

# REVELATION

## Chapter 20

### *The Thousand Years*

**Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2 And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. 4 Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who 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 for 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. 6 Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.**

**20:1–22:5†** The seventh vision, consisting of the victory over Satan, the last judgment and the triumph of Christ and his church. These last three chapters reflect many of the subjects and themes of the first three chapters of Genesis. (CSB)

**29:1-6** In summary, it is the view of this commentary that Tyconius and Augustine in the early church, and many interpreters who have agreed with them throughout church history down to the present day, are correct in interpreting the thousand years not as a literal, chronological period of time, but rather as a metaphor that symbolizes the completed era between Christ's first advent and his second coming at the end of this present world. Thus it is truly the Sabbath day (Heb 4:7–9) of the earth's existence and history, the messianic age of blessedness and rest during which the human race has an opportunity to hear the Gospel message of the Savior, Jesus Christ. It is designated by the number one thousand because it is the time when the Lord God will carry out and *complete* to his satisfaction, according to his gracious will, the mission that he has given to the church: to witness to Christ throughout the entire world. The devil is bound so that he cannot destroy Christ's church nor prevent her godly task. Through the two beasts (Revelation 13), the beast and the harlot (Revelation 17–18), the beast and the false prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10), the dragon can cause the church much agony and suffering, but he and the gates of hell cannot overcome her (cf. Mt 16:18). (CC)

This millennium, which would be like the seventh day (the Sabbath), began in the ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Christ. Satan was cast out of heaven at the ascension and enthronement of the Christ (the holy Child as portrayed in Rev 12:5–9), as a direct result of the victory of the Lamb, his death and resurrection (Revelation 4–5). Satan was also bound during Christ's earthly ministry (Mt 12:29; Mk 3:27; cf. Lk 11:21–22), which binding was completed by Christ's death and resurrection and demonstrated at his ascension, and Satan was cast into the abyss. Those who live and reign with Christ during the millennium because of "the first resurrection" (Rev 20:5–6) are the whole company of God's saints, the faithful followers of Christ, both the church militant on earth and the church triumphant in heavenly glory. The church militant reigns with Christ even now on earth (7:1–8; 14:1–5; 20:4); the church triumphant is with Christ in that heavenly peace before God's throne (7:9–17). The millennium, which is the present

church age, will come to an end in God's own economy of time through the exalted reign of the Lamb, when the mission of the church is completed. At that time Christ will return to bring this present world to a close; all the dead will be raised bodily; and the judgment of all people will take place (20:11–15). (CC)

How “blessed and holy is the one who has a share in the first resurrection” (20:6), in this millennial reign of the Lord Christ! Those who rule with Christ during the thousand years sit on thrones in judgment, suffer persecution because of their witness, and do not bear the mark of the beast or worship its image (20:4). They are blessed, for “over these the second death [“the lake of fire,” 20:14] does not have authority” (20:6). Even now while still on earth, Christians are and will continue to be priests of God and of the Christ, and their destiny is to reign with him now through the millennium and then forever in the new heaven and new earth (20:6; cf. 21:1–4). (CC)

In 1:6 the thought was first introduced that all those who have their sins forgiven through Christ's shed blood are as a result priests of God, royal priests. And then in 5:9–10, at the ascension and coronation of the victorious Lamb, the twenty-four elders (on behalf of all the saints of God) sing Christ's praises because by his blood he purchased a people for God and thus made them priests, royal priests. Now here in 20:6 once again God's people are reminded that they are royal priests of God and the Christ. This is their blessing: they are privileged to serve their God and Lord throughout the millennial Sabbath as his priests, as those who mediate the Christ and his redemptive work to an alienated world. This is their mission as they reign with Christ (cf. 1 Pet 2:9–10). (CC)

**20:1** *I saw* – A new vision. (TLSB)

Frequently John uses the words “after these things” (μετὰ ταῦτα) before “I saw” (εἶδον). The fact that here in 20:1 John does *not* say “after these things I saw an angel ...” indicates that there is no “order of time” in relating the vision of the angel binding Satan to the visions that preceded it. That is, we are not necessarily to understand that what John sees in 20:1–10 *follows in time* what he has just seen in Revelation 19, the marriage feast of the bride and the Lamb (19:1–10) and the second coming of Christ at the End (19:11–21). If John intended for the reader to understand that the “thousand years” (20:2–3) was to take place *after* the second coming of Christ, he most likely would have indicated that by using a phrase such as “after these things” (μετὰ ταῦτα) to introduce 20:1–10. For example, in 19:1 he uses “after these things” (μετὰ ταῦτα) to introduce the scene of the celebration that takes place *after* the judgment and overthrow of the harlot and the beast described in Revelation 17–18. (CC)

*angel* – Because of what this angel does within this vision—He binds Satan and confines him in the abyss—some believe this may represent Jesus. At the very least, an angel acts on the Lord's behalf. (TLSB)

ἄγγελον—There is no article (τόν) or numerical designation (e.g., ἕνα) before ἄγγελον, “angel.” This suggests that the angel is indefinite and unidentified, that is, John did not recognize the angel in relation to other angels that had earlier appeared. When John *does* recognize an angel as one that he has seen before, he regularly attaches the definite article (e.g., 8:2) or the number “one” (17:1; 18:21; 19:17; 21:9). (CC p. 542)

*bottomless pit*.† Here it is most certainly a name for hell (cf. 1:18). (CSB)

*key to the bottomless pit* – Apparently the same place is mentioned in 9:1. In contrast to the lake of fire, which is the final place to which the evil are banished (cf vv 10, 14–15; 21:8), this abyss is more like a temporary holding cell. (TLSB)

The angel has “the key of the abyss and a heavy chain in his hand” (20:1). In 9:1 “the key of the shaft of the abyss” was given to the star which had fallen out of heaven. That star is to be identified as “the angel of the abyss” in 9:11, that is, Satan, the “king” of the demons. He opened the shaft of the abyss (9:2) from which then came the demons who afflict the human race (9:3–6). Now here in 20:1 John sees an angel *from heaven*, that is, *from the presence of God*, who has “the key of the abyss”—not just of the shaft of the abyss, but of the abyss itself. This time “the angel of the abyss” (9:11), the dragon (20:2), will himself be put into the abyss. He is named “Satan” (20:2). Satan was given a key by which to open the shaft and unleash the demons on humanity (9:1–2). Now with another key, the key to the abyss itself, the abyss will be closed and secured after Satan has been cast into it. Satan cannot open what is shut with the angel’s key from heaven (cf. Is 22:22; Mt 16:19; Rev 3:7). Jesus Christ is the one who holds “the keys of death and the grave” (Rev 1:18) and “the key of David,” which is the key that locks and unlocks, and no one else can undo what is done with that key (Is 22:22; Rev 3:7). (CC p. 547)

*great chain* – Shackles restrain feared criminals. (TLSB)

μεγάλη—Literally this means “large, great.” The nuance depends on what it modifies. It can mean a “great” or “loud” voice (1:10; 5:2, 12), a “great” or “important” day (6:17), a “great” or “strong” wind (6:13), or (here in 20:1) a “heavy” or “strong” chain—a chain that could not be broken by any strength or power. (CC p. 542)

To ensure that Satan cannot escape from the abyss, he is bound by “a heavy chain” (Rev 20:1). In 1 Enoch 88:1 the fallen star is seized and bound hand and foot and then is thrown into the abyss. That reference suggests that such a seizure and incarceration of the devil may have been envisioned even before the time of the writing of Revelation. The chain must be so heavy that it would not be possible for the dragon to break it. An ordinary chain could have been broken, as was done by the Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5:3–4). Here in Rev 20:1 the chain is not a physical, earthly fetter, but a metaphor for God’s power, exercised by the angel, by which the dragon is bound. (CC p. 548)

**20:2 he seized** – The angel “took hold of the dragon ... Satan, and he bound him for a thousand years” (20:2). Is it possible to determine when this binding of Satan took place? Nowhere else in Revelation is there a reference to a binding or imprisonment of Satan. However, in the synoptic gospels there is a reference to Satan being bound. Jesus was casting out demons, and he was accused of doing so by the power of “Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons” (Mt 12:24; Mk 3:22; Lk 11:15). In Jesus’ response, he equates Beelzebub with Satan (Mt 12:26; Mk 3:23, 26; Lk 11:18). Jesus countered the accusation by saying that if he were casting out demons by the authority of Satan, then Satan is divided against himself and as a result will meet his end, like a kingdom divided against itself (Mt 12:22–27; Mk 3:20–26; Lk 11:14–19). Then Jesus explained why he was casting out demons. In a parabolic saying Jesus spoke about someone entering into the house of “a strong man” (ἰσχυρός, Mt 12:29; Mk 3:27; Lk 11:21) to rob him of his goods. But before robbing the strong man, he must first “bind” (δήσει, the aorist subjunctive of δέω, Mt 12:29; Mk 3:27) the strong man. *The “strong man” is the devil, and the one who had come to rob him by first binding him is Jesus Christ.* (CC p. 548)

By this parabolic saying Jesus answered his critics by asserting that *in his ministry of exorcising demons he was setting people free from the demonization and slavery of Satan. And by such*

*exorcising of demons he was displaying the power and authority by which he was binding Satan.* Jesus was clearly demonstrating that the kingdom of God had come because he was doing this by the power and authority of the Spirit of God (Mt 12:28; Lk 11:20). *This reference to the binding of Satan in the synoptic gospels is the only other place in the NT which speaks of such a binding of the devil, other than Rev 20:2.* The gospel of John does not refer to the binding of Satan but describes Satan as being “judged” and “cast out” when Jesus would be lifted up on the cross (Jn 12:31–33; cf. 16:11). *According to the four gospels, then, the devil was bound, conquered, judged, and cast out as a result of Jesus’ saving ministry, culminating in his death on the cross and his resurrection. Therefore, the binding of Satan, the dragon, took place at Jesus’ victory, accomplished by his ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension (cf. also Rev 12:5, 7–10)—at the beginning of the “thousand years” (Rev 20:2).* (CC p. 549)

Other references that may be of help in determining when the binding of Satan took place, *and so also when the “thousand years” or millennium started,* are 2 Pet 2:4 and Jude 6. In 2 Pet 2:4 the apostle says that the angels who sinned were put into “chains of darkness” (σειράς ζόφου) by God. While the word there for “chain” (σειρά) is not the same as ἄλυσις (“chain”) in Rev 20:1, it bears a similar meaning, a chain or rope by which someone is bound in order to be carried off to prison or kept there. Their place of confinement in 2 Pet 2:4 is “hell,” as is described by the verb ταρταρώσας (aorist participle of ταρταρώ, “to put into hell”). Having been bound with “chains of darkness” in hell, they are “being kept [there] for the purpose of judgment” (εἰς κρίσιν τηρουμένων). This reference in 2 Pet 2:4 could well be describing the same event depicted in Rev 20:1–3. However, 2 Pet 2:4 gives no indication *when* the binding of the fallen angels took place, except that it happened before the final judgment at the End. (CC p. 549-550)

Jude 6 says of the angels who left their “dwelling” (οἰκητήριον), that is, their heavenly life with God, the Lord has and is keeping (τετήρηκεν) them by means of eternal chains (δεσμοῖς αἰδίου) under darkness (ὑπὸ ζόφον) for judgment of the great day (εἰς κρίσιν μεγάλης ἡμέρας). This reference in Jude says essentially the same thing that 2 Pet 2:4 does. In this biblical tradition the fallen angels are bound by chains and are kept in the darkness of hell until and for the purpose of judgment at the End. This particular tradition does not say *when* the fallen angels were bound, only that it was *before the judgment at the End*. But it does suggest that the event of the fallen angels being bound by chains and cast into the dark abyss is the same event that John sees in Rev 20:1–3, except that only the dragon, the leader of the fallen angels, is mentioned in 20:1–3. The biblical statements about binding in 2 Pet 2:4 and Jude 6 do not tell *when* Satan and the demons were bound, and they also say *nothing* about Christ coming to earth to establish a visible kingdom *while* the devils are bound in the abyss. But they do affirm that the demons are bound in the abyss up to and for the purpose of the final judgment. If Rev 20:1–3 refers to this same action (and it probably does), it adds a time element during which the demons are bound—“a thousand years” (20:2)—and it also adds a description of what is taking place on earth during that same period in the following verses, 20:4–6. (CC p. 550)

*dragon.* All of these names refer to the original usurper and archenemy of God and His people, he who first rebelled against God and so was cast out of heaven (cf Is 14:12–15; Ezk 28:12–19; Lk 10:18; Rv 12:7–9 for other possible allusions). Recall that Satan is the first member of the Book’s anti-Trinity (see notes, 13:4, 11–12; 19:20). (TLSB)

*ancient serpent.* ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος—This is in the nominative case, but grammatically one would expect the accusative (τὸν ὄφιν τὸν ἀρχαῖον), since it is in apposition to τὸν δράκοντα. This grammatical anomaly of the nominative instead of an oblique case is frequent in Revelation. (e.g., Rev 1:5; 2:113, 20; 3:12; 9:14; 14:12, 14) This may be a Semiticism. “Since the Hebrew noun in the indirect cases is not inflected, the Seer acts at times as if the Greek were similarly

uninflected.” Thus here in 20:2 he uses the nominative in apposition to the accusative. This grammatical anomaly is on occasion found in the LXX (e.g., Ezek 23:12; Zeph 1:12). However, John’s frequent use of the nominative in apposition to an indirect case may be due as much, if not more, to his desire to achieve emphasis. (CC pp. 542-543)

*Satan* – ὁ Σατανᾶς—Some manuscripts (for the most part those in the Byzantine family not with the commentary by Andreas) insert after ὁ Σατανᾶς the words ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην (“the one who is deceiving the whole inhabited earth”). This exact phrase is found in 12:9 following ὁ Σατανᾶς. The insertion of these words here in 20:2 may be due to harmonization with 12:9. (CC p. 543)

*bound him* – According to the four gospels, then, the devil was bound, conquered, judged, and cast out as a result of Jesus’ saving ministry, culminating in his death on the cross and his resurrection. Therefore, the binding of Satan took place at Jesus’ victory, accomplished by his ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension – at the beginning of the thousand years. (CC p. 549)

