

OBSERVATION STUDY SERIES

REVELATION

THE FIRST
RESURRECTION

20:4-6

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The First Resurrection

There is a first resurrection and a second resurrection? Two resurrections? There is a "first death" and a "second death?" Two deaths? Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Lions and tigers and bears!!! Oh, my!!!

Okay. I admit it. This scene might seem a little puzzling, but that's alright. I'll walk you through it slowly and carefully. You'll get it in no time! This part of Revelation might be new territory for some of you, but there is nothing to fear. Except that you might have to let go of a preconceived notion or two to learn what God is teaching us here. Don't worry! The Word speaks for itself! We're going to stick 100 percent to the Word of God. The Holy Spirit is your Resident Teacher. Be sure and ask God in prayer to open your eyes to behold wonderful things from His Word. (Psalm 119:18) Remember, we want to know the truth more than we want to be right! Right? Right!!!

Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the Word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. Revelation 20:4

The timing for this scene is directly after the Great War of God, the Almighty. The birds are most likely still waddling around gorging themselves on the nations who waged war against Jerusalem and were struck down by the Lord. The beast and the false prophet have been thrown alive into the lake of fire; they reek of sulfur as they smolder. Sinister Satan has been sentenced to 1,000 years of hard time in solitary confinement, shut up and sealed in the abyss.

John keeps looking, and he sees filled thrones. Who is sitting on them? "They" are. Who is "they"? Scholars have varying views and conclusions. According to the last antecedent rule, "they" might be the armies from Revelation 19:14, which includes the church. Our purview does not include settling obscure interpretations; instead, we want to look at the main and the plain. Context is always a safe place to be. So let's leave the thrones alone for a moment and continue with the text.

We don't know how many thrones there are, and we don't know who all will sit on them, but we do know whoever sits on them will be given the power to judge.

John doesn't say, "then I saw" next; instead, he says, "and I saw." The words are

significant because it shows us that John is still looking at the same scene. John sees what seems to be two groups. He sees the souls of those beheaded, the souls of martyrs. They were beheaded because *they testified of Jesus!* They were beheaded because *they spoke the Word of God!* We saw this group in the 5th seal; they were the souls under the altar.

When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also. Revelation 6:9-11

They had cried out with a loud voice; they were shrieking and shouting, *"How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"* They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little while longer. Guess how long they were to wait? Until the very event we are examining! Scene 50, Revelation 20:4-6. Until after the 7th bowl judgment. Until after the marriage of the Lamb. Until after Faithful and True comes in glory! Until the Word of God throws the beast and the false prophet into the lake of fire. Until the King of kings and Lord of lords strikes down the nations at Jerusalem. Until after the great supper of God is served to the birds, and they finish off the flesh of those killed by the sword of the Lamb. Until Satan is bound in the abyss. Then... then they will be done waiting for the Lord to judge and avenge their blood!!!

John also sees a second group, those murdered because they *would not* worship the beast! And they *would not* worship the beast's image! They *would not* receive the mark of the beast on their forehead! And they *would not* receive the mark of the beast on their hand! These are the great tribulation saints from Revelation 7:9-17. (The scene below takes place in the throne room of heaven during the great tribulation and, therefore, occurs before the event we are examining. I just want you to realize both scenes are the same group and learn what you can from both passages.)

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes." Revelation 7:9-17

I have to ask. Do you think our (or your) earthly praise and worship looks much like this? What do you think? What needs to stay? Does something need to change or go?

As I write about the scene of the first resurrection, I feel mixed emotions. I feel anger at the injustice they suffered and anger at the evil of both spirits and men. I feel pride in the God they served and worshiped, and I feel honored to call them brethren. And I feel a sense of excitement; the end is near, and our Lord and Savior will judge righteously and true! It won't be long until we are with Him and see Him precisely as HE IS!

I believe the "beginning of birth pangs" (Matthew 24:4) is looming over us at this present time. Many believers will suffer the consequences of a world gone mad. Tragically, we see the insanity in our world already; it's like a mass psychosis has taken over the general population. Men and women have lost their ability to connect to reality any longer. They call evil "good, and good "evil" (Isaiah 5:20). Depraved through and through, they are unable to do anything about their condition. Their foolish hearts are dark. (Romans 1:21). God has given them over to what they want (Romans 1:28).

