

Revelation 20 Commentary

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Revelation 20:1

As we have continued in our study of the book of Revelation, we have observed how the number of fellow saints who share our understanding of the text dwindles ever more as we proceed. This is because interpreting the book of Revelation is like traveling along a series of roads from a point of origin to a destination. As with any roadway, along the route we meet with numerous forks in the road which head off in different directions—leading to varied destinations. The fork in the road which looms before us in Revelation 20+ is the thousand years: the [Millennial Kingdom](#). Is the thousand year reign described here that of a literal kingdom on earth? And is it a future reign—or is it already in progress? Are the two resurrections which bracket the thousand years to be understood as literal, physical raisings from the dead? Or are they spiritual resurrections, related to faith? Or are they some combination of the two? When Satan is bound for the duration of this period, how complete is his binding? Who binds him and how is he bound? Is he bound even now? These are just some of the questions which confront the reader of Revelation 20+. That a kingdom would be the subject of this chapter is not unexpected. In the previous chapter we saw Christ ride forth under the declaration that he would (1) strike the nations, and (2) rule them with a rod of iron (Rev. 19:15+). The striking took place during the [Campaign of Armageddon](#). Now, the “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev. 19:16+) is to take up His promised earthly reign (Mat. 6:10). It would seem most natural that if His Second Coming occurs in Revelation 19+, then the rule described here (Rev. 20:4+) would follow upon His physical return. Alas, there is great confusion over what should be obvious. The reader may recall the introductory material which we studied prior to our verse-by-verse exposition. He may recall the premise which motivated such preparation: *If we all read the same text, how is it that such widely-different understandings result?* The answer, to a great degree, was found in differing [Systems of Interpretation](#) which are themselves the result of different views concerning how to interpret the text, especially [Interpreting Symbols](#). There is perhaps no more dramatic illustration of the significant affect that *interpretation* has upon meaning than the divergence of opinion attending the [Millennial Kingdom](#) which comes before us in this chapter. The view we set forth is that of the earliest Church Fathers, known as [premillennialism](#) or [chiliasm](#)—the belief that Christ returns *before* His kingdom commences on earth for *one thousand years*.

We now come to Rev. 20:1-6+ which was so universally held by the early Church to teach a literal resurrection, and to be so thoroughly consonant with Jewish views, that the Apocalypse narrowly escaped proscription by the enemies of Chiliasm . . . If we reject the early Church belief in this particular, the veracity of Apostolic Fathers, who assert that they received their interpretation of it from the Apostles and their associates . . . is impeached, and the teaching of the Apostles themselves which directly led to such a faith in all the churches established by them is open to grave suspicion. . . . Popery . . . almost crushed the early interpretation of the passage; but others held fast to it, as e.g. Paulikians, Waldenses, and Albigenses. Various writers, some men of acknowledged ability and talent, have continued from the Reformation . . . down to the present, to entertain the same, and today some of the most able men in nearly all, if not all, denominations, accept of this ancient faith.¹

ED COMMENT - Dr Renald Showers has an well-done, succinct summary of the belief of the early church regarding the millennium. [A Description and Early History of Millennial Views](#). Dennis Swanson has an interesting analysis on C H Spurgeon's beliefs on the Millennium - [The Millennial Position of Spurgeon](#).

In accord with our [A Policy of Inoculation](#), we will present elements of alternate views—together with what we view to be their weaknesses—so that the reader is better equipped to judge these matters for himself. Let the reader take note: whether or not one grasps firmly to the [Golden Rule of Interpretation](#) will to a large degree determine what meaning is derived from the text. Most agree that a plain, literal reading of the passage results in the premillennial understanding which we hold—that a future, literal reign of Jesus Christ on earth will follow His Second Coming and precede the eternal state:

Kuyper, in trying to refute chiliasm, makes admissions which substantially give his position away. In commenting on the passage

Rev. 20:1-7[±], he notes: “Reading this passage as if it were a literal description would not only tend to a belief in the Millennium but would settle the question of chiliasm for all who might be in doubt concerning the same . . . If we take it for granted now, that these thousand years are to be taken literally, that these thousand years are still in the future, and that this resurrection was meant to be a bodily resurrection, why then we may say, that at least as far as Rev. 20[±] is concerned, the question is settled. Then we must admit that Rev. 20:1-7[±] is a confession of chiliasm with all it contains.”—Kuyper, A. *Chiliasm*, p. 9.²

It was this very matter, opposition to what the book of Revelation describes regarding [The Arrival of God's Kingdom](#) on earth, which inhibited its [Acceptance into the Canon](#). See [Millennial Kingdom](#). See [The Millennial Kingdom in the Early Church](#). Depending upon how one understands the first few verses of this chapter, one will most likely wind up in one of the major interpretive camps: premillennial, [postmillennial](#), or [amillennial](#). Only the premillennial interpreter takes the verses in their most literal way—symbolism being used to describe literal events yet future. The other two interpretive positions are forced into spiritualizing elements of the passage in order to achieve self-consistency among elements within the passage (e.g., the nature of the resurrections, the binding of Satan, the duration of the kingdom). Waymeyer offers a helpful summary of key differences between premillennial, postmillennial, and amillennial interpretations of the first six verses of this pivotal chapter:

Key Interpretive Issues in Revelation 20:1-6^{±3}

Issue	Premillennial View	Postmillennial View	Amillennial View
Satan's Binding:	Future	Present / Future	Present
First Resurrection:	Physical	Spiritual	Spiritual
Thousand Years:	Literal	Literal / Symbolic	Symbolic
Locale of Reign:	Earth	Earth / Heaven	Heaven
Chronology of chapters 19-20:⁴	Sequential	Sequential / Recapitulation	Recapitulation

We submit that the premillennial interpretation is the only interpretation which does justice to the text—recognizing the use of *symbols* to describe *literal events* which are entirely consistent and which do not violate exegetical consistency (e.g., such as taking one resurrection as physical and the other as spiritual).

I saw an angel coming down from heaven

John has previously seen other angels coming down from heaven on divine missions. A mighty angel came down from heaven to stand upon the sea and land and declare God's dominion retaking the earth (Rev. 10:2[±]). An angel with great authority came down from heaven to declare the destruction of Babylon (Rev. 18:1[±]). Even before this angel takes action, we know that he is on a mission from the throne having divine authority. Given his mission, it is remarkable that he is not even described as being *great* or *mighty*. Nevertheless, he will be able to easily dispatch Satan to his millennial prison.

having the key to the bottomless pit

In the ninth chapter, John saw a “star” which fell from heaven having the key to the shaft of this same earthly compartment (Rev. 9:1[±]). The star (angel) opened the pit to loose the demonic locusts at the fifth trumpet judgment. Here, an angel will perform the opposite action with his key: locking up the bottomless pit, probably by means of securing the same shaft. If the star which loosed the locusts was Satan, the irony which confronts him now is being a prisoner in the very abyss which he was previously able to unlock. See commentary on [Revelation 9:1](#). *Bottomless pit* is [βυσσος](#) [abysson]: a very deep gulf or chasm in the lowest parts of the earth. See commentary on [Revelation 9:1](#).

The Angel with the Key to the Bottomless Pit

[5](#)

a great chain in his hand

This is not a literal chain, but a figure describing the angel's authority and ability to restrain Satan. This is not the first time where an angelic power will have been said to be *chained*: “God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and

delivered *them* into chains of darkness” (2Pe. 2:4) and “the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own above, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 1:6). Since spiritual beings, such as angels like Satan, cannot be restricted by physical means, we must understand the chain to denote a supernatural restraint which is ultimately provided by God for the express purpose of the angel’s task. In a similar way that the rebellious angels were locked away and unable to roam, so too will be Satan. The figure of a *chain* is used: the restraint provides no degree of freedom whereby it may be *stretched*. In our discussion of [The Rise of Allegorical Interpretation](#), we saw that once the tether of literal interpretation is cut, there is virtually no limit to the variety of fanciful solutions which may be provided as possible explanations for the meaning of the text. And so it is with amillennialism which denies the plain meaning of the text and takes almost the entire passage as an imprecise approximation of the spiritual authority now present in the Church. Here, we are told that an *angel* will bind Satan. Although the Church is never said to be an *angel*, amillennialist Kik is sure it is the Church which has this chain and that Satan is *currently bound*:

It is not difficult to ascertain by what means Satan is bound. The chain is the Gospel. Wherever a soul is released through the preaching of the Gospel there Satan is restrained and limited. . . . Unfortunately the Church of today does not realize the power that Christ has given her. Christ has placed in her hands the chain by which she can bind Satan. She can restrain his influence over the nations. But today the Church bemoans the fact that evil is becoming stronger and stronger. She bemoans the fact that the world is coming more and more under the control of the Devil. Whose fault is that? It is the Church. She has the chain and does not have the faith to bind Satan **ever more firmly**. Satan is bound and the Church knows it not! Satan can be bound **ever more firmly** and the Church does it not! [emphasis added]⁶

According to amillennialism, the chain is riddled with lack of faith. Its ability to restrain is compromised because the Church doesn’t realize it already has this chain. Satan would be bound *ever more firmly* if she would just realize this fact. Immediately we meet with a characteristic of amillennialism which fails to do justice to the text: the binding is not truly a binding. It is “loose” and needs to be *ever more firmly* pulled in. Amillennialism teaches that Satan was bound at the cross:

According to the preterist view, Satan is currently bound (Revelation 20:2-3⁺) and crushed (Romans 16:20). The enemy was not just defeated *de jure* (legally) at the cross, but has been crushed *de facto* (in fact). Therefore, there is no external spiritual roadblock prohibiting Christians from reigning and ruling now.⁷

If the binding of Satan is *now* and its ineffectiveness is found in the weak faith of the Church, then what hope is there that he will *ever* be bound by this means? By the measure of amillennialism, even the “super apostle” Paul was unable to muster the necessary faith to get the job done:

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2Cor. 12:7-9)

Paul was unable to “bind” Satan because Satan is not bound in this present age. His binding is future, after the Second Coming of Christ and during the [Millennial Kingdom](#).

Revelation 20:2

He laid hold of the dragon

Laid hold is [κράτησε](#) [ekratēse]: “take into one’s possession or custody . . . arrest . . . apprehend someone.”⁸ The dragon is the most-frequently used title for Satan in the book of Revelation (Rev. 12:3-4⁺, 7⁺, 9⁺, 13⁺, 16-17⁺; 13:2⁺, 4⁺; 16:13⁺; 20:2⁺).

that serpent of old

Serpent of old is [τῷ φιδ τῷ ῥέοντι](#) [ton ophin ton arxaion]: *the serpent, the ancient [one]*. This alludes to the serpent in the garden of Eden, which Satan used to deceive Eve (Gen. 3:1-6). His title as dragon and serpent were seen in the heavenly war, when he was cast out: “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan” (Rev. 12:9⁺). See commentary on [Revelation 12:9](#). Now that his two human accomplices, the [Beast](#) and the False Prophet, have been cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 19:20⁺) and his demonic forces are imprisoned in the burnt regions of Babylon and Edom (see commentary on [Revelation 18:2](#)), he must fend entirely for himself.

