

PREMILLENNIALISM: REVELATION 20, THE FIRST
RESURRECTION

Revelation 20:4 speaks of those who were faithful to the Christ, even to the point of martyrdom. It is said, "...they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years." Previous articles pointed out that this "thousand years" symbolizes the multiplied greatness of Christ's power in the gospel, and that living and reigning with him describes one's dominion over sin and death by faithfulness to Christ in the gospel.

Verse 5 goes on to say, "But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection."

To what resurrection did this refer?

Thinking in an earthly vein, as premillennialism does, it is assumed by some that this refers to a bodily resurrection and implies at least a second resurrection to follow. Some have even assumed this refers to the bodily resurrection of the faithful to live and reign on the earth for a literal thousand years followed by the bodily resurrection of the wicked. These two forces are then to be joined in carnal warfare leading to the complete destruction of the world's wicked ones and a triumphal existence thereafter for the faithful. Regardless of the attractiveness of this to some, it is totally without basis in the language of The Revelation or, for that matter, any other book of The Bible.

It is well to remember that while The Revelation was penned in apocryphal symbolism by John, the apostle, that he also wrote other New Testament books in simple, direct language, for instance, The Gospel According to John. So, is the concept of a resurrection other than that of the body ever encountered there? Yes, at John 5:25 where Jesus promised 2,000 years ago that, "...the hour is coming, AND NOW IS, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live" (emphasis added). Here, then, is a resurrection from the death of sin enjoyed by all who will hear Jesus' voice. (Cf., Ephesians 2:1; Colossians 2:13.) They are the ones who submit to the indomitable power of his reign by obedience to the gospel. Over these, the second death, the punishment depicted by the lake of fire, has no power (Revelation 20:6; 21:8). Nor is there any indication that any-one else will be resurrected to this life since emphasis here is focused on the faithful. So, then, let each of us be obedient to the gospel of Christ and remain faithful to him always, in every trial.—Jerry F. Bassett