

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The Resurrection of the Tribulation Saints*

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PREVIOUS ARTICLES IN THIS SERIES have argued that the great multitude in Revelation 7:9–14 are victorious saints of the future Great Tribulation, and that they will receive physical rewards in the eternal state (vv. 15–17).¹ To enjoy their rewards these saints will need to be physically resurrected, and this resurrection is described in 20:4–6.

Though scholars differ in their interpretations of this scene,² careful study of these three verses helps identify the subjects, purpose, nature, and timing of the resurrection of these saints. Comparing their resurrection with that of church-age saints aids in determining if these Tribulation saints are included in the church, the body of Christ, and its rapture.

THE SUBJECTS OF THIS RESURRECTION

In a vision John saw the resurrection of souls “who had not worshiped the beast” (20:4). Does this refer to *all* saints in the Great Tribulation or only those saints who will be martyred? The following discussion leads to the view that this resurrection refers to *all*

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¹ Richard Shalom Yates, “The Identity of the Tribulation Saints,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163 (January–March 2006): 79–93; idem, “The Function of the Tribulation Saints,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163 (April–June 2006): 215–33; and idem, “The Rewards of the Tribulation Saints,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163 (July–September 2006): 322–34.

² William Barclay, *The Revelation of John* (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland, 1958), 3:113; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1001; Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 212; Alan F. Johnson, “Revelation,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 583; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 538; George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 83; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, Guides to New Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 92; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 706; and Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of John*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 262.

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saints who will die during the Great Tribulation, whether they are martyred or die natural deaths, including the great multitude mentioned in 7:9–17.

One reason the great multitude in chapter 7 is to be included in the resurrection described in 20:4–6 is that the groups in both passages are similar. Like the groups in Revelation 6:9–11 and 7:9–17, those in 20:4 are waiting for the resurrection of their bodies. While ψυχή (“soul”) can refer to a living body (8:9; 12:11; 16:3), this meaning is not likely here,³ for the plural ψυχὰς refers to those who have been beheaded (20:4). It seems best to understand that John saw the souls of deceased people rather than beheaded bodies. John subsequently saw these souls’ bodies come to life, but they are first seen in a preresurrection state like that of the multitudes in heaven in 7:15.

In addition the opening words of 20:5, “the *rest* of the dead,” indicate that the persons referred to in verse 4 were among the physically “dead” (νεκροί).⁴ Thus John saw souls that were awaiting the resurrection of their bodies. These souls were of people who came from the Great Tribulation, which was dominated by the Antichrist’s persecution of those who would not worship him.

Also since they will be “beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus” (20:4), they likely will include the martyrs John previously saw coming out of the Great Tribulation (7:14). Also the fact that John saw these resurrected saints as victorious over the Antichrist (20:4) implies that the group includes the saints in 7:9 who held palm branches to symbolize their victory over the Antichrist. Such victory came through either death (martyrdom) or imprisonment (13:10).

In addition to seeing those who will be beheaded, John also saw *all* deceased Tribulation saints. Martyrs and nonmartyrs are viewed together in 13:10. And 17:14 refers to the Lamb’s “called and chosen and faithful” companions, that is, all the Tribulation saints, not just those who will be martyred. Furthermore the reward that these saints will receive—to reign with Christ—is not limited to martyrs (Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 6:2–3; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26–27; 3:21; 5:10; 22:5). If nonmartyred Tribulation saints, envisioned in Revelation 5:10, have the same rewards as those mentioned in 20:4, then 20:4 likely includes nonmartyrs. Also the promise of ruling, given to encourage Tribulation saints,

³ In this context Bauer refers to ψυχή (“life, soul”) as follows. “The soul is delivered up to death (the pass. in ref. to divine initiative), i.e. into a condition in which it no longer makes contact with the physical structure it inhabited 1 Cl 16:13 (Is 53:12), whereupon it leaves the realm of earth and lives on in Hades ... or some other place outside the earth Rv 6:9; 20:4; ApcPt 10:25” (Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. Frederick William Danker [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 1098).

⁴ R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1920), 2:183.

