

## 93. The Book of Revelation—20:5-6

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A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier  
(9-14-22)

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### Revelation 20:1–5 (NKJV)

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. <sup>2</sup> He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; <sup>3</sup> and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. <sup>4</sup> **And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them** [a reference to Old Testament Saints and Church Saints]. **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** [a reference to Tribulation Saints]. **And they** [all three groups] **lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.** <sup>5</sup> **But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.**

The order of this statement has confused many over the years as to what John is saying—because it sounds like John is saying, the dead who did not live again until the thousand years were finished are those belonging to the ‘first resurrection.’

Let me rearrange John’s statement so that what he is saying becomes clear:

### Revelation 20:4–5 (NKJV)

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> **[This is the first resurrection.] But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.**

As we talked about last time, the Jews believed in one great resurrection of the dead—as do many Christians.

But if there is a “first resurrection”—there has to be at least one more after it.

Jesus taught in John’s Gospel 5:28-29 that there would be 2 great resurrections—one for believers and the other for unbelievers. Then in Revelation 20:5 we learn that they are separated by at least 1000 years.

Now, with regard to the physical, bodily resurrection of believers (which Jesus called the ‘*resurrection of life*’ in John 5:29—and John calls the ‘*first resurrection*’ in Revelation 20:5)—Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that this resurrection is not a single event but a category that contains *multiple* resurrections of believers—

### 1 Corinthians 15:20-21, 23 (NKJV)

<sup>20</sup> But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For

since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead...<sup>23</sup> But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming.

The word for “order” in verse 23, “*But each one (each group), will be resurrected) in his own order*” is the Greek word ‘tagma’ and it means ‘*an order of succession.*’

The word originally referred to military rank—the order of command (i.e. the ‘*order of importance*’).

Paul is telling us that the physical/bodily resurrection of believers doesn’t happen all at once but consists of a series of successive resurrections starting with:

### **1. The resurrection of Jesus, the Firstfruits**

*“But now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”* (v.20)

Referring to Jesus as the “**firstfruits**” (Jesus rose from the dead on the Sunday after Passover which was literally the Jewish feast of firstfruits)—as Jesus was raised *first* never to die again, it guaranteed that a great harvest of souls would someday be resurrected never to die again as well. But once again, this resurrection would take place as a series of successive resurrections starting with Jesus and then:

### **2. The resurrection of the Church saints**

After the resurrection of Jesus next comes the physical resurrection of the Church (the Body of Christ)—all those people who came to saving faith in Christ from Pentecost to the Rapture—or what is commonly referred to as the ‘Church Age.’

The resurrection of Church saints known as the ‘Rapture’ (I believe Scripture teaches) will happen sometime *before* the Antichrist is revealed and rises to power and the Tribulation Period officially begins—or in other words, I believe in a ‘Pre-Trib.’ Rapture of the Church saints.

One of the classic passages detailing the Rapture (not its timing but its reality) is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:

#### **1 Thessalonians 4:13 (NKJV)**

<sup>13</sup> But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

To believers, death is only “*sleep*”—but not ‘soul-sleep.’ (Explain)

Death for the believer in Christ is where the body sleeps, but the soul and spirit go home to be with the Lord (“*...to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord*”—2 Corinthians 5:8).

At the Rapture, the physical body will be resurrected (“awakened”), glorified, and will be reunited with our soul and spirit.

#### **1 Thessalonians 4:14-16 (NKJV)**

<sup>14</sup> For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. [The dead saints belonging to the Church]

These will be joined by believers who will still be alive on the earth at that time—

**1 Thessalonians 4:17 (NKJV)**

<sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

‘**Caught up**’ is the Greek word *harpazo* which means to be ‘*snatched away suddenly*’ (the Latin Vulgate translates the Greek ‘harpazo’ with the Latin ‘*rapio*’—the word we get the word ‘rapture’ from).