*thousand years.* † The millennium (from the Latin *mille*, “thousand,” and *annus*, “year”). It is taken literally by some as 1,000 actual years, while others interpret it metaphorically as a long but undetermined period of time. There are three basic approaches to the subject of the millennium: 1. Amillennialism: The millennium describes the present reign of the souls of deceased believers with Christ in heaven. The present form of God’s kingdom will be followed by Christ’s return, the general resurrection, the final judgment and Christ’s continuing reign over the perfect kingdom on the new earth in the eternal state. 2. Premillennialism: The present form of God’s kingdom is moving toward a grand climax when Christ will return, the first resurrection will occur and his kingdom will find expression in a literal, visible reign of peace and righteousness on the earth in space-time history. After the final resurrection, the last judgment and the renewal of the heavens and the earth, this future, temporal kingdom will merge into the eternal kingdom, and the Lord will reign forever on the new earth. 3. Postmillennialism: The world will eventually be Christianized, resulting in a long period of peace and prosperity called the millennium. This future period will close with Christ’s second coming, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment and the eternal state. (CSB)

Symbolic number representing the completion of a most perfect era. It is derived by cubing the number 10, the number of perfection and completion (see note, 9:16). See p 217. Traditionally, this period is equated with the time of the NT Church. (TLSB)

A close examination of the text for vv. 1–6 definitely favors amillennialism. The “angel” is Christ, who in the OT is often called “the angel of the Lord.” The “Abyss” is hell. The “chain” is similar to one which prevents a vicious wild animal from harming those who stay beyond its reach (not like handcuffs and leg irons), for the devil is free to prowl around “like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1Pe 5:8). There is no single passage in Scripture which tells us that the devil will be removed from earth for any length of time prior to the Day of Judgment. Since the chain hinders the devil in his attempts to lead people astray into eternal damnation, it symbolizes the preaching of the gospel (1Jn 3:8). The Greek for nations (*ethne*) usually refers only to Gentiles (or “heathen,” as Goodspeed translates). The conversion of Gentiles on a large scale was a post-ascension assignment for the followers of Christ (Lk 2:32; Ac 13:46; 14:27; Ro 11:11; 16:25–27; Eph 2:11–13; 3:4–6). (CSB)

The thousand years (10 symbolizing completeness, and a thousand being the cube of 10) represent a complete period of time whose length is firmly fixed by God—it is the entire NT period, beginning with Jesus’ vicarious atonement and Great Commission and ending with his

second advent at the day of judgment. The short time in which the devil is released refers to the last days of the world's history, characterized by widespread apostasy, as Jesus predicted (Mt 24:21–25; Lk 18:8). Whether this short period takes place after the “thousand years” (if “after that” in v. 3 refers to “years”) or at the closing time of the “thousand years” (if “after that” implies the imprisonment of Satan) is not certain, although the latter seems to fit better with vv. 7–8. (Another translation for v. 7 is “when the thousand years come to an end.”) (CSB)

Apart from Rev 20, the phrase “a thousand years” appears in only two other passages (Ps 90:4; 2Pe 3:8), and those passages speak only of the timelessness of God. No Scripture passage speaks of a thousand-year reign of *Christ*—nor about a reigning at Jerusalem; Jesus said to Pilate: “My kingdom is not of this world” (Jn 18:36). John did not see resurrected bodies, but the *souls* of those who had been beheaded reigning with *Christ*. According to Scripture, when believers die, they go to live with Christ in the glories of heaven. The souls never died; only the bodies died (cf. Lk 23:43; Jn 11:26; Php 1:23; 2Pe 1:13–14). John means that during the entire period of the thousand years the souls of those beheaded, without interruption, lived and reigned with Christ. The meaning of v. 5 then is that while the believing dead will live during the thousand years (enjoy the blessings of God), the unbelieving dead will not live during that time (will be in a state of separation from God's blessings). (CSB)

The living and reigning with Christ is called “the first resurrection” of believers, for the conversion of the sinner is spoken of in the Bible as a resurrection (Ro 6:1–11; Eph 2:4–6; 5:14; Col 3:1). The second resurrection is the bodily resurrection which will take place on the last day. Then the first death is physical death, and the “second death” (v. 6) is eternal damnation in hell, which has no power over them. 1Th 4:16–17, to which millennialists appeal, does not speak of two resurrections, but says that the living believers will be taken to heaven only after the dead believers have been raised first—to show that the living believers have no advantage over dead believers when Christ comes again. In his Gospel (5:25, 28–29) John speaks of two resurrections: (1) when the spiritually dead listen to the gospel; (2) the bodily resurrection of both believers and unbelievers on the last day. (CSB)

Except perhaps for the number 666 (13:18), no other portion of Revelation has caused more confusion and consternation than the first six verses of chapter 20, which describe what has come to be known as the millennium. One could receive the impression from the amount of interest caused by these verses that they are the most important and influential in the entire book. In fact, the manner in which commentators view the millennium determines to a large degree how the whole of Revelation is interpreted.<sup>2</sup> Since these verses which describe a thousand-year period are a part of John's vision of the End at Christ's return (17:1–22:5), they should be interpreted first of all in relationship to the other events described in this section of Revelation. The description of the millennium (20:1–6) is placed between two scenes: the scene of the overthrow of the beast and the false prophet at the second coming of Christ (19:11–21) and the scene of the last great battle when Gog and Magog are defeated and Satan is thrown into hell (20:7–10), where the false prophet and the beast had already been cast (19:20). This suggests that whatever the millennium is and to whatever time it refers, its placement between these two scenes determines how it is to be interpreted and, more importantly, how it is to be viewed in relation to the rest of Revelation. This commentary's exposition of 20:1–10 will show that the millennium began with the binding of Satan at Christ's first advent (his incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension) and will conclude when Christ returns in glory to bring this present world to its end. (CC)

There are today three prevalent interpretations of this thousand-year period, usually labeled “premillennialism,” “amillennialism,” and “postmillennialism.” Those who advocate the premillenarian interpretation believe that Jesus Christ will return to earth before (*pre-*) he

establishes his kingdom *on earth*. His believers will then rule with him in this earthly kingdom for a literal thousand years, and such a millenarian kingdom is still in the future. Amillennialists believe that the millennium is not just in the future but continues in the present time of the church. It began with Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension and lasts up to Christ's return at the end of this present world, when the final judgment will take place, followed by the creation of the new heaven and new earth. In this interpretation the millennium is equivalent to the NT era and thus is *not (a-)* a literal thousand years. Postmillennialists believe that the Christian church will influence the entire world gradually and increasingly, making it more and more righteous and thus fit for the Lord Christ to return. This will eventuate in a period of peace and righteousness among the peoples on earth that will last for a thousand years, *after* which (*post-*) the Lord will come to earth. There are many variations of all three of these interpretations. (CC)

### **Jewish Millennial Views**

Even before John wrote Revelation there was a tradition within Judaism concerning a millennium. According to this tradition the history of the world consists of seven periods of a thousand years each, patterned after the seven days of creation. There would also be an eighth day, an eighth thousand-year period which would come after the seven millennia of the present world, and this eighth would continue without end (2 Enoch 32:2–33:2). The seventh day, the seventh thousand-year period, would be a millennial day of rest (2 Enoch 32:2–33:1), in which the Messiah would reign, after which would be the resurrection and judgment (4 Ezra 7:28–33); the messianic reign would endure until the present evil world has come to an end (2 Baruch 40:1–4). When the Messiah would come, he would bring a time of rejoicing, peace, and plenty (4 Ezra 7:28–33; 2 Baruch 29:2–8; 40:1–3; 72:1–74:4). At the coming of the Messiah, the evil one would be subdued so that he no longer would be able to afflict God's people (2 Baruch 40:1–3; cf. Jubilees 23:24–31). For Satan would be bound in a pit of darkness by the angel Raphael so that all the people would not perish (1 Enoch 10:4–8; cf. 14:5; 88:1). In 1 Enoch 10 the devil is called by the name of Aza'-zel, which in the OT was the name of the "scapegoat" that was sent out and exiled into the desert on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:7–10). (CC)

A reflection of this Jewish tradition can be seen in the Apocalypse of Elijah and in the Epistle of Barnabas. The Apocalypse of Elijah, which is a composite work containing Jewish as well as Christian material, has this statement about the millennium at the very end (5:36–39): (CC)

On that day, the Christ, the king, and all his saints will come forth from heaven. He will burn the earth. He will spend a thousand years upon it. Because the sinners prevailed over it, he will create a new heaven and a new earth. No deadly devil will exist in them. He will rule with his saints, ascending and descending, while they are always with the angels and they are with the Christ for a thousand years. (CC)

Here in the Apocalypse of Elijah the millennium seems to be a symbol of eternal life in the new heaven and new earth—a symbol of the eternal Sabbath, of the eternal seventh day—rather than referring to a millennium of one thousand years during the messianic age on the present earth. In the Epistle of Barnabas (15:4–9) the seven days of creation symbolize the seven periods of the earth's existence, a thousand years for each period. As in the creation, when everything was completed by God in six days, so in six thousand years God will complete all things for the coming of the Messiah. And as God rested on the seventh day, so in the seventh thousand-year period, the millennium, the Son of God will come to earth and "destroy the time of the lawless one" (καταργήσει τὸν καιρὸν τοῦ ἀνόμου). An eighth day is also mentioned, which was inaugurated by Christ's resurrection and ascension, and it will be "the beginning of another world" (Epistle of Barnabas 15:8). Apparently the eighth day represents eternal life after the end of this present world's existence, which eternal life was inaugurated by Christ's resurrection and ascension. (CC)

The tradition of a millennium in Judaism does not seem to fit a single, agreed upon pattern. Rather, one finds fragments of various schemas. Nevertheless, Jewish tradition does envision a millennium which would be the age of the Messiah and in which God's people would be protected from the onslaught of the evil one. (CC)

### **A History of Christian Views**

The Christian church too has expressed a variety of millennial views, though these are more similar to each other than the Jewish conceptions, and most of the Christian views draw on a particular interpretation of Rev 20:1–6. (CC)

Throughout the history of the church, interpretations of the millennium have varied. Often particular views have come and gone and then reappeared. In the early church a premillennial interpretation was seemingly prevalent, partly due to the influence of the church father Papias, who may have known and listened to the apostle John. According to the church historian Eusebius (ca. 260–ca. 340), Papias (ca. 60–ca. 130) thought that after the resurrection of the dead there would be a millennium, at which time “the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this very earth” (σωματικῶς τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ βασιλείας ἐπὶ ταυτησί τῆς γῆς ὑποστησομένης). Eusebius says that this belief came to Papias “through unwritten tradition” about “mystical things” and “through a misunderstanding of the apostolic accounts, not perceiving that the things said by them were spoken mystically in figures. For he appears to have been of very limited understanding. ... But it was due to him that so many of the Church Fathers after him adopted a like opinion.” (CC)

The first Christian author whose statements specifically about the book of Revelation have survived is Justin Martyr (ca. 100–ca. 165). In *Dialogue with Trypho*, 80–81, Justin expressed the belief that after the resurrection of the dead Christians, the millennium would then commence. After the thousand years there would be the general resurrection of all the dead and the judgment. Justin based his views on both Isaiah 65 and Revelation 20. Other church fathers who may have held this view or a similar view were Irenaeus (ca. 130–ca. 200), Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 225), and Hippolytus (ca. 170–ca. 235). Victorinus (third century) in his Latin commentary on Revelation interpreted the millennium in a way similar to that of Justin—in particular the two resurrections—and thus he believed that it was still in the future. (CC)

In the third century the church began to turn away from a premillennial interpretation and increasingly espoused what today would be called amillennialism. Tyconius (died ca. 400), a Donatist theologian and layman of considerable influence, wrote a commentary on Revelation which sadly is lost to us today. However, from excerpts of his other writings some of his thoughts on Revelation can be reconstructed. As Victorinus had earlier, Tyconius interpreted Revelation by the principle of recapitulation. But he rejected Victorinus' premillennial interpretation, because he thought the millennium was not some future period of time. Rather, it represented the period of time from Christ's first advent up to his return. He also rejected two physical resurrections of the dead. He believed that the first resurrection is the spiritual raising to life of Christians which occurs in Baptism (cf. Rom 6:1–4; Col 2:11–13), and the second is the physical resurrection of all people at the present world's end. Because Tyconius was a Donatist, later theologians were hesitant to endorse his views even if they agreed with his interpretation. (CC)

One such theologian was Augustine (354–430). In *The City of God* he duplicates Tyconius' interpretation of the millennium. Augustine too believed that the millennium was not a literal one thousand years. Latin commentators and biblical scholars followed Augustine's interpretation and helped to spread his views on the millennium. These include the great biblical scholar and

translator Jerome (ca. 342–420) and also Primasius (sixth century) in his Latin commentary on Revelation. While Jerome was at first a premillennialist, under the influence of Augustine he adopted the amillennial interpretation. Jerome edited Victorinus' commentary on Revelation, and Jerome's version states: "The thousand years in which Satan is bound are those [years] from Christ's first advent up to the end of the age" ("mille anni in quibus alligatus est satanas, isti sunt ab adventu primo Christi usque ad terminum saeculi"). This is quite different from Victorinus' own commentary. Some of the later Greek commentators on Revelation, such as Oecumenius (sixth century), Andreas<sup>24</sup> (sixth century), and Arethas (tenth century), also followed the interpretations of Tyconius and Augustine on the millennium. (CC)

Tyconius' and Augustine's interpretation of the millennium dominated, for the most part, the Western church's theology up to the late twelfth century, especially in Europe. But in the twelfth century the church began to review its interpretation. For example, Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202), while holding to the recapitulation method of interpreting Revelation, revised Augustine's interpretation of the millennium—so much so that he was the cause of premillennialistic views being entertained again. *However, it was not until the Reformation in the sixteenth century that premillennialism began to become popular and take its place alongside of the amillennialism of Augustine.* Luther (who had been an Augustinian monk) and Lutheranism opposed the reintroduction of premillennialism. However, it was sponsored by such fanatical leaders as Muntzer and Bockelson. Calvin himself also rejected premillennialism,<sup>30</sup> but later Calvinists like Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588–1638) accepted and advocated it. Throughout much of Protestantism up to and through the twentieth century this new chiliasm (premillennialism) has been influential. (CC)

Along with the rebirth of premillennialism there has also arisen the postmillennial view. In the eighteenth century in both England and America this interpretation had strong advocates such as Philip Doddridge (1702–51) and Jonathan Edwards (1703–58). In Germany even the Lutheran biblical scholar Johannes Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752) suggested a twofold millennium which was patterned somewhat after both premillennial and postmillennial ideas. He suggested that there would come about a first millennium-like era for the church after the papacy would be overthrown in A.D. 1836, and then after Satan was set free in the year 2836, a second millennium would follow in 2836–3836 in which "the saints would reign in heaven and the church on earth would enjoy a false sense of prosperity." This peculiar idea of the millennium would later influence John Wesley (1703–91), though he did not accept it but thought it worthy of consideration. (CC)