As we go through life, including the suffering and persecution it brings to us who testify of Jesus and speak the Word of God, we can know He is with us and accomplishing His will in us. The perseverance of the saints achieved through Him alone. And we can also look forward with a great longing to hear the words, *"Well done, My good and faithful servant."* Amen.

Back to the text.

These two companies of peoples, the souls from under the altar and the great tribulation saints, are no longer dead! Killed because they would not deny their God, and now, their God brings them back to life! On top of their glorious resurrection, they are given the authority to reign with Christ for a thousand years! Where do you think they are going to sit during those 1,000 years? You guessed it! They will sit on the thrones that John saw, and given the authority to judge.

Although we already saw that most likely the church (the believers in Christ, the saints in Christ, one of the armies that followed the King of kings and Lord of lords from heaven to earth) will be sitting on the thrones John saw, we now see two other groups

which might be sitting on these thrones, as well. Don't worry. God is the Creator. He can make as many thrones as He pleases! We know of three groups who will sit on the thrones: the church, the souls under the altar, and the great tribulation saints. How are you doing? Are you with me?

You might have some questions at this point, so I want to stop and explain a couple of things before moving on. Many of you might not have heard what I'm about to describe, so it might seem like a big thing. It isn't really. Scripture makes it clear, but most churches teach that almost everything in the Bible concerns the church, which is not correct. I've mentioned it before. The church is not the only group in the Bible, nor are the Jews the only other group in the Bible. There are many companies of peoples or creatures, such as angels, the living beings around the throne, unbelievers, Satan's crew, and many more. I won't get into this very deeply, just enough to help you understand the two companies of peoples John addresses in this scene. So relax and ask God to open your mind to understand the Scriptures.

Ready? Here we go.

The church is not Israel. The church began at Pentecost. Israel rejected "the time of her visitation" from her Messiah, after which God "paused" His plan concerning her until after the period of the church. This time is generally recognized and accepted as the gap of time between weeks 69 and 70 of Daniel's 70 weeks (referring to seven periods of seven.) Each week is seven years, so seven times 70 equals 490 years. You can read his prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27.

The time between a decree issued to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (after her destruction by Babylon) until Israel's Messiah (Jesus) came to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; there were to be 69 weeks total—7 plus 62. (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel are useful cross-references.) Once the 69 weeks were completed, the Messiah would be cut off and He was—Jesus was crucified. That left one of Daniel's weeks, the 70th, unfulfilled; it is unfulfilled to this day.

Fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to indwell believers. That day was the beginning of the church or the body of Christ. Believers would now enter the New Covenant. The church will remain on this earth until Christ comes to take her to be with Him in heaven. This event is called the Rapture. (Remember, the book of Revelation does not include the Rapture. So, I'm going out of my purview a bit, but I think it will help you.)

By the way, are you doing okay? Don't worry if you don't get all of this; my purpose in drilling down a bit here is to help you understand the different groups in Revelation 20:4-6. Hopefully, that part will become clear (or at least, less foggy).

Jews who believed in the Messiah *before* the church's time are part of "believing" Israel or the wife of God. From the time the Holy Spirit came until the Rapture, anyone who believes so as to be saved becomes part of the church, whether Jew or Gentile (a

Gentile is anyone other than a Jew). Jews who believe *during* the church period also become part of the church or bride of Christ. *Two different groups.*

The time clock for Daniel's 70 weeks paused at the time of Christ's murder when Israel rejected Him as her Messiah. It will start again when a seven-year covenant (Daniel's 70th week) is in force between the world and Israel. (Negotiated, of course, by the beast.) God's plan for Israel is still in effect, but while God's time clock silently waits for God's command to start ticking again, He offers a New Covenant. Those who enter become the body of Christ, or the church. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Anointed Seed of God, Messiah, Christ during this period enters the New Covenant, the body of Christ.