In that day the Lord with His severe sword, great and strong, will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan that twisted serpent; and He will slay the reptile that is in the sea. (Isa. 27:1)

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD! Awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. *Are You not the arm that cut Rahab apart, and wounded the serpent?* (Isa. 51:9)

bound him

Bound is [δῆσεν](#) [edēsen]: used of actual binding and imprisonment, as they attempted to bind the demoniac of the Gadarenes with chains (Mark 5:3). Used of John the Baptist who was *bound* in prison by Herod (Mark 6:17), it can also be used in a metaphorical sense, as when describing the deformed woman bound by Satan (Luke 13:16). Paul said that he went to Jerusalem, “bound in the spirit” (Acts 20:22). This generic angel, not said to be mighty or strong, is able to bind Satan with no mention of a protracted struggle. This is an indication of the great authority which the angel has which attends his divine mission. Although he is also a creature, a mere angel like Satan, he is empowered by the Creator and is able to bind any creature with ease—even Satan himself. This is the *de facto* (actual) fulfillment of what was accomplished *de jure* (legally) at the cross. In the bruising of Christ’s heel, the serpent had ultimately laid the groundwork for the bruising of his head: “And I will put enmity Between you [the serpent] and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed [Christ]; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel” (Gen. 3:15). Here is the foundational question regarding the binding of Satan? *Is he truly bound or isn’t he?* The text will make plain that his binding is complete because it is followed by his being casting into the bottomless pit which is then sealed. Those who assert that Satan is *bound even now* are faced with a dilemma because it is obvious both from Scripture and real experience that if Satan is bound today, then “his chain is too long!” Hence, [amillennialists](#) demonstrate great zeal (and considerable confusion) in their attempt to explain this “binding” such that it is not really a binding:

B. B. Warfield, whose eschatology seems to embrace some of the elements of both amillennialism and postmillennialism, attempts to support the idea that Satan is bound in respect to heaven. He writes: “The ‘binding of Satan’ is therefore in reality not for a season but with reference to a sphere; and his ‘loosing’ again is not after a period but in another sphere: it is not subsequence but exteriority that is suggested. There is, indeed, no literal ‘binding of Satan’ to be thought of at all: what happens, happens not to Satan but to the saints, and is only represented as happening to Satan for the purposes of the symbolical picture. What actually happens is that the saints described are removed from the sphere of Satan’s assaults. The saints described are free from all access of Satan—he is bound with respect to them: outside of their charmed circle his horrid work goes on.”⁹

The basic problem with interpretations which assert that the kingdom described in this passage is actually upon us now, having begun at the cross, is that they are unable to understand or unwilling to recognize the delay between spiritual accomplishments and their outworking in the physical realm. On the way to Jerusalem prior to presenting Himself as king, just a few days from His crucifixion, Jesus stopped to teach a [parable](#) “because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately” (Luke 19:11). The parable concerned a nobleman who “went to a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return” (Luke 19:12). He instructs his servants to attend to his affairs in his absence. His *kingdom is not received until the time of his return*. “And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants” (Luke 19:15). This parable, we might observe, was specifically intended to do away with the delusion that God’s kingdom on earth is fulfilled in the Church today. Christ accomplished everything necessary for the establishment of the kingdom at the cross, but the time was not right for its commencement—there was to be an intervening age: “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:7b). The amillennialist, in his headlong zeal to make God’s kingdom on earth be *now*, ignores the many interpretive indicators otherwise. We agree with the amillennialist at one point: *if* the kingdom of God on earth is now *then* Satan must be bound even today. But the premise itself is flawed. Amillennialism must deny reality to cling to this error:

That something drastic happened to Satan with the first advent of Christ is seen also by the words of John 12:31, “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” . . . In spite of the above passages there are people who will not believe that Satan is bound or that he has been cast out of his sphere of influence. They simply will not believe the words of Christ. “If Satan were bound and cast out,” they argue, “why is there so much evil in the world? If we believe that Satan is bound we must deny our senses.” It is better to believe Christ than it is to believe our senses.¹⁰

Kik confuses lack of faith with unsound interpretation. It is not our *disbelief* which tells us that Satan is not bound, it is our proper reading of God’s word *which confirms our real experience*. A sound interpretation of the text is in complete alignment with our experience: Satan cannot now be bound. The type of “faith” which Kik espouses is a blight on the people of God. It is founded on a flawed interpretation of God’s word and tries to fly at all costs, even denying reality, to the detriment of the believer. In this, it is like the faith of Christian Science which attributes the reality of sickness to an illusion of the mind. Typical are amillennial explanations of the binding which is no binding at all:

There has been a binding of Satan. It is such a binding that he cannot touch a Christian. . . . We read in Revelation Twenty that Satan is also bound as far as deceiving the nations is concerned. Where previously he had completely deceived the Gentile nations now [after the cross] he could no longer do so. **This does not mean that no one within a nation could not be deceived. There might be many within a Gentile nation that would be deceived by the cunning of Satan. Even though Satan is bound** as far as the individual Christian is concerned, yet **a Christian may, for a period of time or concerning a certain doctrine, be deceived** So also in regard to the nation. It simply means that Satan would no longer be in complete control of the nations as he was before

the coming of Christ. [emphasis added]¹¹

We can agree with Kik at one point: Christians can indeed be deceived concerning doctrine: amillennialists are deceived concerning the doctrine of the binding of Satan! Even a cursory examination of Scriptural passages written *after the cross and the resurrection* indicate that Satan is not presently bound:

- Satan filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit resulting in the death of he and his wife (Acts 5:3).
- Paul said that Satan is blinding the eyes of nonbelievers in this current age so that they should not receive the gospel (2Cor. 4:3-4).
- Paul told the Corinthians that Satan transforms himself (deceptively) into an angel of light (2Cor. 11:14).
- Paul was given a thorn in the flesh, “a messenger of Satan” to keep him humble (2Cor. 12:7).
- Paul told the Ephesians that the prince of the power of the air “now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2).
- Paul told the Ephesians not to give place to the devil (Eph. 4:27) and that they wrestled against “spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*” (Eph. 6:12).
- Paul was hindered by Satan from visiting the Thessalonian church (1Th. 2:18).
- The coming of the lawless one, the [Antichrist](#), will be “according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs and lying wonders” (2Th. 2:9). This is fulfilled, in part, by the activities of the [False Prophet](#) documented in the book of Revelation.
- Paul delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan so that they might learn not to blaspheme (1Ti. 1:20).
- James warns believers to submit to God and resist the devil (Jas. 4:7).
- Peter warns believers to be sober and vigilant because “your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1Pe. 5:8).
- John tells us that “the whole world lies *under the sway of the wicked one*” (1Jn. 5:19).
- Satan is a source of deception throughout the events of the book of Revelation (Rev. 12:9_±; 13:14_±; 18:23_±; 19:20_±; 20:8_±, 10_±).

Here is a foundational danger of amillennialism: in their appropriation of “kingdom now” theology, they *deny reality*. But an important part of reality is the factual, historical resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amillennialists need to ask why a skeptical world should believe their witness concerning the historical fact of the crucifixion of Jesus for sin when they hold a theology which essentially denies reality?

This strange theory, the origin of which is traced to the Romish notion that the church is the kingdom, contends that whatever millennium there may be is being experienced in the present age. Its advocates interpret the book of Revelation as a description, or varied, descriptions, of this church age. . . . In their unenviable attempt to fit all the events anticipated in the Revelation into the history of this age, the amillennialists indulge in a form of speculation almost unsurpassed. Their abandonment of reason and sound interpretation has but one objective in mind, namely, to place [χιλίοι](#) [chilioi] (“thousand”) years—six times repeated in Revelation, chapter 20—back into the past and therefore something no longer to be anticipated in the future. **The violence which this interpretation imposes upon the whole prophetic revelation is such that none would propose it except those who, for lack of attention, seem not to realize what they do. . . . In sheer fantastical imagination this method surpasses Russellism, Eddyism, and Seventh Day Adventism, since the plain, grammatical meaning of language is abandoned, and simple terms are diverted in their course and end in anything the interpreter wishes.** [emphasis added]¹²

How much better to take both Scripture and our real experience at face value—especially when they speak in concert that Satan is not bound at the present hour. The binding of Satan at the beginning of the [Millennial Kingdom](#) is part of the seventh bowl judgment which was poured out upon the *air*, the domain of the “prince of the power of the air” (Rev. 16:17_± cf. Eph. 2:2). See commentary on [Revelation 16:17](#). The same bowl judgment also brought about the incarceration of his demonic hoards. See commentary on [Revelation 18:2](#).

thousand years

Thousand is [χιλία](#) [chilia], from which [chiliasm](#) is derived: the belief in a literal one thousand year reign of Christ on the earth.¹³ As with all progressive revelation, this passage provides information which was not before revealed—the duration of the [Millennial Kingdom](#). Although critics are fond of observing that little more is revealed concerning the kingdom in this passage, the characteristics of the kingdom are set forth at length elsewhere in God’s word—especially in the [OT](#)—so God has no need to repeat Himself here. Even though the duration of one thousand years is listed no less than six times in this passage, few are those who take it at face value. See [The Abuse of Numbers](#). Once we deny that one thousand years means one thousand years, there is no end to the suggestions which can be offered as to what period is really in view:

The term *thousand years* in Revelation Twenty is a figurative expression used to describe the period of the Messianic Kingdom upon earth. It is that period from the first Advent of Christ until His Second Coming. It is the total or complete period of Christ’s Kingdom

upon earth. . . If the binding of Satan began with the first coming of Christ then it follows that the *thousand years* began with His first coming. . . . Now the natural objection to this view is that the period from the first coming of our Lord to the present time can hardly be described as a Millennium. For one thing wars have not ceased and wickedness is still very much prevalent. As someone has stated: "if Satan is bound he must have a long tether." **All appearances seem to be against the view that we are in the millennium now.** The trouble is that we have altogether a too materialistic concept of the millennial blessings. [emphasis added]¹⁴

Again we meet with amillennialism's characteristic denial of reality. We are actually in the Millennium now: our error is that we just don't happen to realize it! This detachment from reality can reach ridiculous extremes: "[Mild preterist] Gentry actually believes we are in some way in the new heavens and the new earth of Revelation 21⁺-22⁺. If this is true, then we all must be living in the ghetto side of the New Jerusalem. But there is no ghetto in the New Jerusalem."¹⁵ In this rush to assert that every work of God has already come to pass, amillennialists *devalue* the promises of God. If *this* is the sum total of God's kingdom on earth, then what's there to get excited about? If most of the people living on earth *in the kingdom* have no idea they are even in such a kingdom—much less know and acknowledge the king—how can it be a kingdom in any real sense? In this, amillennialism has more in common with bizarre cults which specialize in "spiritual realities" and brainwash their adherents to ignore objective reality. This is unhealthy and unscriptural. Our God is a God of *reality* who does not ask us to deny the obvious:

Is the binding of Satan . . . so ineffective that murderers of saints, that dangerous enemies, still exist? What, then, becomes of God's promises, if persecution, sore trial, threatened death and violent death itself is the characteristic of the Millennium?¹⁶

