

Becky Bereans – Death and Resurrection – Session 4

Session 4

Review

Last time, we discussed immortality, making a distinction between immortality and eternal life. We flatly stated that mankind is created with immortal souls that continue in perpetuity even after bodily death. We also saw that we are all born spiritually dead due to sin, but that those who call upon the Name of Jesus for salvation have our spirits reborn by God's Spirit dwelling within us. Then in the future bodily resurrection, those whose spirits have been thus restored are resurrected unto eternal life with God, but those whom God's Spirit never entered will be resurrected unto eternal torment apart from God.

Finally, we talked about the state of our souls in the interim between bodily death and resurrection with those souls whose spirits have been redeemed preserved in a state called Abraham's bosom and Paradise in God's Word, while the souls of unbelievers exist in a state of torment called Sheol – שְׁאוֹל *š'ôl* or ᾗδης *hades* as they await God's final judgement.

We also briefly examined the concept of soul sleep – listing three ideas about its nature, and ultimately rejecting it as having no firm Biblical basis, but leaving the details as “an exercise for the student.”

The Two Resurrections

Last time, we deferred discussing the details of bodily resurrection until a later time saying we would dedicate an entire session to discussing it. Well, that time has now arrived. From this chapter in [Dr. Lehman's](#) paper [Death and Afterward](#), we find that the term “the resurrection” is actually a misnomer, since the Bible clearly speaks of multiple resurrections at various times and to various ends. We see that the resurrection of Christ followers is starkly distinct from that of non-believers in both its timing and its nature.

CAVEAT – Before we launch into our discussion of the details of these distinct resurrections, it is important to flatly state “up front” that Dr. Lehman and I share an eschatological belief known as “Dispensational Pre-millennialism.” In a nutshell, we believe that in the future (possibly the very near future) there will be a 7-year period of intense destruction and suffering on the earth commonly known as the “Tribulation.” Afterward, Christ will return to the Earth and rule in person for a literal 1000 years – the “Millennium.” Dispositional Pre-millennialism holds that Jesus will gather His Church (living and dead) to Himself in an event known as “The Rapture of the Church” prior to the Millennium. Furthermore, there are three distinct “flavors” of Dispositional Pre-millennialism that differ regarding the timing of the Rapture – pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation. Of these, I'm personally hopeful for a pre-tribulation rapture. But my eschatological beliefs are certainly not the only possible interpretation of the associated passages in God's Word, nor are *anyone's* eschatological beliefs essential to our salvation and redemption into eternal life with God – which is surely by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone. But since our various eschatological positions (if any) will color and direct our discussion of the resurrection(s), it is important that we recognize them beforehand. But what if you don't actually *have* any eschatological convictions? That's perfectly fine. Nor is it the purpose of this discussion to try to lobby for any particular view of eschatology.

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Those who are curious may find a lesson I taught at Mt. Freedom Baptist Church one Wednesday evening in 2021 giving a summary of various traditional eschatological beliefs informative – <https://www.huppbrian.us/all/notes/overview-of-eschatological-traditions/>. But enough of that...

For purposes of our discussion, it is helpful to consider the resurrection(s) of Christ followers separately from the resurrection of unbelievers.

Resurrection of Believers Unto Eternal Life with God – The First Resurrection

Jesus clearly taught the resurrection of believers in His Gospel. When His friend Lazarus (not the same Lazarus from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus) died, Jesus went to Bethany to call Lazarus out of the grave. As He arrived, He had an intriguing conversation with Lazarus' sister Martha...

²¹Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” ²³Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” ²⁴Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” ²⁵Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.” John 11:21-27 [ESV]

Of course, the raising of Lazarus wasn't the eternal resurrection that Jesus told Martha about. Lazarus eventually died again, after Jesus was no longer around in the flesh to raise him up right away. But clearly Martha believed in an enduring resurrection “*on the last day*” and Jesus did not contradict her. But He went on to tell her that those who believe in Him shall *never* die. Yet we know that all of those alive during Jesus' ministry – including Jesus Himself – did indeed die. So clearly Jesus affirmed the immortality of our souls, yet taught that our bodies will still die and then be raised and re-united with our souls at a future time that Jesus called “*the last day*.”

³⁹This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” John 6:39-40 [NKJV]

But when exactly will this resurrection take place. Actually, God's Word tells us that the resurrection of some believers has already happened, and other believers will be resurrected in distinct stages.

First came Jesus' own resurrection on the first day of the week following His crucifixion. In his great treatise on resurrection, the apostle Paul speaks of Jesus' resurrection as being the firstfruits of the harvest of believers to be followed by the resurrection of His followers.

²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:22-23 [ESV]

On the day Jesus was crucified, we read...