### **A Biblical Perspective**

The position which has been expressed throughout this commentary and will be evident in the exposition of Rev 20:1–6 is shaped by several overarching considerations. Of first importance is the centrality of God's grace in Christ. Above all, every interpretation of Scripture must be in harmony with the central teaching of all Scripture, which is God's plan of redemption by grace alone and through faith in Christ alone. That focus precludes, for example, dispensational premillennialism, which allows for a two-covenant plan of salvation (one for Jews, another for Gentiles) or even a multiplicity of ways to salvation. Whenever Scripture speaks of redemption and the restraint and final destruction of evil, God accomplishes that in and through Christ, and through Christ alone. All of God's promises are and will be fulfilled in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). Moreover, God has already accomplished that salvation through the incarnation, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. While we still await the future consummation of God's promises when Christ returns, no additional or future actions by God nor by human beings are necessary to effect our redemption because Christ's work is finished and is completely sufficient. (CC)

A related consideration is the nature of the kingdom of God established by Christ and the full effect of Adam's sin (cf. Rom 5:12–21). Fallen human beings are inherently corrupt and depraved (cf. Rom 1:18–32; 2:9–24), and the present world likewise is characterized by futility and corruption. Therefore all hopes for a visible kingdom of God similar to kingdoms of this world, to be established among fallen human beings on this present earth, are misguided. That includes such hopes expressed by both premillennialists and postmillennialists. In particular, the two world wars in the twentieth century and the general worldwide decline of the human condition have largely eradicated the optimistic postmillennial view that things will get better and better. Jesus himself said that his kingdom is not of this world (Jn 18:36). The kingdom of God is not, and will never be, a worldly entity. God's kingdom comes invisibly and mysteriously, as the Holy Spirit attends the Gospel message and works in human hearts faith in Christ. To be sure, God is at work transforming Christians by his grace (cf. Romans 12), but the Christian's life in this world is always a struggle (Romans 7). In the plan of God the church will suffer worldly defeat (Rev 11:7; 13:7), and victory comes only through death and resurrection in Christ (2:10–11; 3:21; 12:11). (CC)

A final overarching consideration that may be mentioned is the hermeneutic of interpreting Scripture with Scripture. While many Christian groups, including Lutherans and fundamentalists holding various millennial positions, adhere to this hermeneutical principle, the decisive issue is *which* scriptural passages are to be used to interpret which other passages. The view of this commentary is that the eschatological outlook provided by the gospels and the epistles is clear, and that eschatological framework is the guiding principle for the interpretation of the apocalyptic visions in Revelation, rather than the other way around. (CC)

**20:3** *threw him into the pit* – The angel threw the dragon “into the abyss and closed and sealed [it] over him” (20:3). In Revelation 9, the demons under their king (9:11), the angel of the abyss, pour forth out of “the shaft of the abyss” (τὸ ὄρεα τῆς ἀβύσσου, 9:2) to afflict the human race. In Lk 8:31 the demons of the Gerasene demoniac beg Jesus not to send them back to “the abyss” (τὴν ἄβυσσον). In Rev 11:7 the beast which makes war with the two prophetic witnesses comes out of the abyss, and in 17:8 the beast which bears the harlot also comes out of the abyss. “The abyss” seems to be the *temporary* abode of the demons until the End, in contrast to “the lake of fire” (ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός), which appears in 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15; 21:8. For at the End the dragon and all his hosts will be cast into “the lake of fire,” which will be their *permanent* abode, where they will be tormented forever and ever (20:10). (CC pp. 550-551)

Satan is overcome by Jesus, the “stronger man” who comes and binds the “strong man” (Mt 12:29). Note that Christ has authorized His Church to share in this binding and overthrowing of Satan's power, through the administration of the Word and Sacraments (Mt 16:16–19; 18:18; Jn 20:22–23). (TLSB)

**LOCKED AND SEALED** – The angel “closed” the abyss and as “a last precaution taken to prevent escape” “sealed [it] over him [the dragon]” (20:3). Seals were used to mark and guard an enclosure so that no one would enter or leave (e.g., Matt 27:66). Seals were also used to keep hidden or secret the contents of documents, and only the authorized person could break the seals and open the document (see Rev 5:1). Prisons also were sealed so that no one could enter or leave. So here in Rev 20:3 the abyss is closed and sealed. The dragon remains confined and cannot come out until the seal is broken and the cover of the abyss is removed. And only God, who authorized the closing and the sealing, can authorize the breaking of the seal and the uncovering of the abyss. (CC p. 551)

*any longer.* During his protracted confinement, while awaiting execution, Satan cannot withstand the triumphs of the Gospel (e.g., the worldwide growth of the Church after Jesus' resurrection). (TLSB)

*thousand years* – The dragon is confined in the abyss for a “thousand years” (20:2–3). Only two other passages in the Bible mention a time period of a thousand years. In Ps 90:4 “a thousand years” are to God “like a day just gone past and like the watch of the night” (cf. Job 10:5). In 2 Pet 3:8 the apostle states “that a day with the Lord is like a thousand years and a thousand years like a day.” Those two references do not refer to the same thousand-year period of time mentioned in Rev 20:2–3. However, they do suggest the hermeneutical method for interpreting the length of time represented by the “thousand years” that the dragon is confined. In both cases it is not a specific period of earthly history, exactly one thousand years long, that is in view. Rather, the “thousand years” is a general reference to a lengthy period of earthly time which is, however, brief in God’s estimation. God will bring his plans and purposes to completion according to his own time schedule. (CC p. 551)

While not referring to a time period, another illuminating reference to the number one thousand is found in Ps 50:10, where God says, “To me belongs all the wildlife of the forest, the beasts on a thousand hills.” This is not a specific reference to exactly one thousand particular hills. Rather, it is a general reference to a large number of hills, and the large number of a “thousand” points toward *all* hills throughout all of creation. The number “a thousand” is *a number of completeness* designating all the hills of the earth, and all that is upon them, as belonging to God. That a “thousand” can be used to signify *completeness* seems also to be evident in references such as Is 7:23, where “a thousand vines” represent abundant vines, vines in any and every place, whatever their exact number. (CC pp. 551-552)

In 2 Enoch 32:2–33:2 and also the Epistle of Barnabas 15:4–9, a comparison or analogy is drawn between the seven days of the original creation and seven periods of one thousand years each. The total of seven thousand years represents the complete span of earthly history, and it is *not* a literal or exact period of time. Just as each day of the seven days in the creation was complete in and of itself, that is, God accomplished what he had set out to do in each day, so also it would be with the seven periods of a thousand years each. God would complete his plans for humanity and the world according to his own time frame. Both of these writings also speak of an eighth “day,” that is, an eighth period of one thousand years, which represents the new creation that will endure forever; therefore the eighth “thousand” too is not a literal period of time, but a symbolic period of completeness. (CC p. 552)

These biblical and extrabiblical references indicate that a “thousand years” are not so much a literal chronological, period of time, but rather a period of time of completeness, a time when God will accomplish everything that he planned and set out to do. This indicates that this tradition of one day like a thousand years and of a thousand years like a day in the sense of *the completeness and completion of all that God had planned to accomplish* was known in Judaism and in the NT itself, and so it continued in the early church. (CC p. 552)

The stated purpose of the confinement of the dragon during the thousand years is “so that he could no longer deceive the nations” (Rev 20:3). In order for the church to fulfill her mission of proclaiming the Gospel to all peoples (cf. 10:11), the devil must not be permitted to ruin the church and thwart her efforts. “The confinement of Satan to the Abyss is not so much a punitive as a precautionary measure.” Up to his imprisonment in the abyss, the devil could deceive and mislead people for the purpose of destroying them and any relationship they might have with God. This deception began in the Garden of Eden when the dragon, the ancient serpent (Rev

12:9), lied to and thus deceived Adam and Eve (Genesis 3). Ever since then he has been known as the liar and the father of lies (Jn 8:44; cf. 1 Jn 3:8). Before Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension, Satan could even accuse and bad-mouth God's saints before God's heavenly throne (Job 1:6–11; 2:1–5; Zech 3:1–5). But at Christ's victory he was thrown out of heaven (Rev 12:7–12). Never again would Satan be able to accuse God's saints in his holy presence. Satan's exile from heaven was a direct result of Christ's saving ministry and death (cf. Lk 10:17–19; Jn 12:31–32), which exile was authorized and carried out at his ascension (Rev 12:5, 7–9). (CC pp. 552-553)

When Satan was thrown out of heaven, was he also at that time bound and cast into the abyss? This seems to be so, for after his exile from heaven and his confinement to the earth he takes his wrath out on the woman in order to destroy her and her seed, the church (Rev 12:13–18). But he is restrained and hindered in his attempt to destroy her, for she is cared for and kept safe under God's protective hand (Rev 12:5–6, 14–16). *This restraint and holding back of Satan is depicted visually by his being bound and cast into the abyss. He was cast into the abyss "so that he could no longer deceive the nations," that is, so that he could not destroy the church (the woman) and her witness to Christ and her mission to the nations.* This interpretation agrees with what Jesus states in the synoptic gospels about his saving ministry, the result of which was the expulsion of Satan from heaven (Lk 10:18) and the binding of Satan as Christ set people free from slavery to the devil (Mt 12:22–29; Mk 3:20–27). (CC p. 553)

*released for a little while.* For reasons hidden in God, the Church must pass through tribulation and testing at the end times. (TLSB)

The devil will not be released in order to harm the church but only to gather all his servants and agencies together for their combined and final overthrow and everlasting damnation. (Poellot)

When the thousand years are completed, it will be necessary for the dragon to "be released for a short time" (20:3). Whatever the time period that the thousand years represents and whenever it takes place, what is certain (as implied by the number one thousand) is that *the divine purpose for which Satan had been bound will have been completed according to God's will.* During the season of time when Satan is bound and hindered, the church is able to carry out her mission of proclaiming Christ to the world (cf. Rev 11:3–13). But after the appointed period of time, when God determines that the church's mission is completed, Satan will "be released for a short time." This short time is described in 20:7–10. No answer is given as to *why* he will be released, except that "it is necessary" (δεῖ, 20:3). To speculate why "it is necessary" may be a vain attempt, save to say that it will be according to the sovereign will of God and his eternal plan for the consummation of all things. (CC p. 553)

**20:4-6** Rev 20:4–6 describes those who come to life and rule with Christ during the period of the "thousand years" (20:2–7). Rev 20:4 says three things about those who are raised to life and reign with Christ during this time: (1) they sit on thrones and are given authority to execute judgment; (2) they suffer martyrdom because of their witness to Jesus; and (3) they do not worship the beast nor bear its mark. Does this threefold description refer to three different groups of people? Or does it refer to the same group, so that all of them sit on thrones, suffer martyrdom, and do not worship the beast? (CC)

**20:4 thrones...authority to judge** – This scene is enacted in heaven, not on earth. It is simultaneous with Satan's binding. *authority to judge.* This picture of the saints sharing in God's kingly rule is first presented in Dn 7:13–14, 26–27. The NT presents this picture repeatedly (cf Mt 19:28; 1Co 6:2). (TLSB)

John “saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them” (20:4). This first description *could* refer to a select few among the entire company of people who are raised to live with Christ during the thousand years. In 4:4 and 11:16 the twenty-four elders sit upon thrones around the throne of God in heaven. They represent the entire people of God of both testaments (twelve for the old covenant and twelve for the new). In Mt 19:28 Jesus said to the twelve disciples that when the Son Man would sit on his throne of glory, they “in the new age” (παλιγγενεσία) would sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Lk 22:30). (CC p. 556)

However, the picture in Rev 20:4 of those sitting upon thrones and judging might not be limited to just a select few. It *could also* include *all of God’s saints*, who live, serve, and reign with Christ during the millennium. In 3:21 “the one who conquers” (that is, *all* the saints) will sit with Christ on his throne. In Dan 7:9 the prophet in a vision sees that “thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated [enthroned].” Then “judgment was given to the saints of the Most High” (Dan 7:22), and later in the vision Daniel sees that all “the kingdom and the power and the greatness of the kingdoms under all the heavens will be given to the people of the saints of the Most High” (Dan 7:27). It is not entirely clear whether “judgment was given to the saints” in their favor (that is, they were judged favorably, justified), or whether the power of judgment was given to them to exercise on behalf of God. It could be the latter, for that may be reflected in the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon, which says that God’s people will be the judges over the nations of the world (Wisdom 3:8). In 1 Cor 6:2 Paul makes the statement “that the saints will judge the world” (ὅτι οἱ ἅγιοι τὸν κόσμον κρινοῦσιν). In Rom 5:17 Paul says that all those “having received the free gift of righteousness in life will rule through the one Jesus Christ” (τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς δικαιοσύνης λαμβάνοντες ἐν ζωῇ βασιλεύσουσιν διὰ τοῦ ἐνὸς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). In Rom 5:17 there is a sense in which God’s saints begin to rule with Christ *while still on earth*, and the saints before God’s heavenly throne also rule. (CC pp. 556-557)

Thus there is a biblical tradition that states that the people of God on earth already do rule and execute judgment on his behalf. What John saw here in Rev 20:4 in visionary form could well be this ruling and judging by God’s saints on earth. Such a reigning with Christ is not limited only to the select few but is God’s gift *to all in Christ*. Before God’s throne in heaven this rule and judging, which belongs to all the saints, is represented by the twenty-four elders (4:4; 11:16). Such a ruling with Christ on earth and participating in the judgment of God over the nations may be difficult to understand, but it reflects the earthly ministry of Christ. For as he rules everything (Mt 26:52–54, 63–64) and exercises all judgment on behalf of his heavenly Father (Jn 5:22–23; 12:31–33), despite appearances to the opposite, so also his church, in her ministry of witnessing for him to all the nations, does the same. This role of the church is also expressed in passages such as Mt 28:19–20, where Jesus authorizes the church—on the basis of all authority in heaven and on earth, which is given to Jesus—to carry out his ministry by baptizing and teaching on his behalf. *The way in which the church exercises judgment* may be seen, for example, in Mt 16:16–19 and Jn 20:21–23, where Jesus authorizes the church to open and shut heaven by forgiving the sins of the penitent and retaining the sins of the impenitent. These pronouncements by the church, of forgiveness or condemnation, are judgments proclaimed in the stead of Christ and on behalf of God. (CC p. 557)

*souls of those who had been beheaded.* See 6:9–11. (CSB)

Refers to the martyrs already in heaven. (TLSB)