Revelation 20:3

he cast him into the bottomless pit

Having unlocked the abyss, the angel casts Satan into it. The picture is of all authority being with the angel and Satan as his helpless prisoner. See commentary on [Revelation 20:1](#).

shut him up, and set a seal on him

Shut him up is [κλεισε α τον](#) [ekleise auton]: *he locked him*. Only the [TR](#) text has *him* ([α τον](#) [auton]). *Set a seal on him* is [σφραγισεν πονω α το](#) [esphragisen epanō autou]: he sealed over or upon him, which can also denote having authority over the dragon.¹⁷ In the [MT](#) and [NU](#) texts, it is the *abyss* which is shut and sealed, not the dragon himself. In any case, the intended result is the same. Satan now has three strikes against him, he is: (1) bound, (2) shut up, (3) sealed in his prison. The word for sealed, [σφραγισεν](#) [esphragisen], is the same word which describes sealing elsewhere in the book of Revelation (Rev. 7:3-8⁺; 10:4⁺; 20:3⁺; 22:10⁺). Examples of *sealing* elsewhere in Scripture indicate its complete effectiveness:

- Nebuchadnezzar sealed Daniel in the lion's den (Dan. 6:17).
- Daniel was told to seal the book of Daniel until the time of the end (Dan. 12:4).
- Pilate commanded that Jesus' tomb be sealed (Mat. 27:66).
- Believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit (John 14:16; 2Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30).
- Jesus' testimony was sealed (John 3:33).
- Jesus was sealed by the Father (John 6:27).
- The 144,000 witnesses from the twelve tribes were *sealed* on their foreheads (Rev. 7:3-8⁺).
- The things which the seven thunders uttered were *sealed up* so they would not be recorded by John (Rev. 10:4⁺).
- The contents of the book of Revelation are not to be *sealed* (Rev. 20:3⁺; 22:10⁺).

The angel's treatment of Satan corresponds to Isaiah's prediction that disobedient angels would be punished and imprisoned:

The earth is violently broken, the earth is split open, the earth is shaken exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut; its transgression shall be heavy upon it, and it will fall, and not rise again. It shall come to pass in that day **That the LORD will punish on high the host of exalted ones**, and on the earth the kings of the earth. **They will be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and will be shut up in the prison; after many days they will be punished.** (Isa. 24:19-22) [emphasis added]

First, they are imprisoned, and after *many days* they receive their final punishment. This corresponds to the age of the Millennial Kingdom during which Satan and his angels are locked away. After his release and final rebellion (Rev. 20:7-10⁺), he will meet his final punishment.

so that he should deceive the nations no more

The first human target of his deception was Eve in the garden (1Ti. 2:14). Since then, he has deceived nations throughout history,

but never more so than his final attempt at victory during the Great Tribulation (Rev. 12:12+). He restored [the Beast](#) from death so that all the world would worship him (Rev. 13:3+). He spoke by the mouth of the False Prophet (Rev. 13:11+) and empowered him to deceive the [earth dwellers](#) to their doom by taking the mark of the [Beast](#) (Rev. 13:14+, 16+; 14:9-11+). He carried the [Harlot](#) as she rode throughout history upon his [seven heads](#) (Rev. 17:3+ cf. Rev. 12:3+) and made the inhabitants drunk with her fornicating wine (Rev. 17:2+) and sorcery (Rev. 18:23+). He controlled the three unclean spirits which were sent out to gather the kings to the [Campaign of Armageddon](#) (Rev. 16:13-14+) which led them to the slaughter (Rev. 19:21+). His deceptive activities, which affect both believers and unbelievers, are a fact of the Church age:

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (2Cor. 11:3).

For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. (2Cor. 11:13-15)

A plain reading of the passage indicates that Satan is *unable* to deceive while he is locked away. As soon as he is released, he immediately goes out *to deceive* the nations (Rev. 20:8+, 10+), which he had been completely unable to do while in the abyss. "If this language does not mean that the immobilization of Satan is complete, so far as his deception of the nations (Grk. *ethne*) is concerned, then there is no way to express the idea."¹⁸ This is his pattern: misrepresentation of truth through deception so those who respond to his promises *always* wind up with unforeseen liabilities which attend participation in his schemes. His two greatest tools are *temptation* and *compromise*. See commentary on [Revelation 13:14](#).

till the thousand years were finished

What an amazing time of blessing this will be! Satan and his demonic realm will be rendered *completely inoperative* during the coming earthly kingdom of God. But this great blessing also has a flip side: in the removal of the great tempter is the removal of a convenient excuse by which men hide their own rebellious nature. And this, it would seem, is part of God's plan in locking Satan away for the duration of the [Millennial Kingdom](#)—to show man his utter incapability of obedience to God, even in the midst of ideal conditions and in the absence of the influence of the serpent of old.

But after these things he must be released for a little while.

After the thousand years have expired, he is released to deceive the nations one final time. Here we see the sovereignty of God Who uses *all things* to achieve His ultimate ends. Satan is no less a tool of God in his rebellion than in his obedience. Although God is not the author of sin, His sovereignty over the affairs of history is not the least threatened by the disobedience of His creatures. See commentary on [Revelation 20:7](#).

Revelation 20:4

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them

Previously, it was the twenty-four elders who were seen sitting on thrones (Rev. 4:4+). Here, the throne-sitters are resurrected *men* which supports our conclusion that the twenty-four elders are not angels, but resurrected men who also sit on thrones. See commentary on [Revelation 4:4](#).

Now the only "Company of Believers" that we see sitting on Thrones are the "Four and Twenty Elders" of Revelation 4:4-5+. These as we have seen stand for the Church, and were resurrected or caught out before "The Tribulation," and are the "Harvest" of which Christ and those who rose at the time of His Resurrection were the "First Fruits."¹⁹

"Surely the sitters on these thrones are those to whom this implied judicio-regal authority is everywhere promised."²⁰ They are the overcomers who obtained the promises Jesus gave to the church at Thyatira and Laodicea: "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—*He shall rule them with a rod of iron: they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels*" (Rev. 2:26-27+), "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. 3:21+). See commentary on [Revelation 2:26](#) and [Revelation 3:21](#). See [Millennial Reign of the Saints](#).

Here we begin to see what God has gained out of the whole trail of earth history. Man, made a little lower than the angels, is raised through the redemptive death of the Lord who also was willing to be made lower than the angels (Heb. 2:7, 9), to a higher position. In salvation we are not lifted back to the level from which Adam fell, but higher. We are not lifted to the level of the angels, but higher. We are lifted above all the principalities and powers to the very throne of Heaven.²¹

and judgment was given to them

These both reign and judge during the Millennial Kingdom. See [Judgment by the Saints](#). These seated on thrones are from two major resurrection events, both of which are part of the category known as the *first resurrection*:

1. **OT Saints** - Those who came to faith and died prior to the baptizing work of the Spirit which began on the Day of Pentecost. These are the OT saints, many of whom are Jews, and who were resurrected after [Jacob's Trouble and the Great Tribulation](#) (Dan. 12:2; Isa. 26:19).²²
2. **Church Saints** - Those who came to faith and lived beyond the Day of Pentecost to be baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ, the Church. These were resurrected or translated at the [Rapture](#) of the Church (John 14:3; 1Cor. 15:51; 1Th. 4:13-18). See [Rapture](#).

See [Order of Resurrection](#).

Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded

Souls is [ψυχῆς](#) [psychas]. "These souls, once disembodied (Rev. 6:9⁺), but here clearly resurrected, for they live and reign with Christ a thousand years. Thus, this is the figure of speech Metonymy of the Cause, whereby 'soul' is put for the person. . . . The use of 'soul' here provides no basis for asserting a spiritual, as opposed to a literal, reign or resurrection."²³ It is also possible that John first describes them as souls because as he watches in the vision they come to life (are joined with their resurrected bodies). *Who had been beheaded* is [πεπελεκισμένων](#) [pepelekismenōn], perfect tense: *the ones having been beheaded with an axe*.²⁴ They were martyred and are now identified as having been faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10⁺). At the opening of the fifth seal, John saw those who had been slain "for the word of God and for the testimony which they held" (Rev. 6:9⁺). Elsewhere, John was shown a great multitude who came out of the Great Tribulation, most of whom were probably martyrs (Rev. 7:13-14⁺).

The guillotine in revolutionary France was a revival of the mode of capital punishment of pagan imperial Rome. Paul was *beheaded* [as was John the Baptist, Mat. 14:8; Mark 6:24-15], and no doubt shall share *the first resurrection*, in accordance with his prayer that he "might attain unto the resurrection from out of the rest of the dead" (Greek, "exanastasis"). The above facts may account for the specification of this particular kind of punishment.²⁵

for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God

Witness to Jesus is [μαρτυρίαν ἡσο](#) [martyrian lēsou], elsewhere translated *the testimony of Jesus* (Rev. 1:2⁺, 9⁺; 12:17⁺; 19:10⁺). John "bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ" which included all the things he saw in his vision and are recorded in this book (Rev. 1:2⁺). See commentary on [Revelation 1:2](#) and [Revelation 19:10](#).

who had not worshiped the beast or his image

Who had not worshiped is [καὶ οὐκ ἐκείνησαν](#) [kai hoitines ou prosekynēsan]: *and all the ones who not worshiped*. The [Beast](#) arose from the sea, having recovered from a deadly wound to the acclaim and worship of the world (Rev. 13:4⁺). The [earth dwellers](#), under the urging of the False Prophet, constructed an [image of the Beast](#) which was worshiped under penalty of death (Rev. 13:14-16⁺). These, having faith and being protected from deception by the power of the Holy Spirit, had not been swayed by the great deception of their age. They had rejected worship of both the Beast and His image. As a result, they suffered martyrdom. In their *physical* death, having held true to their testimony (Rev. 12:11⁺), they had escaped eternal torment (Rev. 14:9-11⁺) which is the second death (Rev. 2:11⁺; 20:6⁺). Prior to the bowl judgments, John saw those from among them who had already died, who had "victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and* over the number of his name" singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb (Rev. 15:2-4⁺). The grammar of the Greek provides the possibility that a *third* group is described beyond those sitting on thrones and those who had been beheaded.²⁶

John describes three groups of resurrected believers (they "came to life") in Rev. 20:4⁺. First, the thrones represent believers of the pre-tribulation era (as the twenty-four elders sat on their thrones before the tribulation began—Rev. 4:4⁺); second, the souls of those who will be martyred in the first half of the tribulation; and third, those who will refuse to worship the Beast in the second half of the tribulation.²⁷

The three groups are not mutually exclusive, for the second two are probably a subset from among the first:

That martyrs and the faithful ones under the Beast are not different parties from the sitters on the thrones, but special classes specifically included. A somewhat parallel presentation occurs in Revelation 1:7⁺, where it is said of the Saviour at his great Epiphany, that "every eye shall see him, and they which pierced him." The meaning is not that "they which pierced him" for a separate class apart from "every eye," but that even those who slew Christ shall be among those denoted by "every eye," and that

they too shall look upon him.²⁸

In any case, these cannot include the living saints who survive the Tribulation until the Second Coming of Christ and enter the [Millennial Kingdom](#) in their natural bodies, because *these* have previously died and are resurrected.

