelles, Remarks on the Prophetic Visions in the Book of Daniel, p. 159; words in brackets supplied by Tregelles].

Tregelles followed some early Jewish commentators such as Saadia Haggaaon (10th Century) and Aben Ezra (12th Century).

So, the righteous will *awake*- be resurrected with glorified bodies to enter the Messianic Kingdom and the unrighteous will be resurrected at another time- after the Millennial Kingdom ([Rev.20:11-15](#)).

V.13- Daniel shall *rest* (die) and *stand* (resurrected) at *the end of days*, again right before the Messianic Kingdom.

6) The Resurrection of Tribulation Martyrs:

Resurrected at the end of the Tribulation and will enter the Millennial kingdom to rule and reign with Christ. ([Revelation 20:4-6](#))

Again, in context, the first resurrection refers to the Tribulation martyrs in contrast to the "second resurrection" of the unrighteous of all time that will experience the second death.

B. The Second Resurrection: The Unrighteous:

Revelation 20:5a; 11-15

The unrighteous dead of all time will be resurrected at the end of the thousand-year Messianic Kingdom. They will stand at the Great White Throne Judgment with resurrected bodies fit for the eternal punishment of the Lake of Fire.

C. What About Those That Entered The Millennial Kingdom With Physical Bodies?

We know that some enter the Millennial kingdom with physical bodies (The sheep of [Matthew 25:31-46](#)). We know that children will be born and will have to make a choice to follow Christ or rebel. There must be unsaved people to rebel with Satan at the end of the Millennial Kingdom.

Again, [Isaiah 65:20](#) mentions death in the Millennial Kingdom. So, what happens to these people? Is there a resurrection and translation of these? Scripture does not tell us specifically what happens with these people.

One person suggested to me that they will continue throughout eternity in physical bodies and somehow sustained by the “*Tree of Life*.” I would have to give more study to that, but I am not yet convinced. In my mind, these people would need to be resurrected and translated. Since God will either cleanse or completely recreate the heavens and the earth, it seems to me that these forementioned people would need glorified bodies. But God is silent and we need to be ok with that. God will certainly take care of them!

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

Why does it matter if there is one general resurrection, or two resurrections, or multiple resurrections? It matters because this is God’s Word and we should desire to handle it carefully and accurately.

There are clear dispensational implications. God has a plan for Israel and He has a plan for the Church and they are not identical- some overlap, but not completely the same. But certainly, the Church does not replace Israel.

We need to be thankful for God’s wisdom in these issues. He will be faithful in fulfilling all His promises to Israel. He will be faithful to us as church age saints that we will be raptured out of this world and will not come under God’s wrath during the Tribulation or at any other time.

(ESV) [1Thessalonians 1:10](#) and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

(ESV) [1Thessalonians 5:9](#) For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Appendix 1:

Albert Barnes on Revelation 20:4 (Barnes Notes: e-Sword addition)

(An example of spiritualizing the passage)

And they lived - ἐζήσαν *ezēsan*, from ζάω *zaō*, “to live.” Very much, in the whole passage, depends on this word. The meanings given to the word by Prof. Robinson (*Lexicon*) are the following:

- (a) To live, to have life, spoken of physical life and existence;
- (b) To live, that is, to sustain life, to live on or by anything;
- (c) To live in any way, to pass one’s life in any manner;
- (d) To live and prosper; to be blessed.