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is not limited to those who die for Christ; it is promised to all who overcome (2:26–27; 3:21). Thus if nonmartyred Tribulation saints are not resurrected with these martyred ones, they would miss ruling with Christ in the millennium. Therefore there is good reason to expect all Tribulation saints to be resurrected together. Yet some scholars debate whether 20:4 includes all deceased Tribulation saints or only those who will be martyred.

*Some hold that only one group is mentioned, and that it includes both martyred and nonmartyred deceased Tribulation saints.*⁵ “Those ... beheaded” represent all Tribulation saints who will overcome the Antichrist.⁶ In this view the second descriptive phrase in 20:4, “those who had not worshiped the beast,” clarifies the first, “those who had been beheaded.”⁷ This follows the coupling of martyrs with other overcomers in 13:10.

*Another viewpoint is that there is only one group and it refers only to martyrs.*⁸ In this view nonmartyred saints are not referred to in 20:4. Charles suggests that all Tribulation saints will be martyred. He says 13:15 means that all who refuse to worship the image will meet a martyr’s death.⁹

However, while the beast’s image will have authority to kill all who do not take his mark, the text does not state that all will be executed. Instead some will be destined to imprisonment (v. 10), and others will die from other causes (14:13). Some saints will even survive the Tribulation (Matt. 13:30; 24:13, 22, 34; 25:31–32).

In this view the second clause in 20:4 (“those who had not worshiped the beast”) defines those who will be beheaded.¹⁰ This is based on a similar usage in 1:7, where “and those” (καὶ οἱ τινες) indicates members of the previous clause. Also using a relative pronoun (such as οἱ τινες) without formal agreement with its antecedent (*constructio ad sensum*) is

⁵ Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, 113; Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 1001; Hughes, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary*, 212; Johnson, “Revelation,” 583; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 538; Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 83; Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 92; Osborne, *Revelation*, 706; and Swete, *The Apocalypse of John*, 262.

⁶ Johnson, “Revelation,” 583; and Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 92.

⁷ Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 538.

⁸ Leon Morris, *Revelation*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 238; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 365; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 415–6; and John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 297.

⁹ Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 183.

¹⁰ Morris, *Revelation*, 238; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 365; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 415–16; and Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 297.

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common in Revelation (1:15, 19–20; 5:6; 11:4, 9, 11, 15; 14:7; 17:3; 19:1).¹¹ This view makes καί ascensive, leading some to translate the phrase “even those who did not worship.”¹² Furthermore advocates of this view argue that if a new group is in view, nothing is said about their death; therefore it is difficult, these advocates say, to see how the clause “they came to life” (ἐζήσαν) can refer to a second group, especially since the verb ἐζήσαν governs the resurrection of all those mentioned in 20:4. The close connection between martyrdom and refusal to align with the Antichrist (13:15–16) is also seen as support for the view that nonmartyrs are not included in this resurrection.¹³



However, a problem with holding that nonmartyred Tribulation saints are excluded in 20:4 is the fact that the resurrection of these saints is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. Some seek to get around that point by saying “the rest of the dead” in verse 5 includes these nonmartyred Tribulation saints.¹⁴ This would mean that their resurrection would not occur until after the millennium. However, deceased Tribulation saints are not likely to be included in “the rest of the dead,” for “the rest of the dead” will not be protected from “the second death.” Since the second death refers to being sent to the lake of fire (v. 14), “the rest of the dead” in verse 5 implicitly refers to unbelievers.

Another problem with holding that the nonmartyred Tribulation saints are excluded from the resurrection of verse 4 is that all deceased Tribulation saints must be included in the first resurrection of verses 5b–6. While verse 5a parenthetically addresses the deceased sinners’ second death, verses 5b–6 refer to the first resurrection, comprising those who will reign with Christ. This first resurrection, in contrast to that of unbelievers before they experience the second death, includes *all* believers.¹⁵ Thus nonmartyred saints are part of the first resurrection.¹⁶

*A more promising view is that John referred to two different groups of believers in Revelation 20:4, martyrs and nonmartyrs.*¹⁷ In this view all deceased saints from the Great Tribulation will

¹¹ Jack S. Deere, “Premillennialism in Revelation 20:4–6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135 (January–March 1978): 65; and David J. MacLeod, “The Fourth ‘Last Thing’: The Millennial Kingdom of Christ (Rev 20:4–6),” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (January–March 2000): 56.

