

One or Two Resurrections?

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Revelation 20 describes two resurrections separated by a millennium. Those who participate in “the first resurrection” (literally, “*the resurrection, the first one*”) are immune from the “second death.”¹ Amillennialists deny that “the first resurrection” is a resurrection of the body. Aside from the obvious literal interpretation of this passage, there are other obstacles to their attempt at allegorizing “the first resurrection.”

I. Biblical Usage of the Noun Αναστασις

The first exegetical problem for amillennialists is the fact that there is no clear example of the Greek noun “*αναστασις*” (resurrection) ever being used figuratively in Scripture. (It occurs 42 times in the New Testament). Of these, 21 times it has the definite article. When *αναστασις* has the definite article (as in Revelation 20), it always refers to the resurrection of the body, either to Jesus’ own bodily resurrection or to the future bodily resurrection of the dead.² Any attempt to allegorize “*the resurrection, the first one*” carries an enormous burden of proof against all of the Biblical data which is contrary to this interpretation.

Amillennialists attempt to justify their unique interpretation of “the resurrection” by appealing to the Gospels which they claim teach a single unified resurrection of all of the dead at the same time. Further, they claim that no other passage in Scripture describes multiple bodily resurrections.

II. Jesus’ References to Resurrections

John 11:23-26 NKJV

23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

24 Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

¹ Rev. 20:6

² All occurrences of *αναστασις* with the definite article are: Matt. 22:28,30,31; Mark 12:23; Luke 14:14; Luke 20:33,35,36; John 11:24,25; Acts 1:22; Acts 2:31; Acts 4:2; Acts 4:33; Acts 17:18; Rom.6:5; 1 Cor. 15:42; Phil. 3:10; 2 Tim. 2:18; Rev. 20:5,6.

Jesus' words indicate that He is the source of resurrection. Lazerus, who was a believer, will rise again at "the last day." Some claim that because this resurrection is at the "last day," there can be no more "days" after this resurrection. Yet, Revelation speaks of a "day" even in the New Jerusalem!³

Jesus often spoke of time being divided into "ages." For example:

Matt 12:32 NKJV

32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

Luke 18:29-30 NKJV

29 So He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life."

In this manner of speaking, "the last day" could just as easily refer to the end of the present age.

Jesus spoke of the "resurrection of the just" as a distinct event.

Luke 14:13-14 NKJV

13 "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Why would Jesus identify this as "the resurrection of the just?" Why not just "the resurrection" if there was only one? The resurrection being applied here only to the "just" implies a distinct resurrection.

Jesus Himself distinguished between resurrections for the righteous and unrighteous.

John 5:28-30 NKJV

28 Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves 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 condemnation.

³ Rev. 21:25

Some point to the clause, “the hour is coming” in an attempt to show that both resurrections occur at the same time. Yet, this argument asks more of the Greek text than it can provide. The definite article in our English translations was added by the translators. It does not appear in the Greek text. The noun “hour” is not definite, but indefinite. In this situation, the text probably means that each has its own “hour.”⁴

However, if Jesus wished to assert that both resurrections will occur in the same “hour,” all He had to do was use the definite article with “hour.” He chose not to do so. And the fact that Jesus spoke of two distinct resurrections for two distinct classes of people means there are two separate resurrections, period. Whether these resurrections are separated in time or only class is not possible to determine from this text with certainty.

The fact is, in all of Jesus’ teaching on resurrection, He always seemed to distinguish between two resurrections. He never spoke of a general “resurrection” for all people. The most that can be argued from the Gospels is that the issue of a time span between these two resurrections is left unanswered by Jesus.

It is true that Jesus spoke of a judgment of both the righteous and the wicked at His coming.⁵ But no resurrection is suggested in these passages. They refer only to what will become of the living at His return.

III. Other Scriptures Describe Multiple Resurrections

Besides Revelation 20, there are other passages which either explicitly or implicitly describe more than one future resurrection. The first is Daniel 12:1-3.

Dan 12:1-3 NASB

*1 “Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. 2 **Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.”***

⁴ An example of the same Greek construction can be found in John 16:2. “but ***an hour is coming*** that everyone who kills you would think that he is offering divine service to God.” The word “hour” refers to a short space of time, a single event. Yet, the disciples did not all experience martyrdom in the very same hour. Such an “hour” came for each one of them separately. The singular “hour” without the article refers to an hour for each of those included in the statement. There is no reason to think otherwise in John 5:28.

