Three Resurrections of the Dead

Authored by
Terry K. Moore & Arthur V. Braidic

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Virtually all who believe in the God of the Bible agree that there will be a resurrection from the dead. This truth is stated numerous times throughout the Scriptures. Nevertheless, believers differ greatly when it comes to questions such as who will be resurrected, when does it take place, and exactly what form will people have when they are raised? Will they be resurrected to spirit or to flesh?

Some have imagined that the deceased go immediately to heaven or hell. A large number entertain the theory of a secret rapture. Others believe the Bible describes one resurrection, while many accept two or even three. What is the truth? Can we be certain?

While the Bible speaks numerous times about this subject, few have understood exactly what it says. But now you can know. This booklet will plainly explain that there will be three distinct resurrections of the dead. The following pages will also make the unique purpose of each one clear. It will show you how the Eternal has designed each resurrection to occur at different times and for different reasons. What you are about to read will make it possible to understand how God's plan gives every human being the opportunity to know Christ and make the personal choice to obey Him or not.

This is Not the Only Time of Salvation

Before explaining the timing and purpose of the resurrections, it must first be understood that God is not attempting

to save everyone at this particular time. Most people living before the flood knew nothing of Christ. The multitudes in ancient Egypt never even heard of the God of Abraham. Neither did the Eternal attempt to convert the people of Babylon, Persia, Greece, or the Arab nations. Even the vast majority of Israel was not called to spiritual salvation. God worked primarily with a comparative few. The truth is, throughout history, most of the world has never really known the true God. The Apostle Paul made note of this fact when he wrote:

> For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called.* But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

God's plan to offer salvation to everyone was set in motion prior to the physical creation. That plan includes calling only a relatively small number of people during the first period of human history. During this time, God would proclaim His moral law to most people, but only reveal His ultimate purpose to a few (Rom. 1:20; John 6:44, 65).

In that context, the majority of those called at this time are not the great and mighty of the world. They are not the kind of people who seek to elevate themselves. Instead, they are empowered by God's Spirit to understand His holy character. This inspires within them a humble desire to obey God's law and proclaim His coming Kingdom.

While speaking to the disciples, Christ mentioned the exclusivity of being called at this time:

> He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are

> outside, all things come in parables, so that 'seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand lest at any time they should be converted...'" (KJV, Mark 4:11-12).

As shocking as these words may sound, they are absolutely true! Christ was not trying to convert the masses of humanity during His ministry. Instead, God is personally selecting certain individuals to become a part of a first resurrection. In addition, not all who are called at this time will qualify. As Christ stated:

> Many are called, but few *are* chosen (Matthew 22:14).

For a complete Bible study explaining that God is not trying to save everyone at this time, please request our free booklet answering the question *This is Not the Only Time of Salvation.* For the purpose of this booklet, it is important to realize that God is not calling the vast majority of humanity—yet. Salvation will ultimately be offered to everyone, but only a comparatively small number have had God's plan revealed to them at this time. Of these, a comparative few will be found worthy of obtaining the first resurrection (2Ths. 1:5).

The First Resurrection

Those God will choose to be a part of the first resurrection will not be half-hearted in their approach to obedience. They will not be individuals easily overcome by sin (Rev. 3:16; Heb. 12:1). They will be tried and true Christians who will have qualified to become the firstfruits of God's harvest of humanity.

The Bible gives us many examples of the price God's faithful servants have been willing to pay to attain the first resurrection. In one section that has been surnamed "the faith chapter," the book of Hebrews states:

> By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain... By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household... By faith

Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance... By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God. By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised... These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth... By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*... By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible... By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also *of* David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not

> accepting deliverance, **that they might obtain a better resurrection** (Hebrews 11:4-35).

This chapter speaks of champions of faith who overcame great obstacles in order to obey God. No matter what hardships they may have encountered, nothing would persuade them to lose their focus of attaining the first resurrection.

These verses also state that the faithful seek a "better resurrection." Because the focus is a resurrection that is considered to be better, it is clear that there is more than one. Additionally, this wording implies that any other resurrection is not as esteemed.

The book of James also mentions the better resurrection. While writing to the scattered tribes of Israel, the apostle used a unique expression that stands as additional evidence showing God is only calling certain individuals to become a part of the first resurrection:

> Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of **firstfruits** of His creatures (James 1:18).

James indicated that the Christian goal is to become "a kind of firstfruits." The word "firstfruits" describes a unique group that will be raised first. This is another reference to those accounted worthy of the first resurrection. The fact that some are first requires that others will be raised later.