¹² Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 415; and Deere, “Premillennialism in Revelation 20:4–6,” 65.

¹³ Osborne, *Revelation*, 706.

¹⁴ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 370.

¹⁵ This point will be discussed later in this article.

¹⁶ Osborne, *Revelation*, 707.

¹⁷ Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, 113; Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 1001; Hughes, *Revelation*, 212; Johnson, “Revelation,” 583; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 538; Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 83; Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 92; Osborne, *Revelation*, 706; and Swete, *The Apocalypse of John*, 262.

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be included in this resurrection. The change in gender from the feminine (ψυχὰς) to the masculine (οἱτινες) hints at a subject change.¹⁸ The switch in case (from nominative to accusative) also indicates a second group is referred to¹⁹ as does inserting καὶ οἱτινες.²⁰ In addition, forms of ὅστις are preceded by καί in the New Testament three other times (Matt. 5:41; 23:12; Rev. 1:7).²¹ While it is used in Revelation 1:7 to refer to a subset of a previous group, in Matthew 5:41 and 23:12 it is not used that way. In fact καὶ ὅστις in Matthew 23:12 connects two clearly different subjects.

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Thus Revelation 20:4 suggests that two groups will be in the resurrection: “the souls of those who had been beheaded ..., and those [souls] who had not worshiped the beast.” This interpretation places Tribulation martyrs and nonmartyrs in the same resurrection. Therefore all the saints who will die during the Great Tribulation will be in this resurrection.²²

THE PURPOSE OF THEIR RESURRECTION

All deceased Tribulation saints will be resurrected to serve as priests and rulers with Christ for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4, 6). These two verses clarify when they will reign, where they will reign, and over whom they will reign. It also gives insight into their priestly function. These purposes can be compared to that of church-age saints to help discern if the Tribulation saints are included in the church.

THE TIME OF THEIR RULE

The time of service of the Tribulation saints is twice stated as a thousand years (vv. 4, 6). There are good reasons for taking this thousand-year duration as literal. Numbers in Revelation are intended to be understood in a literal way, as in the seven literal churches (1:11, 20), specific time periods such as “five months” (9:5, 10), “forty-two months” (11:2), and “twelve hundred and sixty days” (11:3; 12:6). Six times in chapter 20 the word

¹⁸ Deere, “Premillennialism in Revelation 20:4–6,” 65.

¹⁹ Since the pronoun οἱτινες is in the nominative case, it is “the subject of a new sentence altogether.” Rather than depending on εἶδον, “I saw,” its predicate is ἐζησαν, “lived again” (E. W. Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or “the Day of the Lord,”* 2nd ed. [London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1909; reprint, London: Bagster and Sons, 1972], 615).

²⁰ “The οἱτινες clause becomes deictic and practically independent” (R. C. H. Lenski, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* [Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935; reprint, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961], 584).

²¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 1001.

²² It was argued elsewhere that all Tribulation saints will confess Christ rather than worship the beast; thus all deceased Tribulation saints will be in the resurrection described in Revelation 20:4 (Yates, “The Function of the Tribulation Saints,” 215–33).

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“thousand” (χίλιοι) occurs, thus emphasizing the exactness of their duration of service. After ruling for a millennium, their service will continue in the eternal kingdom (22:3, 5).

THE LOCATION OF THEIR RULE

The place of their reign will be on earth (5:10). Christ will convert the Antichrist’s domain to His messianic kingdom (Ps. 2:8; Rev. 11:15), where He will reign in justice (Isa. 11:4–6; Rev. 19:11–16).²³ His saints will then rule with Him in this earthly kingdom (Dan. 7:18, 22, 27).

Apparently this honor of earthly rule is connected with the Tribulation saints’ vindication.²⁴ In exchange for suffering at the hands of the world’s ungodly leaders for a brief time, saints will later govern the world for a thousand years.