τῶν πεπελεκισμένων—This is the only time that the verb πελεκίζω appears in the NT. It does not appear in the LXX, possibly because beheading was not a frequent mode of execution among Semitic peoples. However, the Israelites knew of the barbaric practice of dismembering a dead person, for the Philistines cut off the head of Saul after they found his body on Mt. Gilboa (1 Sam 31:9). The Hebrew text reads, “and they cut off his head” (וַיִּצְרְפוּ אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ). The LXX does not literally translate the Hebrew text but reads καὶ ἀποστρέφουσιν αὐτόν (“and they remove him”). David too cut off the head of Goliath (1 Sam 17:51; cf. Acts 12:2). The Hebrew text has the verb חָרַץ as in 1 Sam 31:9. LXX 1 Kingdoms 17:51 does translate the Hebrew literally, though not with πελεκίζω, but with ἀφαιρέω: ἀφείλεν τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ (“he removed his head”). Revelation uses other verbs for the killing of Christian martyrs, including ἀποκτείνω (2:13; 6:11; 11:7; 13:15; cf. 13:10) and σφάζω (6:9; cf. 18:24), which is also used of the Lamb who was slain (5:6, 9, 12; 13:8). In addition, the death of Christians is denoted by phrases with the noun θάνατος (2:10; 12:11; cf. 21:4). Elsewhere in the NT a variety of words and phrases are used for the killing of martyrs. For example, Acts 12:2, which describes how James was put to death by the sword, uses ἀναρέω and in Acts 7:58–59 a crowd stones Stephen (λιθοβολέω). (CC pp. 543–544)

The varied NT vocabulary for martyrdom indicates that this verb in Rev 20:4 should not be restricted to a literalistic sense. *All Christians are in view here.* “The ones who had been beheaded on account of the witness of Jesus” epitomize all martyrs of the faith. Indeed, they represent all Christians, including those who have died (regardless of the circumstances of their death) and also those who have not yet died physically but who would die for the faith if called upon to do so. The sense and reference of the phrase, then, is similar to those biblical passages that say that those who have been incorporated into Christ through Baptism and faith *have already died with Christ* in a spiritual sense. (E.g., Rom 6:2–6; Col 2:12; cf. also Mt 10:38; 16:24) All of these Christians will also be pictured in the rest of 20:4–6 as those who “came to life” spiritually, that is, who were given new spiritual life in Christ. (CC p. 544)

Second, John saw those who participate in “the first resurrection” (Rev 20:5–6) as “the souls of the ones who had been beheaded on account of the witness of Jesus and on account of the Word of God” (20:4). Does this refer *only* to those who were *actually beheaded*? Does it have a wider reference to all those Christians who were martyred—put to death in any way—because of their Christian faith, as was Antipas, for example, in the church of Pergamum (2:13)? Or does it refer to *all Christians*, since all in Christ may, in one way or another, suffer for their Christian witness? If all Christians are in view here, then those martyrs who were beheaded serve as outstanding examples of the suffering that may come to all, in the same way that “the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God” underneath the altar in heaven represent *all* who have died in Christ (6:9–11). (CC)

The fact that a specific verb for beheading (πελεκίζω) pointedly describes these martyrs *could* suggest that here it means *only* those who were *put to death in that particular way*. And that John should use such a rare and gruesome word for beheading here in 20:4 could support the suggestion that he had in mind *only these* martyrs and not all Christians in their various sufferings. However, since crucifixion and martyrdom are used to represent the persecutions and sufferings that *all Christians do and will experience* (E.g., Mt. 10:38–39; 16:24–25; Rom. 6:3–11; Gal. 5:24; 6:14; cf. Rev. 2:13; 6:9–11), most likely the ones beheaded here in 20:4 represent *all Christians*. The deaths of the actual martyrs themselves would serve as epitomes or types of all sufferings and persecutions that all Christians experience because of their faith and witness. John’s use of the verb “to behead with an ax” in 20:4 would then serve as *a violent reminder that all who live for and with Christ during the “thousand years”—the NT era, the church age—*

would suffer intense persecution of whatever sort it might be, such as was happening and had happened under Rome, for example, under Nero and Domitian. (CC)

The words “martyr” or “witness” (μάρτυς), “to testify, witness” (μαρτυρέω), and “martyrdom” (μαρτυρία) in the NT refer to *all Christians* in the sense that *all* are “witnesses” who give a “testimony” to the “witness” of Jesus and to the Word of God (cf. Lk 24:44–49; Jn 15:27; Acts 1:8). So also here in Rev 20:4 John sees those who had been beheaded because of their “witness” (μαρτυρία) to Jesus. Rev 11:3–7 says that after the “two witnesses” (δύο μάρτυρες), who represent the entire Christian church, have finished “their witness” (τὴν μαρτυρίαν αὐτῶν), they were conquered and put to death. And John himself on the island of Patmos suffered persecution because of the Word of God and his “witness” (μαρτυρία) to Jesus (1:9). John did not suffer death as a martyr, yet he was still known as a martyr because of his witness and his suffering and persecution. In Revelation Jesus Christ himself is called “*the witness, the faithful one*” (ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός, 1:5; 3:14), that is, “the witness” to the truth of God (cf. Jn 3:11, 31–32). In Rev 2:13 Antipas is called by the Lord Christ “my witness, my faithful one” (ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου). Antipas did confirm his witness by his martyr’s death. *A martyr of Jesus, then, is a Christian who witnesses to the truth of Jesus and the Word of God. And for this he will suffer various forms of persecution. Whether he dies a martyr’s death or not, he is still a martyr of Jesus. The biblical usage of “martyr” and “martyrdom” supports an interpretation of beheading here in 20:4 as the epitome of the persecutions that all Christians experience.* For Christian witnesses (martyrs) back up and confirm their testimony with their lives, and if necessary, by the way they meet their death. (CC pp. 558-559)

*not worshiped* – Third, John describes those who are raised to live with Christ during the thousands years as those “who did not worship the beast nor its image, and who had not received its mark upon the forehead and upon their hand” (20:4). While there may be some question as to who is represented by the ones on the thrones and the ones who were beheaded, *here it is clear that all Christians are meant.* For all the faithful followers of Christ on earth do not worship the beast and its image, and they do not have the mark of the beast on their forehead and hand. All Christians have nothing to do with the beast. (CC p. 559)

The beast here in 20:4 is the same beast described in 13:1–10. It is the first beast, which comes from the sea and is an agent of the dragon (Satan, Revelation 12), and it represents all earthly and human powers (governmental, economic, societal, and so on) that the dragon manages to get under his control in his warfare against the woman, the church (12:13–18; cf. 20:10). An image is made for this first, political beast by the second beast (13:14–15), which is the beast from the earth; the second beast represents all false spirituality, in particular apostate Christianity. The second, religious beast evolves and later is identified as the false prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10) and as the harlot (17:1; 19:2). The religious beast makes an image of the political beast in order to encourage the human race to worship and serve this first monster which, under the dragon, dominates human affairs. In addition the second, religious monster places a “mark” (χάραγμα, 13:16) on the foreheads or hands of those who worship and serve the first beast (and its image) to identify its adherents. But the followers of Christ do not have such a mark, for they do not belong to the beast and the dragon. They have their own mark by which they are identified as saints of God in Christ. For God has sealed them on their foreheads (7:3; cf. 9:4) with the seal of the name of the Lamb and the name of God the Father (14:1; 22:4). Those who bear the mark of the beast are destined for hell (19:19–21), while those who bear the mark of the name of Christ and his Father are destined for eternal life with God in the new heaven and earth (22:1–5). (CC p. 559)

Who are all these who live and reign with Christ during the thousand years? *They are the whole people of God, who follow his Christ, both those still on earth and those already in heaven.* The

church militant on earth and the church triumphant in heaven, they rule with Christ on thrones (20:4; as represented by the twenty-four elders in 4:4; 11:16). Even those still on earth have in faith already died with Christ (Rom 6:3–4; Gal 2:20), and they also suffer persecution (Rev 20:4; as illustrated by the martyred saints under God’s heavenly altar in 6:9), and they do not worship the beast nor bear its mark. While it is the whole people of God who live with Christ during the millennium, *the emphasis here in 20:1–6 is on those still on earth, the church militant* (cf. Rev 14:1–5). All Christians live and reign with Christ for a short time already while they live on earth during the thousand years (the NT or church age), and then upon their physical death they are brought before his heavenly throne where, at peace, they continue to live and reign with him and the heavenly Father (6:11). (CC p. 560)

*came to life.*† An alternate translation is “lived” for the Greek verb. Same in v. 5. (CSB)

Does not refer to the final, bodily resurrection, but rather to the regeneration the saints enjoy on earth and in God’s presence after death, before Christ’s second coming. (TLSB)

ἐζήσαν—This is the aorist indicative active of ζάω, “to live.” It can mean “to be alive,” “to become alive,” or even “to come back to life” (see BAGD). Here in 20:4 the aorist can mean either the completed action of being alive (that is, “they lived” for one thousand years) or the completed action of coming to life, in which case “they came to life. That latter sense is preferable here in 20:4. The verb describes all Christians as those who “came to life,” that is, who were given new, spiritual life through baptismal incorporation into Christ and faith in Christ. Spiritually, then, those who “came to life” during the thousand years continue to live on spiritually even after their physical death, since their souls are taken to heaven, as John saw in 6:9. At the time during the millennium when they become alive spiritually, they also begin to reign with Christ (20:4, 6) and begin their service as priests (20:6). (CC p. 544)

**20:5** *rest of the dead.*† Those who did not believe the gospel. (CSB)

This expression refers to those who remain dead in trespasses and sins, as opposed to those who were thus dead, but were made alive (Eph. 2:1, 5, 6; Col 2:13). They “lived not until the thousand years were finished.” (Poellot)

This is a striking commentary on the words of Jesus “He that is not with Me is against Me.” (MT. 12:30; Mk. 9:40; Luke 9:50; 11:23) He that is not spiritually alive is spiritually dead. There is no middle ground. (Poellot)

What is more, those who are spiritually dead and die physically in that state of unbelief remain dead. They have fallen victim to “the second death” (Rev 20:14). They do not have a “second chance” for eternal life after they leave this world. When unbelievers die, their souls leave their bodies. Far from living and reigning with Christ, their souls continue to exist in a state of spiritual death (a living death), with the infinite misery that this involves. (Ps. 49:14; 1 Peter 3:19; Is. 66:24; Mk 9:43-48; Lk 16:22-28) Their souls remain in this state of death until the final Judgment on the Last Day. Nor will the lost have another chance for heaven them, but will be cast, body and soul, into everlasting damnation (Rev. 20:12,15). (Poellot)

“The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years had come to an end” (20:5a). This first portion of 20:5 seems to be out of place or even redundant. Perhaps for those reasons many Greek manuscripts of Revelation omit it. It is a negative statement inserted after the description of those who live and reign with Christ during the thousand years (20:4) and before the two references to “the first resurrection” (20:5–6). Those who live and reign with Christ

during their earthly lives are participants in the first resurrection. “The rest of the dead” do not participate in this millennial reign with Christ. To insert that somber thought within the glorious scene of the millennial life of the first resurrection with Christ may seem out of place, for it adds no thought as to what the millennium and the first resurrection are and mean for Christians. It simply states that unbelievers do not and will not participate in them. In addition it separates the description of the Christians’ millennial life with Christ from the repeated phrase that identifies such living as “the first resurrection” (20:5–6). But if this first sentence of 20:5 is genuine, *which it probably is*, a case can be made for its relevance both on the basis of what it says and on the basis of its position between the description of the millennium (20:4) and “the first resurrection” (20:5–6). Its content and its position certainly emphasize that *under no circumstances will those who are now spiritually dead, and who remain dead in the state of unbelief, live with Christ during the thousand years*. The spiritually dead have no part whatsoever in this glorious reign with Christ here on earth. And this sobering declaration is made after the description of those who do come to life and reign with Christ (20:4). Then and then only is the designation of “the first resurrection” presented (20:5–6), for the dead ones have already been excluded. (CC pp. 567-568)

Who are “the dead” (τῶν νεκρῶν, 20:5)? *In keeping with the understanding that “the first resurrection” is spiritual and the first death is the state of unbelief, “the rest of the dead” are all those throughout the thousand years who never come to faith in Jesus Christ*. They physically lived and died “in a state of impenitence and unbelief.” Even while physically living on earth, they did not have true life (cf. Jn 10:10; 11:25; 14:6; 17:3) for they were dead in their sins and trespasses (cf. Eph 2:1; Col 2:13) and separated from God (cf. Eph 2:12; 4:18; Col 1:21). And when they physically died and were buried, they remained “dead” (cf. Mt 8:22), separated from God and from his Christ as they wait for their eternal condemnation in the final judgment at the End. There is no state of blessedness for them. Only the bodily resurrection of the damned is in their future (cf. Jn 5:29). As mentioned above, John does not directly speak of a first death. However, his mention of “the rest of the dead” is a reference to the concept because “the dead” remain in the first state of death from their conception and birth (cf. Ps 51:5 [MT 51:7]) up to the End. At the End they will come alive physically from the grave, only to be cast into “the second death,” the lake of fire (Rev 20:6, 14). During the millennium, then, over these the second death *does* have authority, for sadly that is their future destiny (19:20; 20:10, 15). (CC p. 568)

*first resurrection* – Refers to regeneration, the divine work by which sinners are raised from spiritual death to spiritual life by the means of grace. This is received through faith in this life and then consummated in paradise. As such, it is to be distinguished from the bodily resurrection that occurs at Christ’s second coming. (TLSB)

Those who come to life and live and reign with Christ *during the millennium* participate in “the first resurrection” (20:5–6). Some early church fathers (such as Justin Martyr) believed that there would be two physical resurrections, one (of the saints) at the beginning of the millennium and the other (of all people) at the present world’s end. Some modern commentators interpret the two occurrences of ἐζησαν, “came to life” in 20:4 and “did ... come to life” in 20:5, similarly and reason that there cannot be in the same context two different meanings for the same word. *The difficulty with that interpretation is that John does not speak of a second resurrection in 20:1–10*. (CC p. 560)

The scene in 20:1–10 is a unit to be interpreted first on its own merit and then related to what comes before and what follows. The relative independence of this unit is indicated by the words “and I saw” (καὶ εἶδον, 20:1) which introduce the scene. These words are a formula that John often uses throughout Revelation to introduce *a new scene within a vision or a new vision itself* (E.g., Rev. 5:1; 6:1; 8:2; 9:1; 10:1; 13:1; 14:1, 6, 14; 15:1), or at times to introduce a particular

thing within a scene (e.g., 5:6, 11; 8:13). At times instead of “and I saw” (καὶ εἶδον), he will use the words “after these things/after this I saw” (μετὰ ταῦτα/τοῦτο εἶδον) to introduce a new vision or scene (e.g., 4:1; 7:1; 15:5). *Here in Revelation 20 καὶ εἶδον is used in 20:1 and then again in 20:11. This indicates that 20:1–10 is a literary unit in its own right, and that it is followed by another literary unit, 20:11–15.* (CC pp. 560-561)