In another example, the Apostle John was given a vision of the future where he witnessed these firstfruits after they have been resurrected. He described them with the following words:

> These were redeemed from *among* men, *being* firstfruits to God and to the Lamb (Revelation 14:4).

Those God shall redeem before all others are known as "firstfruits to God." The firstfruits are also referred to as God's "elect." Christ mentioned these chosen people while prophesying about His second coming:

> Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will **gather together His elect from the four winds**, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:30-31).

The elect will be gathered from various locations all around the world. This spiritual assembly will include faithful men and women from the beginning of human history. It will include the patriarchs, faithful Israelites, various proselytes, King David, the prophets of old, the apostles, and genuine Christians that have been called since the establishment of the New Testament Church. The author of Hebrews declared this truth when he wrote:

> And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us (Hebrews 11:39-40).

The promise spoken of in these verses is the "hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began" (Tit. 1:2). However, God's pledge has not yet been fulfilled. These champions of faith who died while striving for the first resurrection are still dead and in their graves.

The Bible states that no human but Christ has ever gone to heaven (John 3:13). Even King David who is known as a man after God's own heart has not been raised from the dead. As the Apostle Peter wrote:

> Men *and* brethren, let *me* speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day... For David did not ascend into the heavens (Acts 2:29, 34).

For more on this subject, please request our booklet titled *The Truth about Heaven*. The point that must be understood is that

only our Savior has ascended to heaven (John 3:13). However, the saints will one day rise to meet the Messiah in the air. This will occur near the end of the great tribulation; just before the bowl plagues begin (Rev. 10:7). At that time, all who have been called and remained faithful will be raised to become incorruptible and immortal spirit beings.

The Apostle Paul prophesied of this remarkable future event on several occasions. In one example, while encouraging the brethren in Thessalonica, he said:

> But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep (dead). For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

In another epistle, Paul actually revealed the time of the first resurrection. He wrote that it will occur at the seventh and last trumpet plague:

> Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought

> to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

Paul was handpicked by Christ to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God (Acts 9:1-6). His calling resulted in the revelation of many things. Among them was a profound understanding of a great mystery that billions have not known. There will be a series of three resurrections that will ultimately include all humanity.

When the first resurrection occurs, those who are qualified will be raised. Then, those faithful servants who are alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds. These chosen few will have a special place in the family of God. They will be given positions of leadership as "kings and priests" (Rev. 5:10). They will also have the honor of marrying Christ (Rev. 19:5-20).

Speaking of those chosen for this first resurrection, the Savior revealed that they will be taken to a heavenly marriage supper. As John recorded:

> Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: "Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God" (Revelation 19:7-9).

These are "the true sayings of God." We can be confident in their veracity. There is a first resurrection planned for God's elect. It is considered a better resurrection because of the honor, authority, and reward that will be bestowed to the firstfruits. Out of the many who have been called throughout the ages, only a relative few will be chosen to marry Christ and reign with Him for 1,000 years.

How God Will Decide Who Attains the First Resurrection

Why are only a few chosen if many are called? (Mat. 22:14). It is because many will not **qualify** to become the Bride of

Christ. Those called at this time are being judged as they live their lives based on God's law. By their behavior, and by the choices they make, God is evaluating their works. This present time of judgment on God's Church determines who is worthy of obtaining the first resurrection. As Peter wrote:

> For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God… (1 Peter 4:17).

The "house of God" is a reference to God's true Church. This means that baptized members of His Church—those who have received the Holy Spirit—are being judged right now!

In addition to deciding who will be in the first resurrection, a judgment on those who attain it will be pronounced in heaven when God decides what their positions in the body of God's government will be. As Paul wrote:

> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

This judgment on those chosen will determine the reward they shall receive. As Christ stated:

> For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works (Matthew 16:27).

The type of judgment upon those whom God has called during this age will be the same standards used to assess others at a later time. For more information on this subject please request our book titled *The 144,000.*

The Truth about a "Secret Rapture"

Before explaining the next resurrection, we must understand an important truth regarding a relatively new false doctrine called "the secret rapture." Proponents of this belief

contend that Christ is going to secretly take believers to heaven before the end-time tribulation begins. This teaching began in 1837 with a man named John Darby. Cyrus Scofield later adopted the theory and published it in his famous *Reference Bible.* Today, thousands of congregations around the world teach the rapture as an orthodox doctrine. Nonetheless, this theory is bogus.

In an attempt to justify the teaching, rapture theorists have misused Bible verses that actually speak of faithful saints being taken to a place of safety before the great tribulation. One set of verses that have been grossly misused is found in the book of Luke. There Christ foretold how some will be miraculously taken:

> I tell you, in that night there will be two *men* in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two *women* will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two *men* will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left (Luke 17:34-36).