THE DOMAIN OF THEIR RULE

In the millennium the Tribulation saints will rule over all human kingdoms (Dan. 7:27). Survivors of the Tribulation will repopulate the earth during the kingdom²⁵ and will have children who will normally live over a hundred years (Isa. 65:20).²⁶ While the apostles will rule over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28), Tribulation saints will govern Gentile nations. As in past and present regimes, the millennial rulers’ responsibilities could include settling disputes, overseeing construction, or coordinating transportation and food distribution (Isa. 22:22; Jer. 23:5; Ezek. 34:23; Luke 19:17). The privilege of ruling over nations in the future kingdom is also promised to loyal church-age saints (1 Cor. 6:2–3; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26–27; 3:21).

THE CHARACTER OF THEIR RULE

As priests of God and of Christ (Rev. 20:6), these resurrected Tribulation saints will fulfill another aspect of God’s redeeming purpose. They will serve in the religious life of the millennial kingdom (5:10). In light of Zechariah 8:23, teaching Gentiles God’s ways is a possible function of these millennial priests.²⁷ Their priestly role will be shared by church-

²³ The anticipation of Christ’s coming kingdom in Revelation 11:15 is realized when Christ will return after the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:29). Following the Tribulation saints’ resurrection, He will inaugurate His kingdom rule (Isa. 9:7; Dan. 7:27; Rev. 20:4–6).

²⁴ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 364.

²⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 35:1.

²⁶ Commodianus wrote that those overcoming martyrdom under the Antichrist would marry and “beget children for a thousand years” (Commodianus, *Instructions* 54).

²⁷ Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2:186.

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age believers (1:6) and revived Israelites (Isa. 61:6). Such service might later be included in the eternal function of all God's people (Rev. 22:3).

THE COMPARISON WITH CHURCH SAINTS

The Tribulation saints will be resurrected to serve as priests and rulers with Christ during the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:6). And in the millennium church-age believers will be with Christ and will be rewarded by Him (1 Cor. 15:58; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Thess. 4:17), and they too will rule with Him (2 Tim. 2:12).

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THE NATURE OF THEIR RESURRECTION

According to Revelation 20:4, Tribulation saints will “come to life” (ἐζήσαν). Scholars debate whether this use of ζάω means regeneration,²⁸ a symbolic resurrection,²⁹ the apocalyptic unveiling of the reality of salvation to the suffering,³⁰ the soul's entrance into heaven,³¹ or a literal bodily resurrection.³² The view that ζάω refers to the soul's entrance into heaven, that is, a spiritual resurrection, requires taking the verb as a constative aorist, “they were living.”³³ On the other hand the physical-resurrection view takes the verb as an ingressive aorist, “they lived” or “they came to life.”³⁴

THEIR BODILY RESURRECTION

The interpretation that 20:4 refers to a bodily resurrection for deceased Tribulation saints is the best view for the following reasons. First, the verb ζάω, which occurs twelve times in Revelation (1:18; 2:8; 3:1; 4:9–10; 7:2; 10:6; 13:14; 15:7; 19:20; 20:4–5), normally refers to eternal (4:9–10) or physical life (2:8; 19:20). When it refers to a local church coming to life, like Sardis in 3:1, the context clarifies that ζάω is being used figuratively. Second, since

²⁸ Augustine, among others, held this view (*The City of God* 20.6).

²⁹ “The First Resurrection is one which takes effect in the present life, in contrast with that which belongs to the new order and is to be introduced by the Parousia” (Swete, *The Apocalypse of John*, 263).

³⁰ “Resurrection means that they have been ‘let loose into the world,’ not a return to their fleshly bodies” (Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 254–55).

³¹ “It is as souls that they live and reign” (Hughes, *Revelation*, 212; cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 1010).

³² Henry Alford, *The Greek New Testament* (London: Rivingtons, 1866; reprint, Chicago: Moody [4 vols. in 2], 1958), 4:732; Deere, “Premillennialism in Revelation 20:4–6,” 67–69; Harold W. Hoehner, “Evidence from Revelation 20,” in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, ed. Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 254; Johnson, “Revelation,” 584; Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 266–67; and Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 416–17.

³³ Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 539–41.

³⁴ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich note that ζάω here refers to “dead persons who return to life, [who] become alive again” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 425 [italics theirs]).