In the first literary unit “the first resurrection” is mentioned (20:5–6), but not a second resurrection, though those who “come to life” *after* the millennium (20:5) are part of the second resurrection. In the following unit, 20:11–15, the second resurrection is described in fuller detail. It is the *physical* resurrection of *all bodies* at the End. This can be referred to as the second resurrection, in contrast to the one in 20:5–6, for it is the other resurrection that follows “the first resurrection” (20:5–6). *Since the two resurrections are in two different literary units and not in the same context* (except for the brief reference to the second resurrection in 20:5a) *they probably refer to two different kinds of resurrections. The first is the present, spiritual resurrection of all believers, and the second is the future, physical resurrection of all the dead on the Last Day.* To emphasize this difference, the two resurrections are presented differently. The first resurrection in 20:5–6 is presented only with the words ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη, which literally mean “the resurrection, the first one.” But the second resurrection in 20:13 is graphically described with these words: “and the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and the grave gave up the dead which were in them” (καὶ ἔδωκεν ἡ θάλασσα τοὺς νεκροὺς τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ᾄδης ἔδωκαν τοὺς νεκροὺς τοὺς ἐν αὐτοῖς). (CC p. 561)

While John does not speak of a second resurrection in 20:1–10, by mentioning a “first resurrection” (20:5–6), he seems to have in mind a second of *some* sort, for he knows that a universal physical resurrection will take place at the End (cf. Jn 11:24), as he will shortly view in Rev 20:11–15. But then what is this “first resurrection” mentioned in 20:5–6, and how is it to be related to the whole of the prophetic message of Revelation? Certainly the interpretation of this first resurrection plays an important part in attaining an understanding of what the millennium is all about. If the “first resurrection” is a *physical* one, then we have two bodily resurrections in Revelation 20 taking place at different times and in two different situations, the first one before the millennium and the second one after it at the End. If this were so, how could these two physical resurrections be reconciled with what is stated elsewhere in the NT, in particular about what is said concerning a bodily resurrection? For nowhere else in the entire Bible are two bodily resurrections referred to or described. It is for this reason that many modern commentators refer to “the first resurrection” here in 20:5–6 as a *spiritual* resurrection. (CC p. 561)

Nowhere else does Scripture speak of two *physical* resurrections. Nor must one hear Revelation 20 as though it were speaking of two *physical* resurrections. Granted that this chapter does describe *two different resurrections*, the first one is spiritual and the second is one physical and bodily. And this is consistent with the way in which the rest of the NT speaks. For example, in Jn 5:19–30, when Jesus spoke about his authority, he said (Jn 5:25) that the moment was then present when “the dead [οἱ νεκροί] will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will come to life” (ζήσουσιν—the same verb, ζῶω, that is used in Rev 20:4–5). In Jn 5:25 the “dead” are unbelievers who, when they hear the Word of Jesus and believe, “come to life.” Death and resurrection language is used to represent *conversion*, that is, the translation from *the spiritually dead state* of unbelief to the *resurrected state* of coming to life through believing in Jesus and his Word. At the end of his discourse concerning his authority, Jesus then spoke about the *bodily* resurrection at a future time (ἔρχεται ὥρα) when those in their “tombs will hear his voice and will come forth,” either to the “resurrection of life” (ἀνάστασιν ζωῆς) or to the “resurrection of judgment” (ἀνάστασιν κρίσεως, Jn 5:28–29). Here in the same context, the same discourse, *two different resurrections are described, one spiritual and one physical.* The spiritual resurrection

takes place in the present time through conversion to faith in Christ, while the physical resurrection will occur at a future time, that is, “at the consummation of the age.” (CC pp. 562-563)

In his writings the apostle Paul also refers to two resurrections, one *present* and *spiritual* and the other *future* and *physical*. The present, spiritual resurrection occurs through incorporation into Christ and as a result of Christ’s bodily resurrection. In Eph 2:1–6 Paul reminds his hearers that formerly they were “dead” (νεκρούς) in their sins, but they are so now no longer, for in his grace God “made [them] alive with Christ” (συνεζωποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ) and he “raised [them] together in Christ Jesus” (συνήγειρεν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). Similarly in Col 3:1–4 Paul reminds his readers that “if you have been raised with Christ [εἰ οὖν συνεγέρθητε τῷ Χριστῷ], seek the things above.” And in Rom 6:1–5 Paul says that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus “have been baptized into his death” (cf. Col 1:12). “We were buried with him [συνετάφημεν] through Baptism in his death, so that even as Christ was raised [ἠγέρθη] from the dead [ἐκ νεκρῶν] ... so also we should walk in newness of life [ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς].” As John does in Jn 5:19–30, Paul also uses death to characterize the state of unbelief and separation from Christ, and resurrection language for conversion and newness of life in the state of faith as the result of being baptized into Christ, who has already been raised physically from the dead (Rom 6:1–5; Eph 2:1–6; cf. Col 3:1–4).

Those references in Paul with regard to the *spiritual resurrection of Christians in the present age* can be viewed in contrast to his references to *the physical resurrection at the end of the present age*. In 1 Cor 15:12–28 Paul relates Christ’s bodily resurrection to the physical resurrection of all people at Christ’s second coming (cf. 1 Thess 4:14–16). For this bodily resurrection he uses the words ἐγείρω, “to raise,” (E.g., 1 Cor. 15:4, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20) and ζωοποιέω, “to make alive” (1 Cor 15:22), which are used elsewhere for present, spiritual resurrection. (CC p. 563)

Is the “first resurrection” here in Rev 20:5–6 *spiritual* resurrection, that is, being raised to spiritual life in Christ? When viewed in contrast to John’s graphic description of the *bodily* resurrection at the present world’s end (20:13), it would certainly seem so. This would interpret John in Revelation in agreement with other parts of the NT which likewise refer to two resurrections, one spiritual, present now, and one physical, in the future at the End. Commentators who believe that John in Revelation 20 is speaking of two physical resurrections are creating a disagreement between Revelation 20 and the NT as a whole—a disagreement which would be difficult to reconcile. In Revelation 20 John is seeing *visually* what is presented verbally elsewhere in the NT, that a spiritual resurrection takes place in the present life when a person comes to faith in Christ, and a second resurrection, a physical one, will take place at the End. (CC pp. 563-564)

There is a possible hindrance, however, to interpreting “the first resurrection” as a spiritual one, and that is the use of the word ἀνάστασις in 20:5–6. This word is the common noun for “resurrection” in the NT. Almost every time it occurs, it is in reference to *physical* resurrection. (E.g., Mt. 22:23; Jn. 5:229; Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 15:12; Heb. 6:2) A possible exception would be Rev 20:5–6. In support of interpreting ἀνάστασις in a physical, bodily sense is Paul’s reference in 2 Tim 2:18, in which he takes to task those who thought that the “resurrection” (ἀνάστασις)—that is, the bodily one—“had already taken place.” Evidently some of Paul’s hearers had understood his portrayal of Baptism and conversion as resurrection, (Cf. Rom. 6:3-11; Eph 2:5-6; Col 2:12-13; 3:1-2) a raising to life with Christ, as the *only* resurrection, and that there would not be another physical one at the End (cf. 1 Cor 15:12). (CC p. 564)

At first glance, then, the use of ἀνάστασις here in Rev 20:5–6 would suggest that “the first resurrection” is a bodily resurrection if John is using the word in the same sense as the other NT

writers, especially Paul. However, before a final conclusion can be drawn, the use of the corresponding verb must be considered, ἀνίστημι (“to raise”). When ἀνίστημι is used transitively in reference to “raising” the dead, most often its object is a physically dead person. When it is intransitive, it can likewise refer to a dead person (E.g., Jn. 6:39, 40, 44, 54; Acts 2:24, 32; 3:6; 13:33-34) miraculously rising up bodily. (Mk. 5:42; 8:31; 9:9-10, 31; 12:25; Lk. 9:8; 16:31; 24:46; Jn 11:23-24; 1 Thess 4:14, 16) *But in Eph 5:14 it is used in reference to spiritual resurrection.* In this particular instance Paul quotes what appears to be either a combination of OT references (E.g., Is. 26:19; 51:17; 52:1; 60:1) or possibly a hymn verse, the source of which is unknown. It says, “Arise [ἔγειρε], O sleeping one, and rise up from the dead [καὶ ἀνάστα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν], and Christ will shine on you.” Here the verb ἀνίστημι is used for spiritual resurrection from the death-like state of unbelief, or if the address is to people who are already Christians, the exhortation is to arise from a death-like state of apathetic indifference. Paul is urging his hearers who “have been raised from the dead” through faith in Christ “to die more fully and constantly to ‘the old man’ and increasingly day by day to put on ‘the new man.’ ” Thus *Christ’s physical resurrection* is to be a constant reminder to them of their *spiritual resurrection* and the call to live accordingly as new creatures. (CC pp. 564-565)

Similarly in Col 2:12 Paul voices the thought that “you were buried with him [Christ] in the Baptism [τῷ βαπτισμῷ], in which you have also been raised [συνηγέρθητε] through faith of the working of God, who raised [ἐγείραντος] him [Christ] from the dead.” Paul here uses the verb ἐγείρω, “to raise,” not ἀνίστημι, to refer to God raising Christ bodily, and he uses συνεγείρω, a compound of that same verb, to refer to the spiritual resurrection of Christians with Christ and its effect on the believers’ lives. Paul also uses συνεγείρω, “to raise [Christians] together with [Christ],” in Col 3:1 and Eph 2:6 in reference to the *present, spiritual resurrection* of baptized believers in Christ. Eph 2:5 and Col 2:13 convey the same theological truth of the *present, spiritual resurrection* using the synonym συζωοποιέω, “to make [Christians] alive together with [Christ].” Eph 2:6 even adds that God—already *now*, in a preliminary way—has also seated or enthroned Christians in heaven, even as those Christians (Paul, the Ephesians, and so on) still live on earth; the thought is the same as in Rev 20:4. (CC p. 565)

All these theologically parallel passages confirm that even though elsewhere in the NT the noun most often is used for *physical resurrection*, ἀνάστασις in Rev 20:5–6 may refer to the *present, spiritual resurrection* of Christians still on earth, in analogy with the use of the verb ἀνίστημι in Eph 5:14. (CC p. 565)

The relationship between Christ’s physical resurrection and the new life of the Christian is an important thought throughout the NT. For example, in 1 Pet 1:3 the apostle gives thanks to God, “who according to his great mercy has given us new birth [ἀναγεννήσας] in a living hope through the *resurrection* [ἀναστάσεως] of Jesus Christ.” In Holy Baptism the Christian has died with Christ in order to be raised with Christ and to live now in “newness of life” (καινότητι ζωῆς, Rom 6:3–4). And in Jn 11:23–26 Jesus said that because he is “the resurrection and the life” (ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ), whoever believes in him will never again die (cf. Jn 8:51), and therefore the believer has “crossed over” or “been translated from” (μεταβέβηκεν) death into life (Jn 5:24). For that reason John can say here in Rev 20:6 that whoever participates in the first resurrection is blessed, because “over these the second death [ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος] does not have authority.” (CC p. 565)

**20:6 Blessed.** The fifth beatitude. (CSB)

It underlines the blessedness of having faith in Jesus. (TLSB)

*second death*.† Eternal death of unbelievers, damnation in hell. (CSB)

Defined in v 14 as punishment in the lake of fire. It follows the bodily resurrection, which occurs on the Last Day, and is the eternal consequence of refusing to repent and believe in Christ. (TLSB)

The “second death” is defined in 20:14 (see also 2:11; 21:8) as “the lake of fire” (ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός). Those who have been spiritually resurrected with Christ will not be touched by the torments of hell. Christ has freed them from it, and it does not rule their thoughts and lives as they live with Christ here on earth (cf. Heb 2:14–15). “But rather they are and will be priests of God and of the Christ, and they rule and will continue to rule with him for [the] thousand years” (Rev 20:6). Already 1:6 stated that Christ made God’s people to be “a kingdom, priests to his God and Father.” This royal priesthood they exercise now and throughout the millennium (cf. 1 Pet 2:5, 9). And in Rev 5:9–10 the “new song” of the Te Deum is that the victorious Lamb had “made them for our God a kingdom and priests, and they rule on the earth.” (CC)

While there is no mention of the first death in 20:1–10 (or elsewhere in Scripture), if it were to be identified it would be a designation for the dead state of unbelief, as the word “death” (θάνατος) is so used in Jn 5:24 and elsewhere (e.g., 1 Jn 3:14). The word νεκρός, “dead, a corpse” is so used for the state of unbelief in Eph 2:1, 5. Thus John juxtaposes “the first resurrection” (Rev 20:5–6) and “the second death” (20:6). But the relationship between these two ideas can be fully understood only if one keeps in mind that there also is a *second* resurrection and a *first* death. Andreas (sixth century) in his Greek commentary on Revelation refers to *two resurrections* and *two deaths* (even though Revelation 20 only mentions “the first resurrection” and “the second death”) when he says, “Two lives and two corpse-like states—that is, deaths—we are taught from divine Scripture” (δύο ζωάς καὶ δύο νεκρώσεις, ἤγουν θανάτους, ἐκ τῆς θείας Γραφῆς διδασκόμεθα), for Andreas knows that the Scriptures elsewhere testify to the first death and the second resurrection. Because the Christian has experienced the first resurrection from the first death (conversion through faith), the second death has no hold on him, for he will participate in the second resurrection at the End—the bodily resurrection to life eternal, and not the bodily resurrection to eternal condemnation (Jn 5:28–29; Rom 6:3–5; Col 2:12–13; 3:3–4). (CC)

This then affirms that “the first resurrection” (Rev 20:5–6) is the spiritual coming to life by faith in Christ, for over those who have “a share in the first resurrection” (20:6) the second death (hell) has no power. If the first resurrection were the bodily resurrection to eternal life with Christ (e.g., 1 Corinthians 15), it would make little sense to say that the second death now has no authority over those already raised, body and soul, for they would be beyond the time when such a threat would pertain to them. But it does stand to reason to say that “the second death” (20:6; that is, “the lake of fire,” 20:14) has no authority over believers in Christ who are still living here on earth, before the judgment at the End. On Judgment Day the second death *will* hold sway over all unbelievers, including those who fell away from the Christian faith back into the dead state of unbelief, and thus they will be thrown into the lake of fire (cf. 19:20). The dragon wars against the followers of Christ (that is, those who are participants in “the first resurrection”), as depicted in 12:13–17 (cf. also 1 Pet 5:8). Sadly in his war there are casualties: those who abandon the faith and forfeit God’s gift of eternal life in Christ (cf. 1 Tim 1:19–20; Rev 3:1–3, 16). If the first resurrection were the physical one to eternal life and not the present, spiritual resurrection to faith, no such threats of hell could be hurled at those raised, for the bodily resurrected Christians will be beyond the realm in which such threats could still be applied to them. They will be incorruptible (1 Cor 15:52; cf. 1 Pet 1:4). But Christians who have come to faith and by such faith live and rule with Christ here on earth during the millennium—to them such threats can still be hurled by the dragon, and the *possibility* of apostasy and damnation to hell is a reason for the