⁵ Matt. 25:31-46

Verse 2 states that *“many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake.”* The word “many” refers to a subgroup of the larger group – *“those who sleep in the dust of the ground.”* The larger group is obviously the dead. “Many” refers to a portion of the dead, not all of the dead. The pronoun “these” in the next clause has as its antecedent the “many” (which is the portion of the dead that “awake”). Since only a portion of the dead “awake” at this time and go into eternal life, the remainder of the dead is not included in the action of the verb, “awake.” Both the Hebrew and LXX require this distinction. Daniel 12 describes a partial resurrection of some of the dead at the end of the time of trouble. This is perfectly consistent with Revelation 20’s “first resurrection.”

The second passage that requires multiple resurrections is 1 Corinthians 15:22-26.

1 Cor. 15:22-26

*22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But **each one in his own order**: Christ the firstfruits, **afterward** those who are Christ’s at His coming. 24 **Then** comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.*

This passage describes resurrections of the dead, *“each one in his own order.”* The word translated “order” is the Greek word “ταγμα,” and only appears here in the New Testament. However, it appears 20 times in the Septuagint, always referring to an orderly arrangement of classes of people. It was used eleven times in Numbers (LXX)⁶ to refer to the orderly placement of the twelve tribes of Israel in the wilderness according to tribe, and their sequentially moving out in ranks according to tribe when they travelled. Each of the twelve tribes was camped in specific locations around the tabernacle in a set order of divisions. *“Let the children of Israel encamp fronting each other, every man keeping his own **rank**, according to their standards, according to the houses of their families; the children of Israel shall encamp round about the tabernacle of witness. And they that encamp first toward the east shall be the **order** of the camp of Juda with their host, and the prince of the sons of Juda, Naasson the son of Aminadab.”*⁷ When the pillar of cloud moved, indicating it was time to take down the encampment and travel, each tribe moved out together in a sequential order established by the Law of Moses. *“And they first set in motion the **order** of the camp of the children of Juda with their host; and over their host was Naasson, son of Aminadab. ... And the **order** of the camp of Ruben set forward with their host; and over their host was Elisur the son of Sediur. ... And the **order** of the camp of Ephraim shall set forward with their forces; and over their forces was Elisama the son of Semiud. ... And the*

⁶ Numbers 2 & 10

⁷ Num. 2:2-3 LXX

order of the camp of the sons of Dan shall set forward the last of all the camps, with their forces: and over their forces was Achiezer the son of Amisadai."⁸

Every time this Greek word appears in the Septuagint, it refers to encampments by rank or to ranks of Israelites moving out according to tribe, or to ranks of troops in battle,⁹ or to official government ranks of officers.¹⁰ This is the background for this term in Paul's statement, that all will be raised in ranks – an orderly succession of groups of people of the same class or rank.

Some might suppose that these successive ranks will all be raised on the same day. But, Paul went on to describe when each rank will be resurrected. He first referred to Christ as the "firstfruits" (or prototype). He then used a term of sequence – "afterward." The rank or class to be raised "afterward" refers to "those who are Christ's," and they will be raised "at His coming." Notice that Paul only placed the resurrection of believers at Christ's coming. Nowhere in Scripture is the resurrection of non-believers placed at Christ's second coming.

Verse 24 begins with the word "then," which is often misunderstood. In English, "then" could mean either "next" or "at that time." Amillennialists wrongly suppose that it means "at that time" in this passage. But the Greek word for "at that time" is "τοτε." Paul did not use "τοτε" here, but "ειτα" which means "after that" or "next in sequence." Therefore verse 24 indicates another resurrection after the resurrection of those who belong to Christ at His coming. Paul went on to inform his readers when this third resurrection will take place – at "the end," after Christ has reigned and put down all enemies, including death. We know from Revelation 20 that "death" is cast into the lake of fire after the millennium, after the saints reign with Christ. Paul has described here three resurrections in orderly sequence:

- Christ's own resurrection (the prototype)
- afterward the resurrection of those who are Christ's
- afterward a third resurrection at the end of Christ's reign when "death" is fully defeated.

There is some confusion among both amillennialists and premillennialists about the statement, "For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet." This is supposed to be a quote from Psalm 110:1. We therefore ought to seriously consider this Psalm,

⁸ Num. 10:14,18, 22, 25 LXX

⁹ 1 Sam. 4:10; 1 Sam. 15:10; 2 Sam. 23:13

¹⁰ Dan. 6:2 & 4

and the manner in which it is interpreted in the New Testament before we can fully understand the statement in 1 Cor. 15:25, “for He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet.”