In these verses, the Savior was not talking about a resurrection. His words are not referring to people being changed into spirit beings, and they certainly are not parallel verses to Paul's statement that "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (1Cor. 15:51). Instead, Christ was speaking of the days immediately prior to the tribulation when those who are found worthy to escape will be taken to a place where they will be protected. However, this safe haven will not be in the heavens. As will be demonstrated, Christ revealed that a place of safety will be in a wilderness on the earth.

Another False Teaching

When reading Christ's prophecy that some will be taken before His return, many have drawn a wrong conclusion. They believe that this means selected individuals will be taken by calamity or death while those who are left will be spared. Such a belief is the result of misunderstanding the context and the terms that Christ used. Consider again His words:

> But as the days of Noah *were,* so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and **took them all away**, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two *men* will be in the field: **one will be taken** and the other left. Two *women will be* grinding at the mill: **one will be taken** and the other left (Matthew 24:37-41).

Christ began by saying that the tumult of end-time events will begin much like they did in the days of Noah. Evil will abound, but the main point that He made is people will be caught off guard! This is evident by the very next sentence when Christ said, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (Mat. 24:42). The context is a striking element of astonishment. Those who were swept away by the flood had no idea that such a disaster would come upon them just like most at the end will refuse to recognize the sign of the times. Then, Christ described some being taken while others are left.

Because many translations say that the flood came and "took" them all away, and Christ said that select individuals will be "taken," these two English terms appear to be strikingly similar. This has led some to equate being "taken" as a negative, horrific, even tragic experience. However, the literal Greek terms reveal a different meaning. The word "took" is the Greek *airo*. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament* explains that this word means "to take away or remove out of this world by death" (Spiros Zodhiates, G142, IV, A). *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* explains that this Greek term relates to a Hebrew word meaning "to expiate sin" (G142). It is the same term Christ used in John 15:2 where it was translated, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He **takes away**." For this reason, more than ten different translations use another word in Matthew 24:39 stating, "the flood came and **swept** them all away."

On the other hand, when speaking of those who will be taken, Matthew used the Greek word *paralambano* which means

"to *receive near*, that is, *associate with* oneself (in any familiar or intimate act or relation); by analogy to *assume* an office; figuratively to *learn*; to take to, to join to one's self (*Strong's, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, G3880). As we can see, this term is a positive one. Those who will be taken at the end time will be removed from harm's way, taken to a place of safety, and protected during the great tribulation. For more on this subject, please read our booklet titled *A Place of Safety*.

The Great Tribulation

Consider that the coming tribulation is going to be worse than any catastrophic event ever experienced by humanity. For this reason, Christ said:

> For *in* those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be (Mark 13:19).

These words explain that dreadful events such as the medieval Black Plague, the horrors of WWII's holocaust, and the volcanic eruption of Mt. Krakatoa, will pale in comparison to the end-time tribulation. That is why the Savior told His disciples to:

> Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass... (Luke 21:36).

Destruction will be widespread. Suffering will be felt by all nations. The only way of escape is through divine protection, and refuge will only be given to those who are found worthy of receiving it. But God's protection during the tribulation has nothing to do with the false doctrine of the rapture.

Other verses also validate the error of a secret rapture. In a symbolic vision given to John, Christ revealed that His faithful will be taken to an undisclosed location on the planet. There they will receive spiritual nourishment:

> But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent (Revelation 12:14).

A woman in prophecy always refers to a church (Eph. 5:32). The woman in this passage is symbolic of God's Church. When comparing this Scripture with other parallel verses, we see that the faithful will not go to heaven in some kind of rapture before the tribulation begins. Instead, they will be taken to an area on the earth where they will be protected and nourished for several years. For more information on this subject, please read our booklet titled *A Place of Safety*.

These two events are entirely separate. Supernatural protection of the faithful occurs on the earth before the tribulation begins. The first resurrection takes place a full 3½ years later at the sound of the seventh trumpet plague (1Cor. 15:52; Rev. 10:7).

Instead of rightly dividing the word of truth, rapture theorists have read Bible verses regarding the Church being taken to safety, and the saints being raised at the last trump, and have attempted to merge their meaning in order to make these two events appear as one. Since the Bible does not teach this man-made doctrine, theologians invented a name for their theory calling it "the rapture." Instead of recognizing God's intended message, and understanding the true sequence of these end-time events, advocates of the rapture theory have attempted to make Bible verses fit their false doctrine. As has been demonstrated, such inference and conjecture are entirely unfounded.