Christian to continue to fear God during this earthly life (Lk 12:5). But the purpose of the beatitude in Rev 20:6 is to instill hope and joyful confidence that God will preserve his people in the true faith until “the day of Christ Jesus” (his return) at the End (Phil 1:6). Like the other beatitudes in Revelation (Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 22:7, 14), 20:6 has as its purpose the strengthening of the Christians’ faith in God’s grace in Christ by describing the joyful bliss of those who persevere in the faith until the End. “Blessed are the dead who are dying in the Lord from now on” (14:13). (CC)

“The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years had come to an end” (20:5a). This first portion of 20:5 seems to be out of place or even redundant. Perhaps for those reasons many Greek manuscripts of Revelation omit it. It is a negative statement inserted after the description of those who live and reign with Christ during the thousand years (20:4) and before the two references to “the first resurrection” (20:5–6). Those who live and reign with Christ during their earthly lives are participants in the first resurrection. “The rest of the dead” do not participate in this millennial reign with Christ. To insert that somber thought within the glorious scene of the millennial life of the first resurrection with Christ may seem out of place, for it adds no thought as to what the millennium and the first resurrection are and mean for Christians. It simply states that unbelievers do not and will not participate in them. In addition it separates the description of the Christians’ millennial life with Christ from the repeated phrase that identifies such living as “the first resurrection” (20:5–6). But if this first sentence of 20:5 is genuine, *which it probably is*, a case can be made for its relevance both on the basis of what it says and on the basis of its position between the description of the millennium (20:4) and “the first resurrection” (20:5–6). Its content and its position certainly emphasize that *under no circumstances will those who are now spiritually dead, and who remain dead in the state of unbelief, live with Christ during the thousand years.* The spiritually dead have no part whatsoever in this glorious reign with Christ here on earth. And this sobering declaration is made after the description of those who do come to life and reign with Christ (20:4). Then and then only is the designation of “the first resurrection” presented (20:5–6), for the dead ones have already been excluded. (CC)

Who are “the dead” (τῶν νεκρῶν, 20:5)? *In keeping with the understanding that “the first resurrection” is spiritual and the first death is the state of unbelief, “the rest of the dead” are all those throughout the thousand years who never come to faith in Jesus Christ.* They physically lived and died “in a state of impenitence and unbelief.” Even while physically living on earth, they did not have true life (cf. Jn 10:10; 11:25; 14:6; 17:3) for they were dead in their sins and trespasses (cf. Eph 2:1; Col 2:13) and separated from God (cf. Eph 2:12; 4:18; Col 1:21). And when they physically died and were buried, they remained “dead” (cf. Mt 8:22), separated from God and from his Christ as they wait for their eternal condemnation in the final judgment at the End. There is no state of blessedness for them. Only the bodily resurrection of the damned is in their future (cf. Jn 5:29). As mentioned above, John does not directly speak of a first death. However, his mention of “the rest of the dead” is a reference to the concept because “the dead” remain in the first state of death from their conception and birth (cf. Ps 51:5 [MT 51:7]) up to the End. At the End they will come alive physically from the grave, only to be cast into “the second death,” the lake of fire (Rev 20:6, 14). During the millennium, then, over these the second death *does* have authority, for sadly that is their future destiny (19:20; 20:10, 15). (CC)

THEY WILL BE (PRIESTS) – ἔσονται—The future tense of the verb εἶμι (“to be”) could reflect the Hebrew Qal imperfect, which can have a durative or continuing force through the present time and into the future. This could mean that Christians, who will serve as priests, begin to do so as soon as they come to life—to new life through Baptism and faith in Christ. They will then continue to serve as priests here on earth and in heaven after their earthly lives. John’s Greek

is often influenced by Hebrew or Semitic idiom. Here the Hebrew verb reflected would be הָיָה, “to be, to continue to be.” (CC p. 546)

**20:1–6** Because Jesus has bound Satan and severely limited his power to harm the people of God, the faithful actually share in Jesus’ rule throughout the entire NT age. However, in the last little bit before the end, all hell will break loose as Satan will be released and will thus wreak destruction. Happily, those remaining in the Lord will not be overcome. The second death has no power over those whom God’s Spirit has regenerated and kept in the true faith. • Lord, may we treasure above all things the “first resurrection” given us through the Word and Sacraments, for nothing will ever separate us from Your great love and compassion. Amen.

#### *The Defeat of Satan*

**7 And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. 9 And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, 10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.**

**20:7-10** These verses describe the last battle in which the dragon desperately attempts once and for all to destroy the church and her mission of witness to Christ. This is the third and last view in which John sees this great battle. In the sixth scene (the sixth trumpet-angel, 9:13–21) of the second sevenfold vision of events on earth (8:6–11:19), John saw for the first time a glimpse of this battle. He saw a host gathered at the great river Euphrates, restrained and held back until the predetermined time when they would be released just before the End. In the sixth scene (the sixth censer-angel, 16:12–16) of the third sevenfold vision of events on earth (15:1–16:21), John saw a second view of this last battle. That time he saw the gathered host unleashed and engaged in actual battle at Armageddon. And now for a third and final time here in 20:7–10 John sees this terrible last battle—its conclusion. (CC pp. 571-572)

**20:7 released.**† Toward the close of the NT period Satan will be set free, and antichristian cults and an apostate church will thrive.

At the conclusion of the thousand years, Satan is let loose from his prison, from the abyss (20:7). While in his temporary confinement during the thousand years, the dragon could not *directly* attack the woman (the church) in order to destroy her and her godly mission. He was hindered from doing so by God’s care of the woman (12:6, 13–18; cf. 11:3–6). Through the two beasts (13:1–18), the beast and the harlot (17:1–18:24), the devil could cause all manner of suffering and agony and persecution for the people of the church. Now he is released to confront the church *directly*, and through devilish deceptions and force he attempts to keep the nations from hearing the witness of Christ as it is proclaimed by God’s people. The limitations and restraints placed upon him by God during the millennium are now removed so that the world becomes increasingly hostile and violent toward the church and the message of Christ (cf. 20:3). Throughout the millennium, because of the warfare of the dragon through the beast and the harlot, (Rev. 13:7, 16-17; 15:2; 17:1-18:24; 19:1-2) the church always suffers opposition and persecution from the world—here and there and to a greater or lesser degree. Now that opposition and persecution will be worldwide and deadly. (CC p. 572)

**20:8 deceive the nations** – A spiritual deception, so that people believe anything but the Gospel truth. (TLSB)

*Gog and Magog.*† Symbolize all the spiritual and moral evil with which the church must contend (cf. Eph 6:11). The OT background is Eze 38–39. Undoubtedly the same battle as the battle of Armageddon in ch. 19. (CSB)

Symbols for the enemies of God’s people. Cf Eze 38–39. (TLSB)

τὸν Γὼγ καὶ Μαγὼγ—The grammar does not indicate unambiguously whether “Gog and Magog” (either or both of them) are individual leaders, names of peoples, or even geographical names of the regions from which those peoples come. In Ezek 38:2 Gog is the individual ruler from the land of Magog. In Rev 20:8 the names are in apposition to τὰ ἔθνη, “the nations,” earlier in the verse. The two names are introduced by the single article τὸν, perhaps suggesting that the pair form a hendiadys, but the following pronouns αὐτούς and ὧν are plural, and the rest of the verse says that “the number of them” is like the sand of the sea. Extrabiblical references too are ambiguous. In any event, the names represent the entirety of unbelieving humanity toward the end of the present world at Christ’s return. (CC p. 571)

The imagery that is used to portray this last great effort of the dragon to destroy the saints of God on earth is that of Gog and Magog. These two names represent the gathering of all the nations of the earth for this great war. The exact meaning of Gog (גִּיג) is not known. It does appear in 1 Chr 5:4 as the name of one of the later descendants of Reuben, a son of Jacob. Possibly it was the name of some ancient king of infamy and/or the name of an ancient and fierce people no longer known from historical records. Magog (מַגּוּג) appears in Gen 10:2 and 1 Chr 1:5 as the name of one of the sons of Japheth the son of Noah. Josephus identified Magog with the Scythians who invaded the Near East in the eighth/seventh century B.C. and may have invaded Palestine in the seventh. (CC p. 572)

Whatever the source of the names, they eventually became terms which designated evil forces on earth opposed to God and godliness. In Ezekiel 38–39 they represent the enemies of God’s people in a warfare in which they attempt to destroy the people of Israel. In this prophecy in Ezekiel, Gog is the prince and leader of the evil forces that are hurled against Israel (Ezek 38:7–9, 14–16). Gog comes from Magog, a land in the far north (Ezek 38:2, 15; 39:2). But God promises to deliver his people from this onslaught just when they are about to be totally annihilated by striking the forces of Gog with fire from heaven (Ezek 39:3–6). So large in number would be the fallen hosts of Gog that their abandoned weapons would supply Israel with fuel for seven years (Ezek 39:9–10), and it would take the people of Israel seven months to bury their bodies (Ezek 39:12). God would invite the birds of prey and the wild animals to a celebration feast upon the fallen enemies, a feast furnished by God (Ezek 39:17–20). John saw this prophetic celebration banquet as a type of the great banquet of God which would celebrate the destruction of the beast and the false prophet in Rev 19:17–21. By the overthrow of Gog and his hosts, God would display his glory before all the nations of the world and to his own people (Ezek 39:21–29). Similarly in Rev 19:11–16 John saw the overthrow of the false prophet and the beast by the Lord Christ at his second coming at the End, and by such a judging of them Christ would display his own power and glory. (CC p. 573)

In the pseudepigrapha Gog and Magog are mentioned only in the Sibylline Oracles (3:319–22; 3:512), which state that Gog and Magog are “situated in the midst of Ethiopian rivers,” and that they would receive a great “effusion of blood” and would be called “a habitation of judgment among men,” and they would “drink black blood.” Elsewhere in the pseudepigrapha there are references to a great battle (though without mentioning the names of Gog and Magog), a battle in which the enemies of God attempt to destroy his people, a battle that takes place in the end times

and which seems to be patterned after Ezekiel 38–39. In rabbinic literature Gog and Magog frequently appear as types of the nations who war against God’s people and their Messiah. For example, the Jerusalem Targum on Num 11:26 says that at “the end of the days” Gog and Magog will rise up against Jerusalem, “but by the hand of the King Meshiha [Messiah] they will fall.” (CC p. 573)

Among the church fathers, the historian Eusebius (ca. 260–ca. 340) identified Gog as a representative of the Roman Empire. Ambrose (ca. 339–397) identified Gog with the Goths, a Germanic people who invaded the Roman Empire. Andreas (sixth century) in his Greek commentary on Revelation mentions that some identify Gog and Magog with the “Scythian peoples” (Σκυθικὰ ἔθνη) which, Andreas says, “we call the Huns” (ἅπερ καλοῦμεν Οὐννικά). (CC p. 574)

However the terms “Gog” and “Magog” were used to represent evil hosts, and from whatever sources they came, Augustine was correct when he rejected all narrow interpretations that tried to limit them to certain historical peoples or nations. He said in *The City of God* (20.11) that Gog and Magog symbolize *all the nations of the earth* which will rise up against the church in a final protest, “for this will be the last persecution ... which the holy church will endure from the whole world; just assuredly as the entire citizenry of Christ [is persecuted] by the entire citizenry of the devil, so much will it be everywhere over the earth” (“haec enim erit novissima persecutio ... quam sancta Ecclesia toto terrarum orbe patietur, universa scilicet civitas Christi ab universa diaboli civitate, quantacumque erit utraque super terram”). (CC p. 574)

Despite a few differences, Ezekiel 38–39 was for John the prophetic prototype of Gog and Magog as an illustration of the last great battle here in Rev 20:7–10. In Ezekiel (38:16) the hosts of Gog are hurled against the people of Israel in their own land. John sees the hosts of Gog and Magog covering “the expanse of the earth” as “they encircled the encampment of the saints—the beloved city” (Rev 20:9), that is, they attack the church of Christ wherever it is throughout the world. Prophetically speaking, the land and the people of Israel would typify the people of God in the church of Christ. The picture of “the encampment of the saints” (20:9) would also reflect the camp of the Israelites in the wilderness (Num 2:2), suggesting that the church of Christ is on her earthly pilgrimage, as were the people of God on a pilgrimage to the Promised Land (cf. Rev 12:14). The designation “the beloved city” (20:9) would also remind John of Mt. Zion, the city of God, which represents the heavenly Jerusalem (Ps 87:2; Heb 12:22; cf. Gal 4:24–26; Rev 21:2). Just as in Ezekiel (38:7–16) the evil hosts of Gog trampled underfoot the land of Israel and her people, so the church will be devastated by all the evil forces throughout the world (Rev 20:8; cf. 11:2). All the hosts of the devil, as represented by Gog and Magog, in this last great battle are singled-minded in their determination to destroy the people of God, the church of Christ, before the end of the present world comes. (CC pp. 574-575)

**20:9 THE CITY HE LOVED** – Not the earthly Jerusalem, but a symbol of the whole Christian Church on earth. (TLSB)

**FIRE** – The church would be totally annihilated were it not for God’s direct intervention. In Mk 13:14–23 the Lord Jesus describes these last days of torment for the church. It will be “a tribulation” (θλίψις, Mk 13:19) of such magnitude that it is beyond comparing to any other since creation, and nothing comparable would ever happen again. Unless the Lord would cut short those days, no flesh would be saved (Mk 13:20). In Mk 13:14 Jesus likens those days to “the abomination of desolation” mentioned in Daniel (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; cf. 1 Macc 1:54). But for the sake of his “elect, whom he has chosen,” he will cut short those days (Mk 13:20). In Ezekiel 38–39 as Gog and his hosts, after having laid waste the land of Israel, were about to

destroy God's people, God himself directly intervened to rescue them by sending fire on Magog (Ezek 39:6) and by striking the weapons from the hand of this host, whereupon the enemies would fall, never to rise again (Ezek 39:3–5). Here in Rev 20:9 John also sees that “fire came down from heaven.” It devours the hosts of Gog and Magog, whereby God rescues his people. (CC p. 575)

