

The RESURRECTIONS from the DEAD

According to Hebrews 6, the 'Resurrection from the Dead' is identified as one of six Fundamental Christian Doctrines. To fully fathom this Essential Truth, we need to examine carefully the other Resurrection chapter: Revelation 20.

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From the earliest times, the people who knew God had a general awareness of a most unbelievable phenomenon, that of a personal resurrection from the dead. Even the pre-Mosaic patriarch, Job, was certain that he would rise from the grave in the distant future, to personally meet God. *"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another."* Not only that there is to be a resurrection, but that there is to be a 'judgment'! *"Be afraid of the sword for yourselves; For wrath brings the punishment of the sword, That you may know there is a judgment"*. (Job 19:25-29) (NKJ)

Though the resurrection from the dead is a well known and widely professed belief in the Christian world, few can present in detail the timing and the purpose of this enigmatic phenomenon. Though Christ's resurrection is presented as an absolute essential to the Faith, how our personal resurrection factors into the redemptive process remains infinitely harder for most believers to explain. After all, once the believer, having died in Christ, is consigned to his 'eternal reward', what possible need would there be thereafter for a restoration to life? What purpose is there for any resurrection from the dead? Why do places like 1 Corinthians 15 and Hebrews 6 present the fact of the resurrection as being an essential component of belief?

The Scriptures are far from silent on this matter.

A Personal Application?

In many churches, the idea of a personal resurrection from the dead, though given lip service, is a relatively minor component. Upon decease, they see each person assigned to either of two eternal

destinations. There they spend eternity. One in a state of bliss, the other under excruciating torment!

Why is a Resurrection Necessary?

At what point in time, and for what imaginable purpose, are individuals restored to life, with their conscious mentalities reunited with their physical form? For that matter, why are the Saints of God assigned immortal Spirit Bodies.¹ Does one need that in order to attain entrance into Heaven? Do those consigned to that other place need to be changed to anything in order to go there? And, why does this happen all together, at a specific moment in time? Being given a Spirit Body does not happen sequentially, as each person dies, as traditional theology requires, but rather all together in a single moment of time!

Can modern Theology answer?

One can easily see why the Christian community is uncomfortable with major elements of the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead.

More Than One Resurrection?

Further complicating the picture is the explicitly clear Biblical statements that there are to be more than just one resurrection! *"But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection."* (NKJ) (Re.20:5) So, what is this 'thousand years' and how does it factor into the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead? That contingent of Biblical students who can provide a viable explanation at this point are becoming noticeably fewer.

¹ 1Cor. 15:35 thru 54 *"...we shall not all sleep, but we all shall be changed – in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, at the last Trumpet. For the Trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed..."*

Why is there to be more than one resurrection, and what possible reason could there be for there being **one-thousand years between** them?

One can easily perceive from this that modern day Christianity has embraced a belief system that excludes a certain element of Biblical Truth.

The ‘resurrection from the dead’ is a fundamental Christian truth. First Corinthians 15 states clearly that “...*if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*” (v.16-17) We can see here the absolute need for this doctrinal element in true Christian theology. What may not be quite so apparent is the need for it also on a personal level. Verse 18 of that same passage continues, “*Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.*” How could that be? If a personal resurrection is not a reality, then all, even the dead in Christ, are here stated as being forever perished!

A Fundamental Doctrine

The scripture most commonly used to establish the fact of the resurrection being one of the fundamental Christian doctrines is Hebrews, Chapter 6. This passage lists six fundamental doctrines,² in the process of advocating yet a seventh. Considering what the seventh is, it becomes clear that this is not just a list of fundamental doctrines, it is also an **in-order** description of the progression someone goes through while becoming converted. In pursuit of ‘perfection’, the seventh element, we must progress into and through: Repentance, Faith, Baptism, Laying on of Hands, the Resurrection, and Eternal Judgment. No one is truly converted and brought to their just reward, without developing through and experiencing each of these stages. Each of these are eminently personal. The resurrection not excluded. There is far more involved than just believing and professing Christ’s personal resurrection. There is also a matter of our own!

The Apostle Paul recognized this personal application. In Philippians 3:10, he says, “*That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed*

to His death, if by any means, I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead.” In Romans 6:5: “*For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.*” (NKJ) Obviously, this describes a personal resurrection. That **ultimate Grace** referred to in 1st Peter 1:13: The resurrection with judgment, being found worthy of eternal life. Those last two elements listed in Hebrews 6, being components of the quest toward ultimate perfection.