and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands

Their hands is [τῆν χεῖρα αὐτῶν](#) [tēn cheira autōn]: *the hand [singular] of them*. Hands is plural in the same sense as foreheads, *many people with one [right] hand* each that could have received the mark.²⁹ Their refusal of the mark of the Beast meant they could neither buy nor sell (Rev. 13:17⁺). Their only means of survival was by supernatural assistance, living off the land, or through the black market. Thus, they demonstrated their faith *by their works* and lived under extreme duress in order to remain true to their faith in God.

they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years

They lived is [ζῆσαν](#) [ezēsan], used of “dead persons who return to life, *become alive again*.”³⁰ It is an ingressive aorist: *they came to life and began to live*.³¹ The same word is used by Christ to describe His own resurrection: “These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and *came to life* ([ζῆσεν](#) [ezēsen])” (Rev. 2:8⁺). It describes the revival of the Beast from *physical* death: “And he [the [False Prophet](#)] deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and *lived* ([ζῆσεν](#) [ezēsen])” (Rev. 13:14⁺). The reason they come to life is because Christ overcame death (Rev. 1:18⁺; 2:8⁺). “For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will” (John 5:21). “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also” (John 14:19). “*This is a faithful saying*: For if we died with *Him*, We shall also live with *Him*” (2Ti. 2:11). Through identification by faith in Jesus Christ, they obtained resurrection to life. In one of the most significant scenes in the gospels, Jesus makes a dramatic claim:

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “**I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.**” (John 11:23-25) [emphasis added]

Their persecutors, the Beast worshipers, had saved their own physical lives for a time, but ultimately lost eternal life: “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it” (Mat. 10:39). This is a resurrection to receive a glorified body never to die again. It differs from those who were raised from the dead, but then died again (1K. 17:22; Luke 7:15; 8:54; John 11:43-44):

Jesus answered and said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.” (Luke 20:34-36)

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. (1Cor. 15:50-53)

Those who claim we are already in the time which John describes must find a different way of understanding this verse because the physical resurrection of the believing dead has obviously not yet transpired. The most frequent way to explain away the future force of the passage and move it into the past is to explain this resurrection as being a *spiritual regeneration* by which people come to faith—having previously been *spiritually dead*.

From at least the time of Augustine, the first resurrection was understood as a regeneration of the soul and the second resurrection as the general physical, bodily resurrection of the just and unjust (*City of God* 20.9-10). It must, however, be insisted that it is quite weak exegesis to make the first resurrection spiritual and the second one physical, unless the text itself clearly indicates this change, which it does not.³²

But this cannot be a spiritual resurrection because these are said to have *previously died because of their faith!* The very faith which the [amillennialist](#) now claims is attained at their “resurrection”:

It seems absurd to press this passage into a spiritual or moral conversion in the face of the beheading which was *endured for* the Word, since it is virtually affirming that the sinner, *previous* to his conversion, suffers death because of his witnessing for Jesus; that the unregenerated man endures a beheading for his unswerving devotion to the truth; and then, after such an exhibition of love, he is resurrected, i.e., converted, etc. . . . The persons who have part in this resurrection are such as were converted to the truth *before*

this death.³³

This is the future *physical resurrection* of the just which the early Church Father [Irenaeus](#) described:

“For, behold,” says Isaiah, “the day of the Lord cometh past remedy, full of fury and wrath, to lay waste the city of the earth, and to root sinners out of it.” And again he says, “Let him be taken away, that he behold not the glory of God.” And when these things are done, he says, “God will remove men far away, and those that are left shall multiply in the earth. And they shall build houses, and shall inhabit them themselves: and plant vineyards, and eat of them themselves.” For all these and other words were unquestionably spoken in reference to the resurrection of the just, which takes place after the coming of Antichrist, and the destruction of all nations under his rule; in [the times of] which [resurrection] the righteous shall reign in the earth, waxing stronger by the sight of the Lord: and through Him they shall become accustomed to partake in the glory of God the Father, and shall enjoy in the kingdom intercourse and communion with the holy angels, and union with spiritual beings; and [with respect to] those whom the Lord shall find in the flesh, awaiting Him from heaven, and who have suffered tribulation, as well as escaped the hands of the Wicked one.³⁴

Their coming to life and reigning with Christ is a future event which is the fulfillment of the prayers of the saints throughout history that God would bring His kingdom to earth (Mat. 6:10). See [The Arrival of God's Kingdom](#). This is the beginning of the literal kingdom on earth which smashes all other earthly kingdoms and fills the globe. See [Nebuchadnezzar's Dream and Daniel's Vision](#). See [Millennial Kingdom](#). Both Jesus and the saints rule in the kingdom. See [Millennial Reign of Messiah](#). See [Millennial Reign of the Saints](#). At the sounding of the seventh trumpet, it was announced that “He shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15+). The reign of Christ and the saints eventually extends beyond the thousand years and on into the eternal state (Rev. 22:5+).

Revelation 20:5

But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.

Live again is [ανεζησαν](#) [anezēsān]: used “of the dead *become alive again, rise again, return to life*.”³⁵ The [MT](#) and [NU](#) texts have [ζησαν](#) [ezēsān], the same term described the resurrection of the Tribulation martyrs in the previous verse. “Since all of the righteous are raised during the first resurrection, these designated as ‘the rest of the dead’ must refer to the unrighteous, who are not raised until after the first thousand years of the reign of Christ have transpired.”³⁶ Those [amillennialists](#) who are consistent in their exegesis are forced to take this resurrection as a spiritual resurrection, as they do the first resurrection. This places them in a bind because it is clear that these are the unsaved dead who are *never* spiritually regenerated. Kik illustrates the interpretive gymnastics which result when attempting to overcome the consistent literal meaning of the text:

It might seem that these dead would remain so only during the thousand-year period. They lived not *until the thousand years were finished*. One might think that when the thousand-year period ended that these dead would live. But the conjunction *until* is used in the sense “to the time that.” The rest of mankind remained in spiritual deadness to the time that the thousand years ended. . . . Their souls remained dead.³⁷

Kik tortures the word “until” until it finally cries out “never!” But *until* cannot mean *never* in this context because we see the rest of the dead resurrected a few verses from now! If the first resurrection is *spiritual*, then so must be the second. But if the second resurrection is taken as being spiritual, the amillennialist has a problem—after the thousand years the unsaved dead are resurrected: regenerated! Thus, he must make “until” mean “never.” It is difficult to imagine a clearer example of bringing a faulty concept to the text and twisting the interpretation until it yields the desired results. Here we see the most significant danger of amillennialism which is not its denial of the Millennial Kingdom, as serious as that might be, but its proclivity to distort God’s word. This resurrection is not that of the Church, previously taken up in the [Rapture](#):

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1Th. 4:15-17)

Nor is it the resurrection of the two witnesses which occurred at the rise of the [Beast](#) from the abyss at the mid-point of the Tribulation:

Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. (Rev. 11:11+)

This is the first of two resurrections *subsequent to Christ's Second Coming*, one prior to the [Millennial Kingdom](#) and the other afterward. The text describes *two resurrections* separated by a period of one thousand years.³⁸ This fact is compatible with the many other resurrection passages which indicate this very thing. As early as the book of Daniel we see an indication of two

categories of resurrection: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). The Hebrew in this passage is difficult. The passage makes a distinction between *many* versus *all* and between two resulting categories: *everlasting life* and *everlasting contempt*.

Tregelles translates Daniel 12:2 as follows: “And many from among the sleepers of the dust of the earth shall awake; these shall be unto everlasting life; but those [the rest of the sleepers, those who do not awake at this time] shall be unto shame and everlasting contempt.” [S. P. Tregelles, *Remarks on the Prophetic Visions in the Book of Daniel*, p. 159; words in brackets supplied by Tregelles].³⁹

The true rendering of Dan. 12:1-3, in connection with the context, is “And (at that time) *Many* (of thy people) shall awake (or be separated) *out from among* the sleepers in the earth-dust. *These* (who awake) shall be unto life everlasting, but *those* (who do not awake at that time) shall be unto shame and contempt everlasting.” So, the most renowned Hebrew Doctors render it, and the best Christian exegetes.⁴⁰

Numerous passages in the [NT](#) indicate different categories of resurrection:

And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid **at the resurrection of the just** (Luke 14:14) [emphasis added]

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

Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain **a better resurrection**. (Heb. 11:35) [emphasis added]

Paul taught that all men will be raised from the dead:

But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of *the* dead, **both of the just and the unjust**. (Acts 24:14-15) [emphasis added]

Although Paul appears to describe a single resurrection, elsewhere his teaching betrays otherwise: “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Php. 3:10-11). If Paul taught that all men were to be raised (Acts 24:14-15), how could he say he hoped to attain *the resurrection* from the dead? Here he speaks of a *specific resurrection*, the resurrection of the just—a separate resurrection from that of the unjust and the subject before us in this verse.

This *is* the first resurrection.

First is [πρώτη](#) [prōtē] which can be used “of time: *first, earliest*”⁴¹ or it can describe relative priority: “foremost, chief, most important of all.”⁴² The various individual resurrections which make up the category of the first resurrection all precede the second resurrection in time. It is also the chief or foremost resurrection, the “better resurrection” (Heb. 11:35) because participation in the first resurrection indicates a person is saved and participates in the blessings of God’s kingdom on earth.

This resurrection is, therefore, the *chief, principal, pre-eminent one, because it pertains to that of the first-born*, constitutes the persons embraced in and experiencing its power *the first born* that belong exclusively—in a particular sense typified by the Jewish first-born—to *God Himself*. Hence not time but distinction is denoted.⁴³

The expression “first resurrection” has constituted an exegetical problem for all interpreters. Posttribulationists cite this reference as evidence that the rapture could not occur until after the tribulation. Pretribulationists have rightly held that **the first resurrection is not an event, but an order of resurrection**. It is evident that our Lord rose from the dead as the first one to receive a resurrection body—others previously raised from the dead had merely been restored to their former natural bodies. His resurrection, though widely separated from resurrections which follow, is included in the first resurrection, otherwise the event described in Revelation would not be “first.” According to 1 Corinthians 15:20, Christ is “the firstfruits of them that are asleep,” i.e., the first part of the resurrection of all saints. Likewise, the evidence that the translation of the church takes place before the tribulation would point to a large segment of the righteous dead being raised before the tribulation. These also would qualify as taking part in the first resurrection. In contrast to the first resurrection of Revelation 20⁺ is the resurrection of the wicked dead portrayed in the latter part of the chapter. The first resurrection therefore becomes the resurrection of all the righteous in contrast to the final resurrection which is the resurrection of the wicked. [emphasis added]⁴⁴

The first resurrection must not be spiritualized into the new birth experienced in this life by every believer, for such is not called a resurrection in Scripture. Many interpreters have been confused by failing to understand the meaning of “first.” “First” is here a term of priority, and the first resurrection includes all the several resurrections of the righteous dead which have occurred.⁴⁵

