

# Blessed and Holy are those Who Have Part in the First Resurrection

## 20: 5-6

**DIG:** What is the first resurrection? Who is involved in the first resurrection? What is the second death? How are they different? Who are the firstfruits of the first resurrection? What are its stages?

**REFLECT:** Does knowing about the first resurrection affect how you live today? What would be different without it?

The major result of **Christ's** Second Coming, from our standpoint, is **the resurrection**. This is the basis for our hope in the face of death. Although death is inevitable, we anticipate being delivered from its power. The Bible clearly teaches **resurrection** of the believer and the TaNaKh gives us several direct statements (**Psalm 49:15; Ezekiel 37:12-14; Daniel 12:2**), the foremost being from **Isaiah: But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You, who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead (Isaiah 26:19).**

Because of progressive revelation, we must be careful not to read too much of the B'rit Chadashah revelation into the TaNaKh. But it is significant that **Yeshua** and the writers of the New Covenant maintained that the Hebrew Scriptures taught **the resurrection**. When the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, questioned **Jesus**, **He** accused them of **error** due to their lack of knowledge of **the Scriptures** and **the power of God**, and then went on to argue for **the resurrection** on the basis of **Exodus: Now about the dead rising - have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken (Mark 12:24-27).**

The New Covenant, of course, teaches **the resurrection** much more clearly. I have already mentioned **Jesus'** response to the Sadducees, which is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels (**Matthew 22:29-32; Mark 12:24-27; Luke 20:34-38**). And **John** reports several additional times when **Jesus** spoke of **the resurrection**. One of the clearest assertions is when **He** said: **I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear it will live . . . Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out - those who have done good will rise to live in the first resurrection, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned in the second resurrection (see Fn -**

**The Second Resurrection**). Other occasions of **the resurrection** are found in **John 6:39-40, 44, 54** and the description of the raising of Lazarus from **the dead** in **John 11**, especially in **verses 24 and 25**.

The New Covenant Epistles also give proof of **the resurrection**. Rabbi Sha'ul clearly believed and taught that there is to be a future bodily **resurrection**. The classic passage is **First Corinthians 15**, where he discusses **the resurrection** at great length, especially where he says: **Listen, I tell you a mystery** (something that was once hidden and now is revealed): **We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will all be changed.** Rabbi Sha'ul also clearly taught about **the resurrection** in **First Thessalonians 4:13-16** and implied in **Second Corinthians 5:1-10**. And when Sha'ul appeared before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, he created a huge **dispute** between the Pharisees and the Sadducees by declaring: **My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6).** He also made a similar declaration before Felix (**Acts 24:21**). John also affirms the doctrine of **the resurrection** in **Revelation 20:4-6** and **13**.

All the members of **the Trinity** are involved in **the resurrection**. Sha'ul informs us that **the Father** will raise believers through **the Spirit**: **And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Messiah from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you (Romans 8:11).** There is a special connection between **the resurrection** of **the Son** and **the first resurrection**, a point emphasized by Sha'ul: **But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Messiah has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith (First Corinthians 15:12-14).** Therefore, **the resurrection** of **Christ** is the basis for the believer's hope and confidence. Rabbi Sha'ul writes: **[Since] we believe that Yeshua died and rose again, we also believe that God will bring with Jesus and all those who have fallen asleep in Him (First Thessalonians 4:14).**

But just what will this **resurrection body** be like? There are certain problems if we see it as merely a physical **resurrection**. One is that it would presumably be subject to dying again like Lazarus. Yet Rabbi Sha'ul speaks of the new **body** as being **imperishable**, in contrast to the **perishable body** that is buried (**First Corinthians 15:42**). A second problem is the contrast between the **physical body** that is sown and the **spiritual body** that is raised (**First Corinthians 15:44**). There is a significant difference between the two, but we do not know the precise nature of that difference. Further, there are explicit statements that rule out the possibility that **the resurrection body** will be purely physical. Sha'ul says near the end of

his discussion of the resurrection body: **Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable (First Corinthians 15:50).** Yeshua's sharp reply to the Sadducees: **At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven (Matthew 22:30),** seems to carry the same implication.

What we have, then, is *something more* than a post-death survival by the spirit or soul; however, this *something more* is not simply a physical resuscitation. The old body is used but it is also transformed in the process. Some sort of metamorphosis occurs, so that a *new* body arises. This new body has some connection or point of identity with the old body, but it ends up being different. Sha'ul speaks of it as a **spiritual body (1 Cor 15:44)**, but does not elaborate. He uses the analogy of a **seed** and the **plant** that springs from it (**1 Cor 15:37**). What sprouts from the ground is not merely that which is planted; yet, it comes from the original **seed**. There is a continuity of identity, however, despite all the changes.

We can conclude, then, that there will be a bodily reality of some type in the **resurrection**. It will have some connection with, and derive from our original body, and yet it will not be merely a resuscitation of our original body. Rather, there will be a transformation or metamorphosis. An analogy would be the petrification of a log or a stump. While the shape of the original remained intact, the composition is totally different. We have difficulty in understanding this concept because we do not know the exact nature of the resurrection body. It does appear, however, that it will retain and, at the same time, glorify the human form. We will be free of the imperfections and needs that we have on earth.<sup>432</sup>

But getting back to the book of **Revelation**, John tells us that **the rest of the dead**, or all of the unrighteous who have rejected **the Messiah** since the beginning of time, will **not come to life until the thousand years had ended** at the second **resurrection**. But here, **the resurrection** of the Tribulation martyrs completes **the first resurrection**.

**The first resurrection** involves believers only. That is why **the Holy Spirit** says: **Blessed and holy are those who have a part in the first resurrection** because they will never suffer or die again. This is the fifth of seven blessings in the book of **Revelation (1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, 22:14)**. **The second death has no power over the Tribulation martyrs, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years (20:6)**. Moses had said: **You will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6)**. During the millennial Kingdom this promise will reach its fulfillment, not only for Jewish believers but for **Gentile** believers also (**First Peter 2:5 and 9; Revelation 1:6, 5:10**).

However, **the resurrection** is not a general one-time occurrence, but comes in stages in an orderly progression. **But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when He comes, those who belong to Him (First Corinthians 15:20-23).**

Therefore, **the first resurrection** happens in five distinct stages. The first stage was **the resurrection of Messiah (First Corinthians 15:23)**. The second stage is the resurrection of the believers at the Rapture during the Church Age (**First Thessalonians 4:16**). The third stage will be the resurrection of the two witnesses in the middle of the Great Tribulation. The fourth and fifth stages will be the resurrection of the righteous ones (see Fd - **The Resurrection of the Righteous of the TaNaKh**) and Tribulation martyrs during the seventy-five day interval. There will be no need for a resurrection during the messianic Kingdom (see my commentary on **Isaiah Kq - The Wolf and the Lamb Will Feed Together, and the Lion Will Eat Straw Like the Ox**).