



# The First and Second Resurrections of Revelation 20

by Steve Wood

---

Revelation 20 mentions two resurrections separated by 1,000 years.  
This passage has generated endless conflicting interpretations.

**Revelation 20: 4** Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. **They came to life** and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. **5** The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the **first resurrection**. **6** Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the **first resurrection**! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

## PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION FOR DIFFICULT PASSAGES

**St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book III, Chapter 39.**

39. For it is far safer to walk by the light of Holy Scripture; so that when we wish to examine the passages that are obscured by metaphorical expressions, we may ... obtain a meaning about which there is no controversy. (same author, same subject)

## FIRST RESURRECTION

**John 5:24** Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

**Revelation 20:5...** This is the first resurrection. **6** Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.

## SECOND RESURRECTION

**John 5:28** Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice **29** and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.

**St. Augustine, *City of God*, Book XX, Chapters 6 & 7.**

CHAP. 6. —WHAT IS THE FIRST RESURRECTION, AND WHAT THE SECOND

... so are there also two resurrections,—the one the first and spiritual resurrection, which has place in this life, and preserves us from coming into the second death; the other the second, which does not occur now, but in the end of the world, and which is of the body, not of the soul.

**St. Augustine, *City of God*, Book XX, Chapters 6 & 7 (continued)**

CHAP. 7. — WHAT IS WRITTEN IN THE REVELATION OF JOHN REGARDING THE TWO RESURRECTIONS, AND THE THOUSAND YEARS, AND WHAT MAY REASONABLY BE HELD ON THESE POINTS

The evangelist John has spoken of these two resurrections in the book which is called the Apocalypse, **but in such a way that some Christians do not understand the first of the two, and so construe the passage into ridiculous fancies.**

---

**Additional New Testament Scriptures on the First Resurrection:**  
(Showing Christians in This Age Passing from Spiritual Death to Spiritual Life)

**Ephesians 2:1** And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins ....  
**4** But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead through our trespasses, **made us alive** together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),  
**6** and **raised us up** with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.  
(Compare carefully with Rev. 20:4, “they came to life and reigned...”)

**1 John 3:14** We know that we have passed out of death into life...

**2 Corinthians 5:17** Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

**Romans 6:4** We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

**John 3:3** Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” **4** Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” **5** Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’ (Baptism = born to a new life in Christ)

(Both John 3 and Revelation 20, composed by St. John, describe being “born again.”)

**The Primary Parallel Passage to the Second Resurrection of Revelation 20**

**1 Thessalonians 4:15** For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. **16** For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; **17** then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. **18** Therefore comfort one another with these words.

**This handout accompanies Episode 517 of Luke 21: Biblical Prophecy Explained.**

**Additional resources, including *Three Views of the Millennium*  
and *The Little Season*, are available at [Luke21.com](http://Luke21.com).**

---