Dean Alford (“New Testament for English Readers,” *Com. loci*) remarks: “I cannot consent to distort the words from their plain sense and chronological place in the prophecy, on account of any considerations of difficulty, or of any risk of abuses which the doctrine of the Millennium may bring with it. Those who lived next to the Apostles, and the whole Church for three hundred years, understood them in the plain literal sense; and it is a strange sight in these days to see expositors who are among the first in reverence for antiquity, complacently casting aside *the most cogent instance of consensus* which primitive antiquity presents. As regards the text itself, *no legitimate treatment* of it will extort what is known as the spiritual interpretation now in fashion. If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned, where certain persons lived at the first, and the rest of the dead only at the end of a specified period *after* the first—if, in such a passage, the first resurrection may be understood to mean *spiritual* rising with Christ, while the second means *literal* rising from the grave; *then* there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as *a definite testimony* to anything. If the first resurrection is spiritual, then so is the second, which I suppose none will be hardy enough to maintain; but if the second is literal, so is the first, which, in common with the whole Primitive Church and many of the best modern expositors, I do maintain, and receive as an article of faith and hope.”⁴⁶

3.20.5.1 - Order of Resurrection

The use of *first* to describe a resurrection which follows *after* Christ’s resurrection, gives us an initial clue that *first* cannot denote absolute chronological order—as that of a single event which occurs before all others. By this time, Christ has been resurrected for almost two thousand years, yet Scripture calls this *subsequent* event “the first resurrection.” It is *first* from the perspective of its *priority*: those who participate in the resurrection of life rather than the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:28-29). It is also first relative to the [Millennial Kingdom](#) since the subsequent resurrection will not be until one thousand years later. Christ was the first man to rise in the category which is the first resurrection:

But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. **But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.** (1Cor. 15:20-23) [emphasis added]

In this passage, Paul describes two, or possibly three resurrection events: (1) Christ, (2) the Church at His coming in the [Rapture](#), and possibly, (3) all other believers at His physical Second Coming in judgment. An examination of Scripture reveals a number of individual resurrection events separated in time, all of which fall into one of two categories: the resurrection of life (the first resurrection) and the resurrection of condemnation (the second resurrection).⁴⁷ The first resurrection consists of several sequential resurrection events which are treated as a single category—the raising of all who are redeemed:

A man on Thanksgiving day may say, with great satisfaction, “All of the harvest is gathered in.” That harvest may have included a few handfuls gathered on the first day, then after a long interruption due to a rainstorm, for example, the major part of the harvest may have been gathered, and then, after another momentary interruption, the final sheaves are garnered.⁴⁸

These references [Luke 14:1-14; Php. 3:10-14; John 5:28-29; Rev. 20:6+] show that there is a part of the resurrection program that is called “the resurrection of the just,” the “out-resurrection from the dead,” “a better resurrection,” “the resurrection of life,” and “the first resurrection.” These phrases suggest a separation; a resurrection of a portion of those who are dead, which resurrection leaves some dead unchanged while these resurrected undergo a complete transformation.⁴⁹

There are several different resurrection “events” which transpire in history, each of which falls into one of two categories. All but the last resurrection event make up the *first resurrection*.⁵⁰

The Resurrections⁵¹

Order	Which	Timing	Who	Description	Scriptures
1	First	The Third Day	Jesus Christ	The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”	Mat. 28:1-7; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18; 1Cor. 15:20

2	First	Shortly after Christ's Resurrection.	A Few OT Saints	At the earthquake attending the crucifixion, graves were opened. Shortly after the resurrection of Christ, these saints were raised. 52	Mat. 27:50-53
3	First	Before the Tribulation.	Church	The resurrection of Church-age believers at the Rapture .	John 14:3; 1Th. 4:13-18; 1Cor. 15:50-53
4	First	Middle of the Tribulation. 53	Two Witnesses	God's two witnesses will be raised after being killed by The Beast .	Rev. 11:11-12+
5	First	After Jacob's Trouble	OT Saints	Old Testament saints will be resurrected to enter the Millennial Kingdom. 54	Dan. 12:1-2; Isa. 26:19; Eze. 37:13-14 55
6	First	Beginning of Millennial Kingdom .	Tribulation Martyrs	The Tribulation martyrs will be resurrected so that they can rule and reign with Christ.	Rev. 20:4-6+
7	Second	End of Millennial Kingdom	Unbelieving Dead 56	At the end of the millennial reign of Christ, the final resurrection will consist of all of the unbelieving, wicked dead. They will be found guilty at the Great White Throne Judgment and cast into the Lake of Fire.	Rev. 20:11-15+

Although Scripture makes no mention of it, some believe there may be a resurrection of saints from among those who entered the Millennial Kingdom in their natural bodies and their offspring (Mat. 25:34). If the righteous die at an advanced age (Isa. 65:20), then their resurrection is not recorded in Scripture:

The question has been raised concerning the judgment of those who die in the millennium. It is clear that the unsaved who die in the millennium are included in [the Great White Throne] judgment. The Scriptures are silent, however, concerning any rapture or translation of saints who survive the millennium and concerning the resurrection of saints who may die in the millennium. Both events may be safely assumed, but are not the subject of divine revelation, probably on the principle that this truth is of no practical application to saints now living. Further light may be cast upon this in the millennium itself as the truth of God is made known.[57](#)

Others suggest that only unbelievers die during the Millennial Kingdom resulting in no believing dead to be resurrected:

The resurrection of the Tribulation saints completes the first resurrection. There will be no such thing as a resurrection of millennial saints.[58](#)

According to Fruchtenbaum, in the Millennial Kingdom, believers never die but sinners die at age 100. This could account for the lack of mention of a post-millennium resurrection of the righteous dead.

Death in the millennium will be for unbelievers only. This is why the Bible does not speak of a resurrection of millennial saints, and why the resurrection of the tribulation saints is said to complete the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-6+).[59](#)

A key passage which describes longevity in the Millennial Kingdom is found in Isaiah:

No more shall an infant from there *live but a few days*, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner *being* one hundred years old shall be accursed. (Isa. 65:20)

This passage does not unambiguously teach that only unbelievers die in the Millennium. It merely describes the great longevity which will be the blessing of those who are still in their natural bodies during this period. For example, what could it mean for *an old man* to *fulfill his days* if all sinners die at a relatively early age and the faithful never die? Furthermore, there is no indication whatsoever that death has been abolished until after the Millennium (Rev. 21:4+). The argument that only unbelievers die during the Millennium is an argument from silence—the silence of an explicit mention of a post-millennial resurrection of the righteous dead. Although it is possible, arguments from silence are generally to be avoided. Others suggest that the second resurrection includes believers who die during the [Millennial Kingdom](#) and who stand in judgment with the unbelieving dead at the Great White Throne Judgment.[60](#) This view has its own complications:

1. Scripture consistently recognizes two categories of resurrection in such a way as to infer that believers are not to be found in both.
2. The names given to the second resurrection, the resurrection “unto shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2) and “the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28-29), seem to exclude the possibility of the inclusion of believers.
3. Believers do not face the possibility of standing in a judgment which decides their eternal destiny: (John 5:24).
4. The passage (below) which describes the second resurrection and subsequent judgment makes no mention of the presence of any faithful. Although the [Book of Life](#) is mentioned, nothing is said of the destiny of those who might be found written therein. Everything seems to indicate the book is used merely to testify to the absence of the names of the unsaved. “Only one group will be seen at this judgment, the dead—the spiritually dead.”⁶¹

See [Births, Deaths, and Resurrections](#).

Revelation 20:6

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection

They are blessed because “they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6+). This blessing is equivalent to the blessing for those “who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9+) because they find entry into the kingdom of God (Luke 14:15). See commentary on [Revelation 19:9](#). Their blessing is one of seven blessings given in the book of Revelation. See commentary on [Revelation 1:3](#). These are *holy* ([ἅγιος](#) [hagios]) because they are the saints ([ἅγιων](#) [hagiōn]). They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14+).

Over such, the second death has no power

Christ promised the overcomer of the church at Smyrna, the persecuted church which experienced martyrdom, that they would not be hurt by the second death (Rev. 2:11+). They would be part of the first resurrection (at the [Rapture](#) of the Church) and the second death would have no power over them. The second death is the destiny of those who are not written in the [Book of Life](#): “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the [Book of Life](#) was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14+). “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8+).

In the Palestinian Targum on Deuteronomy 33:6, the OT *locus theologicus* in rabbinic Judaism for proving the resurrection from the dead, the Targum reads: “Let Reuben live in this world and not die in the second death in which death the wicked die in the word to come.” In the Targum the second death means exclusion from the resurrection. Not to die the second death, then, means to rise again to eternal life.⁶²

3.20.6.1 - Births, Deaths, and Resurrections

Scripture knows of *two births*, *two deaths*, and *two resurrections*. Everyone is *physically born* once. Those who do not undergo the second birth, the *spiritual birth*, also undergo the *second death* which is the permanent separation from God with eternal torment.

Participation in Births, Deaths, and Resurrections

Event	Unbeliever	Believer	Description
Born Again	No	Yes	The first birth is <i>physical</i> birth. The second birth is <i>spiritual</i> and occurs when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ. ⁶³ Only believers are “born twice.”
1st Death	Yes	Yes	The first death occurs at the end of one’s physical life.
1st Resurrection	No	Yes	The first resurrection is a category and occurs in stages, beginning with the resurrection of Christ (1Cor. 15:20) and ending with the resurrection just prior to the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:5-6+). Only believers participate in the first resurrection. ⁶⁴
2nd Resurrection	Yes	No	The second resurrection occurs at the end of the Millennial Kingdom at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-13+). Only unbelievers participate in the second resurrection. See Order of Resurrection .
2nd Death	Yes	No	The second death is after the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:14-15+). As there is eternal life beyond this present life for the faithful, so there is eternal death beyond the death of the wicked. ⁶⁵ The second death is commonly known as <i>hell</i> . ⁶⁶

When a person is *born again* (John 3:3-7; 1Pe. 1:23; 1Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 5:1, 18), he will only undergo the first death, but the second death has no power over him: "though he may die [the first death], he shall live [be resurrected never to face the second death]" (John 11:25b).

they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years

Christ made the saints "kings and priests to His God" (*a kingdom, priests to God*, [MT](#) and [NU](#) texts) (Rev. 1:6[±] cf. Rev. 5:10[±]). See commentary on [Revelation 1:6](#). See [Millennial Reign of the Saints](#). The priestly duties of some will include service in the [Temple](#):

"I will set a sign among them; and those among them who escape I will send to thenations: *to* Tarshish and Pul and Lud, who draw the bow, and Tubal and Javan, *to* the coastlands afar off who have not heard My fame nor seen Myglory. And they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles. Then they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the LORD out of all nations, on horses and in chariots and in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem," says the LORD, "as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD. And I will also take some of them for priests *and* Levites," says the LORD. (Isa. 66:19-21)

What the prophet has in mind here [Isa. 66:21] is a completely new order of things: the inclusion of Gentiles in the service of the Lord, without regard to race or descent.⁶⁷

See [Millennial Temple](#).