The Second Resurrection

God's true Church has always understood that there will be more than one resurrection. This is explained in Revelation 20 which outlines a chronology describing all three resurrections.

The prophetic timeline begins with the return of Christ and the first resurrection. Then the Scriptures mention a second resurrection taking place after Christ's millennial rule. Notice John's words describing these future events:

> Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. **But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.** This *is* the first resurrection. Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years (Revelation 20:1-6).

The principal subject of these verses is the first resurrection. The passage begins by revealing Satan's future imprisonment, and then it speaks of the faithful saints who will be raised to reign with Christ for 1,000 years. "This is the first resurrection." In addition, in the midst of the chronology, the Scriptures clearly mention a second resurrection by stating that "**the rest of the dead** did not live again UNTIL the thousand years were finished." This indicates that another resurrection will take place 1,000 years after Christ returns.

After the saints have been raised, and they return to the earth with Christ, the world will be transformed to reflect the way of God. Millions will come to understand how love should be expressed toward one another. Christ's reign will usher in centuries of worldwide peace, happiness, and prosperity. The world will be transformed to the way God intended it to be (Acts 3:19-21).

However, the first resurrection does not include the billions of people who lived and died without a chance to know Christ.

When considering the many tribes, nations, and empires that have existed down through time, there is a multitude of individuals who never knew the true ways of God. Included in this number are the unfaithful Israelites who were actually blinded to the truth because of their unfaithfulness (Rom. 11:7).

This leads to the purpose of this second resurrection. The rest of the dead, who will be raised after 1,000 years, will be those who never understood God's way. It will consist of individuals from every age of humanity, and will likely include people who had some knowledge, but never fully committed themselves to being righteous. Billions will be given a new lease on life, and they will experience a world that has prospered for centuries under God's law. "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD" (Hab. 2:14). At that time, these people will come to understand the way God intended man to live, and they will behave accordingly.

Think for a moment about the world we have always known. From the beginning of humanity's existence, Satan has influenced people to decide for themselves what is right and wrong. This has resulted in widespread rejection of God's authority which has led to a world continually plagued by violence, disease, and pollution. Instead of choosing to live by His moral law, most have accepted the standards of the devil who currently rules as a type of god in this world (2Cor. 4:4). Thus, the vast majority have never really known the true God's way.

These teeming masses will be raised to a physical existence in a second resurrection. At that time, they will finally see the difference between the way of this current world and the way God intended for it to be. These masses will include Africans, Asians, Arabs, Indians, Hispanics, Caucasians, and many others from various tribes, tongues, and creeds. The second resurrection will also include atheists who, without knowledge, vehemently opposed the idea of an Almighty God.

During that future age, everyone will be called to live by the Ten Commandments, God's holy days, and the dietary food laws. They will have access to the Holy Spirit and their minds will be opened to the gospel of Christ. Only then will they understand the two ways of life and have an opportunity to choose one or the

other—to obey God or not. These are the same options that were presented to Adam and Eve, ancient Israel, and to all those called during our current age (Deu. 30:19).

After the millennium, all those raised in the second resurrection will understand the choice they need to make. Satan will also be loosed from his prison and be allowed to tempt all of humanity one last time. As the chronology continues to unfold, Christ explained:

> Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth… (Revelation 20:7-8).

Satan will have been bound throughout the 1,000-year reign of Christ and the saints. The devil will then be released for a specific reason—the same reason he has power in this world today—to test those who have come to know the true ways of God. This will be their chance for salvation.

Like the chosen few from the first resurrection, before any of these people can be changed to glorified spirit, they must first be taught the truth. Then they must overcome Satan, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—just as the elect had to do during their physical lifetime.

For this reason, the second resurrection is not a change to spirit. It is a physical resurrection that will give the rest of humanity an opportunity to develop the moral character worthy of receiving salvation. Like those in the first resurrection, this is the only way for God to see if these people from various racial, cultural, and religious backgrounds can be trusted to be incorruptible spirit beings. They must overcome while they are physical before they can be changed.

Consider that God has not given His Holy Spirit to most people. Billions have lived and died without knowing the truth of God and the purpose of our existence. As the Apostle John wrote:

> But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the

> prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes and turn, so that I should heal them" (John 12:37-40).

Paul also indicated that God has allowed the devil to blind people from understanding the truth. While calling Satan "the god of this age," the apostle wrote:

> But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

It becomes obvious that God is not calling most people at this time. He is hand picking a limited number of individuals to fulfill His purpose of assembling a divine leadership team. Instead of a spirit of understanding, God has given most people a spirit of stupor—"eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear" (Rom. 11:8). However, their lack of godly knowledge will not endure. Those who died without a full understanding of the truth will be raised up as physical beings during this second resurrection. They will receive God's Holy Spirit, and their eyes will be opened to the way of God and the purpose of our existence.