At some point in time, God will signal His clock to begin its final countdown; Daniel's 70th week will start, and the timer will tick off every second of the seven years until the full 490 year period is complete. Those who genuinely believe during this time will go to heaven. However, once the Rapture takes place, the church is closed for membership; no one else will enter Christ's body. So, those who believe after the Rapture, but before Christ comes again, will go to heaven as believers, but not as part of the church, the body of Christ, nor as part of the Old Testament saints, Israel, the wife of God. *Different groups.*

So the groups we see in Revelation 20:4-6 are three. First, there is the "they" group, which most likely includes the body of Christ. Secondly, we see the souls who were beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the Word of God. Thirdly, there is the group who had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received the mark on their forehead or their hand. The second and third groups are not the church. They are believers, but they are not the body of Christ. They are not in the New Covenant. *Different groups.*

Knowing the groups should help us to understand a little better Group 2 and Group 3 coming to life and reigning with Christ for a thousand years. The "they" group's resurrection is *before* this time. The dead in Christ, those in the New Covenant, were resurrected when Christ gathered His church to Himself (Rapture). The timing of the church's resurrection and that of Group 2's and Group 3's resurrection are not the same. That is why John sees the "they" group already sitting on the thrones before the two new groups are resurrected.

Hopefully, you are not too confused. You might want to read through the above paragraphs a few times to reason it all through. I pray God will help you to understand.

Now that we have the different groups established, what will the "they" group do? After their resurrection, what will Group 2 and Group 3 (who are not the church) do? They will all reign with Christ for 1,000 years. The same 1,000 years of Satan's imprisonment in the abyss, Christ will reign on the earth, and those on the thrones will reign with Him.

The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Revelation 20:5

The *rest of the dead*... What! There's *more*? Yes, there are, and you can do this!

What do we know about those who did not come to life with the other groups? It may seem a bit obvious, but they are not alive; they are dead. And they will remain so for another 1,000 years. They are not part of the first resurrection, which includes Group 2, the souls beheaded because of their testimony concerning Jesus and God's Word, and Group 3, those who didn't worship the beast or his image and did not receive his mark on their forehead or hand. The rest of the dead will not *sit on* thrones; instead, they will *stand before* one!

Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. Revelation 20:6

We learned in verse 4 which groups will have a part in the first resurrection. Now we learn more about them. They are blessed and holy. Divine favor makes them happy in their present situation, and divine consecration sets them apart for God's use alone.

The second death (which we will discover more about shortly) is the lake of fire, and it will have absolutely no power over those of the first resurrection! The lake of fire will be filling up shortly, but it won't be with any of these who have a part in the first resurrection. Instead of being cast into the lake of fire for eternity, they will serve as priests of God and priests of Christ! The lake of fire will never have power over them, but they have the power and authority to reign as sovereigns with God! What a contrast!

They will even reign and rule over the earth with Christ for 1,000 years! Who, exactly, will they rule? Well... not every person on earth will be killed in the battle at Jerusalem. The soldiers who gathered to fight will have families back home. Every single person who is not present at that glorious final battle will be ruled with a rod of iron. And what about 1,000 years of generations of those people? There will be a copious population on the earth. And what about those who make it through the great tribulation *alive* without taking the mark? They are not the same as Group 3 above, who *died* without receiving the mark. *There are many different companies of peoples.*

Has this been confusing? Has it been eye-opening? I hope it has been interesting.

So many of us have grown up in the church and learned our flannel graph lessons, memorized verses, and even attended daily vacation Bible school and church camp. Eventually, as adults, we become the ones who give the flannel graph lessons and lead the Sunday schools. What are we able to give to the younger generation? Only that which we know. Do we teach the Bible from the Bible? Or do we teach a lesson from a guide given to us? I wish I could say that I know most children cut their teeth on the Bible itself; sadly, I know that's not what happens. Why not? Maybe we study books

about the Bible instead of the Bible? Perhaps we don't know how to study the Bible for ourselves?

What if we knew how to study the Bible for ourselves? What if, instead of studying books *about* the Bible, we learned truth *directly from* the Bible?