

## **What Is the First Resurrection?**

Daniel 12:1-3; Revelation 20:4-6

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Why spend time discussing controversial subjects surrounding prophetic events (like the millennium)? Since there is so much disagreement among Christians about the millennium, why not just focus on that which all Bible-believing Christians can agree?

First, I submit that controversy is not a good reason to avoid difficult subjects in Scripture, for all Scripture is given to us by God for our good—even that which might be hard to understand (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Peter states (2 Peter 3:15-16) that Paul’s letters though inspired Scripture, nevertheless teach truths that are hard to be understood. So just because there are truths that are difficult to understand, we should not cease from being earnest students in the School of Christ. How much of the Bible are we willing to avoid simply because there is not unanimous agreement on the interpretation of passages of Scripture?

Second, we ministers are not infallible, although we handle that which is infallible. We must, therefore, approach the Scripture at all times in the fear of God, handling His Word with all seriousness/humility, calling upon the Lord to crucify our pride. It is a most sobering fact that we ministers can either lead or mislead Christ’s sheep for which we are responsible before Jesus Christ, our King.

Third, the study of Scripture is not a mere academic work. It is necessary to seek to understand a text in its literary, grammatical, and historical context, but if we fail to have our minds illuminated by the Holy Spirit, we will not truly understand a Book that is spiritually discerned.

Fourth, though we are not infallible, God has given to us an infallible rule of interpretation—namely, Scripture itself. Thus, we are to search out more clear places to help in our interpretation of less clear places.

Fifth, even in controversial passages, God’s truth is available to us. It is His revelation. The Lord is not schizophrenic, giving to us contrary meanings to His truth. The problem in understanding Scripture is in our thinking, not in His. We will never have perfect knowledge this side of heaven, but that doesn’t mean we ought not to strive to understand.

Sixth, thankfully, we have over 2,000 years of history of some of the greatest Christian minds with whom to confer in our interpretation of Scripture. We are not an island to ourselves in this generation. We ought not to look upon creativity and new paths as being the way to interpret Scripture, but rather to study the old paths (throughout history).

Let us then with a sober-mindedness and yet with excitement continue our study of the future glorious millennial reign of the saints with Jesus who will bring all nations into the Visible Church of Christ.

We continue with a couple more questions from our text: (1) Who Are the Saints That Are Raised to Live and Reign with Christ for a Thousand Years? (2) What Is the Nature of the First Resurrection that Lasts for a Thousand Years?

### **I. Who Are the Saints That Are Raised to Live and Reign with Christ for a Thousand Years?**

A. They who sat upon the thrones and to whom judgment was given so that they reigned a thousand years are faithful martyrs/witnesses for the truth and testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 20:4).

B. These martyrs in Revelations 20:4 consist of two groups that lived under two persecuting Roman systems of government: PAGAN ROME which persecuted and BEHEADED many of the martyrs of Christ with the sword; and PAPAL ROME which persecuted and slew the faithful who would not worship the beast, nor his image, nor receive his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands.

1. The first group of faithful martyrs/witnesses that were beheaded are found in Revelation 6:9-11 as “under the altar”, signifying that they had shed their blood for their faithful testimony to Christ and His truth. John sees the souls of these martyred Christians who were slain under PAGAN ROME

crying out for God's righteous judgment and holy vindication to be given them for their testimony for Christ and His truth. But note what these martyrs in heaven were told (Revelation 6:11). They are to wait for judgment/vindication to be given to them until a second group of faithful martyrs/witnesses is likewise slain for their testimony.

2. The second group of faithful martyrs/witnesses for Christ were slain by PAPAL ROME in Revelation 20:4 as those who did not worship the Civil Beast (joined with the Papal False Prophet) or his image (Revelation 13:7,14,15; Revelation 17:6).

3. The first group slain by PAGAN ROME are told to wait for God's righteous judgment and vindication of their blood and testimony until the second group slain by PAPAL ROME join them in heaven. God's righteous judgment and vindication against PAPAL ROME comes when the Civil Beast and the Papal False Prophet are destroyed (Revelation 19:20) and when they are raised to reign with Christ in the millennium (Revelation 20:4-6).

4. That is to say that the souls of the martyrs in heaven are not yet reigning with Christ in the millennium until judgment is given to them and they are raised to reign with Christ (Revelation 20:4). Only as judgment is given to them will they be raised and reign with Christ for a thousand years.

**II. What Is the Nature of the First Resurrection that Lasts for a Thousand Years?** Let's look at several truths about the first resurrection.

A. **First Truth:** The "first resurrection" is stated to be the coming to life of these martyrs/witnesses upon earth who reign with Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-5). Carefully note that the first resurrection is not stated to be an instantaneous, momentary resurrection (whether physical or spiritual), but rather a resurrection and coming to life and reigning of faithful martyrs/witnesses that lasts a thousand years—the living and reigning with Christ contemporaneously for a thousand years "is the First Resurrection" (Revelation 20:4-5).

