

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

“...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE...” ~ EPHESIANS 4:12

VOLUME 3

MAY 13, 2018

ISSUE 46



HOW MANY RESURRECTIONS?

By Andrew Dow

In Revelation 20 John describes a thousand year period during which Satan will be bound—i.e., restricted from harming God’s people. John’s original readers looked forward to this occasion because it was the point at which they experienced freedom from their suffering. However, John describes another reason for these first century Christians to anticipate this event.

“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 worshipped 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. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. 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 with Him for a thousand years” (Rev 20:4–7).

This text describes a time when those readers who had suffered at the hands of Rome and Satan would “[**come**]

to life ... for a thousand years.” What a wonderful blessing to anticipate!

This text, however, has been the source of numerous misinterpretations and misapplications. The difficulty arises, in part, due to the description of two resurrections. **“This,”** John says, **“is the first resurrection”** but **“the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed.”** Some suggest that this describes two literal resurrections from death. Others say that this describes two figurative resurrections. Still others see a mixture of symbolic and literal resurrections. Which of these is the most reasonable conclusion?

The greek word translated **“came to life”** can refer to both a symbolic or figurative resurrection. Therefore, the meaning must be dictated by the context. The text predominately describes something that would impact the original hearers—the binding of Satan brought relief in the first century and the first resurrection and thousand year reign involves the saints who suffered at the hands of Rome. With this context in mind how should we identify these resurrections?

From our perspective the first resurrection is a past event. John says that it occurs in conjunction with the thousand year binding of Satan (i.e., during the lives of the first readers). There are at least two issues with identifying this as a literal resurrection: (1) there is no historical record of such a monumental event taking place in the first or second century and (2) the book is predominately symbolic (cf. Rev 1:1). For these reasons it seems best to understand this first resurrection as a symbolic representation of the victory of the saints. That is to say, although Satan may

have destroyed many of God's people through the Roman empire, this is not the end of the story. God's people will ultimately be victorious. This is not the only time resurrection is used symbolically of victory. The prophets often employed similar imagery to speak of Israel's ultimate return from captivity (cf. Ezek 37). John appears to use resurrection in the same way here—those original readers would (and did) receive a victory over the power of Satan.

What, then, does this vague allusion to a second resurrection mean (v. 5a)? Some have concluded that this second resurrection refers to the resurrection at the end of time to which Paul (1 Cor 15) and Jesus (John 5) referred. This is a possibility but it appears to be a forced conclusion. The greek word for “**come to life**” in verse 5 (i.e., the second resurrection) is the same word translated “**came to life**” in verse 4 (i.e., the first resurrection). The same word used so closely in the same context almost certainly indicates that the same meaning is in view. Therefore, it is best to view this second resurrection (which occurs some time after the thousand years) as a symbol of victory. This time, however, it is not confined to those first century saints who suffered at the hands of Rome. The second resurrection involves “**the rest of the dead.**” In other words, one day ALL of God's people will be victorious over Satan and his powers.

To summarize, the two resurrections that John describes in Revelation 20 should not be read as literal, bodily resurrections. There are passages that describe the future resurrection from death; this is not one of them. Rather, John uses resurrection here to describe the victory of God's people over Satan. What a wonderful hope!

RIGHTEOUS VS. WICKED: WHO WILL PROSPER?

By Andrew Dow

Solomon illustrates and encourages the life of “**a wise son**” (Prov 10:1) by providing a lengthy list of sayings which contrast righteous and wicked living. The first several contrasts deal with physical provisions and prosperity:

**“Ill-gotten gains do not profit,
But righteousness delivers from death.**

**The Lord will not allow the righteous to hunger,
But He will reject the craving of the wicked.**

**Poor is he who works with a negligent hand,
But the hand of the diligent makes rich.**

**He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely,
But he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully.**

**Blessings are on the head of the righteous,
But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence” (vv. 2–6).**

These wise sayings invite us to consider the end of the matter. Despite how tempting it is to be dishonest or lazy in the pursuit of money we must realize that the righteous are ultimately cared for by God (cf. Matt 6:19–34). The wicked rely on their own ingenuity and cleverness—their end is death.

NOTES: _____

AM LESSON:

Run With
Patience

PM LESSON:

Secret Sin

**“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES...”
(MATTHEW 28:19-20)**