As we have already admonished, don’t confuse *this* coming of Jesus (the Rapture) with the Second Coming—here Jesus comes for His Church and we meet Him in the air—whereas the Second Coming is Jesus coming with His Church to the earth to establish His Kingdom.

**3. The resurrection of the Tribulation saints**

Next will be the resurrection of the Tribulation saints.

Many will come to trust in Christ during the Tribulation Period (7 years total)—especially during the last 3 ½ years known as the *Great Tribulation* (Matthew 24:21).

During this horrific period of time, many godly people will be put to death by the Antichrist and his followers for their faith (Revelation 6:9-11; Revelation 7:9-10, 14; Revelation 13).

At the end of that period of time, Jesus will return to the earth, end the Antichrist’s persecution of God’s people, destroy his armies and cast him into the Lake of Fire. (Revelation 19:20)

Then Jesus will resurrect all those believers in Him that the Antichrist martyred, and they will become a part of His Kingdom upon the earth and reign with Him for a thousand years—

**Revelation 20:4 (NKJV)**

<sup>4</sup> 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.

**4. The resurrection of the Old Testament saints**

The resurrection of the OT saints, I believe, will occur *simultaneously* with that of the Tribulation saints.

The resurrection of Old Testament saints was promised by God through the O.T. prophets like Daniel—

**Daniel 12:1-2 (NLT2)**

<sup>1</sup> “At that time Michael, the archangel who stands guard over your nation, will arise. Then there will be a time of anguish greater than any since nations first came into existence. But at that time every one of your people whose name is written in the book will be rescued. <sup>2</sup> Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace.

This parallels what Jesus said in John 5:28-29.

Now if we only had the Old Testament passages on the resurrection of the just and unjust—we would be left to conclude (like the Jewish people) that this will be one giant all-encompassing resurrection of believers and unbelievers together.

Except in John 5:29 Jesus said there were *two* great resurrections, and in Revelation 20:5 John tells us they are separated by a thousand year.

### **5. The resurrection of Millennial Kingdom believers**

Then during the Millennial Kingdom there will, of necessity, be the resurrection of those who die during that time. Remember, death won't be done away with once and for all—until after the Millennial Kingdom when God creates a new heaven and a new earth—

#### **Revelation 21:1, 4 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... <sup>4</sup> And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

During the Millennial Kingdom death will be rare—but not totally gone.

One pastor commented on this by saying—

*"It is interesting to think that they may well be raised as soon as they die, no burial being necessary. It would make death for a believer during the Kingdom nothing more than an instant transformation into his eternal glorified body."*

Although, because of the conditions upon the earth during the Millennial Kingdom (I believe the earth will be returned to a tropical/paradise state as it was in before the Flood—most people will live for the entire thousand years—

#### **Isaiah 65:20 (NLT2)**

<sup>20</sup> "No longer will babies die when only a few days old. No longer will adults die before they have lived a full life. No longer will people be considered old at one hundred! Only the cursed will die that young!

**The only resurrection remaining** will be that of the unrighteous, who will be raised to condemnation (eternal punishment in hell) at the end of Christ's thousand-year reign:

#### **Revelation 20:5 (NKJV)**

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

#### **Revelation 20:5 (NLT2)**

<sup>5</sup> This is the first resurrection. (The rest of the dead did not come back to life until the thousand years had ended.)

God has promised us that if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you belong to the '*first resurrection*' category—and on you (with regard to you) the second death will have no power!

When John the Apostle says in verse 5, "*the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished*" he is referring to—the bodily resurrection of all *unbelievers* who have ever lived upon the earth.

These resurrected unbelievers will stand before Jesus at the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11–15) which will take place directly *after* the Millennial Kingdom. These people have been living in Hades, conscious and in torment ever since they're physical death where their body died and was buried—but their soul (consciousness) went into hades (see Luke 16:19-31).

Hades (called 'Sheol' in the O.T.) is not the same as *hell* even though the KJV translates both *hades* and *hell* with the same word—"hell".

Hades is in the center of the earth—Hell is in the "*outer darkness*" (probably a burning star that gives off no light, and so far out in the universe that no light reaches it).