Revelation 20:7

when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison

Will be released is [λυθήσεται](#) [lythēsetai]: to "set free prisoners."⁶⁸ Satan was bound and imprisoned in the abyss and is now set free. *Prison* is [φυλακή](#) [phylakēs], the same word which indicated the imprisonment of demons in Babylon (Rev. 18:2⁺). Contrary to [amillennial](#) assertions, during the Millennial Kingdom Satan will not be able to deceive *anyone* even to the *slightest degree*. He is not omnipresent and spends the entire time locked away in the abyss. See commentary on [Revelation 20:2](#).

Revelation 20:8

go out to deceive the nations

As soon as Satan is released, he goes forth in his age-old pattern of deception. That Scripture records his going forth in deception is further confirmation of the fact that he was completely unable to do so during the time of his binding.

the four corners of the earth

This is figurative language indicating the four main compass directions (Eze. 7:2; Rev. 7:1[±]).

Gog and Magog

The name Gog first appears as a descendant of Joel, of the tribe of Reuben (1Chr. 5:4). The leader of the rebellion which came against Israel more than one thousand years prior to this event was also named Gog:

The prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal ("the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal," KJV), who, Ezekiel said, would invade the restored land of Israel from the far distant northern land by the appointment of God in the last times, with a powerful army of numerous nations (Eze. 38:1-9) and with the intention of plundering Israel, now dwelling in security (Eze. 38: 10-16).⁶⁹

Attempts to identify Gog have included proposals of connections with (1) Gyges, King of Lydia (*Gugu* of Ashurbanipal's records); (2) *Gaga*, a name in the Amarna correspondence for the nations of the N; (3) *Gaga*, a god from Ras Shamra writings; (4) a historical figure, especially Alexander; and (5) mythological sources, with Gog being a representation of the evil forces of darkness which range themselves against Yahweh and his people. None of these identifications has been demonstrated with certainty.⁷⁰

The name Magog is introduced to us as a son of Japheth and grandson of Noah (Gen. 10:2). In the previous attack against Israel, Gog is said to be "of the land of Magog" (Eze. 38:2):

The descendants of Magog (Eze. 38:2), possibly a people who lived in northern Asia and Europe. The Jewish historian Josephus identified these people as the Scythians, known for their destructive warfare. Magog may be a comprehensive term meaning

“northern barbarians.” The people of Magog are described as skilled horsemen (Eze. 38:15) and experts in the use of the bow and arrow (Eze. 39:3, 9).⁷¹

Although Gog and Magog are both mentioned in Ezekiel 38 and 39, this rebellion is not the same event, as a comparison of several factors reveals:

This prophecy of Ezekiel concerning Gog and Magog cannot be identified with the prophecy in Rev. 20:7-10⁺ for three reasons. The former takes place before the Kingdom is established on earth; the latter after this Kingdom. Also, in Ezekiel the invasion comes only from the north, but in Revelation it comes from the ‘four quarters of the earth.’ Furthermore, the rebellion of Gog and Magog and their destruction in Rev. 20:7-10⁺ marks the ushering in of the eternal state (Rev. 20:11-15⁺); but in Ezekiel it is preliminary to the Millennial Kingdom on earth.⁷²

First, the Ezekiel invasion comes from the north; the Revelation invasion comes from all over the world; *Second*, this view also fails to answer the problem of the seven months and seven years. This earth is done away with soon after the invasion mentioned in Revelation, not allowing any time (or place!) for seven months of burial or seven years of burning.⁷³

Whether Gog and Magog is a general reference to the enemies of the people of God or specific peoples in the rebellion of the end is difficult to determine from the scant details of this final rebellion.⁷⁴

While many explanations have been made, one of the intriguing ones is that Gog refers to the ruler and Magog to the people as in Ezekiel 38. Hence, what the passage means is that the nations of the world follow Satan, including the rulers (Gog) and the people (Magog) under the rulers. Another plausible explanation is that the expression is used much as we use the term “Waterloo” to express a disastrous battle, but one related to the historic origination of the term.⁷⁵

to gather them to battle

They are gathered by the deceiver, Satan. His function in the final rebellion is much like that of the three unclean spirits which went forth to gather the kings of the earth to the [Campaign of Armageddon](#) (Rev. 16:13-16⁺). *Battle* is [πόλεμον](#) [polemon]: armed conflict. The term is often used of a protracted engagement, but can also be used of a single battle.⁷⁶ See commentary on [Revelation 16:14](#).

Revelation 20:9

breadth of the earth

Breadth is [πλάτος](#) [platos]: “the broad plain of the earth is perhaps meant to provide room for the countless enemies of God”⁷⁷ (cf. Hab. 1:6).

surrounded the camp of the saints

Camp is [παρεμβολή](#) [parembolē]: used of the barracks or headquarters of soldiers or an army in battle array, but also of the camp of Israel (Ex. 29:14 [LXX](#); Lev. 4:12 [LXX](#); Heb. 13:11).⁷⁸ “Used for the city of Jerusalem, inasmuch as that was to the Israelites what formerly the encampment had been in the desert.”⁷⁹ Here is proof that children are born during the Millennial Kingdom. All the unsaved were destroyed at the Second Coming leaving only the faithful at the inception of the [Millennial Kingdom](#). One thousand years later, after numerous generations, there is a multitude of faithless who come against God. These are from among the offspring of the faithful who entered the Millennial Kingdom in their natural bodies.

It is a frightful commentary upon the nature of mankind that this showy rebellion is able to muster millions and millions of followers who gladly join in a last desperate effort to strike at God. Truly the carnal mind is *enmity* against God. The number is as the sands of the sea.⁸⁰

This section shows something of the deep, complex nature of evil. The source of rebellion against God does not lie in man’s environment or fundamentally with the devil but springs up from deep within man’s own heart. The return of Satan will demonstrate this in the most dramatic manner once for all.⁸¹

Men claim that they are seeking, evermore, a “perfect form of government”; but that they are not at all seeking such a government, but that they actually *hate* it, will be evidenced by their instant revolt to Satan’s banner when he is loosed for a “little season” after the Millennium. For we shall find the hordes of mankind rushing up to overthrow the righteous and benevolent reign of Christ at Jerusalem!⁸²

The rebellion is ultimately permitted by God who released Satan from prison for this very test. He is used to cull the last from among the unfaithful from the midst of humanity for God’s impending judgment. This rebellion also demonstrates to mankind their utter

inability to vanquish sin apart from God's power. Man now fails his final [dispensational](#) test:

From this we see that the "Millennial Dispensation," like all the six Dispensations before it, will end in *failure*. God will have tested man in "Innocence," under "Conscience," under "Self-Government," under the "Headship of the Family," under "Law," under "Grace," and finally under the influence of the "Holy Spirit," free from Satanic influences, and under them all he will prove himself to be hopelessly, incurably and incorrigibly bad.⁸³

the beloved city

Beloved is [ἡγαπημένην](#) [egapēmēnēn], perfect tense participle: *having been loved*. This speaks of Jerusalem: "The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob" (Ps. 87:2 cf. Ps. 78:68; 132:13; Jer. 12:7). See [Jerusalem Married to God](#).

fire came down from God out of heaven

The enemies of God are destroyed directly by His hand, in much the same way as Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24), those who came to arrest Elijah (2K. 1:10-15), Gog on the mountains of Israel (Eze. 38:22), and the land of Magog (Eze. 39:6).

Revelation 20:10

The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire

At the coming of Christ, it was the *instrument* of the devil, the False Prophet, who deceived but was captured and cast into the Lake of Fire. Now the devil himself meets a similar fate. The devil has been cast, in a series of stages, from the highest point in creation to the lowest. Satan was previously cast out of heaven to the earth (Rev. 12:9⁺), probably near the mid-point of the Tribulation. After the Second Coming, he was bound and cast into the abyss (Rev. 20:2⁺). Now, he is cast into his final destination, the Lake of Fire, which was originally prepared for him and his angels (Mat. 25:41). Since it was prepared for both him and *his angels* (Rev. 12:4⁺), we can infer that the fallen angels, who were confined during the Millennial Kingdom, are either cast with him into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 18:2⁺; Isa. 34:8-17), or join him shortly thereafter following the Great White Throne Judgment when the earth (including the abyss) is no more.

The career of Satan will then come to an end. With this final revolt, the Millennial Kingdom will come to an end, and there will be a transfer of authority as described in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 . . . Ultimately, the power and authority of the Kingdom must be turned over to God the Father. But this can only occur after every enemy of man is abolished and there is no longer any challenge to God's rule, authority, and power (1 Cor. 15:24). . . . It should be remembered that death will still exist in the Kingdom. It is only after Satan's final revolt and his confinement in the Lake of Fire that death can be abolished.⁸⁴

where the beast and the false prophet are

The devil joins his two henchmen from the time of the Tribulation who are already in the Lake of Fire. The [Beast](#) and the [False Prophet](#) were cast into the lake at the Second Coming of Christ one thousand years earlier (Rev. 19:20⁺). They are *still* there and undergoing continuous torment. The Lake of Fire does not annihilate its occupants. They suffer *eternally*.

tormented day and night forever and ever

Day and night is a figure of speech meaning *continually* (Luke 18:7; Acts 9:27; Rev. 7:15⁺; 12:10⁺). Those who worshiped the Beast will be tormented forever and ever (Rev. 14:10⁺ cf. Rev. 20:15⁺).⁸⁵

At all events the doctrine of conscious, eternal torment for impenitent men is clearly revealed in the Word of God. Whether we can defend it on philosophic grounds or not, it is our business to believe it; and to leave it to the clearer light of eternity to explain what we cannot now understand, realizing that God has infinitely wise reasons for doing things for which we in our ignorance can see no sufficient reason at all. It is the most ludicrous conceit for beings so limited and foolish as the wisest of men are, to attempt to dogmatize how a God of infinite wisdom must act. All we know as to how God will act is what God has seen fit to tell us.⁸⁶

Revelation 20:11

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it

The scene before John is very similar to that which Daniel saw in his night vision:

I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the

books were opened. (Dan. 7:9-10)

In Daniel's vision, it is the Father who judged on behalf of the Son. The judgment involved the decision to terminate the reign of [Antichrist](#) and give the kingdom to the Son and the saints:

"The Ancient of days" (God in His own ineffable person, not in the person of Christ) *did sit* in the role of a judge about to pass sentence. He is the Judge here [in Daniel 7:9-10], because the case is Christ's, involving the judgment of the Antichrist (Dan. 7:11-12), and the Son does not judge His own case, which is the peculiar province of the Father, to be distinguished from the province of the Son as Judge (cf. John 5:22).⁸⁷

The final judgment of the wicked is almost certainly to be judged by the One Who died on behalf of the world (John 1:29; 1Ti. 2:6; Heb. 2:9; 2Pe. 2:1; 1Jn. 2:2) to whom judgment has been given:

For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. (John 5:22-23)

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31)

Very little is said concerning the scene. The description of the throne is pregnant with forboding:

Weigh each word. *Great*,—it is the Infinite before whom the finite must stand; *White*,—it is the unveiled, undimmed blaze of the divine holiness and purity and justice; *Throne*,—it is majesty unlimited, in which inheres utter right to dispose of the destiny of creatures. Before such a throne, creatures cannot stand; but they *shall stand*—even the lost!⁸⁸

from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away

At the opening of the sixth seal, "the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up" (Rev. 6:14⁺). Here, the old order of things gives up its dead and retreats in preparation for the creation of a new heavens and earth: "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea" (Rev. 21:1⁺). Jesus had predicted that God's word would outlast the first heavens and earth: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Mat. 24:35). The first heavens and first earth were preserved by God's word for a time, but now the time has come for their judgment by fire and the perdition of ungodly men (2Pe. 3:7). This marks the end of the period of *The Day of the Lord*. See commentary on [Revelation 21:1](#). Mention of God's *face* speaks of His immediate presence, before which no man can stand without divine protection (Ex. 3:6; Ex. 19:21; 1K. 19:13; Isa. 6:5; 1Jn. 4:12):

The Talmud tells the legend of how Hadrian the emperor asked Yehoshua b. Hananya (c. A.D. 90): "I would like to see your God." Yehoshua replied: "You cannot see him." The emperor said: "Indeed I must see him." Then the rabbi took Hadrian and placed him in the full blaze of the sun and said to him: "Look into it." He answered: "I cannot." Yehoshua replied; "If of the sun you say 'I cannot look at it,' which is only one of the servants who stand in the presence of God, how much more is it true of the Shekinah."⁸⁹

The flight of His own creation from before his unmitigated presence also infers a degree of terror for those who are about to stand before the piercing gaze of His omniscient eyes of fire (Rev. 1:14⁺; 19:12⁺). Their judgment is before the completely righteous, all-powerful Perfection of Perfections.