This second resurrection to flesh was revealed to the prophet Ezekiel in a comprehensive vision. Although most of ancient Israel failed to obey God, the Apostle Paul stated that one day all Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:26). Note the following Scriptures regarding these people. They include key words indicating that this second resurrection will include an enormous amount of people raised from the dead to a physical existence:

> The hand of the LORD came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down **in the**

> **midst of the valley; and it *was* full of bones**. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, *there were* very many in the open valley; and indeed *they were* very dry. And He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" So I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know." Again He said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: **Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live**. Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD.'" So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but *there was* no breath in them. Also He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.'" So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army. Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken *it* and performed *it*, says the LORD'" (Ezekiel 37:1-14).

These verses speak of the same resurrection mentioned in Revelation 20:5—one that will occur 1,000 years after the Messiah has returned. The fact that these bones are "very dry" is symbolic

of untold centuries that passed while their bodies lay in the grave. By God placing the bones together, putting flesh on them, and giving them breath, it is obvious that this is a resurrection to mortal life. Ezekiel prophesied of this time when an enormous number of people will be raised from the dead—not as spirit beings, but as human beings.

This passage also explains that those raised during the second resurrection are people who never fully knew God. This is revealed by the words "THEN you shall know that I *am* the LORD" (vs. 6, 13). It is only after they are raised from the dead that these people will begin to "know the Eternal." Therefore, it is clear that they did not have a relationship with Him previously. Nevertheless, they will finally be shown the right way to live and will come to understand God's purpose for humanity.

Then, their faith will be tested. These individuals will be required to make the most important decision of their lives. They must choose to either join God in His plan by obeying Him, or reject God with lawless behavior. Being presented with these two choices follows the same pattern for qualification already established by Christ and those who attain the first resurrection.

Released from the Captivity of the Grave

At the end of 1,000 years after Christ's return, billions of people will be raised from the dead to live again as mortal beings (Rev. 20:5). This is the second resurrection. God spoke to Ezekiel on more than one occasion about this physical resurrection. While prophesying about the wicked people of Judah who would perish during a Chaldean invasion, the prophet recorded these far-reaching words regarding a civilization that perished more than 1400 years prior:

> When I bring again their captives, the captives of Sodom and her daughters, and the captives of Samaria and her daughters, then *I will also bring again* the captives of your captivity among them, that you may bear your own shame and be disgraced by all that you did when you comforted them. When your sisters, Sodom and her daughters return to their former state, and Samaria and

> her daughters return to their former state, then you and your daughters will return to your former state (Ezekiel 16:53-55).

The "captives of Sodom and her daughters" is a reference to the wicked people of Sodom and Gomorrah who had long been dead. Their lifeless state in the grave is spoken of as a form of captivity; of which only God is able to set them free.

When Ezekiel wrote that God will "*bring again* the captives of your captivity," the prophet spoke of releasing those of ancient Assyria and Babylon from the captivity of their graves. The intended meaning of "captivity" is clear when we consider a prophetic psalm regarding Christ's resurrection from the dead, which states:

> You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive... (Psalm 68:18).

This verse speaks of Christ's death. It explains that He is the first one to entirely overcome death. He is the one who led the way out of the lifeless captivity of the grave!

Thus, when God stated that He will bring again the captives out of their captivity, He is speaking about a resurrection from the dead. Even so, the resurrection spoken of in Ezekiel 16:53-55 will include the ungodly people of Sodom and Samaria. For this reason, these verses cannot be speaking of the first resurrection of God's chosen saints. It can only be the second resurrection which is to flesh and blood. This becomes clear when we consider that God said He will return these people to their "former state." This means that the Eternal will restore them to their former state of existence as human beings.

Interestingly, Ezekiel also wrote that the "daughters" of these ancient civilizations will be raised up as well. This means that the progeny of those people will be included in the second resurrection.

A Final Rebellion

More evidence proving that the second resurrection is to a physical existence is found in two prophetic facts regarding the Millennium. At that time, the knowledge of God will cover the earth (Isa. 11:9). After finally comprehending how humanity is supposed to live, the majority of people will choose Christ's way. But not everyone will agree. The Scriptures foretell that many will choose to reject Christ. Consider what the book of Revelation tells us about humanity's final rebellion.

