

The Book of Revelation (One of Three Questions)

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The Eldership of the Central Church of Christ in McMinnville, Tennessee invited me to preach a series of six lessons on the book of Revelation during their gospel meeting. Obviously, this was a concentrated study. The meeting was well attended. The young people sat up front and paid excellent attention to each lesson. One parent tested his children and proudly informed me that they could answer three right out of four questions he asked them after the lesson. I told him I thought that was exceptional because if he were to ask me those four questions I doubt I could get three out of four! Brock Fariss, son of Tim, one of the Deacons, had three questions he wrote down for me and agreed to allow me to answer them in three bulletin articles which I will forward on to him and his Dad as I answer them. (Thanks for your patience Brock!) What this article and the next two following it will be is the answer to those three questions. I thought you might like to hear about the background out of which these questions emerged.

Why would it matter that a second resurrection would occur after 1,000 years if hell and heaven are forever?

This question comes to us from Revelation 20:4-6 which reads, “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

The second resurrection mentioned here doesn't occur after 1,000 years but happens in the context of the opening verse of the book which says, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants ***things which must shortly come to pass***; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.” Given the advantage of history following the time in which John wrote, we now know about something called The Edict of Toleration issued by the Roman Emperor Constantine in A.D. 312 that not only “tolerated” Christianity but swung to the opposite extreme of offering financial rewards to those who would be baptized!

Looking a little deeper into this, we find that the resurrection of Revelation 20:4-6 is not the literal resurrection, sometimes called the general resurrection, because there are no bodies mentioned, only souls. (The Resurrection will reunite bodies and souls in the same hour and be followed by the Judgment of everyone who has ever lived after which time those blessed to go to heaven will have their mortal bodies changed into immortal bodies. See: John 5:28-29; Revelation 20:12; and 1 Corinthians 15:44-53). The resurrection of Revelation 20:4-6 is not the literal the resurrection but the resurrection of the cause of the martyrs. As proof, consider and compare Revelation 2:11 which says, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” with Revelation 20:6

which says, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." Therefore, to overcome means not to be hurt of the second death. But, what is the second death? We find the answer in verse 14, "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire, This is the second death." So, by remaining faithful to Christ they would overcome the enemies of Christianity, and by overcoming the enemies of Christianity they would not "be hurt of the second death" or suffer the pains of hell fire. Christians living in the first, second, and third centuries were privileged to have this message of hope communicated to them through the book of Revelation. For those of us living today, we benefit from the assurances given that God is standing in our best interests and always will no matter what is going on in the world.