How Many Resurrections Are There?

But, how many resurrections are there? Just from the clear statement in Revelation 20:5, we can know with certainty of at least two. These two are separated by 1000 years. To answer this question, we need to look at the “Resurrection Chapter”. To most, that would be 1st Corinthians 15. This resurrection chapter deals with Christ’s resurrection and our personal resurrection: that being, what Revelation 20:5 identifies as the First Resurrection. What Paul, Luke and John refer to as the “better Resurrection”, the “resurrection of the just”.³ The First Resurrection occurs at the Last Trumpet, concurrent with Christ’s Second Coming, just at the onset of the One-Thousand Years.

But there is another resurrection chapter, in which we can glean a better understanding of the subsequent resurrection: The one that occurs after the thousand years. This other Resurrection Chapter is Revelation 20, particularly verses 4 through 15. When we examine this chapter in depth, we begin to see not only the relative timing of the latter resurrection, but its essential purpose in the overall Plan of God. In fact, in these passages, we can see something very noteworthy.

The Resurrection of the Last Day.

But first, we need to back up a little. Statements of Martha, in John 11:24, and Christ in John 5:28-29 refer to and confirm the common understanding of that day, that there would be a resurrection at the ‘last day’. One in which ‘the just’ would be separated from ‘the evil’. “...*for the hour is coming in which all who are in the grave will hear His voice,*

² Heb. 6:1-2

³ Heb. 11:35, John 5:29, Luke 14:14

and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” Further definition is given in Matthew 25:31-34, in which Christ says, “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will *separate* them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the *sheep* on His right hand, but the *goats* on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come you, blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:’” This is very clearly NOT referring to the First Resurrection. This is a resurrection in which the ‘sheep and goats’ types come from their graves together, and appear before God and are separated one from the other. The First Resurrection involves exclusively God’s True Saints, changed instantly as the Dead in Christ rise at the time of Christ’s Second Coming.⁴ No **unconverted** people rise in the First Resurrection! Revelation 20:5 states specifically, “...the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years are finished.” So, when does this “**sheep from goats**” resurrection with sentencing, that Christ refers to, occur?

What Revelation 20 Reveals

First, we should take note of the setting in which the resurrections are presented in Revelation 20. Beginning back in chapter 18 we see:

The fall of Modern Babylon: 18:21 thru 19:4,
 God’s Reign announced: 19:5-6,
 The Marriage of the Lamb: 19:7–10,
 Dealing justice to errant society: 19:11-16,
 Beast’s armies defeated: 19:17-21,
 Satan bound 1000 years: 20:1-3,
 Saints co-reign 1000 years: 20:4-6,
 Satan is released, provoking rebellion: 20:7-10,
 The Great White Throne Judgment: 20:11-12,
 Final sentencing of all humanity: 20:13-15.

Here we see the general sequence of events leading up to these incidental references to the resurrection periods in chapter 20: verses 6 thru 14. Revelation 20 is not about the resurrections specifically, but

⁴ 1st Thess. 4:13-17, 1st Cor. 15:51-52

presents them only incidentally to other prophetic matters. However, the small glimpse into this key subject given here is absolutely priceless!

The First Resurrection.

Let’s review what is known about what Revelation 20 calls the First Resurrection. First, it occurs just before the thousand years.⁵ Those who are worthy of this better resurrection are raised immortal,⁶ and reign with Christ during the thousand years.⁷ On them, the second death (that death from which there is no resurrection) has no power.⁸ The rest of the dead are not raised at this time, but **wait** until after the thousand years have passed.

WHY the Thousand Years?

This question was posed earlier: Why is there this thousand year interlude between the first resurrection and the last, that general resurrection, in which **all** the dead will be raised? This is a more defining question than might at first be apparent. In order to answer it fully, we need to consider the various components brought into the picture in this chapter.

First, **the Book of Life**, mentioned in verses 12, and 15. (Mentioned additionally in Philippians 4:3, Revelation 3:5, 13:3, 17:8, 21:27 and 22:19.)

Then, **the thousand years**. We see it mentioned in verses 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Also, the **Reign of the Saints**, mentioned in verses 4 and 6. (Additionally in 1:6, 2:26, 3:21 and 17:18)

Each of these factor in to this question.

