



The First Resurrection and The Rest of The Dead

For many years most of the Church of God has taught that there are three resurrections in God's plan of salvation for mankind. As a result, the terms "second resurrection" and "third resurrection" are commonly used even though these terms are not found anywhere in the Bible. These terms were created because the term "first resurrection" does appear in the Bible. Due to the fact that the term "first resurrection" is used in Revelation 20:5-6, the terms "second resurrection" and "third resurrection" were created based on the logic that if there is a "first resurrection" by necessity there must at least be a "second resurrection".

The logic that all of this is based on assumes that the term "first resurrection" in Revelation 20:5-6 carries the meaning of "first in time order". However, there is another possible meaning for the term "first resurrection" that appears to more accurately fit in the total context of these verses and also more closely matches the pattern of how the Bible speaks about the resurrections.

First In Time Order vs First In Rank Or Honor

Revelation 20:4-6 gives us a picture of the resurrected Firstfruits reigning with Christ during the millennium. These verses also mention the "first resurrection".

Rev 20:4-6

⁴ 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. ⁵ But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. **This is the first resurrection.** ⁶ **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.

The term “first resurrection” in these verses is most often assumed to carry the meaning of “first in time order”. However, let’s consider whether or not this logic actually works. Would this resurrection be the first time any human being was resurrected back from the dead? There are numerous accounts of humans being resurrected back to physical life in both the Old and New Testaments that obviously occurred prior to the events being described here in Revelation 20 (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:18-37; 2 Kings 13:20-21; Matt 9:18-26; Luke 7:11-17; John 11:38-44; Matt 27:51-53; Acts 9:36-43; Acts 20:7-12). So, clearly the resurrection described in Revelation 20:4-6 could not accurately be stated to be the very first time that any human was resurrected back to life. However, since we know that this resurrection involves humans being resurrected to eternal life as spirit beings and not just back to physical life let’s consider whether this resurrection could accurately be stated to be the first time that any physical human had died and then was resurrected and given eternal life as a spirit being. The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ lived as a physical human, died, and then was resurrected as an eternal God being. In addition, He is specifically given the title of being the “firstborn from the dead”.

Col. 1:18

¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, **the firstborn from the dead**, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

Rev. 1:4-5

⁴ John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, **the firstborn from the dead**, and the ruler over the kings of the earth.

So, the resurrection to eternal life that would be “first in time order” would have to be the resurrection of Jesus Christ and not the resurrection of the Firstfruits. Given this fact, we need to consider what other possible meanings John might have intended when he referred to the resurrection described in Revelation 20:5-6 as the “first resurrection”.

The Greek word that is translated into the English word “first” in these verses is “protos” (Strong’s 4413). This word can carry the meaning of “first in time order”. However, it can also carry other meanings that we need to consider. The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates lists one of the possible meanings as “Figuratively of rank, dignity, meaning first, chief...” Thayer’s Greek Lexicon by Joseph Thayer lists one of the possible meanings as “first in rank, influence, honor; chief; principal...” Here are a few examples of protos being used in the New Testament to express this meaning:

Mark 9:33-35

³³ Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, “What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?” ³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. ³⁵ And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “If anyone desires to be first [protos], he shall be last of all and servant of all.”

Acts 13:50

⁵⁰ But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief [protos] men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.

Acts 17:4

⁴ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading [protos] women, joined Paul and Silas.

1Cor. 15:3-5

³ For I delivered to you first of all [protos] that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.

1 Tim 1:15

¹⁵ This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief [protos].

So, if the term “first resurrection” carries the meaning of “first in rank, influence, honor, chief, principal”, we need to ask the question, “First as compared to what?” In other words, if the “first resurrection” is first in rank or honor we need to ask in what context is this statement meant? Consider the fact that the Bible repeatedly compares the resurrection to eternal life with the resurrection to condemnation in the lake of fire.

Daniel 12:2

² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, **Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.**

John 5:28-29

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**.

Acts 24:15

¹⁵ 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**.

Looking at this pattern the resurrection that would be considered “first in rank, influence, honor; chief; principal” would be the resurrection to eternal life. So, we need to consider the possibility that the term “first resurrection” is simply another way of saying “resurrection to eternal life”. This makes sense if we consider that the stated blessing of the first resurrection is that fact that the “second death has no power” over those included in this resurrection. Notice that the contrast stated is based on a comparison to those that will be thrown in the lake of fire.