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ζάω refers to the physical resurrection of unbelievers in 20:5,³⁵ its previous usage in verse 4 also refers to a literal resurrection. Third, in contexts that refer to resurrection ζάω is normally an ingressive aorist (Luke 15:32; Rom. 14:9; Rev. 2:8; 13:14) and is translated “they came to life.”³⁶ Fourth, since the saints’ resurrection is contrasted with their physical death by beheading (20:4), their resurrection will be physical.

Fifth, in verse 5 John used the noun ἀνάστασις, “resurrection,” to refer to physical resurrection. Elsewhere John used this word in John 5:29 and 11:24–25. In both cases Jesus referred to people who would physically come out from their tombs. The promise of a bodily resurrection provided hope for Martha (John 11:24) and later to Paul in the midst of his persecutions (Rom. 5:3–4; 2 Cor. 5:2). Rising as Christ did is also the hope for believers today (1 Cor. 15:19–20). This same hope of physical resurrection will motivate Tribulation saints to suffer and die for Christ (Rev. 14:12–13).

THEIR “EARLIER” RESURRECTION

The Tribulation saints will join all believers in what is called “the first resurrection” (ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη). This contrasts with the second resurrection, which is for unbelievers at their “second death” (20:6). The term πρῶτος, “first,” can mean either “first in a sequence” or “earlier.”³⁷ While the instances of “the first in time, number, and sequence” are more numerous,³⁸ the idea of an “earlier” resurrection fits the context of verses 4–6. Here in relation to time it is best translated “earliest” or “earlier.”³⁹

This earlier resurrection for the righteous will occur at the end of the age in contrast to the resurrection of the wicked (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28–29). Other terms used of this first resurrection are the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15), the resurrection from among the dead (Luke 20:34–36), the resurrection of life (John 5:29), and the resurrection to everlasting life (Dan. 12:2).

This sense of “earlier,” where earlier is contrasted with later (i.e., first and last), is also seen in Job 8:7; Matthew 12:45; 20:10; 27:64; Luke 11:26; John 1:15; Hebrews 9:15; 2 Peter 2:20; and Revelation 1:17; 2:4–5, 8; 21:4; 22:13. The resurrection of these Tribulation saints

³⁵ The second death will be physical for it involves people standing and being thrown into the lake of fire, where they will be tormented with fire and brimstone (Rev. 20:10–15; cf. 14:10).

³⁶ Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 1000.

³⁷ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 892.

³⁸ Wilhelm Michaelis, “πρῶτος,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 866.

³⁹ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 892.

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is viewed as part of this earlier resurrection, the resurrection of the righteous. Actually the resurrection of the Tribulation saints is part of a series of resurrections of the righteous, all of which are seen as part of “the first resurrection.”

Another reason for saying “the first resurrection” includes all the resurrections of the righteous is its contrast with the second death (20:5–6). For there to be a second death, there must be a first death. Since the second death is the resurrection of the wicked to the lake of fire, the first death refers to the death that unbelievers experience when their souls leave their bodies. Just as the first death obviously does not occur to everyone at the same time, neither will the first resurrection. It too will occur in various stages over a large portion of time.⁴⁰

The Tribulation saints’ resurrection, although part of the first resurrection series, is preceded by Christ’s resurrection (1 Cor. 15:23) and the resurrection of the two witnesses (Rev. 11:12). Then at Christ’s second coming several other resurrections of believers will occur. In the rapture the dead in Christ will rise first, followed by the surviving members of Christ’s church *before* the end (1 Cor. 15:23–24; 1 Thess. 4:16–17). Old Testament saints, who will be resurrected *in* the last day, will be raised at Christ’s second coming (Dan. 12:2; John 11:24).

At the end of the millennium, saints who will have died during the millennium will be resurrected. And since the resurrection of the righteous precedes the resurrection of the wicked, millennial saints will be raised before the second resurrection to death (Dan. 12:2; Rev. 20:12–14). In this resurrection these millennial saints will receive incorruptible bodies.⁴¹

The fact that these Tribulation saints and the church are part of the first resurrection does not mean that their resurrections will occur at the same time. Neither will the resurrection of Old Testament saints (who will enjoy the kingdom; Matt. 8:11) occur at the same time as the later resurrection of millennial saints. Since the first resurrection has several stages, at what stage will the resurrection of Tribulation saints occur?

