

The Resurrection in Revelation

Revelation 20:1-6

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In Revelation 20, John described the resurrected saints seated on thrones and reigning with Christ after having been resurrected.

Rev 20:4-6

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

*5 But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. **This is the first resurrection.***

6 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 a thousand years.

The "first resurrection" is the only resurrection in the book of Revelation. Notice John did not actually see the resurrection of the saints taking place, but described resurrected saints being given their places of authority in the Kingdom. It is clear that they had been previously resurrected. According to verse four, this resurrection includes those who were slain by the Antichrist. Therefore, they must have come through the tribulation, not bypassed it. This resurrection, which is clearly posttribulational, was called by John, the "first resurrection." He contrasted it with the resurrection of the ungodly after the millennium. Of those who will experience the "first resurrection" he said: "*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.*" The implication is that all those who will reign with Christ will be raised in the "first resurrection." The fact that he called this the "first resurrection" precludes the possibility of there being a resurrection before this one at the beginning of the tribulation. By placing the "first resurrection" after the tribulation, John has also placed the rapture after the tribulation.

Many try to escape this obvious conclusion by claiming there are two stages of the "first resurrection" of the saints. The first stage being before the tribulation, and the second being after the tribulation, as described in Revelation twenty. But this interpretation is

extremely strained and unnatural. If John meant this was the second stage of the "first resurrection" he would have said so, especially since there is no other resurrection mentioned in Revelation. For that matter, there is no resurrection before the tribulation anywhere in the Bible! So such a supposition is a complete fabrication. The original readers of this epistle would have had no basis to draw such a conclusion. The natural, unforced, interpretation of Revelation twenty requires a posttribulation resurrection of the Church of Jesus Christ. This agrees with Paul's comments in 1 Cor. 15.

1 Cor 15:22-23

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

*23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward **those who are Christ's at His coming.***

Paul seems to say there is only a single future coming of Christ when ALL saints will be raised! No doubt Paul was referring to Jesus' plain teaching that all who belong to Him will be raised the same day.

John 6:39,40,44,54

*39 "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, **but should raise it up at the last day.***

*40 "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and **I will raise him up at the last day.**"*

...

*44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and **I will raise him up at the last day.** ...*

*54 "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and **I will raise him up at the last day.***

John 11:24

*24 Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again **in the resurrection at the last day.**"*

Some pretribulationists claim this resurrection in Revelation twenty cannot occur at the rapture because it follows the second coming in chapter 19. In other words, it seems to occur after Christ destroys the Antichrist rather than just before. However, this objection is based on misunderstanding the verb tenses that John used, and poor English translations.

John was NOT describing the "first resurrection" as taking place in the context of Revelation twenty. The English wording in most translations does not do a very good

job of conveying the precise verb tenses found in the Greek text. In most cases in Revelation, John recorded what he saw in the order he saw it. But, in the case of the "first resurrection," the wording and tenses of the verbs in the Greek text suggests that the first resurrection was already past, and John was seeing the saints already ruling on thrones after having been raised. The rest is his explanation of who these people are.

Notice that John did NOT say he saw the resurrection. He began by saying that he saw THRONES with people sitting on them. This was a Millennial scene he was describing. They were already reigning with Christ when John observed them, INCLUDING the resurrected martyrs of the tribulation. John then went on to explain who these people are. The second occurrence of the words "and I saw" in verse 4 are NOT in any Greek text, but were added by the translators. They give the false impression that the martyrs were resurrected after the others. That is NOT what the Greek text says at all. Here is Young's Literal Translation.

4 "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them, and the souls of those who have been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus, and because of the word of God, and who did not bow before the beast, nor his image, and did not receive the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand, and they did live and reign with Christ the thousand years;" YLT

Here is how the Greek text literally reads word for word: "And (I) saw thrones and (they) sat upon them, and judgment **had been given to them and the souls that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus...**"

The words "was given" (YLT) in verse 4 is the Greek verb "edoqh" (a form of "didomi" #1325). This verb is an aorist indicative, and points to an action that occurred in the past. It is precisely the same verb used by Jesus in Matt. 28:18, where He said, "all authority in heaven and earth **has been given unto me.**" So, John was not witnessing judgment being given to them. Rather, he was telling his readers that judgment had already been given to them prior to his seeing them on thrones.

Also, the verb "lived" in verse 4 does NOT mean raise up, or the act of being resurrected. It is "ezhsan" a form of "zao" (live). It is an aorist active indicative verb, meaning the state of living. In the New Testament, **it always refers to a state of life after having been raised from the dead.**

Luke 15:32

*32 It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and **is alive again**, and was lost and is found.'"*

Rev 2:8

8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:

Rev 13:14

14 And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.

As you can see, in every case this verb in its aorist active indicative form means a state of living AFTER having been raised, never the act of being raised. We see then that judgment being given to them was something already accomplished, and their resurrection was already accomplished when John saw them reigning on thrones in Rev. 20.

Now, let's translate this passage, leaving out the words that are not in the Greek text, and using the more precise verb tenses. I have put John's explanatory notes in parenthesis in order to mark off what John actually saw from his regressing to give explanations. The parenthetical portion is not a part of what he actually saw occurring in sequence, but are his explanatory notes.

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them,

*(and judgment **had been given** unto them AND the souls that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands);*

and they were living and reigning 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."

Note the switch from the present tense (which I have in blue type), where John was narrating what he saw, to his regressing in order to explain who these people are, (the bracketed portion in black type). The reason he mentioned "souls" was NOT because he saw "souls," but to identify some of the ones reigning on thrones with the "souls" he had previously seen under the altar at the 5th seal.

Rev 6:9-11

9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until

You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"
11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

John was showing the final results of the martyr's resting and "waiting" for a little season. He described one large group who were all sitting on thrones. Then he explained that some of these were the "souls" he had previously seen under the altar, which had later been given authority, and were now LIVING and REIGNING with Christ in His Kingdom. So, in the sequence of events that John was describing, the "first resurrection" had already taken place (presumably at the second coming in the previous chapter). He was describing the aftermath of the resurrection, and what became of the martyrs he had previously seen under the altar, not the resurrection itself.

In the final analysis, the only resurrection of the saints mentioned in Revelation includes all of those killed by the Antichrist. It is therefore correct to say that the only resurrection of believers in Revelation is posttribulational.