**Revelation 20:6 (NKJV)**

<sup>6</sup> **Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection** [not a single event but a category for all true believers who have ever lived upon the earth]. **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 second death is referring to the final judgment of all unbelievers in the lake of fire (hell)—

**Revelation 20:14 (NKJV)**

<sup>14</sup> **Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.**

This is exactly what Jesus promised—

**John 5:24 (NKJV)**

<sup>24</sup> "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 Paul the Apostle affirmed this—

**Romans 8:1 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup> *There is therefore now no condemnation* [eternal punishment in hell] to those who are in Christ Jesus...

All true *believers* whether they are Old Testament saints, New Testament saints, Tribulation saints or Millennial Kingdom saints will be part of the first resurrection—and all *unbelievers* will be a part of the second of these two resurrections—the resurrection which Jesus called—the '*resurrection of condemnation*' (John 5:29b).

Those who take part in this final resurrection (at the end of the Millennial Kingdom) will be cast into the Lake of Fire, otherwise known as the '**second death**' or **hell**—

**Revelation 21:8 (NLT2)**

<sup>8</sup> "But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

God has promised that whoever belongs to the first resurrection (O.T. saint, N.T. saint or Tribulation Period or Millennial Kingdom saint)—on these the second death will have no power (i.e., all of these 'first resurrection saints' will never be cast into hell).

I read an article some time ago, written by a Wall Street Journal columnist who claimed that the idea of a place called *hell* has 'outlived' its usefulness. In that article the writer contended that hell was an invention of man

and adopted by the Christian church to scare people into heaven while further using it to control their lives here on earth—through fear. This, he said, was popular and effective in Medieval Christianity when people were unenlightened simpletons and superstitious fools.

However, he went on to say, modern society is *enlightened* and has “outgrown” the notion of scaring people with the threat of future damnation in hell.

This journalist (and we all know how ‘infallible’ journalists are) claimed that we need to jettison the idea of a place called hell in favor of a kinder, gentler version of Christianity that chooses to focus on God’s love and mercy rather than scaring folks with an eternal place of torment.

Yet in the book of Revelation chapter 14 we read how that hell is *real* and is an *eternal* place of torment for all those cast into it—

**Revelation 14:11 (NKJV)**

<sup>11</sup> And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night...

The idea of a literal place called **hell** where there will be eternal torment is not a very popular idea with most people in our society today.

They ask, “*How can a God of love allow people He created in His own image to suffer eternal torment?*”

And so, because people can’t reconcile the concept of a loving God sending people to hell—they tend to fall into one of three categories with regard to hell:

- a) They ignore it by living in denial concerning the reality of hell (76% of people believe in heaven but only 6% believe in hell).
- b) They try to get around it—Annihilationism; Universalism. (both of these are rooted in wishful thinking rather than in biblical truth.)
- c) They joke about it—“*I’d rather be partying in hell with all my friends than bored in heaven with all those hypocrites.*”

Several years ago, Cyndi and I spend some time in the Cayman Islands for our anniversary. We actually stayed on Grand Cayman Island where there is a town called “Hell”.

It’s kind of a novelty thing—the people of the town get a lot of mileage out of it and it’s good for tourism—everyone wants to visit ‘Hell’ and tell their friends they’ve been to Hell. They sell Tee-shirts that say things like: “*Let’s all party in Hell*”; “*Go to Hell*”; “*I live in Hell*”; “*I’ve been to Hell and back*” etc.

The devil loves it when people joke about hell and not take it seriously—but the Bible tells us that hell is real and it’s no joke!

Jesus talked about hell more than anyone else; in fact, He talked about it more than He talked about heaven or even love, and I believe He did that because—He didn’t want anyone to go there!

He often talked about hell in the same passage that He talked about heaven—“*And these (the unrighteous) will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life.*” (Matthew 25:46)

In that verse, not only did the Lord Jesus talk about both heaven and hell in the same sentence but—He said that they were both eternal.

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