THE TIMING OF THEIR RESURRECTION

Revelation 20 indicates that the Tribulation saints’ resurrection will occur *after* Christ’s return to earth and His judgment on the surviving wicked. In distinction, 1 and 2 Thessalonians indicate that the resurrection of church-age saints will occur *at* the rapture

⁴⁰ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 299.

⁴¹ Roy L. Aldrich, “Divisions of the First Resurrection,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128 (April–June 1971): 118–19. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, on the other hand, disagrees (*The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* [Tustin, CA: Ariel, 1982], 376).

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and *before* He unleashes His wrath on the wicked. Also while Paul taught that in the church's resurrection all the saints who will be alive on the earth will be taken to heaven (1 Thess. 4:17), the resurrection event of Revelation 20:4 makes no mention of surviving believers. Instead of being resurrected, Tribulation saints who live through the Tribulation without having died will be left on earth to enter the millennial kingdom in nonresurrected bodies (Matt. 25:34). These facts show that the resurrections of church saints and of Tribulation saints are distinct.

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TRIBULATION SAINTS TO BE RESURRECTED *AFTER* THE SECOND COMING

The resurrection of deceased Tribulation saints (Rev. 20:4–6) will take place after the return of Christ (19:11–16), the destruction of the wicked (19:17–21), and the subsequent binding of Satan (20:1–3). This chronology is supported by the pattern of visions in Revelation 19–21. Each of these visions describes end-time events in chronological order. While recapitulation occurs in other parts of Revelation, there is no indication or reason for reiteration in this section. Each of these visions is introduced by “I saw” (καὶ εἶδον; 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11–12), and contains different subject matter, not more details on the same subject.

Also this chronological order in Revelation 19:11–20:6 parallels the eschatological chronology of Daniel 7. That order is (a) Antichrist's worldwide rule, followed by (b) Antichrist's destruction by Messiah, and then (c) the kingdom given to the saints. Therefore the flow of Revelation 18–21 indicates that the resurrection of Tribulation saints (20:4–6) will occur *after* the Tribulation (chaps. 6–18), the return of Christ (chap. 19), and the subsequent binding of Satan (20:1–4).⁴² Also the resurrection of Tribulation saints will occur *before* the millennial kingdom (20:6) and the eternal state (chaps. 21–22).

This chronological sequence of events in Revelation 19–21 is supported by the fact that it moves from one event which set the stage for the next, to another event, and so forth. When Christ returns, He will punish earthly kings and bind Satan, their leader. This will prepare the way for the resurrection of the future rulers, which needs to occur before the millennial kingdom is ushered in. The loosing of Satan will occur after he will have been bound for a thousand years. Then his final judgment, being cast into the lake of fire, will make way for the second death, and then “there will no longer be any death” (21:4). Thus John logically set forth the future end-time events in chronological order in a cause-and-

⁴² The position that Satan is not now imprisoned is supported from New Testament statements that affirm his present influence and activity (1 Cor. 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:11; 4:3–4; 11:14; Eph. 2:2; 2 Tim. 2:26; 1 Pet. 5:8; 1 John 5:19). Such activity was also obvious in the time of Christ and the apostles (Luke 22:3, 31; John 13:27; Acts 5:3; 26:18).

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effect relationship.⁴³ This places the resurrection of Tribulation saints (20:4–6) after the Great Tribulation (chaps. 6–18) and the Second Coming (chap. 19).

This view, that the Tribulation saints' resurrection will *follow* the Great Tribulation and Jesus' second coming, was dominant in early church history. *Second Baruch* (ca. A.D. 100) affirmed that the resurrection of those who hope in the Messiah will take place after He returns in glory.⁴⁴ From the early church to the time of Augustine (A.D. 354–430) church fathers believed that Christ's reign of peace will come after the defeat of Antichrist and the physical resurrection of the saints.⁴⁵

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This resurrection will not include living saints who *survive* the Great Tribulation. Only deceased saints are included. This is affirmed by Jesus' words that surviving Tribulation saints will enter the millennial kingdom in their natural bodies (Matt. 13:30, 43; 24:13).⁴⁶ In fact Jesus' return will come in sufficient time to allow Jewish saints to survive (24:22, 34). Surviving Gentile saints will also enter the kingdom (25:34).⁴⁷