Now, the Book of Life presents an interesting consideration. We need to realize that at the first resurrection all whose names are in the Book to that time are resurrected as Spirit Born Saints. At that time, just as the thousand years begin, there are no individuals named in the Book who are not

⁵ Re. 20:5 “*But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years are finished. This is the first resurrection.*”

⁶ 1Cor. 15:52 & 54 “...*For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible...So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, , then shall be brought to pass the saying, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’.*”

⁷ Revelation 20:6

⁸ Revelation 20:6

already resurrected! Then why, in verse 15, is the Book of Life again opened and names found in it worthy of Life. What else could be its purpose? Asking the question another way, Is the Book of Life the basis of determining who's a 'sheep' and who's a 'goat' type?

What will the co-ruling Saints be doing during the thousand years? Revelation 1:6 says these washed-in-the-blood Saints will be serving as Kings and Priests! Verse 20:4 indicates thrones of judgment. They'll be the civil and religious governing class, under Christ, in His thousand-year (Millennial) Kingdom.⁹ They will be ruling over all those who survived the end-time tribulation and their physical descendants. David will be raised to rule over the Nation of Israel from Jerusalem.¹⁰ The twelve Apostles will be raised to rule each tribe under David.¹¹ We know from Revelation 20:5 that there will be no-one else resurrected but God's Saints prior to the end of the thousand years.

The Book of Life Opened

Back to the Book of Life again. In verse 20:12, we see it 'opened'. Why would it be opened, unless it was for the purpose of adding names? All whose names were in it at the start of the thousand years are then known, being evidenced by their status as resurrected Spirit-Born Saints. There would be no other names in it from that point onward, unless more names were being added! It would be useless to open it at the last judgment, to see whose names were in it, if there weren't any! Who are the 'sheep' Christ refers to in Matthew 25:31-34? Where do these other sheep come from? If they are not additional names, then we must conclude that not all of those written in the Book were raised immortal at the Last Trump!

The only logical conclusion is that the purpose of the Millennial Kingdom is for the up-bringing of additional mega-thousands into the Family of God, beginning with the physical survivors of the end-time events, and continuing on with their descendants. Christ's Bride, His Spirit-Born Saints, will rule with Him to provide opportunity to the over-

⁹ Malachi 3:18

¹⁰ Ezekiel 37:24 See my articles on the Millennial System.

¹¹ Luke 22:29-30 Spoken by Christ at Passover

whelming masses of humanity for conversion and ultimate salvation. The results from this kingdom opportunity are what provide the additional 'sheep' who are added to the Book of Life and who arise in the Last Resurrection.

We can see from this scenario, that the Plan of God extends the opportunity for ultimate salvation on beyond the First Resurrection. Yet, a nagging question persists among more perceptive Bible students. That being, What about all those who died in past ages, who never had opportunity for salvation? All those who died in the world prior to Abraham, all those who lived and died prior to Christ's sacrifice for sin, all those who died in the Christian era, who never heard the Truth? Are they ever to be afforded an opportunity for salvation?

This is where Revelation 20 proves especially insightful!

Before we look there, we should take into account a phenomenon not fully appreciated. Going back to the ancient mention by Job,¹² he refers to being resurrected in a physical state. Also, Ezekiel 37 refers to the whole house of Israel being resurrected physical, flesh being put on their bones, and life being restored to them. Lazarus was raised from the dead in a physical state, only to die a physical death a second time.¹³ When God the Father beamed the power to Earth to resurrect His Christ, it caused co-incident resurrections among recently deceased saints in the vicinity. These created quite a stir in Jerusalem at the time!¹⁴ We could also consider Elisha's raising of the old woman's son,¹⁵ or Christ having done the same thing on more than one occasion.¹⁶

The point here is to illustrate that **physical** resurrections are a precedented phenomenon, each of these individuals re-experiencing a physical death after some time.

And the Books Were Opened

These things in mind, we can now better appreciate

¹² Job 19:25-29 "...in my flesh I shall see God."

¹³ John 12:1, 10 & 17

¹⁴ Matthew 27:52-53

¹⁵ 2nd Kings 4:35

¹⁶ Mark 5:42

the extraordinary information found in Revelation 20. Verses 4-6 present the First Resurrection, and in verse 11, we are introduced to a Great White Throne, which occurs after the thousand years. We know that by the fact that this event involves a resurrection in which “*the dead, small and great, stand before God.*” Now, in this situation, we see “*the books (being) opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life.*” Those are two separate books: One plural, one singular. These people then being judged (the Saints are judging at this point in time (Re.20:4)) by their conformance to these ‘books’ (Greek: *Biblion, the Bible*) which are here opened to them, opened to their full understanding, for them to live by, for the first time!