The Rest of The Dead

If we assume that the term “first resurrection” has the meaning of “first in time order”, then the wording in Revelation 20:5-6 would appear to be rather awkward and disjointed. Verse 5 mentions that “the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished”. It then goes on to add “this is the first resurrection.” If the term “first resurrection” carries the meaning of “first in time order” then obviously this term would exclusively refer to the resurrection of the Firstfruits. If this is the case, then the statement “this is the first resurrection” appears to be in the wrong place because it is stated right after the “rest of the dead” are mentioned. Placing the statement “this is the first resurrection” right after mentioning the “rest of the dead” implies that the “rest of dead” are included in this statement. In addition, verse 6 states that the “blessing” that makes the “first resurrection” unique is the fact that “over such the second death has no power”. This statement would equally apply to anyone resurrected to eternal life at a later time and would not uniquely apply to the Firstfruits.

However, if the term “first resurrection” simply carries the meaning of “resurrection to eternal life” then there is another explanation for the wording in these verses that is not so awkward and disjointed. There is more than one group that will be resurrected to eternal life. The Firstfruits are resurrected to eternal life at the return of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:51-55; 1 Thess 4:13-18). After the millennium, all those out of the rest of mankind that have faithfully obeyed God will have their opportunity to be resurrected to eternal life as well (Matt 25:31-46). So, there is another group of people that will be resurrected to eternal life after “the thousand years were finished” (Rev

20:5). This group is who John refers to as “the rest of the dead”. These individuals are the rest of the group of people included in the first resurrection (the resurrection to eternal life). This is why the statement “This is the first resurrection” appears after the “rest of the dead” are mentioned. The first resurrection (the resurrection to eternal life) includes two groups: the Firstfruits and “the rest of the dead” (those from the rest of mankind that are later born into the Kingdom of God).

Come To Life vs Live Again

Revelation 20:5 is worded differently in some Bible translations. The majority of translations (ASV, CEB, CJB, Darby, ESV, NASB, NIV, NRSV, Phillips, RSV, etc) state that the rest of the dead “come to life” but some translations (KJV, NKJV, NLT, TLB) state that the rest of dead “lived again”.

Rev. 20:4-5 -- NRSV

⁴ Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They **came to life** and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵ (The rest of the dead did not **come to life** until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.

Revelation 20:4-5 -- NKJV

⁴ 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. ⁵ But the rest of the dead did not **live again** until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

This is a manuscript issue rather than a translation issue. While all Bible manuscripts have the Greek word “zao” in verse 4 (typically translated into English as “lived” or “came to life” in this verse) some manuscripts have the Greek word “anazao” (lived again) in verse 5. Other manuscripts have the Greek word “zao” (Strong’s # 2198) in this verse as well. The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates gives several possible meanings for this word including physical life. However, Zodhiates also lists the following as one of the meanings for this word: “In the sense of to exist, in an absolute sense and without end, now and hereafter, to live forever....” Thayer’s Greek Lexicon by Joseph Thayer lists a similar meaning as well:

“emphatically, and in the Messianic sense, to enjoy real life, i.e. to have true life and worthy of the name – active, blessed, endless in the kingdom of God...” The context of Revelation 20:4 makes it obvious that spiritual life is John’s intended meaning because he is speaking about the resurrected Firstfruits reigning with Christ for a thousand years. If we assume that *zao* (rather than *anazao*) is also the word that John used in verse 5 and we apply the same meaning to this word as found in verse 4 then it becomes obvious that John is saying that “the rest of dead” are resurrected to eternal life “after the thousand years were finished”. This explains why he would follow up this statement by saying “This is the first resurrection”.

A Contrast In Thought

There is another point that needs to be clarified as well. In Revelation 20:6, John states that the blessing of the “first resurrection” is the fact that the “second death has no power” over those included in this resurrection. He then goes on to state “but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years”. This sentence is often interpreted to be a list of attributes that all equally and uniquely apply to the Firstfruits. However, if this is John’s intended meaning then we need to ask why he chose to use the word “but” in the middle of this sentence rather than the word “and”. The word “but” indicates that some type of contrast in thought will follow. If one is listing a series of items that all equally apply to the subject in the same way, then the word “and” is used to connect them together. The word “but” indicates a contrast in thought is being presented.