After the Millennial period of 1,000 years has expired, two significant events will occur—the second resurrection and Satan's release from the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:5-7). The second resurrection will see teeming masses rise up to enjoy a planet that has flourished under the rule of Christ and the elect. These people will be given a sufficient amount of time to learn about God and His way. At the same time, Satan will be allowed to work his deceit among the nations. His deception will not occur overnight. It will take an untold number of years for the devil to influence the many generations who will have lived peaceably for centuries under God's law. John's prophetic vision reveals that the wiles of the devil will not be unfruitful. Millions will be persuaded to rebel:

> Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number *is* as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them (Revelation 20:7-9).

Satan will be released during the second resurrection. Regardless of the fact that the knowledge of God will have covered the earth, millions will choose to challenge Christ and the saints. These dissenters are referred to as Gog and Magog in the Scriptures. These terms are expressions representing ungodly people of the earth who will combine forces in an attempt to

overthrow Christ's headquarters. The rebellious attack will include an enormous number from the second resurrection. God prophesied of this final insurrection through the prophet Ezekiel who wrote:

> "I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains," says the Lord GOD. "Every man's sword will be against his brother. And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that *are* with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I *am* the LORD. And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, "Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I *am* against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal; and I will turn you around and lead you on, bringing you up from the far north, and bring you against the mountains of Israel. Then I will knock the bow out of your left hand, and cause the arrows to fall out of your right hand. You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who *are* with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and *to* the beasts of the field to be devoured. You shall fall on the open field; for I have spoken," says the Lord GOD. "And I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in security in the coastlands. Then they shall know that I *am* the LORD. So I will make My holy name known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not *let them* profane My holy name anymore. Then the nations shall know that *I am* the LORD, the Holy One in Israel. Surely it is coming, and it shall be done," says the Lord GOD. "This *is* the day of which I have spoken. Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and bucklers, the bows and arrows, the javelins and spears; and they will make fires with them for seven years. They will not take wood from the field nor cut down *any* from the forests, because they will make fires with the weapons; and they

> will plunder those who plundered them, and pillage those who pillaged them," says the Lord GOD. "It will come to pass in that day *that* I will give Gog a burial place there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea; and it will obstruct travelers, because there they will bury Gog and all his multitude. Therefore they will call *it* the Valley of Hamon Gog. For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land. Indeed all the people of the land will be burying, and they will gain renown for it on the day that I am glorified," says the Lord GOD. "They will set apart men regularly employed, with the help of a search party, to pass through the land and bury those bodies remaining on the ground, in order to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make a search. The search party will pass through the land; and *when anyone* sees a man's bone, he shall set up a marker by it, till the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon Gog. The name of *the* city *will* also *be* Hamonah. Thus they shall cleanse the land" (Ezekiel 38:21 - 39:16).

It must be understood that this final rebellion is not the battle of Armageddon, nor is it a war that has taken place at any time in our history. This is the same Gog and Magog spoken of in Revelation 20:8. It will be an enormous foray consisting of human beings that have been taught the way of God, but choose to reject Christ. Clearly Gog and Magog represent the ungodly who are inspired by the devil.

There are several biblical statements indicating that this event will take place more than 1,000 years after Christ's return. One is found in Ezekiel 38:8 which states that the land of Israel being attacked will consist of people that were "brought out of the nations" and who "dwell safely" in the middle east. Verse 11 of this same chapter also indicates that Gog and Magog will rise up "against a land of unwalled villages" to attack a "peaceful people who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls." This clearly points to a future time when the world will have experienced centuries without practicing war. For this reason, communities will have no need of defensive walls.

Further evidence of this future revolt is found in the weapons used by the insurgents. Because the world will have experienced 1,000 years of peace, people will not have been trained in the ways of war. Micah prophesied of the Millennium saying, "Neither shall they learn war anymore" (Mic. 4:3). Thus, there will be no machine guns, tanks, missiles, nuclear warheads, or weapons of mass destruction. Instead, the future dissenters will assemble weapons that we would consider primitive today. Most will be made of wood and other natural materials.

Because of this, after the insurgency is crushed by God, the faithful people who dwell in the territory will be able to use the weapons as firewood for a period of seven years (Eze. 39:9). In addition, so great will the number of fallen rebels be that it will take more than seven months to bury their bodies.

These future events are further evidence that there will be a second resurrection which will restore billions of people to physical life. These people will learn God's way and then be tempted by the devil. Many will be swayed to reject God and will take part in a massive rebellion which will culminate in an attack on Christ's headquarters in Jerusalem. God declares that their assault will be utterly shattered! Still, mortal life on the earth will continue for years before the third and final resurrection occurs.

The Third Resurrection

A final judgment awaits those who knew Christ and rejected Him during our present age. It will include those who lived throughout the Millennium—whether they were righteous or not. The evaluation of their works will be declared when they are raised to stand before God's throne. This is the third resurrection that was described by Christ who said:

> Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:28-29).