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50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

51 And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, 53 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. Matthew 27:50-53 [ESV]

In 1 Corinthians 15:23, Paul says that the bodies those of us who have died in Christ will wait to be resurrected until “*His coming*.” Paul expands on this in his first letter to the church in Thessalonica who had apparently sent Paul questions regarding the resurrection and the return of Jesus.

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, 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, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 [ESV]

NOTE – This passage in 1 Thessalonians gives us the clearest description of the “Rapture of the Church” we find in all of God’s Word. From it we see without doubt that those of us who are alive in Christ at His coming will never taste bodily death, but will be gathered up to Him and be transformed without first feeling the sting of the grave. Thus, our prayer is – Maranatha!

Those of us who subscribe to the idea of a pre-tribulation rapture believe that this gathering of Jesus’ Church will be just before the beginning the 7-year Tribulation period prior to Jesus 1000-year reign. These passages detail the resurrection of the faithful up until the beginning of the 7-year tribulation. Presumably, this includes those Old Testament saints who came to a saving faith prior to Jesus’ incarnation.

NOTE – There are some notable “outliers” among the Old Testament saints – Enoch (Genesis 5:21-24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2) who never died bodily in the first place, and Moses who appeared in bodily form with Jesus and Elijah at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17, Mark 9). Exactly if, when and how these were resurrected or remain to be resurrected is a mystery to me.

But at this point, the prophecy of the First Resurrection of believers becomes somewhat convoluted. Certainly, some of these will come to faith during the tribulation period, and others will be born and saved during the Millennium. There are a number of intriguing passages in Revelation pertaining to this remnant of believers who are saved and resurrected following the Rapture of the Church. One problem in interpreting Revelation lies in the fact that the relevant narrative of John’s vision is largely non-sequential. Many of the events of the Tribulation that John describes will occur concurrently, but John could only describe them using human language in a manner which makes them seem to follow one after another. A number of passages in Revelation are relevant to our discussion. I present them

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with little additional comment here in the order they appear in the text although not necessarily in the order they will occur.

⁹When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. ¹⁰They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” ¹¹Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

Revelation 6:9-11 [ESV]

¹Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. ²And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, ³and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. ⁴It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, ⁵and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless. Revelation 14:1-5[ESV]

NOTE – These 144,000 may or may not be the same as the 144,000 witnesses who were sealed in Revelation 7 – 12,000 from each of 12 tribes of Israel.

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. Revelation 15:2 [ESV]

NOTE – This is no doubt where we get the image of angels and people in Heaven playing harps and floating around on clouds.

⁶Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

*For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.*

*⁷Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,*

*for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;*

*⁸it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure”—*

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”

Revelation 19:6-9 [ESV]

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¹¹Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. [the Name that is above every name (Philippians 2:9)] ¹⁴And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. Revelation 19:11-14 [ESV]

⁴Then 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. ⁵The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second [eternal] death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. Revelation 20:4-6 [ESV]

Resurrection of Unbelievers Unto Eternal Torment – The Final Resurrection

By contrast to the resurrection(s) of Christ followers, the resurrection of unbelievers is very straightforward, and will not occur until after the Millennium as we saw in Revelation 20:5. Recall that Paul wrote in Hebrews 9:27 that it is appointed for all people to die, and afterward be judged. That final judgement is described in Revelation 20:11-15...

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:11-15 [ESV]

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Discussion Questions

1. What are your eschatological beliefs (if any)? How do they affect your beliefs regarding the resurrection(s)?
2. All three synoptic gospels report Jesus telling His disciples that some who were standing there with Him would not taste death until they see Him coming in His kingdom (Matthew 16:28, Mark 9:1, Luke 9:27). What did Jesus mean by this?
3. What are your thoughts about if, when, and how the three Old Testament “outliers” – Enoch, Elijah, and Moses – were or will be resurrected?
4. Does Paul’s answer to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 verify with certainty the idea of the Rapture of the Church, or is there some other way to interpret it?
5. Are the souls of the martyrs under the Heavenly altar that John describes in Revelation 6 disembodied or do they already possess their resurrection bodies?
6. Are these all martyrs who died for their Gospel testimony during the Tribulation, or are the many Christian martyrs from throughout history among them?
7. Are the 144,000 described in Revelation 7 and 14 the same?
8. A number of passages in God’s Word describe Jesus as a Bridegroom and the Church as His bride. But a bride does not need to be invited to her own wedding. Who then are those blessed who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb of whom the angel speaks in Revelation 19:9?
9. Are the armies of Heaven spoken of in Revelation 19:14 made up of both angels and people or just angels or just people? If people are among these armies, which people?
10. Who are those given authority to judge in Revelation 20:4?
11. Which people will be priests of God and Christ and rule with Christ for 1000 years (Revelation 20:4-6)?
12. Is the Great White Throne Judgement for unbelievers only, or will any or all believers also be judged?
13. Is there any possibility for the redemption of those who are judged at the Great White Throne?
14. Who do we know with certainty will be cast into the lake of fire?