The Greek word for “but” in verse 6 is “*alla*” (Strong’s # 235). The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates defines it as “A particle implying in speech some diversity or superaddition to what preceded. It serves, therefore, to mark opposition, antithesis, or transition....In the NT, it means “but” in various modifications.” So, when John mentions the Firstfruits being priests and reigning with Christ for a thousand years in the later part of verse 6 he is indicating by his use of the word “but” that these concepts are in some way a contrast to what is stated in the first part of the sentence. The key to understanding what this contrast is about is noticing the pronouns he used in verses 4-6.

Rev 20:4-6

⁴ 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. ⁵ But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ 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.

Notice that when John speaks about the Firstfruits reigning with Christ in verse 4 he refers to them with the pronoun “they”. However, when John talks about all those included in the “first resurrection” and speaks about their unique blessing he uses the pronoun “he”. Then halfway through verse 6 he switches back to talking about “they”. This is why he states, “but they...” before going on to discuss the Firstfruits reigning with Christ as kings and priests. He is indicating he is switching from his focus on “he” (all those included in the “first resurrection”) and turning back to his original focus on “they” (the Firstfruits). “They” is obviously a reference to the Firstfruits as this is the group that will reign with Christ in the millennium but “he” (those included in the first resurrection) has to be a group with a different definition or it would make no sense at all to be contrasting these groups with one another. The only way that “he” can be a group with a different definition from “they” is for “he” to be both the Firstfruits and the “rest of the dead”. The context doesn’t give us any other possibility that would differentiate between the two.

Wide Reaching Implications

The meaning of the phrase “the rest of the dead” in Revelation 20:5 has wide reaching implications on the subject of resurrections in the Bible. The most common interpretation in the Church of God of the phrase “the rest of the dead” is that it is a reference to all of the rest of mankind that are not included in the resurrection of the Firstfruits. This interpretation eliminates the possibility of anyone other than the Firstfruits being resurrected until after the millennium. Another interpretation of the phrase “the rest of the dead” is that this phrase is referring to all of those that were offered salvation prior to the millennium but who failed to endure to the end and thus lost out on their chance to receive salvation. This interpretation stipulates that those who were offered the chance to be Firstfruits but failed to endure to the end cannot be resurrected to be cast into the lake of fire until after the millennium. This appears to directly contradict the statements made in Daniel 12.

Daniel 12:1-3

¹ "At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And **at that time** your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book. ² **And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.** ³ Those who are wise shall shine

Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness
Like the stars forever and ever.

Notice that verse 1 refers to a time of trouble unprecedented in human history. This is a clear reference to the Day of the LORD. Then Daniel goes on to describe the deliverance of “every one who is found written in the book.” This is a clear reference to the book of life. In verse 2, Daniel describes a resurrection of two different groups of people. “Some to everlasting life” and “some to shame and everlasting contempt”. The way these verses are stated certainly appears to be placing the resurrections of these two groups in a similar time frame which verse 1 links to the Day of the LORD. The group resurrected to “everlasting life” appears to be a clear reference to the resurrection of the Firstfruits as we know for a fact that they are resurrected to “everlasting life” in the context of the Day of the LORD (1 Thess 4:16-17; 1 Cor 15:50-58).

However, Daniel also seems to indicate that the group resurrected to “shame and everlasting contempt” will be resurrected in a similar time frame. The phrase “shame and everlasting contempt” appears to indicate that this is a group of people that will be cast into the lake of fire. The Hebrew word that is translated into the English word “contempt” in verse 2 is “deraon” (Strong’s 1860). The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament by Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter defines this word as “A masculine noun meaning abhorrence.....It is used only twice in the Old Testament and in both cases speaks about the abhorrence of wicked men in the eternal state (Isa 66:24). Daniel, likewise, spoke about the everlasting abhorrence of the wicked who were resurrected (Dan 12:2).” As Baker and Carpenter point out, “deraon” is only used two times in the Bible and the other time is in Isaiah 66:24. Isaiah 66:24 makes a clear reference to the lake of fire.

Isa 66:24

²⁴ "And they shall go forth and look Upon the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. **For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched.** They shall be an **abhorrence** [deraon] to all flesh."

The phrase “For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched” in this verse is quoted three times in the New Testament by Christ.