At Christ's return He will destroy all the wicked (13:31, 41–42; 25:41–46; 2 Thess. 1:8–10). If the righteous survivors of the Tribulation were given resurrected bodies, then no one would be alive to enter the millennial kingdom in their natural bodies. Since people will enter the kingdom from the Tribulation (Zech. 14:4–11) and the wicked will “be taken” to punishment, nonresurrected believers must “be left” behind on earth (Matt. 24:40–41). These saints will eventually die during the millennium.

CHURCH-AGE SAINTS TO BE RESURRECTED AT THE RAPTURE

By contrast, the resurrection promised to saints of the church age will occur *at* Christ's “coming” when deceased and living saints will meet Him in the air (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 4:15). Since the church will escape the wrath that is to come (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; 2 Thess. 2:13), church saints will be resurrected before Christ deals out retribution to the wicked (1:7–10). The fact that church-age saints will be resurrected *before* this judgment fits the teaching that they will later return to be honored with Him when He executes wrath on

⁴³ John E. Walvoord, “The Theological Significance of Revelation 20:1–6,” in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, ed. Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 229.

⁴⁴ 2 *Baruch* 30.1.

⁴⁵ Justin, *Dialogue* 80; and Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.32.

⁴⁶ Mark L. Bailey, “The Doctrine of the Kingdom in Matthew 13,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156 (October–December 1999): 449.

⁴⁷ Eugene W. Pond, “Interpretive Issues Pertaining to the Judgment of Sheep and Goats” (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2001), 234–35.

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unbelievers (v. 10; Rev. 19:7, 14).⁴⁸ In contrast, remaining Tribulation saints will observe Christ coming with His armies, when His bride is made ready (2 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 1:7; 19:14).

Another distinction is that the resurrection of church saints will involve both those deceased and those who are alive on the earth (1 Thess. 4:13–16). Since the rapture will take all living believers to heaven, it must occur before any of those who enter the millennium are saved. Yet since believers who survive the Great Tribulation will enter the millennium, the church's rapture must take place *before* anyone is converted in the Tribulation.

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SUMMARY

The bodily resurrection of all the saints who will die during the Tribulation is described in Revelation 20:4–6. These Tribulation saints will be part of the earlier ("first") resurrection and will rule with Christ during the ensuing millennial kingdom. Church-age saints will also share in a phase of this earlier resurrection and subsequent millennial rule. Yet the church's resurrection will precede the resurrection of the Tribulation saints.

IMPLICATIONS

It has been argued that the rapture of the church of all living believers will occur before the resurrection of the Tribulation saints. This implies that time will be needed between the church's rapture and the Great Tribulation for an innumerable group to come to salvation before being martyred (Rev. 7:9–14). If the rapture took place at the middle of the Tribulation, not enough time would be allowed for an innumerable group to be saved and then martyred while the Great Tribulation continues.

Also since the rapture will include all deceased church-age believers up to that time, the rapture must occur before the first person in the Tribulation comes to Christ and dies. This again places the rapture of the church before the abomination of desolation, which will trigger the Great Tribulation at the middle of the seven-year Tribulation period (Matt. 24:15, 21; Rev. 13:5), during which time many believers will die (Rev. 13:7).

And since an innumerable multitude of people will come out of the Great Tribulation, it seems reasonable that a few years (in the first half of the Tribulation) will be needed for them to be converted. This places the rapture of the church before the beginning of

⁴⁸ The connection of the church to the returning bride in Revelation 19:7–8 is based on the church's depiction as Christ's bride (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25–27). God the Father, not necessarily Christ, is depicted as Israel's husband (Isa. 54:5–8; 62:4–5; Jer. 3:14; Hos. 2:16, 19), and this would not fit the picture in Revelation 19:7–8.

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Daniel's seventieth week (Dan. 9:27), sometimes called the seven-year Tribulation period.⁴⁹

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⁴⁹ Yates, R. S. (2006). "The Resurrection of the Tribulation Saints." *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 163, 453–466.