It may be applied to those who were before dead [Mat 9:18](#); [Mar 16:11](#); [Luk 24:23](#); [Joh 5:25](#); [Act 1:3](#); [Act 9:41](#), but it does not necessarily imply this, nor does the mere use of the word “suggest” it. It is the proper notion of living, or having life “now,” whatever was the former state - whether nonexistence, death, sickness, or health. The mind, in the use of this word, is fixed on the “present as a state of living.” It is not necessarily in contrast with a former state “as dead,” but it is on the fact that they are now alive. As, however, there is reference, in the passage before us, to the fact that a portion of those mentioned had been “beheaded for the witness of Jesus,” it is to be admitted that the word here refers, in some sense, to

that fact. They were put to death in the body, but their “souls” were now seen to be alive. They had not ceased to be, but they lived and reigned with Christ as if they had been raised up from the dead. And when this is said of the “souls” of those who were beheaded, and who were seen to reign with Christ, it cannot mean:

- (a) That their “souls” came to life again, for there is no intimation that they had for a moment ceased to exist; nor,
- (b) That they then became “immortal,” for that was always true of them; nor,
- (c) That there was any literal “resurrection of the body,” as Prof. Stuart (2:360, 475, 476) supposes, and as is supposed by those who hold to a literal reign of Christ on the earth, for there is no intimation of the resurrection of the “body.”

The meaning, then, so far as the language is concerned, must be, that there would exist, at the time of the thousand years, a state of things as if the martyrs were raised up from the dead - an honoring of the martyrs as if they should live and reign with Christ. Their names would be vindicated; their principles would be revived; they would be exalted in public estimation above other men; they would be raised from the low rank in which they were held by the world in times of persecution to a state which might well be represented by their sitting with Christ on the throne of government, and by their being made visible attendants on his glorious kingdom.

This would not occur in respect to the rest of the dead - even the pious dead [Rev 20:5](#) - for “their” honors and rewards would be reserved for the great day when all the dead should be judged according to their deeds. In this view of the meaning of this passage there is nothing that forbids us to suppose that the martyrs will be “conscious” of the honor thus done to their names, their memory, and their principles on earth, or that this consciousness will increase their joy even in heaven. This sense of the passage is thus expressed, substantially, by Dr. Whately (Essays on the Future State): “It may signify not the literal raising of dead men, but the raising up of an increased Christian zeal and holiness; the revival in the Christian church, or in some considerable portion of it, of the “spirit and energy” of the noble martyrs of old (even as John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elias), so that Christian principles shall be displayed in action throughout the world in an infinitely greater degree than ever before.”

This view of the signification of the word “lived” is sustained by its use elsewhere in the Scriptures and by its common use among people. Thus in this very book, [Rev 11:11](#); “And after three days and a half, the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet.” So in Ezekiel, in speaking of the restoration of the Jews: “Thus saith the Lord God, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves,” and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live,” [Eze 37:12-14](#). So in [Hos 6:2](#); “After two days he will “revive” us (cause us to live again); in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall “live” in his sight.” So in the parable of the prodigal son: “This thy brother was dead, and is alive again,” [Luk 15:32](#).

So in [Isa 26:19](#); “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise.” The following extract, from D’Aubigne’s “History of the Reformation,” will show how natural it is to use the very language employed here when the idea is intended to be conveyed of reviving former principles as if the people who held them should be raised to life again. It is the language of the martyr John Huss, who, in speaking of himself in view of a remarkable dream that he had, said, “I am no dreamer, but I maintain this for certain, that the image of Christ will never be effaced. They (his enemies) have wished to destroy it, but it shall be painted afresh in all hearts by much better preachers than myself. The nation that loves Christ will rejoice at this. And I, awaking from among the dead, and rising, so to speak, from my grave, shall leap with great joy.” So a Brief addressed by Pope Adrian to the Diet at Nuremberg contains these words: “The heretics Huss and Jerome are now alive again in the person of Martin Luther.” For a further illustration of the passage see the remarks which follow (section b) on the state of things which may be expected to exist in the time referred to in [Rev 20:4-6](#).

And reigned with Christ - Were exalted in their principles, and in their personal happiness in heaven, as if they occupied the throne with him, and personally shared his honors and his triumphs. Who can tell, also, whether they may not be employed in special services of mercy, in administering the affairs of his government during that bright and happy period?

A thousand years - During the period when Satan will be bound, and when the true religion will have the ascendancy in the earth. See the notes on [Rev 20:2](#).