Mark 9:42-48

⁴² "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the

fire that shall never be quenched — ⁴⁴ where **'Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched.'** ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched — ⁴⁶ where **'Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched.'** ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire — ⁴⁸ where **'Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched.'**

While quoting the phrase “For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched” Christ repeatedly makes references to the lake of fire. He is clearly indicating that Isaiah was referring to the lake of fire as well. The only way that the people referred to in Daniel 12:2 can have “everlasting contempt” (i.e. eternal abhorrence) is for them to be condemned and sentenced to burn in the lake of fire. If they had any chance of repenting and still making it into the Kingdom of God, then their “contempt” would not be “everlasting”.

So, Daniel appears to be stating that all those that were offered the chance to be Firstfruits but failed to endure to the end will be resurrected and cast into the lake of fire in a similar time period as the resurrection of the Firstfruits to eternal life. This is consistent with how the Bible describes the judgment of mankind. The New Testament makes repeated references to the judgment of mankind using the analogy of a harvest. When crops are harvested both the “wheat” and the “tares” are harvested in a similar time frame. A farmer doesn’t address one and then wait centuries to address the other. He addresses them both in a similar time frame. This is the picture we see painted in the parable of the tares.

Matt 13:24-30

²⁴ Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. ²⁶ But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. ²⁷ So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' ²⁸ He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' ²⁹ But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ **Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."**"

While technically this parable states that the tares are addressed prior to the wheat, the point that is being made here is that both are addressed in a similar time frame. It doesn't paint a picture of the "wheat" and the "tares" being addressed centuries apart from one another. Similar to how a literal farmer harvests their crops, both are addressed in a similar time frame. This is also consistent with how the Bible describes the harvesting of the rest of mankind (i.e. the fall harvest).

Matt 25:31-46

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. ³² **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.** ³³ And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ 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: ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' ³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? ³⁸ When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? ³⁹ Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' ⁴¹ "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: ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' ⁴⁴ "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' ⁴⁵ Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' ⁴⁶ **And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.**"

In these verses Christ is describing a unified scene consistent with the picture presented by the parable of the tares. In both cases the righteous and the wicked are addressed in a similar time frame rather than in separate time frames separated by centuries. Daniel 12:1-3 appears to be depicting the Spring Harvest in the same manner. The picture Daniel appears to be presenting is one where the Firstfruits are resurrected to eternal life and those who were offered salvation but rejected it prior to

the millennium are resurrected to condemnation in the lake of fire in a similar time frame.

The Second Death

The later part of Revelation 20 gives further support that the term “first resurrection” should be understood as meaning “resurrection to eternal life” and as a contrast with the resurrection to condemnation in the lake of fire rather than a statement about numerical order. Historically, Revelation 20:11-15 has often been interpreted as referring to both the “second resurrection” and the “third resurrection”. Verses 11-12 were interpreted to be referring to the “second resurrection” whereas verses 13-15 were interpreted as referring to the “second resurrection”. However, verses 11-15 read as a single consistent event rather than two totally different events separated by numerous years. These verses describe a single event where the wicked are judged before God and sentenced to death in the lake of fire.

To understand these verses, it is very important to first accurately define the meaning John intended by the terms “dead” and “sea” in these verses. If we assume that John intended the term “dead” to refer to the physically dead and the term “sea” to refer to a body of water, then verse 13 makes a very puzzling statement. Verse 13 makes a contrast between the “dead” from the “sea” and the “dead” from Death and Hades. If “dead” in these verses is a reference to the physically dead and the “sea” is a reference to a body of water and thus the location of where these people were buried, then contrasting them with people being brought back from death and the grave really doesn’t make much sense. Even if these people died and were buried at sea and they are later resurrected back to life they are still coming back from death and the grave.

Rev 20:11-15

¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ **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. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

For John’s contrast in this verse to make logical sense he must have meant something else by the terms “dead” and “sea”. The Greek word translated as “dead” in Revelation 20:12-13 is “nekros” (Strong’s 3498). Nekros can refer to the physically dead, but it can also be used figuratively as well. The Complete Word Study Dictionary

of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates states that this word can also mean “Figuratively....those dead to Christ and His gospel, meaning spiritually dead”. There are several times in the Bible where this is clearly the meaning intended. Notice the following examples.