Psalm 110:1 NKJV

1 The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”

This Psalm goes on to describe Christ’s reign in the following verses, which takes place after His enemies are placed under His feet. Hebrews interprets this Psalm, showing clearly that after sitting down at the right hand of the Father, Christ must wait during an intervening time until His enemies are made His footstool (before He can reign over them). “But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.”¹¹ A more literal translation of this passage is as follows: “Yet He, offering one sacrifice over sins, seated Himself at the right side of God unto the materialization, the remainder being received when His enemies should be placed under His feet.”¹² The clause, “unto the materialization” refers to when the promise will be realized by Christ, His enemies being made His footstool. He remains seated until then. The clause, “the remainder being received” refers to the remainder of Psalm 110, which describes His reigning over His enemies. This is proof that Christ’s reign over His enemies did not begin when He sat down at the right hand of God, as amillennialists claim. Rather, His reign begins after this intervening period of time while He is seated at the Father’s side. Christ is not now reigning as King during this intervening period, but is functioning as a Prince and Savior. “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”¹³

As we interpret 1 Cor. 15, we must keep in mind the distinction between the “enemies” described in Psalm 110:1 and 1 Cor. 15:25, and who is placing them under Christ’s feet. In Psalm 110:1, it is Christ’s enemies whom the Father places under Christ’s feet. But in 1 Cor. 15:25, it is all enemies whom Christ places under His own feet. What is the significance of this? “Death” is the specific enemy (of mankind) that Paul was speaking about being placed under Christ’s feet at “the end.” But, death is not Christ’s enemy now. He conquered death through His own resurrection. Yet, death remains the enemy of all the rest of mortal men. For the believer, death will be “swallowed up in victory”¹⁴ when Christ returns. Yet, during Christ’s future reign, death will still be the enemy of

¹¹ Heb. 10:12-13

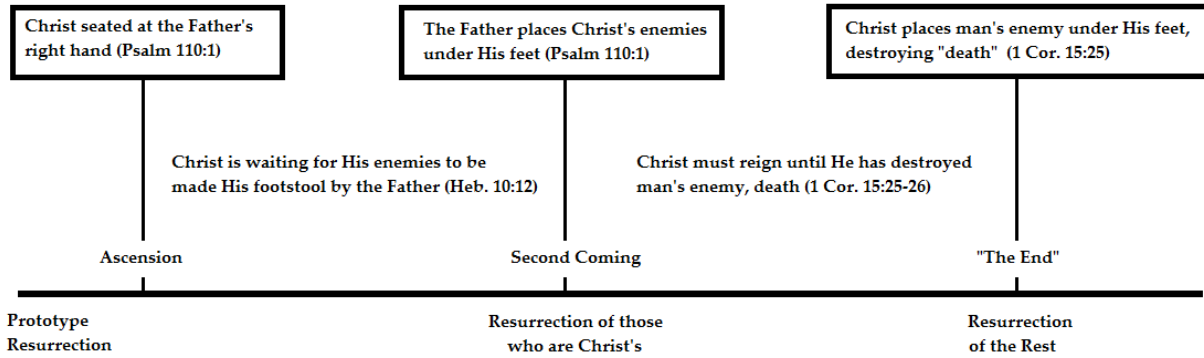
¹² Heb. 10:12-13 LGV - http://www.oasischristianchurch.org/air/LGV_Hebrews.pdf

¹³ Acts 5:30-32

¹⁴ Isaiah 25:8 LXX, 1 Cor. 15:54

mortals who were not resurrected at Christ's coming.¹⁵ This is why Paul said that Christ must reign until the last enemy is destroyed – death. But during His reign, death is no longer an enemy for believers raised in the resurrection at His coming.¹⁶

Every Man Resurrected According to Order of Rank



Death's Dominion Over:



1 Corinthians 15:22-26 indicates multiple resurrections, just like Daniel 12:1-3. Daniel only revealed when the resurrection of the just occurs (after the “time of trouble”). Paul also placed the first resurrection of those who are Christ’s at His second coming. Yet, like Revelation 20, Paul placed a second resurrection at the end of Christ’s reign over His enemies, when He will destroy death forever. The clause, “every man in his own order (or rank),” followed by the two sequential terms (afterward & then), proves that there are two resurrections separated by Christ’s reign.

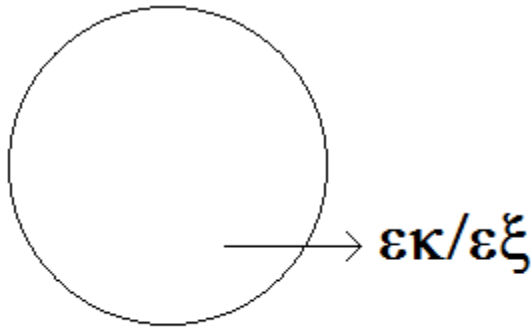
There are also four passages that speak of a resurrection *out from among* the dead, indicating that such a resurrection consists of only some of the dead.