In order to understand the value of what we have here, we need to notice the distinction between verses 11-12 and 13-14. Most commentators see these as a single event, where actually, they should be two separate paragraphs, as they describe two different resurrections! The latter one imposes the ‘second death’ on some. Death itself is eliminated with this final resurrection, but not the earlier one!

The Sheep from Goats

Verses 13-14 describe the Last Resurrection, in which ALL are raised together, for the purpose of final sentencing, based on their ‘sheep’ or ‘goat’ status, as determined by their conformance to God’s righteous standards. At this one, Death and the Grave, as institutions, are discontinued, being themselves cast into the Lake of Fire. This is the **second death**, from which there is no resurrection. This is a vastly different situation than what we see in the resurrection described in verses 11 and 12.

An Opportunity to Live Again

In this Second Resurrection, we see a figurative vast clearing, in which they can see God and God can see them. These are raised physical, otherwise we wouldn’t see the distinction between ‘small and great’. (In modern English: VIP’s and punks!) This physical restoration to life provides opportunity to be called and to gain in understanding (the ‘books’ being opened to them for the first time) pursuant to salvation. This does not include those who **had** opportunity for salvation in their physical lifetimes, but who rejected it. Those await the Last

Resurrection (and their sentencing). These in this Second Resurrection live out the remainders of their lives, and re-experience a physical death, awaiting that Last Resurrection at which they receive their appropriate reward. (v.13)

Bringing us up to the same point in time as seen in verse 12, after the First Resurrection, just after the demise of the Beast’s kingdom, we find the curious statement, in Re. 14:13. “*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.*” This is consistent with the statements in Revelation 20:12 & 13. Through the millennial age, people continue to die, awaiting the resurrection to Eternal Life or Death, just as now.

Further insight into this period of the Great White Throne is found in Isaiah 65:17-20, where we see a new Jerusalem, a new people, and a joyous world. In verse 20. it says, “*No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, Nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; For the child shall die one hundred years old, But the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed.*” The question is, who is this child? How can a ‘child’ be one hundred years old? Well, the ‘child’ is set in opposition to the ‘sinner’. The ‘child’ here is the child of God. This ‘child’ as well as his contemporary, the ‘sinner’, both shall die, please notice, awaiting their ultimate reward!

In this passage, we are given a glimpse into this period of time, of those who, after the First Resurrection, finally have opportunity for salvation, and who die awaiting their reward, either life or eternal death in the Lake of Fire. From this, we expect the Great White Throne period to be the better part of a century. Beyond that is the Last Resurrection and the end of the human experience on the Earth.

With the elimination of Death itself and the grave, there will be no individuals left worthy or capable of death! Physical existence will here be ended!

Sodom Berates Capernaum

Another glimpse into this era is given by Christ Himself in Luke 10:12-14 and Matthew 11:20-24. Here He relates that Sodom, Tyre and Sidon will be raised together with that generation, and will

condemn their failure to take their opportunity seriously. In Matthew 12:41-42 *“The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it,...The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.”* Now, would Christ mislead His disciples? Would He present them with a scenario that wasn’t true? Would He inspire or allow His Apostles to relate to us years later the same if it wasn’t something that was going to really happen? No, these situations He described are of real future events. People from generations living centuries apart are going to be raised together, and come to know one another well enough, to learn what they had opportunity to know, and condemn their unbelievable stupidity!

What possible purpose would there be for this resurrection, with the peoples of Sodom (1500 BC) Tyre and Sidon and Nineveh, all being raised from the dead together, other than to have opportunity to learn? These people were obviously unconverted! That’s the basis of their condemnation of one another! How could one generation even know of the situation of the other, that lived centuries later? Obviously, we are looking at a rising-up together that allows time for them to learn of and to become aware of the witness the other had. In Luke 10:12 we find Christ saying, *“But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom...Woe to you, Chorasin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented a great while ago...But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you, And you Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be thrust down to Hades.”* (NKJ) It’s hard to miss the point here, that there will be a time when these people will be restored to conscious life, together, and **have time** to be made aware of one another’s life situations!

What possible reason could there be for this physical resurrection of unconverted peoples, all being brought-up together, if not for their being given opportunity to repent?