B. **Second Truth:** The "first resurrection" is not in heaven, but upon earth (as noted in the previous sermon). The martyred souls are in heaven, but the living and reigning of the saints is upon earth (Revelation 5:9-10). The Bible never speaks of saints in heaven coming to life in heaven. Both groups of martyrs are brought to life for the very purpose that they should reign with Christ for a thousand years upon earth.

C. **Third Truth:** The "first resurrection" is most likely a figurative coming to life rather than a physical resurrection. Why?

1. This is stated to be a resurrection of the faithful martyrs/witnesses of Jesus who suffered serious persecution for the Word of God (faith) and the testimony of Jesus (practice). It is not stated to be a resurrection of all Christians indiscriminately (whether all New Testament saints or all Old Testament and New Testament saints). It is the resurrection of a specific group of saints—faithful martyrs/witnesses of Jesus under two great periods of persecution from PAGAN ROME and from PAPAL ROME.

2. In all other Scriptures referring to the bodily resurrection of the saints collectively, Scripture does not single out only the resurrection of faithful martyrs for Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22-23; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Remember, it was the souls of the martyrs in heaven (Revelation 6:9-11) that were specifically promised to receive judgment from the Lord in the future (which they will yet receive in the millennium). It was the martyrs that were specifically told to wait.

3. Now someone may suggest that the martyrs represent all other saints to be raised at the same time—not that the martyrs are the only saints to be raised. Do the faithful martyrs/witnesses of Christ that suffer in great persecution ever represent all the saints in being physically raised from the dead at the coming of Christ? I don't know of any place where that is the case. Thus, in a prophetic Book that is filled with symbols when we come across such a unique statement, it should lead us to consider the possibility of another explanation.

4. I submit this is a figurative coming to life of the martyrs and their reigning with Christ.

The faithful martyrs of Christ in heaven figuratively come to life upon earth during the millennium in many generations of Christians who have the spirit, courage, and commitment of the martyrs in spiritually reigning with Christ over all the nations and in bringing all the nations through the gospel to trust in and submit to King Jesus who is reigning from heaven. The spiritual posterity of the martyrs will come alive in the world during the millennium in a way unparalleled in history, and it is likened to a resurrection (Revelation 20:4-5).

5. Such a figurative resurrection upon earth of God's people in coming to life in subsequent generations after a period of captivity, persecution (martyrdom), and subjugation under the feet of their enemies is found in other places in Scripture as well (Ezekiel 37:11-14; Hosea 5:14-6:3; Romans 11:15; Revelation 11:10-15). Note how the prophecy concerning Elijah was fulfilled in John the Baptist (Malachi 4:5-6; Luke 1:15-17; Matthew 11:14—"this is Elias, which was for to come").

6. I submit a figurative resurrection also best explains why the "first resurrection" lasts only a thousand years rather than forever. The first resurrection and reigning with Christ comes to an end after a thousand years (Revelation 20:6-7). However, the physical resurrection of the dead in Christ will not last for only a thousand years—once physically raised from the dead the saints will reign with Christ forever—for death will be destroyed. And yet death is not destroyed and cast into the Lake of Fire until after the millennium (not before it—Revelation 20:14). The physical resurrection of the saints and the wicked occurs contemporaneously after the millennium (Revelation 20:13).

7. That briefly summarizes the reasons why the "first resurrection" is most likely a figurative resurrection rather than a literal, bodily resurrection.

#### D. Application

1. The book of Revelation is filled with comfort and encouragement to those who will not give up their testimony for Christ's truth at the loss of possessions, family, friends, or even at the loss of their own lives. Such a truth pierces into our own hearts as well, asking each one of us, "What are we willing to sacrifice in order to be faithful to Christ and His truth?" The trials we now face are tests in the School of Christ as to what comforts are we willing to give up to faithfully follow Christ. Christians throughout the world are being slaughtered for Christ, and we can barely endure the loss of some temporal comfort.

2. Faithfulness to Christ and His truth will not gain one popularity and applause with a backsliding/compromising church or with a hostile world. In fact, an earnest resolve to hold fast to that which the faithful church throughout history has attained will almost certainly bring the assaults of the enemy to silence that pure testimony for Christ. The cry of the majority is this, "Why can't these faithful witnesses just learn to get along with the majority in church and state?" I'll tell you why. They don't count heads to determine what is true or false, or what is right or wrong. They determine what is true and what is right based upon what God says in Scripture (Isaiah 8:20). They are more concerned in following Christ and walking in the footsteps of the faithful who have preceded them, than in finding a comfortable place with the majority.

3. Dear young people, the peer pressure is intense to walk the broad path with the majority to be accepted—the pressure to engage in sexual immorality, pornography, blasphemous movies, ungodly music, vulgar language, parties, and drugs. It is like swimming upstream against a mighty current to resist the pressure of the majority who worship sports, education, their jobs, their cars, and worship their own "freedom" to resist their parents and God Himself. The resurrection power of Christ is more powerful than any temptation you face. Fall upon Christ and His amazing grace even now. He will make you His faithful witness rather than a mere clone of the majority to be used and abused by the devil.

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