When this final judgment occurs, there will be a formal pronouncement regarding the choices people had made. It will include assessing the motives and character that these people had built after having known God and understood how we are to live. The Apostle John wrote:

> Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book* of Life. And **the dead were judged according to their works**, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works (Revelation 20:11-13).

Those people found written in the Book of Life will be judged worthy to become glorified citizens of the Kingdom of God. Those who chose to reject God will be erased from existence in a lake of fire. This ultimate destruction of the ungodly includes Satan and his wicked angels. For more on this subject, please request our free booklet titled *Satan's Fate*.

This third resurrection is the final judgment. It will include everyone who was not a part of the first. When they are judged, it will be known who accepted and who rejected God. The dissenters will NOT be found written in the Book of Life, and will suffer the second death—a death from which there is no chance of return. As Revelation continues to explain:

> Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14-15).

The third resurrection is also mentioned in the book of Acts where Paul stated that:

> There will be a resurrection of *the* dead, both of *the* just and *the* unjust (Acts 24:15).

The first resurrection will only consist of the just that will become incorruptible, immortal, glorified spirit beings. The unjust will be raised in a second resurrection and given their opportunity for salvation. But Paul spoke of another resurrection that will be a combination of both the just AND the unjust. Therefore, this last resurrection is for the purpose of separating the good from the bad as God further expands His family. This event was described by Christ when He said:

> All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world..." Then He will also say to those on the left hand, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:32-41).

This is the great white throne judgment spoken of in Revelation 20. It is the last of the resurrections. Its purpose is to separate the just from the unjust. The unjust will be cast into a spiritual lake of fire which is capable of destroying spirit beings and wiping out every vestige of sin (2Pet. 2:4; 3:7; Jude 6-7). The lake of fire will also serve as a final witness—a lesson to everyone who continues to live. The lesson is this. Death is the result of iniquity. The Savior made this point clear when He said:

> The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Matthew 13:41-43).

This final judgment was also prophesied by Daniel when he mentioned a truism regarding the verdict that every individual will experience:

> And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame *and* everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

Those not found in the Book of Life will be erased from existence. This has led some to believe that this final resurrection is only to condemnation. However, this Scripture demands that many from this third resurrection WILL be found in the Book of Life! These verses and common sense tell us that most people who live during the Millennium will choose to obey God. There will be billions who will find themselves overjoyed and sincerely grateful for the salvation God has offered them. Like the chosen few from the first resurrection, the untold numbers in the third resurrection who choose to obey God will be glorified. All others will suffer extinction in the lake of fire—this is the second death.

Not the First or the Second

The white throne judgment is a separate resurrection from the first two altogether. Obviously, this final ruling will not include the chosen saints from the first resurrection. Theirs was declared before the Millennium began (Rev. 14). It is also not the second resurrection where people are raised to a physical existence.

As stated earlier, those in the third resurrection will stand before the throne of God, and it is not possible for mortals to see God's actual face and live (Exo. 33:20). Therefore, "the dead, small and great" that are described awaiting their verdict are not human beings. They can only be comprised of spirit.

In addition, the physical heavens and earth will flee from the One sitting on the white throne (Rev. 20:11). Therefore the location of this resurrection is not the earth where those in the second resurrection are raised up. It is in the third heaven before the throne of God.

By definition, this final resurrection is obviously not the first, and it is definitely not the second. It can only be a third resurrection which is to a spiritual state. Even so, it will not be a glorified spirit like that of Christ and His Bride. The reward of these people will only occur after the final judgment has been declared.

In Summary

The Bible reveals that the first resurrection will include God's faithful saints from the time of Adam to Christ's return. These chosen few will rule with Christ during the Millennium. We are also told that the last resurrection will include all other human beings that were not a part of the first resurrection. Holy writ reveals that these two harvests of humanity are resurrections to spirit.

Consider the nature of God. If there were only these two, does it seem acceptable that our loving, merciful, wise, and just God would raise billions of people that never had a chance to know Him and judge them "according to their works" when they were never allowed to make a choice based on understanding the truth? This would be completely out of character for God who is the very embodiment of love and justice.

Thus, the Scriptures reveal that there is a second resurrection which will give everyone a chance to receive salvation. Those people who live during the Millennium, as well as those who are raised up after 1,000 years, will be taught the way of righteousness. They will ultimately be judged according to their works. The final pronouncement of their judgment will occur during the third resurrection.

The timing of Revelation 20 shows all three of these resurrections in chronological order. It is also possible to identify them by the individuals involved in each one, and the form these people will have in their resurrection—either spirit or flesh.