**20:10** *tormented day and night.* † When the devil is thrown into the fire, all the church's enemies are put out of action. (CSB)

Satan and his demonic host are finally cast into the place where they will suffer eternal punishment. This was the punishment they earned by their continual opposition to God's plan of redemption and restoration. (TLSB)

“And the devil,” who was the deceptive mastermind behind Gog and Magog, “was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone” (20:10) where also his henchmen, “the beast” and “the false prophet” (the harlot), had already been consigned (19:20). This is the final disgrace of the dragon, the ancient serpent. All through the millennial, messianic Sabbath he had pursued the woman by means of the beast and the harlot, who is also the false prophet. He had caused her all manner of suffering (11:7–10). But now he is cast into hell, where he “will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (20:10). Even though he was let loose after the thousand years to manhandle the church in one last great effort to destroy her and her witness to Christ, he is now in total defeat and eternal shame. At the victory of the Lamb and at his ascension and coronation, Satan had been cast out of heaven (12:5–9). Now at the end of his last battle against the church (the woman of Revelation 12), at the end of Armageddon (16:16) and the battle of Gog and Magog, in total disgrace and defeat and utterly broken, he is consigned forever to the fires of hell. Never again can he speak against God's saints or pursue them or persecute and threaten them. For the woman, the church, now stands victorious because of her bridegroom and Lord, the Christ (cf. 1 Jn 5:4–5; Rev 2:10). She now stands vindicated before God because of the victory of the Lamb, and she shall reign forever with her Lord and God in his peace and glory. (CC pp. 575-576)

### **The Purpose of the Tribulation**

Why will the Lord God permit Satan to be unleashed after the thousand years (20:3)? What is the purpose the battle of Gog and Magog (20:8; called Armageddon in 16:16)? John is given an answer as to the purpose of the millennium: Satan's imprisonment is so that “he could no longer deceive the nations” (20:3), that is so that Christ's church can carry out his mission to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world. But no such explicit answer is given as to why God will free Satan at the millennium's end to wage the last battle. This can be perplexing. For why will God permit the church to be torn apart by the dragon prior to the second coming of the Lord Christ at the End, when he will claim his bride? (CC p. 576)

This inquiry is not an attempt to question God's sovereign and gracious will concerning his church. Rather, it is an attempt to render glory to God because of his relationship to his saints on earth. In Revelation 12 John was shown the reason why the dragon hunts down the woman in order to destroy her: because Satan, in his hatred of God, could not destroy the holy Child (12:3–5). So after the devil was banished from heaven (12:7–9), in his lasting hatred toward God and his Christ, he now takes his fury out on the woman and her seed, the church (Rev 12:6, 13–18). But even though the church suffers much, God protects her and cares for her (12:6, 14). *And through her sufferings and persecution the church now reflects the suffering of Christ on the cross as she witnesses to that event, and by her steadfast faith and hope she exhibits the resurrection and life of Christ as she proclaims the saving message of Christ's victory.* (CC p. 576)

All this to the glory of God. For as God provides for and protects his church in her warfare with the dragon (Revelation 12) and Satan's two beasts (Revelation 13), he shows forth his glory so that all might come to recognize him as the only God, who is the Creator of all life, and who alone is the Savior and Judge of the human race (Rev 15:3–4; cf. Jer 51:33–57). (CC p. 576)

Similarly, it may be that God will release Satan and permit him to ravage the church *so that he can glorify his name as he rescues her and then casts Satan into hell*. It may be that there is a prophetic type of such an interpretation in Ezekiel 38–39, concerning Gog and Magog. According to Ezekiel, it will be God who unleashes Gog upon Israel, his people (Ezek 38:3–16). But then God himself will also save the faithful remnant of Israel and judge Gog and his hosts (Ezek 38:22). The whole event of Gog and his hosts invading and plundering and nearly destroying Israel would happen under God's sovereign and gracious will *so that when he miraculously delivers his people and then judges Gog, he could show forth his greatness and make known his name among all the nations* (Ezek 38:23; 39:1–7). As a result *God would display his glory to all the peoples of the earth* (Ezek 39:21). And God would show especially to his own people, whom he has just delivered from Gog, that he is Yahweh, the Lord their God (Ezek 39:22). In permitting Gog from Magog to nearly crush his people, *God would display to all the nations his anger over the sins of his own people, but then especially he would show his saving grace as he forgives their sins and shame*. God would demonstrate this grace to his people in delivering them from Gog and by judging and destroying Gog and his hosts. Thus all the nations of the world would then be encouraged to repent and come to recognize that Yahweh is also *their own God* (Ezek 39:23–29). (CC p. 577)

Since John in Rev 20:8 uses “Gog and Magog” from Ezekiel 38–39 as names of the combatants in the last great battle (which he also calls Armageddon in Rev 16:16), this imagery of the battle in which Gog would be let loose to tear into Israel could suggest why God will let Satan loose from his imprisonment in the abyss after the millennium. *God will permit Satan to assault and nearly destroy his people so that he can show his might and saving grace as he delivers his church and judges Satan and casts him into hell*. As God lets Satan have his way with the church, and as the church remains faithful despite all the terrifying sufferings and persecutions, *God will use this testing of the church and her fidelity to her Lord Christ as a way to demonstrate the power of the Gospel and to judge Satan visibly*. It is as if God were to say, “Satan, you had pillaged my saints on earth, but you could not take them from me. By their faithfulness they proclaimed my glory to all peoples, and because of your unjust attacks on them, I now damn you and all your hosts to the everlasting fires of hell.” And thus God will show forth his glory as the only God and Savior and Judge of the entire human race. He is the only one who can and does deliver all who call upon him (cf. Acts 2:21) from the dragon and his hosts. (CC p. 577)

One biblical example of how God permits Satan to strike his saints for the purpose of revealing his grace and judging or showing up Satan is that of Job. God permitted Satan to strike Job for no justified reason (Job 2:3; cf. 1:1, 8). By this Job and his faith were severely tested (Job 1:6–12; 2:1–7; 23:10–12). But Job remained faithful and did not deny his Lord and Redeemer (Job 1:22; 2:10; 16:19–21; 19:23–27). It may be deduced that God not only tested Job to strengthen his faith through the ordeal, but also, through the testing, God displayed the enduring power of his grace by Satan's inability to destroy the faith and trust of one of God's saints. Within the limits set by God, Satan could not dislodge Job from his faith no matter how much he tore at Job and afflicted him. And so the end result of God permitting Satan to strike Job was not only the tested strengthening of Job's faith, but also the judgment of Satan. The unleashing of Satan was all for exhibiting the glory of God! (CC pp. 577-578)

Certainly the ordeal that the church suffers now and will suffer in much greater degree as the last battle of Armageddon draws near will test her faith. This is testing by which her faith is and will be strengthened, to the glory of God in his Christ. But it is also a victorious testing by which God will display Satan's inability to destroy the church's faith, and thus God will demonstrate Christ's victory over Satan. This being the case, the church, the bride of Christ, will participate in the judgment of Satan—for she will be a witness against the dragon's arrogant (and ultimately futile) attempt to subvert her trust in her God, and she will be *a witness to the sustaining power of God's grace in his Christ, by which he holds his saints true to the End. That may well be the purpose for which God releases Satan.* (CC p. 578)

It is also often asked, When will the millennium end and Satan be let loose? When will the last great battle take place? How will we recognize its approach? Are we, perhaps, already in it? Though no timetable is given (for this is in the hidden wisdom of God, Mk 13:32–37), signs and events occur that alert the church that the battle of Armageddon and the End are close at hand (cf. Rev 1:3; 22:7). In Matthew 24 (cf. Mark 13; Luke 21) Jesus, shortly before his crucifixion, spoke about the “great tribulation” (θλίψις μεγάλη, Mt 24:21) and his second coming. He described certain signs and events that would take place—events that would reveal that the last sufferings and the End were very near (Mt 24:3–51). In particular, the sign of “the abomination of desolation” (Mt 24:15), that is, the great apostasy within visible Christendom, points to the imminent presence of the “great tribulation” (Mt 24:21). This “great tribulation” is the equivalent to the battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:16), which is also the battle of Gog and Magog (20:8), for both the “tribulation” and the great battle happen just before the End (cf. Mk 13:24–26; Rev 20:7–15). (CC p. 578)

There may be such terrifying days of evil and suffering for the church at any particular time, so that the Christians will be reminded of the last battle of Armageddon at the End, days of such evil that we think we might already be facing the assault by Gog and Magog. When such times of suffering happen in various places and at different times throughout the history of the church, they may be viewed as types of the final battle at the End, microcosms or miniatures of the bloodiest war (in terms of spiritual casualties) that will ever take place. Though “microcosmic Armageddons” are localized and limited in scope, so that only certain Christians at any given time would experience one, nevertheless, for them it would be as if it were *the* one at the End. (CC pp. 578-579)

In Jesus' eschatological discourse (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), the fearful days of suffering for the Jewish Christians that they would experience immediately before the destruction of Jerusalem would be for them their great affliction, after which the end of Jerusalem would come (Mt 24:15–22; Mk 13:14–24; cf. Lk 21:20–27). It was their Armageddon, in which Satan would sorely test them, and during which they probably would think that the End was at hand—and not just the end of Jerusalem. For the rest of Christendom and ever since then, each Armageddon in microcosm serves as a type of *the* Armageddon and as a warning to all Christians that such a microcosmic assault by Gog and Magog can happen at any time and in any place. And thus whenever the battle is joined, every such attack is a warning and a sign that the great battle of Armageddon will certainly come in God's own time—all to God's glory in his Christ. (CC p. 579)

**20:7–10** Even as John affirms that there will be a “little while” of suffering before the end of all things and the judgment, he assures the faithful that this will result in the ultimate destruction and removal of Satan and his lies. Consider how near we may be to the end of the age. Yet also consider what good news this is for believers! Christ comes to save and deliver us once and for all from every sin and evil. • Lord Jesus, help us to see and understand the great struggle between

good and evil. Keep our hearts true to You, and grant us always to look to You for deliverance from the powers of hell. Amen.

*Judgment Before the Great White Throne*

**11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.**

**20:11-15** The church has finished her mission. The *demonic* enemies who persecuted her have been banished to hell. She has been adorned as the bride of Christ (19:6–8). Now the moment has arrived for the last and final judgment of the *human race*. (CC p. 581)

Luther: “I believe that Christ will return from heaven on the Last Day to judge those who are alive at that time and those who have died before that day [I Thess. 4:16–17], that all mankind, angels, and devils will have to appear before his judgment [Matt. 18:35; Rom. 14:10; I Pet. 1:17] throne to see him visually. Then he will redeem me and all who believe in him from bodily death and every infirmity and will eternally punish his enemies and adversaries and deliver us from their power forever [Rev. 20:11–14]” (AE 43:27). (TLSB)

**20:11** *white throne* – John sees “a large white throne and the One sitting on it” (20:11). In the inaugural vision of heaven (4:1–5:14) which introduced the prophetic message of Revelation, John had seen this “throne” and “One sitting” on it (4:2). Here in 20:11 the throne is described as “large” (μέγας) and “white” (λευκός). In 4:2 the throne of God and his presence upon it are the *central and dominant* feature; around the throne are the twenty-four thrones of the elders (4:4) and the four winged creatures (4:6–7). Here in 20:11 the throne of God and his presence on it are the *only* feature, for now God on his throne is the supreme judge before whom the entire human race stands. Perhaps for this reason John notes the *large size* of the throne, for it alone is present, and the “throne and the One sitting on it” occupy and fill the entire scene. The whiteness of the throne would indicate the purity of the holy justice that will be dispensed. In Dan 7:9–10 the prophet sees a heavenly vision of God the Father, “the Ancient of Days,” dressed in white. God was holding court and books of judgment were opened. Here in Rev 20:11 the whiteness of the throne is mentioned, for God’s judgment will be righteous and no one can gainsay it or dispute its truth. (CC p. 581)

“The One sitting” on the throne is God the Father (as is clear in 5:6–7), and here he is the Judge at the End. Elsewhere in Scripture often the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is portrayed as the Judge. For example, in Jn 5:22–23 Jesus says that “the Father judges no one, but he has given all judgment to the Son, so that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father.” In Mt 25:31–46 Jesus, as the Son of Man on his throne of glory at the End, will judge the human race as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. In 2 Cor 5:10 Paul says that “it is necessary that we all appear before the judgment seat *of Christ*.” However, Paul also says in Rom 14:10 that “we all will stand at the judgment seat *of God*.” The ultimate judgment is under and by the authority of God the Father. But because Jesus Christ suffered and died in the stead of the human race, receiving God’s judgment against all humanity’s sin (Rom 5:16–19; 8:3–4; cf. Is 53:3–10), he earned the right to execute the judgment. For God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ, are

one in their relationship to the world (Jn 10:30) and act together (Jn 5:19), also in the judgment at the End (Rev 6:15–17). And after the End the Father and the Son will be equally honored in occupying the same throne in the new heaven and earth (22:3). (CC pp. 581-582)

*earth and sky fled* – So fearful is this judgment of God that “the earth and the heaven” attempt to flee from God’s face (20:11). Already in 6:12–17, in the sixth scene (the sixth seal) of the first vision of events on earth (6:1–8:5), as John sees a scene of the End, the end of the present world, people of all classes try to hide themselves “from the face of the One sitting on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb” (6:15–16). In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve attempted to hide from God after they had disobeyed him (Gen 3:8). But here in Rev 20:11 it is “the earth and the heaven” that flee from the face of God. In 16:17–21, in the seventh scene introduced by the seventh trumpet-angel of the third vision of events on earth (15:1–16:21), John saw that “every island passed out of sight, and mountains vanished from view” (16:20). This illustrates the terrifying impact that God’s judgment will have even on the created earth. (CC p. 582)

The judgment of the earth and the heaven could be a poetic depiction of the fearful judgment of the human race. For example, in Zeph 3:8d God says, “By the fire of my jealous anger the whole world will be consumed.” In Zephaniah “the whole world” includes all “nations” and “kingdoms” (Zeph 3:8b), which he will gather to pour out on them his wrath. In Rev 20:11 the fleeing of “the earth and the heaven” could thus be a pointed indication that all *human* life stands in fear of God’s righteous judgment. However, it may also point to the *physical* world and thus suggest that in God’s judgment the present earth and heaven will be dissolved and disappear—to be restored, recreated, as the new heaven and new earth. In 21:1 John will see “a new heaven and a new earth” which have taken the place of “the first heaven and the first earth,” which have “passed away” (cf. 2 Pet 3:10–13). For God will “make all things new” (Rev 21:5). (CC p. 582)