Matt 8:18-22

¹⁸ And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side. ¹⁹ Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." ²⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." ²¹ Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." ²² But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead [nekros] bury their own dead [nekros]."

Eph 5:8-14

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), ¹⁰ finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. ¹¹ And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. ¹³ But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. ¹⁴ Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead [nekros], And Christ will give you light."

Rev 3:1

¹ "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead [nekros]."

We also need to consider that the word “sea” in verse 13 could also be meant as a figurative reference rather than as a literal body of water. The Pulpit Commentary makes the following comment regarding verse 13: “The sea being a type of the ungodly nations, the sentence may mean those spiritually dead, but living on the earth at the time of the judgment.” There are several verses in the Bible that would support this interpretation. Satan is often pictured in the Bible as a sea creature named Leviathan.

Isa 27:1

¹ In that day the LORD with His severe sword, great and strong, Will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan that twisted serpent; And He will slay **the reptile that is in the sea**.

Ps 74:12-14

¹² For God is my King from of old, Working salvation in the midst of the earth.

¹³ You divided the sea by Your strength; **You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters.** ¹⁴ **You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces,** And gave him as food to the people inhabiting the wilderness.

Ps 104:24-26

²⁴ O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions — ²⁵ **This great and wide sea,** In which are innumerable teeming things, Living things both small and great. ²⁶ **There the ships sail about; There is that Leviathan** Which You have made to play there.

Job 41:1-8

¹ **"Can you draw out Leviathan with a hook, Or snare his tongue with a line which you lower? "** ² **Can you put a reed through his nose, Or pierce his jaw with a hook? "** ³ Will he make many supplications to you? Will he speak softly to you? ⁴ Will he make a covenant with you? Will you take him as a servant forever? ⁵ Will you play with him as with a bird, Or will you leash him for your maidens? ⁶ Will your companions make a banquet of him? Will they apportion him among the merchants? ⁷ **Can you fill his skin with harpoons, Or his head with fishing spears? "** ⁸ Lay your hand on him; Remember the battle — Never do it again!

In addition, the prophetic beast empires which are controlled by Satan (Rev 13:2) are also pictured as rising out of the sea.

Dan 7:2-3

² Daniel spoke, saying, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were **stirring up the Great Sea.** ³ And **four great beasts came up from the sea,** each different from the other.

Rev 13:1

¹ Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name.

So, there is scriptural precedence for interpreting the word “sea” to be a figurative reference to those that are under Satan’s influence and following his way of life. If we interpret the word “dead” in Revelation 20:12-13 to be referring to the spiritually dead and the word “sea” to be a reference to those that have followed Satan’s way of life, then the picture being described in Revelation 20:11-15 is simply the judgment of those that will be thrown in the lake of fire. The reference in verse 13 that “the sea gave up the dead that were in it” is referring to those that are still physically alive at the time of this event but have chosen to follow Satan’s way of life and thus are spiritually dead. The reference in verse 13 that “Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them” is referring to those that have chosen to follow Satan’s way of life but have previously died and have to be brought back to life to face their judgment. Both of these groups are then cast into the lake of fire in verse 15.

With this interpretation of Revelation 20:11-15 we see a simple contrast in this chapter that matches numerous other scriptures. Revelation 20:4-6 is addressing the resurrection to eternal life which consists of two groups. The Firstfruits who are resurrected to eternal life at the blowing of the seventh trumpet which is the Spring Harvest and all of those who will be resurrected to eternal life as part of the Fall Harvest. Revelation 20:11-15 addresses the resurrection to condemnation in the lake of fire. This resurrection also includes two groups, but Revelation 20:11-15 is only addressing those included in the Fall Harvest. The first group is addressed in Daniel 12:1-3.

This picture reinforces the concept that the term “first resurrection” should be understood as meaning “resurrection to eternal life” and the term “first” meaning “first in rank, influence, honor; chief; principal” should be understood as being in contrast with the resurrection to condemnation in the lake of fire and not as a statement about numerical order. The Bible does not teach the resurrections by using a numerical system of first, second, and third. The Bible teaches the resurrections in the context of how spiritual judgement is administered. All of mankind will ultimately wind up in either the resurrection to eternal life or the resurrection to condemnation in the lake of fire and this judgment process plays out in two stages as pictured by the annual Holy Days.