And there was found no place for them.

The old order vanishes away. In the process, the dead are given up (see below) to stand before the terrifying presence of God.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, . . . the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? (2Pe. 3:10-12)

Although we are not told of the safe harbor provided for the righteous by God during this momentous transition when the subatomic elements disassemble themselves, we can assume they are supernaturally provided for. Writing many centuries in advance of particle physics and atom smashers, Peter describes the end of the universe as we know it in terms which would be difficult for any modern physicist to improve upon. What will it take to bring about such an immense conflagration? We are convinced it will be the mere 'blink' of the eye for God. Perhaps for the barest of time, less than a split nanosecond, He withdraws His sustaining power from the material order and all the matter of the universe converts back to an enormous quantity of energy in an explosion which is described by a famous Jewish equation: $e = mc^2$.

It is not that they [the earth and heaven] are to be purified and rehabilitated, but that the reverse of creation is to take place. They are to be uncreated. As they came from nothing at the word of God, they are to be sucked back into nothingness by the same word of God. Science may say that matter cannot be made and that matter cannot be destroyed, but such an attitude does not believe in the God of creation.⁹⁰

The phenomenon may well be one of mass/energy conversion, with the “matter” of earth structure converted into “energy” (heat, sound, or light). This same energy will be available for reconversion into the materials of the renewed earth, with all the contaminating effects of sin and the curse purged out of it.⁹¹

We can only speculate in great ignorance at the immensity of the scene these few lines describe.

Revelation 20:12

I saw the dead, small and great

Every category of man now stands on an individual basis before God. Wealth, power, fame, is all immaterial now. As the cross stands as the great equalizer among people of faith on the road to salvation, so the Great White Throne Judgment is the equalizer among those on their way to eternal damnation.

standing before God

For saints who pursue after God and desire to be in His presence, this is the ultimate blessing of the eternal state: “They shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:4⁺). Just the opposite is true for the unrighteous dead about to be judged. The immediate presence of God will be a terror unimagined by them, for they are the object of His wrath in righteous judgment. This will be their only time of intimacy with God and it results in devastating negative consequences. While living, they expressed their desire to be independent from God. Soon their desire will be an eternal reality. The flight of earth and heaven underscores the awful reality that nowhere remains to hide from God. Those in the Tribulation had attempted to hide in the rocks and caves from the wrath of God (Rev. 6:15-17⁺), but now the entire material universe is gone and all that remains is a perfectly just, righteous, all-powerful God face-to-face with sinners without any covering for their sin. Previously there was the illusion that sin could be hidden from God, but all illusion has been stripped away. The [MT](#) and [NU](#) texts have *before the throne* which carries the same meaning since God is on the throne.

books were opened

These books record the good and bad deeds of those about to be judged. This is the record of their “works” prior to death.

And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*

This book is singled out from among the other books because of its paramount importance. Unlike the books which record their works, this book records their *faith*, or lack thereof. The mere appearance of this book in the judgment is proof that access to God is by faith alone. For if salvation could be by works, the books recording their deeds would be sufficient for judgment. Those who have not trusted in the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, will be sadly disappointed to find how they have been deceived. Their self-righteousness is no righteousness after all. While living, they sought to establish their own righteousness and refused the gift of righteousness provided by God:

For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. (Rom. 10:2-3)

Membership in beneficent organizations and associations, participation in righteous causes, attending Church, and all earthly *activities* will be of no avail in the ultimate determination of the final destiny of the unsaved. Good deeds will serve to mitigate punishment to some degree, but the ultimate destination—whether “heaven” or “hell”—is determined entirely by the presence or absence of one’s name in the [Book of Life](#). See commentary on [Revelation 20:15](#). Those who worshiped the [Beast](#) at the time of the end were *never* written in the book (Rev. 13:8⁺; 17:8⁺). See [Beast Worshipers are Unique](#). Others were written in the book, but were blotted out as they came to their death without having exercised faith in God (Ex. 32:32-33; Ps. 69:28; Rev. 3:5⁺). See [Book of Life](#). They are not the overcomers. See [Who is the Overcomer?](#) Anyone not found written in the [Book of Life](#) is cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:15⁺). Those who are written in the Book will be able to enter the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:27⁺).

the dead were judged

This is the final judgment of those who have rejected God. There is no second chance, no possibility of repentance beyond death:

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those

who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. (Heb. 9:27-28)

They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. (1Pe. 4:5)

The judgment will be absolutely righteous and true—something to be celebrated by the righteous dead (Ps. 9:7-8; 96:12-13), but feared by those who have not been washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 1:5+; 7:14+). Their robes are not white like the righteous, but scarlet. Like the [Harlot](#), they are stained with sin (Isa. 1:18). The very Lamb of God, whose blood they rejected, will be their judge: “And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42). In the same way that He judged the living sheep and goats at His Second Coming (Mat. 25:31), now he judges the dead: “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom” (2Ti. 4:1).

The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth. (Rev. 11:18+)

Christ will also be the final Judge of all moral creatures, whether men or angels. These judgments can be itemized as referring (1) to the church (2Cor. 5:10-11) (2) to Israel nationally and individually (Mat. 24:27-25:30) (3) to the Gentiles at the time of His second coming to the earth (Mat. 25:31-46) (4) to angels, probably at the end of the millennium (1Cor. 6:3; 2Pe. 2:4; Jude 1:6) (5) to the wicked dead (Rev. 20:12-15+).⁹²

The faithful dead will not stand in this judgment: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24). All the unsaved dead from all of history now stand before God Almighty—with two notable exceptions. The Beast and the [False Prophet](#) of the end were cast directly into the Lake of Fire, bypassing this judgment. There is no possibility that their punishment will be mitigated by any record of good works. See commentary on [Revelation 19:20](#).

according to their works, by the things which were written in the books

The things written is [τιν γεγραμμένων](#) [tōn gegrammenōn], perfect tense passive participle: *the things having been written*. The contents of the books were written in the past. This is the record of all their good and bad deeds prior to death. They will be judged both by their deeds and by their knowledge:

There is a principle in Scripture that does teach degrees of punishment based upon degrees of sinfulness and upon greater or lesser light or knowledge and the response or lack of it to that light [Mat. 11:20-24; Luke 12:47-48; John 19:11].⁹³

Those who knew more and failed to respond will bear greater guilt than those who knew less (Mat. 11:23-24). Those among the Jews, who had great light concerning God but rejected their Messiah, will be among those who bear greater responsibility for their sin:

But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who “will render to each one according to his deeds”: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek. (Rom. 2:5-9)

None will be able to claim “I did not know, I did not hear” because every man entering the world receives sufficient revelation to seek God. Those who did not seek him will stand condemned by general revelation.⁹⁴ Although the revelation of God in nature is insufficient to save, it *is sufficient to condemn* those who fail to respond:

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. **There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.** In them He has set a [tabernacle](#) for the sun. (Ps. 19:1-4) [emphasis added]

For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, **so that they are without excuse**, because, **although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened**. Professing to be wise, they became fools (Rom. 1:20-22) [emphasis added]

Paul tells us that they *knew* God, but refused to glorify him and were not thankful. The horrible result was the developing futility of their thoughts and darkening of their minds. Ultimately, professing wisdom, they actually became fools. Twice in history *every man, woman, and child* on earth had intimate knowledge of God: at the creation and immediately after the global flood. Yet, today great

portions of the earth are cloaked in spiritual darkness. Where once their forefathers knew God, they rejected Him and *actively walked away* from retaining His knowledge for their children and their children's children. No man has ever been forsaken by God. It is always man who forsakes God. Along with His revelation in nature, God provided another form of general revelation: the law written upon men's hearts:

For **as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law**, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, **although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness**, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel. (Rom. 2:12-16) [emphasis added]

Those who never came to faith steadfastly rejected God. It was not a passive rejection where they slowly drifted away due to inaction. Paul tells us it was an active rebellion:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, **who suppress the truth in unrighteousness** . . . And even as **they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge**, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting . . . knowing the righteous judgment of God that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. (Rom. 1:18, 28-32) [emphasis added]

When we speak to people who reject the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and ask them by what means they hope to enter heaven, they almost universally reply with the notion that they are basically good and that by their deeds they will find entry. They are convinced: (1) that their good deeds will outweigh the bad, (2) so long as they are better than some other person then they are acceptable to God—that God grades their sin on a scale relative to other people. The truth is, from God's perspective their bad deeds universally outweigh the good. Moreover, God does not grade on a relative scale to other people, but relative to the perfection of God Himself. This is an *absolute scale*. Blind to these realities, they are convinced they will gain "heaven" by their works. And so God has promised to judge them by their works:

Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavors; give them according to the work of their hands; render to them what they deserve. (Ps. 28:4)

Also to You, O Lord, *belongs* mercy; for You render to each one according to his work. (Ps. 62:12)

If you say, "Surely we did not know this," does not He who weighs the hearts consider *it*? He who keeps your soul, does He *not* know *it*? And will He *not* render to *each* man according to his deeds? (Pr. 24:12)

For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil. (Ecc. 12:14)

I, the LORD, search the heart, / test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings. (Jer. 17:10 cf. Jer. 32:19)

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

I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. (Rev. 2:23_±)

And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. (Rev. 22:12_±)

The unbelieving dead will get what they desire: they will be judged by their works. But their works will be found to be imperfect. Not only in application, but in *motivation* because it is impossible for those who lack faith to please God (Heb. 11:6). Even their altruistic works are flawed by selfish and deceptive motivations.