1. A resurrection will occur just before the return of Christ. Those chosen will become glorified spirit beings like the Messiah. They will marry Him, and will reign on the earth for 1,000 years. As John wrote:

> Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).
>
> ...and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years (Revelation 20:4).

During the Millennium, the earth's vitality will be restored. People will build communities. They will marry, have children, and the populace will prosper like never before while living under God's statutes and judgments.

2. After 1,000 years, there will be a second resurrection to flesh. These will be individuals from all ages who never fully understood the true God. They will be given an opportunity to know Christ and the ability to choose whether to obey God and live, or to disobey and perish (Deu. 30:19; Mat. 25:41). Despite the severity of the latter choice, the Scriptures reveal that many will choose iniquity.

3. At the very end of this world, there will be a third resurrection. This last resurrection will consist of people from every age since the creation of Adam. Whether just or unjust, everyone will be raised for the purpose of pronouncing their final judgment. This resurrection is not to flesh and blood, but to spirit which will result in either the reward of continued spiritual life or eternal death. As the angel related to John:

> He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to every one according to his work (Revelation 22:11-12).

A New Heavens and Earth

Those who are found to be righteous will be raised up as spirit beings to live a spiritual life as glorified children of God. At that time, their home will no longer be the earth as it has always been known. The universe will be remade of spirit. God spoke of this amazing post-millennial event through the prophet Isaiah who wrote:

> For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind (Isaiah 65:17).

God's plan reveals that the current physical creation will not last forever. It will eventually be destroyed in a massive conflagration called "the lake of fire." Following the destruction of the incorrigible, and the current heavens and earth, the very next prophetic event is outlined in Revelation 21 in which John saw something altogether new:

> Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful" (Revelation 21:1-5).

God has revealed the final stage in his plan of salvation. He is going to recreate the universe! Then, the New Jerusalem will come down from heaven to be established on a new earth. A description of this holy edifice is found in this same chapter (Rev.

21:10-21). The measurements that are given explain that the holy city will be the equivalent of 1400 miles high, 1400 miles long, and 1400 miles wide. This building is made of spiritual gold so pure that it is transparent. The wall and the city's foundations are adorned with all kinds of precious stones. Its 12 gates are fashioned from 12 enormous pearls.

It becomes obvious that the enormity of the New Jerusalem would not allow for the present earth to sustain it. Placing a building of such magnitude on our planet would send it spinning off its axis. It is also apparent that the New Jerusalem is not fashioned from physical elements. Clearly the New Jerusalem descends at a time when the physical earth as we know it no longer exists.

When the new heaven and earth are brought into existence, God states that there will be no more death, sorrow, or pain. This leads us to consider that, as wonderful as the Millennium will be, a widespread physical existence will still be in effect. There will be death, sorrow, and pain. Gog and Magog will rebel after Satan is loosed which will result in an enormous amount of bloodshed. Only after the third resurrection, when all who have qualified to receive salvation are changed into spirit beings, will there be no more pain and death.

Recognizing what is destined to become of our universe, we are able to grasp a better understanding of God's reason for three resurrections. The Almighty does not desire that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance (2Pet. 3:9). For this reason, His plan gives everyone a chance to repent from sin and live the only way of life that will bring peace, fulfillment, happiness, and prosperity. Those who choose to live by God's commandments will be saved. They will be able to live upon a new earth with the new heavens, and walk the streets of the New Jerusalem. Those who choose to disobey God will be erased from existence in the lake of fire. The pain and suffering caused by sin will no longer have a place in God's creation. This truth was prophesied by Malachi who stated:

> "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven; and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch" (Malachi 4:1).

All elements of sin will be burned up. Not a single trace of wickedness will be left after the lake of fire has consumed Satan, the demons, the incorrigible, and the entire physical universe.

Understanding the end result of ungodly behavior, we must respond with sincere repentance and obedience. The Apostle Peter recognized our dire situation and admonished believers with the following words:

> Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless (2 Peter 3:11-14).

Our time on this physical earth is limited. Even if we qualify to obtain the better resurrection, and reign with Christ for 1,000 years, that period of time is finite. For this reason, Peter looked towards something even greater—the Kingdom of God that will stretch beyond the Millennium into the vastness of eternity.

God is a Master Architect with a perfect plan of salvation. That plan offers salvation to all who will choose a moral way of life. It includes a series of three resurrections that culminate with a new universe and a magnificent Kingdom inhabited by God's children—a Kingdom that will have no end (Luke 1:33).

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The Eternal Church of God
P.O. Box 80248
Billings, MT 59108
U.S.A

eternalcog.org