Elsewhere Scripture also declares that the present physical world at the End will perish. In Ps 102:26 (MT 102:27) the psalmist confesses that the earth and the heavens that God created “will perish and . . . all of them like a garment will wear out; like clothing you will change them.” In Is 51:6 the prophet cries out that “the heavens will dissipate like smoke and the earth will wear away like a piece of clothing.” And then Isaiah adds that the “inhabitants” of the earth “will die like gnats.” In Mk 13:31 Jesus said that “the heaven and the earth will pass away.” And Peter reminds his hearers that “the day of the Lord will come as a thief, in which the heavens with a loud crash will pass away, and the elements will burn and be destroyed, and the earth and the works in it will be exposed” (2 Pet 3:10). The Scriptures testify abundantly, then, that at the End the *physical world* as well as the *human race* will be confronted by the judgment of God. (CC pp. 582-583)

**20:12** *great and small* – This presupposes a bodily resurrection of all people, including those who rejected Christ. (TLSB)

τοὺς μεγάλους καὶ τοὺς μικροὺς—Many manuscripts, in particular a majority of the Byzantine family, omit these words. Codex Alexandrinus (A), the best witness to the text of Revelation, has them, and so they are most likely original. They appear elsewhere, describing people of all classes (11:18; 13:16; 19:5, 18). (CC p.580)

But the chief focus of the judgment of God and his Christ will be the human race. All the dead stand before God’s throne (Rev 20:12). The universal resurrection described in 20:13 is understood to have already taken place in 20:12. And now all the people of the earth stand before the awesome presence of God. As stated in Jn 5:28–29, the eternal destiny of each person will be declared—either eternal life or an eternal judgment of death. The people will be “judged by the

things that had been written in the books” that “were opened” for the occasion (Rev 20:12). The opened books contain the complete record of “their works.” In Dan 7:10, when the Ancient of Days took his seat in the midst of his “law court” (אֲדָרָה; LXX: κριτήριο), “books were opened.” In pseudepigraphal literature opened books, from which judgment was pronounced based on the things written therein, represented the action of God’s judgment. For example, 2 Baruch 24:1 says that “the days are coming, and the books will be opened in which are written the sins of all those who have sinned” (see also 4 Ezra 6:17–20; cf. 1 Enoch 90:20–24). In 3 Enoch 30:1–33:5 the heavenly law court is described as it sits around God and his throne of judgment. Books are opened from which God pronounces judgment on the wicked. Records are kept and deeds are recorded in scrolls or books (cf. Jer 32:8–14). God keeps his accurate record of each individual’s life and deeds. The “books” are a visual representation of God’s indelible and unerring mind and remembrance. (CC p. 583)

The last phrase of Rev 20:12 implies that *all* “the dead,” both the wicked and God’s own saints, are judged on the basis of what is recorded in the “books,” for all stand before his judgment throne (Cf. Ps. 62:12 {MT 62:13} Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Mt. 16:27; 25:31–46; 1 Peter 1:17). But while the wicked are found guilty and sentenced because of their “works” recorded in the books (20:12–13), God’s own people are acquitted—declared innocent and righteous—*not* on the basis of their works, but on the basis of “another book,” because their names are recorded in the book of life (20:12, 15). While Christians also sin and thus could have had their sinful deeds recorded in the “books” of God’s judgment in 20:12, other passages suggest that God keeps a record only of their good works, the deeds done out of faith and by the love of Christ (see Mt 25:34–40). So then John not only sees the books of judgment, but also “the book of life.” (Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27) All whose names are written in “the book of life” are recorded in the heart of God as ones who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 3:5; 7:9–17). For this reason in the books of judgment only their good deeds are recorded and not their sins, for their sins and guilt have been blotted out of God’s mind and so will not be the object of his righteous anger and judgment. God lists the good deeds of his saints, and they will be recalled as visible demonstrations of their saving faith in his grace, wrought for them by Christ, the victorious Lamb (cf. Mt 5:16; 7:15–20). (CC p. 584)

*books...another book* – Records of human conduct. (TLSB)

βιβλία ... βιβλίον—Probably the “books” John saw were “scrolls.” In Judaism sacred writings, especially those of the OT used in worship, normally were in the form of scrolls. In Greek scrolls were often designated by these terms. For example, the βιβλοὶ in LXX Dan 7:10 and the βιβλίον in LXX Dan 12:1–2, used for the purpose of judgment at the End as also here in Rev 20:12, would have been scrolls. (CC p. 580)

*book of life. See note on 3:5.* (CSB)

The book that lists all who have received Christ and God’s gracious gifts of salvation. (TLSB)

The idea of a “book of life” in which God records the names of all the people who belong to him reaches back into the OT. In Exodus 32, after the Israelites had committed idolatry by worshiping the golden calf, Moses again ascended Mt. Sinai and pleaded with God to forgive their sin. But Moses asked that if God would not do so, God should blot him out from “your book, which you have written” (Ex 32:32). God answered that whoever sinned against him would have his name removed from the book (Ex 32:33). Ps 69:28 (MT 69:29; LXX 68:29) refers to the “book of the living” (סֵפֶר הַחַיִּים; LXX: βιβλος ζώντων), in which the names of the righteous are written. In Dan

12:1 “everyone who is found written in the book” will be delivered at the End, for they will be raised to eternal life (Dan 12:2). In the NT outside of Revelation “the book of life” is mentioned only once, in Phil 4:3, where Paul reminds his hearers that his fellow workers together with him have their “names in the book of life.” In Revelation it is mentioned in six verses. Christians who are victorious by grace will walk about in the white garments of Christ, and their names will not be erased from the book of life (3:5). The adherents and worshipers of the beast are not written in the book of life (13:8; 17:8). Those who are not written in the book of life will be judged for their sins (20:12) and thrown into hell (20:15). And those whose names are written in the book of life will be declared righteous (20:12) and will enter the New Jerusalem (21:27). (CC pp. 584-585)

*judge by what was written.* † The principle of judgment on the basis of works (Ps 62:12; Jer 17:10; Ro 2:6; 1Pe 1:17) assumes that good deeds are the fruit of faith (cf. Eph 2:8–10). This passage (vv. 11–15) is the last and clearest of John’s six visions of the last judgment (cf. 6:12–17; 11:15–19; 14:14–20; 16:17–21; 19:17–21). (CSB)

The righteous do not earn salvation by their works, but their good works were recorded so that they might now be rewarded by the One who was at work in the saints (Php 1:6; 1Th 2:13), causing them to produce good fruit. (TLSB)

**20:13** *the sea gave up* – Those whose bodies were lost at sea or burned are not excluded from the final resurrection and glorification of the body, since God will miraculously call forth these people as well. (TLSB)

*death and Hades.* Further emphasizes the universal scope of the resurrection. (TLSB)

ᾗδης—In classical Greek ᾗδης was the proper name of the god of “the nether world” (LSJ, I 1) and then also the “place of departed spirits” (LSJ, I 2). Therefore it came to refer also to “the grave, death” (LSJ, II 1). Hades could refer to the “underworld” as a place of punishment, but it was never used to refer to a place of joy in the hereafter or anything like heaven. The LXX uses the word to translate ἕλκω. In the NT ᾗδης can refer to the grave in general as the place where all the dead are or go (e.g., Acts 2:24–27, 31), or it can refer to hell in particular (e.g., Lk 16:23; cf. BAGD, 1). The word appears four times in Revelation (1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14), always paired with “death” and always referring to the “grave” in general. In Revelation the terms for hell are ἄβυσσος, “abyss,” and λίμνη τοῦ πυρός, “lake of fire.” (CC pp. 580-581)

A vivid description is given of the *universal resurrection* at the End. The fact that John describes the resurrection (20:13) *after* he has seen the judgment (20:12) seems to be out of sequence. But “it is a bit pedantic to argue that [20:]13 is out of sequence since resurrection ([20:]13) must precede judgment ([20:]12).” This is not the first time that events are not related in a strictly sequential order. In Revelation 19 John related the second coming of Christ, and then in Revelation 20 he sees the millennium and the last great battle (of Gog and Magog) before the End, when in reality the millennium and the last battle (in that order) will take place before Christ’s second coming. Perhaps in 20:12–13 the judgment is shown first for the purpose of emphasis. All members of the human race will be raised from their graves in order to stand before the judgment seat of God, and so John sees the judgment first. (CC p. 585)

“And the sea gave up the dead” (20:13). How many have gone down to the sea in ships (Ps 107:23; Is 42:10) for their livelihood but never came back? In the many raging tempests or in warfare the sea became their grave. The fact that in addition to death and the grave, John sees the sea giving up its dead suggests an emphasis on the bodily resurrection of the dead. For it would be sufficient to refer to a resurrection by speaking only of “death” giving up its dead. But to say

that “the sea gave up the dead which were in it,” then to add the thought that also “the grave” would give up its dead, makes certain that John understood the resurrection to be a *bodily* and *physical* resurrection. The bones remaining from those who died on land would testify to their existence and could be raised to life (cf. Ezek 37:1–14). However, there would be no visible remains of those lost at sea. The reference to the retrieval of the dead from the sea (Rev 20:13) implies that even those without any known physical remains will be raised *bodily* on the Last Day. (CC p. 585)

John also sees “death and the grave” giving up their dead (20:13). “Death” (ὁ θάνατος) would be the all-embracing term. All the bodies of the dead are released from “death” itself. A part of them come out of the sea, and others come out of graves in the earth. In Dan 12:2 all who “sleep in the dust of the earth will awake [יִצְיָקוּ; LXX: ἀναστήσονται], some to everlasting life” and others “to shame and eternal contempt.” In Ezekiel 37 the prophet sees in a vision a valley of dry bones which represent the people of Israel (Ezek 37:11). In the vision Ezekiel sees the bones take on flesh, and then the breath of life comes into the bodies and they come to life (Ezek 37:1–10). Then Yahweh said to the prophet that he would open their graves and bring them out and he would put his Spirit in them and they would live (Ezek 37:12–14). And then God would bring his people back to their land and they would know that he is their God, the Lord Yahweh (Ezek 37:13). This vision in Ezekiel 37 promises the return and restoration of exiled Israel at the same time that it provides a typological picture of the physical resurrection of the dead, and it presents a graphic depiction of God’s physical resurrection of dead bodies. (CC pp. 585-586)

Nowhere else in the NT is there such an earthly and graphic picture of the bodily resurrection at the End as here in Rev 20:13. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul describes the relationship between Christ’s bodily resurrection and the general physical resurrection at the End, with the emphasis on the resurrection of the Christians. He speaks of how the dead are raised (νεκροὶ ἐγείρονται) and that the mortal body will be changed into the immortal (1 Cor 15:16, 35–41, 53–55), but he gives no earthly description of the dead rising from the graves (cf. 1 Thess 4:13–16). There is the description of the bodily resurrection of Lazarus from the grave in Jn 11:38–44. This can serve as an illustration of the bodily resurrection of all the dead at the End, and thus it is akin to John’s vivid description here in Rev 20:13. (CC p. 586)

**20:14–15** *lake of fire*. This is the final destruction of the last enemy, even death itself (1Co 15:51–55). (TLSB)

As a result of our fallen nature, we are all destined for this final separation from God and His goodness until delivered by grace (cf Eph 2:1–5). Only Christ’s forgiveness can deliver people from this dreadful end. (TLSB)

Finally, at the End in the judgment of God “death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire” (20:14). Already in 19:20 the beast and the false prophet (the harlot) were cast into the lake of fire. The devil (the mastermind behind them) was thrown there too in 20:10. Now here in Rev 20:14 John sees “death and the grave” join them. *The last enemy of mankind is now forever destroyed together with its terror and fear* (1 Cor 15:26; Heb 2:15). *Now the victorious reign of the exalted Lord Christ has been accomplished* (cf. 1 Cor 15:24–28). Andreas (sixth century) in his Greek commentary on Revelation compares Rev 20:14 with 1 Cor 15:25–26 and then says, “On account of this, then, there shall no longer be death or decay, but it [the destroying of death as the last enemy] signifies that imperishability and immortality shall reign” (διὰ τούτου τοῦτον τὸ μηκέτι ἔσσεσθαι θάνατον ἢ φθοράν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀθανασία βασιλεύειν σημαίνεται). As Isaiah (25:8) had prophesied, the Lord has now swallowed up death forever and wiped away every tear from all faces. Paul proclaimed a loud amen in Christ to this when he said, “Death has been

swallowed up into victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Cor 15:54–55). For the Lord God himself in his Christ has fulfilled his promise in Hos 13:14: “I will ransom them from the power of the grave [לִּיאֵשׁ; LXX: ᾗδου], and I will redeem them from death [מִמָּוֶת; LXX: ἐκ θανάτου].” This last enemy, death and the grave, has been swallowed up forever! (CC pp. 586-587)

Rev 20:15 concludes the entire chapter. Those “not found written in the book of life” are then “thrown into the lake of fire.” The “lake of fire” is the ultimate destination of all idolaters, all who love and do what is false (21:27; 22:15), all those not in Christ, who did not do the will of his Father, who did no kindness to the least of his brothers (Mt 7:21–23; 25:41, 46). “The lake of fire” is equivalent to Gehenna (γέεννα), which in Judaism and early Christianity was a name for hell and the fires of hell. In the OT “the Valley of Ben-Hinnom” was the name of a ravine just south and west of Jerusalem. This ravine or valley was the site of the abominable worship of burning children, which took place during the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh. (2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chron. 28:1-3; 33:1-6; cf. Deut 18:10; Jer. 7:31; 19:1-4; 32:35) Gehenna became a name for hell and its eternal fiery torment. (E.g., Mt. 5:22; 10:28; 23:33; James 3:6; Mk. 9:43-48) Its fiery torments are never extinguished (Mk 9:47–48). “The breath of the Lord God like a flow of burning sulfur sets it on fire” (Is 30:33). (CC p. 587)

But those “written in the book of life” (Rev 20:15) shall inherit eternal life in righteousness forever with God and the victorious Lamb (21:27). (CC p. 587)

**20:11–15** Finally, John describes the judgment and overthrow of death. Since our first parents fled from the Lord in the garden (Gn 3:24), all their sinful descendants have been shutting their eyes and ears to the somber truth about the last judgment (cf Heb 10:31). However, Christ has covered us in the mantle of His righteousness. Consequently, our bodily resurrection will be unto glory and eternal bliss in God’s presence. • “Be still, my soul; the hour is hast’ning on When we shall be forever with the Lord, When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone, Sorrow forgot, love’s purest joys restored. Be still, my soul; when change and tears are past, All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.” Amen. (*LSB* 752:4)