A Most Complete Overview

With these situations in mind, we can now better appreciate what Revelation 20 reveals. (John 5: relates the same!) Here we see all THREE resurrections presented clearly, together in one passage:

The **First**, being a Spirit Resurrection, including all those converted prior to the Last Trumpet. A resurrection to Life. (Rev. 20:6, 1st Cor. 15:52) This one occurs at the instant of Christ’s return, prior to His thousand year reign.

The **Second**, a physical resurrection, affording an opportunity to all those who never had opportunity, but after which they die again, awaiting their reward, as we all do. (Rev. 20:12) This one takes place some time after the thousand years and after Satan is once again and finally banished.¹⁷

The **Third**, the Resurrection in the Last Day, in which all who ever lived are raised together, and receive their due reward for their life’s experience: the Sheep from the Goats. (Rev. 20:13 and Matt. 25:31-34) This final resurrection occurs after a sufficient time for those resurrected to opportunity to complete their lifetimes, perhaps as much as a century after the end of the thousand years.¹⁸

All Who Die Will Be Raised!

There is no-one who will not be resurrected. There is no-one who will not be presented with adequate opportunity to be called and become converted!

We can now see how essential this fundamental doctrine is: the Resurrection from the Dead. It is a vital component of God’s Plan for saving, or at least **providing opportunity** for saving, the greater segment of humanity!

But, there remains for us a ‘better Resurrection’!¹⁹ The First Resurrection: the resurrection of the Just. *“...we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air....Therefore comfort one another with these words.”*²⁰ **Ω**

¹⁷ Revelation 20:7 thru 10 *“And when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison...”*

¹⁸ Isaiah 65:19-20 Revelation 14:13

¹⁹ Hebrews 11:35 and 1st Corinthians 15:50-54

²⁰ 1st Thessalonians 4:17 & 18

Christ's Personal 'Three-Resurrections' thru John! (John 5 / Rev. 20)

(In these two passages, all three resurrections are presented together, comprehensively in sequence. *Light: John 5 / Bold: Rev. 20*)

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. **“And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them...And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him for a thousand years.”** These are they in the first resurrection, occurring at Christ's Second Coming, prior to the Great White Judgment Throne, in which they will also co-officiate! (1st Cor 6:2 & Mal 3:18)*

*¶ Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear ²¹ will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. ¶ Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. (to be assigned?) And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. This resurrection provides opportunity for those who **never had a chance** to respond to God's call and live 'by the things written in the books': their names then being added into the Book of Life. No such opportunity is referred to in the next and final resurrection. The only book referred to there is the Book of Life, and that, only for the purpose of seeing whose names are written in it!! And, notice, that final resurrection is all-inclusive! This previous one wasn't, nor did it impose the 'second death'!*

¶ Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. ¶ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works...This is the second death. This final 'sentencing and consignment' resurrection involves all who ever lived (excepting only those first resurrected) and is that 'sheep from goats' separation to sentencing Christ explicitly referred to in Matthew 25: verses 31 – 46.

The **first** resurrection is direct into Life. Then the **second** is to afford 'judgment and justice' to those who died never having had opportunity. The **third** is for **final sentencing** of all either to life **or** to condemnation: the second death! The second death is experienced by no-one, without their first having passed through an evaluative judgment. For the Saints of God, that evaluation period is now! ²² For the rest, the dead who were never called at least, that period is after the thousand years are finished.

Now that we can understand from the above passages, the essential doctrine of the **resurrections** from the dead, and as a result, another one listed there in Hebrews 6: that of **eternal judgment**, how judgment and justice will come to all in their appointed time, we are ready to understand the vital purpose for the Last Great Day. God has a PLAN that 'not any should perish' (needlessly). That plan also happens to be His WILL! **This Last Great Day is the Day for 'them too'!** After the Millennial Age, and after Satan's brief release, those dead who never had an opportunity to know the Truth, and to respond to it, by having God's Spirit offered to them (which is essential to True Salvation) will be raised again, still physical, to be offered that opportunity. They will live in an age absent of Satan's influence, as did their physical predecessors in the Millennial Kingdom. They will be allowed to live out the remainder of their lifetimes (possibly up to the century mark! (Isaiah 65:20 & context.)) (consider also Matthew 22:30)

²¹ Notice here the wording, suggesting that not all in this contingent will hear. In the next resurrection, ALL will hear!

²² 1st Peter 4:17...judgment must begin at the house of God... This is for evaluation, not condemnation.