Acts 4:1-2 NKJV

1 Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

¹⁵ Isaiah 65:20

¹⁶ 1 Cor. 15:54 quoting from Isaiah 25:8 LXX. And according to verse 10, mortals will still be present when “death is swallowed up in victory” for believers and Christ reigns in Jerusalem.



The last clause reads as follows in the Greek, “την αναστασιν την **εκ** νεκρων,” literally: “the resurrection, the **out from among** dead ones.” The preposition “εκ”¹⁷ means “out from among.”¹⁸ This preposition is visualized in Greek grammars by the above diagram.¹⁹ Εκ implies a former presence within or among the object(s) of the preposition (in this case the dead ones), and emerging out of and separation from the

object, so as to no longer be within or among the object of the preposition. Thus, a resurrection “out from among” the larger class of “the dead ones” means to leave behind the rest of the dead ones. The idea of separation from among the thing (or class) in which the subject was formerly is the essence of this preposition.

Christ’s own resurrection was described by Paul using the same language, being raised from among the dead ones.

Acts 26:23 NKJV

23 that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”

The underlined clause above is, “πρωτος **εξ** αναστασεων νεκρων,” literally, “first out from among resurrection [from]²⁰ dead ones.” Christ is of course the prototype for the “out from among resurrection,” leaving behind the rest of the dead in their graves. Thus, when Scripture uses the same language for believers being raised at Christ’s coming, the sense is the same – a resurrection of some of the dead while the rest remain dead, or a separating of some of the dead from among the rest of the dead through resurrection.

Rom 1:3-4 NKJV

3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

¹⁷ “When εκ is followed by a word beginning with a vowel, it is written εξ.” (Mounce, Basics of Biblical Greek, p. 61, footnote 8).

¹⁸ “εκ, from, from among, out of, (motion from the interior).” (Bullinger, A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament, p. 308); “A primary preposition denoting origin (the point whence motion or action proceeds), from, out (of place, time or cause; literally or figuratively; direct or remote).” (Strongs #1537)

¹⁹ Mounce, William, Basics of Biblical Greek, p. 60;

Wallace, Daniel, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p. 358

²⁰ The genitive case can refer to either possession or separation. In this case separation is obviously the intent.

As in the previous passage, Christ's resurrection is described as an "out from among resurrection" (ἐξ ἀναστασεῶν νεκρῶν).

Finally, Paul sought to attain to this special (partial) resurrection out from among the larger group of "the dead ones."

Phil 3:10-11 NASB

10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

The underlined clause above is "τὴν ἐξ ἀναστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν."²¹ The Greek preposition "ἐκ/ἐξ" appears twice in this clause, once as a prefix to the word "resurrection" and again before "dead." Literally, this clause says, "the out from among resurrection, the out from among dead ones." The CLV renders this verse accurately, "if somehow I should be attaining to the out-resurrection, that is out from among the dead."²² In other words, Paul was making sure his readers knew which resurrection he was referring to, the resurrection which is "out from among" the dead ones, as opposed to a general resurrection of all of the remaining dead. There is no doubt that Paul believed in a resurrection of all of the dead, both believers and unbelievers. "I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust."²³ Therefore, when Paul spoke of his hope to attain "the out from among resurrection, out from among the dead ones," he was not hoping merely to be resurrected, but rather to attain to a specific resurrection, the partial resurrection which is distinct from and precedes the general resurrection, and which precedes Christ's reign according to 1 Corinthians 15.

All of these passages agree perfectly with "the first resurrection" followed by the resurrection of "the rest of the dead," as described in Revelation 20. There is no passage of Scripture which either explicitly or implicitly requires a general resurrection of all of the dead at the same time. Yet, the above passages absolutely require distinct resurrections separated in time. And 1 Corinthians 15 indicates a separation between resurrections from the time of Christ's second coming, and includes the time of His reign. Therefore, there is no excuse for amillennialists to twist Revelation 20's very clear statement about two resurrections separated by a millennium. The rest of Scripture is perfectly consistent with Revelation 20's "the resurrection, the first one" taken literally.

²¹ The Textus Receptus omits the second "ἐκ." But it is found in all of the early manuscripts.

²² Concordant Literal Version, <http://www.scripture4all.org>

²³ Acts 24:15