The unregenerate man can, through common grace, love his family and he may be a good citizen. He may give a million dollars to build a hospital. . . . If a drunkard, he may abstain from drink for utilitarian purposes, but he cannot do it out of love for God. All of his common virtues or good works have a fatal defect in that his motives which prompt them are not to glorify God,— a defect so vital that it throws any element of goodness as to man wholly into the shade.⁹⁵

The books will be opened and sin will be found. Lacking a covering for sin and unable to produce perfection, they will be unable to be in God's presence and are destined for the Lake of Fire. Being a righteous and just God, the degree of their sin will determine their relative degree of torment. *But all torment is torment.*

It should be noted that while there are varying degrees of punishment in hell, everyone there will suffer intolerable, indescribable

misery and torment. All sinners in hell will be utterly separated from God and all that comes from His goodness. Thus, they will be miserable, but not equally miserable.⁹⁶

Revelation 20:13

The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them

Hades followed along when Death rode forth at the fourth seal which resulted in widespread death (Rev. 6:7⁺). Jesus has the keys of Hades and Death (Rev. 1:18⁺). The righteous dead, whose soul and spirit were at one time in Hades,⁹⁷ have already been resurrected. Their soul and spirit has been reunited with their body at their participation in the category of the first resurrection. Thus, Jesus has emptied Hades and Death of those who are His prior to this judgment. See commentary on [Revelation 1:18](#). This delivery of the dead—their casting out—probably occurs at the moment when the earth and heaven flee away at the presence of the Mighty Judge (Rev. 10:11⁺). As the old order dissolves, “the dead are brought back to this judgment, their bodies being delivered from the grave, whether in the sea or on the land, and their soul and spirit is brought up from hades.”⁹⁸ Every person born into the world has eternal existence and is resurrected after death. “The essential identity of the dying and risen body is hereby shown; for the sea and grave give up their dead. The body that sinned or served God shall, in righteous retribution, be the body also that shall suffer or be rewarded.”⁹⁹ The number given up by the sea will be enormous, the overwhelming majority being those lost in judgment in the global flood (Luke 17:27).

The abhorrent fate of those whose bodies were devoured by the fish accounts for the special mention of this group at the resurrection . . . Both Greeks and Romans attached great importance to land burial and the inviolability of the tomb. They recoiled with great horror at the thought of death by drowning or even burial at sea.¹⁰⁰

This is the “resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:29). See [Order of Resurrection](#). See commentary on [Revelation 20:11](#).

they were judged, each one according to his works

See commentary on [Revelation 20:11](#).

Revelation 20:14

Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire

Death (representing the bodies of the dead which had lain in the earth and sea) and Hades (the place of torment for soul and spirit of the unrighteous dead between death and the judgment) will be destroyed. Their physical reality vanishes in the fleeing of the earth and heaven—the destruction of the old order:

Death and Hades, here viewed as if they were personal beings, share the same fate. They, of course, cease to be. There is nothing more of temporal death or of the place of departed spirits after this. They are not personal beings, hence their casting into “the lake of fire” is the end of them; but, conceived of as persons, they are consigned to exactly the same eternal punishment with the other wicked.¹⁰¹

They are the final enemies to be destroyed before the eternal state and are vanquished to the Lake of Fire, a cosmic garbage dump:

The clearest and most vivid of the New Testament terms used to describe the final hell, the lake of fire, is gehenna (Gehenna). Gehenna is the New Testament word for the valley of Ben-Hinnom (also called Topheth; 2K. 23:10; Isa. 30:33; Jer. 7:31-32; 19:6), located southwest of Jerusalem. In Old Testament times, idolatrous Israelites burned their children in the fire there as sacrifices to false gods (Jer. 19:2-6). In Jesus’ day, it was the site of Jerusalem’s garbage dump. The fires kept constantly burning there gave off foul-smelling smoke, and the dump was infested with maggots. Sometimes the bodies of criminals were dumped there. The valley of Ben-Hinnom was thus an apt picture of eternal hell, one used repeatedly by Jesus (Mat. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5). Hell will be God’s eternal cosmic dump; its inmates will be burning as garbage forever.¹⁰²

Their casting into the Lake of Fire may be another indicator that none who stand in this judgment are saved. All who were part of the second resurrection (which emptied Death and Hades) are bound for the Lake of Fire. This is the fulfillment of the promises of God to destroy death and the grave:

He will swallow up death forever, And the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken. (Isa. 25:8)

So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1Cor. 15:54-55 cf. Hos.

13:14.)

Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death. (1Cor. 15:24-26)

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. (Rev. 21:4⁺)

This is the second death

The [MT](#) and [NU](#) texts have: "This is the second death, the lake of fire." Those who overcome by placing their faith in the Overcomer "shall not be hurt by the second death" (Rev. 2:11⁺): Those who participated in the first resurrection need not fear the second death. "Over such the second death has no power" (Rev. 10:6a⁺).

He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. (Rev. 21:7-8⁺)

See [Births, Deaths, and Resurrections](#).

Revelation 20:15

anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire

God is righteous and just. He will dutifully check the [Book of Life](#) for the name of each and every one who stands in this judgment. Scripture records the sober outcome: those not written in the book face eternal doom. Being "the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:39), none of these will be found written. The [Beast](#) worshipers in their midst—a relatively small proportion of the sum total of unbelievers of all ages—will never have been written in the book (Rev. 13:8⁺; 17:8⁺; see [Beast Worshipers are Unique](#)). The rest of the unsaved dead were written in the book at one time, but having rejected God until their death, their names were blotted out (Ex. 32:32; Ps. 69:28; Rev. 3:5⁺). Although their deeds determine the relative degree of punishment, all who reject the Lamb of God stand without atonement for their sin and are condemned. It is their absence from the [Book of Life of the Lamb](#) (Rev. 13:8⁺; 21:27⁺) which seals their fate and indicates a complete lack of relationship with Jesus—He *never knew them* (Mat. 7:22-23):

He who believes in Him is not condemned; but **he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.** (John 3:18) [emphasis added]

He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but **he who does not believe will be condemned** (Mark 16:16) [emphasis added]

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and **he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.** (John 3:36) [emphasis added]

And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; **he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.** (1Jn. 5:11-12) [emphasis added]

See [Book of Life](#). The redeemed will be blessed with God's intimate presence for eternity, but these go away into torment and eternal separation from all that is good—God. "These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2Th. 1:9).

Yes, O man! O woman! whoever you may be, your biography is written. An unerring hand has recorded every item, with every secret thing. There is not an ill thought, a mean act, a scene of wrong in all your history, a dirty transaction, a filthiness of speech, or a base feeling that ever found entertainment in your heart, but is there described in bold hand, by its true name, and set down to your account, to be then brought forth for final settlement, if not clean blotted out through faith in Christ's blood before this present life of yours is ended.¹⁰³

And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: **Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!** (Luke 12:4-5) [emphasis added]

Notes

¹George H. N. Peters, [The Theocratic Kingdom](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1978, 1884), 2:264.

²Charles Feinberg, [Premillennialism or Amillennialism](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1936), 212.

³Matthew Waymeyer, [Revelation 20 and the Millennial Debate](#) (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian Publications, 2001, 2004), 13.

⁴See [Literary Structure](#).

⁵The angel with the key to the pit seen with the angel showing John the New Jerusalem in the background. Albrecht Durer (1471 - 1528). Image courtesy of the [Connecticut College Wetmore Print Collection](#).

⁶J. Marcellus Kik, [Revelation Twenty: An Exposition](#) (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1955), 19-20.

⁷Thomas Ice, "[Some Practical Dangers of Preterism](#)," in Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, eds., [The End Times Controversy](#) (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 423.

⁸Frederick William Danker and Walter Bauer, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 448.

⁹John F. Walvoord, [The Millennial Kingdom](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), 292.

¹⁰Kik, [Revelation Twenty: An Exposition](#), 17.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 27.

¹²Lewis Sperry Chafer, [Systematic Theology](#) (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976), 4:281.

¹³The 'ch' is pronounced as a 'k': *kill-iasm*.

¹⁴Kik, [Revelation Twenty: An Exposition](#), 28-29.

¹⁵Ice, [Some Practical Dangers of Preterism](#), 420.

¹⁶Peters, [The Theocratic Kingdom](#), 2:268.

¹⁷Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) 283.

¹⁸Alva J. McClain, [The Greatness Of The Kingdom](#) (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959), 481.

¹⁹Clarence Larkin, [The Book of Revelation](#) (Glenside, PA: Rev. Clarence Larkin Estate, 1919), 176.

²⁰J. A. Seiss, [The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 457.

²¹Donald Grey Barnhouse, [Revelation](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 385.

²²Among this number are those few saints which rose shortly after Jesus as firstfruits (Mat. 27:51-53). See [Order of Resurrection](#).

²³Jerome Smith, [The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge](#) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), Rev. 20:4.

²⁴Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) 641.

²⁵A. R. Fausset, "[The Revelation of St. John the Divine](#)," in Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, [A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments](#) (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, 1877), Rev. 20:4.

²⁶"The fact is that this pronoun, [ο τῶν](#) [hoitines] is in the nominative case, and therefore does not depend on any verb, but is the subject of a new sentence altogether, of which the verb is 'lived again.' This is a grammatical fact that scientifically determines the matter for us, and prevents us from introducing our own opinions. Of one class of persons, viz., the beheaded martyrs, it is said that they were righteously judged and vindicated. The next statement of verse 4 goes on to say that not only these (who were beheaded), but all, including these who refused to worship the Beast, 'lived again': *i.e.*, had part in the first resurrection."—E. W. Bullinger, [Commentary On Revelation](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1984, 1935), Rev. 20:4.

²⁷Monty S. Mills, [Revelations: An Exegetical Study of the Revelation to John](#) (Dallas, TX: 3E Ministries, 1987), Rev. 20:4.

²⁸Seiss, [The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation](#), 458.

²⁹Those with physical abnormalities by birth or accident, who lack a right hand, can receive the mark on their forehead.

³⁰Danker, [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) 336.

³¹Daniel B. Wallace, [*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics - Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software, 1999, 2002), 559.

³²Alan F. Johnson, [*Revelation: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 188.

³³Peters, [*The Theocratic Kingdom*](#), 2:266.

³⁴Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., [*Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. I*](#) (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), s.v. "ECF 1.1.7.1.5.36."

³⁵Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, [*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 54, 49.

³⁶Smith, [*The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*](#), Rev. 20:5.

³⁷Kik, [*Revelation Twenty: An Exposition*](#), 53.

³⁸We once listened to a nationally-known radio preacher preach against the idea that there were two resurrections anywhere to be found in Scripture. During his entire presentation—lasting nearly an hour—he never once mentioned Revelation 20+!

³⁹Walvoord, [*The Millennial Kingdom*](#), 282-283.

⁴⁰Nathaniel West, [*The Thousand Years in both Testaments*](#) (Fincastle, VA: Scripture Truth Book Co., n.d.), 266.

⁴¹Danker, [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) 725.

⁴²Friberg, [*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*](#), 338.

⁴³Peters, [*The Theocratic Kingdom*](#), 2:269.

⁴⁴Walvoord, [*The Millennial Kingdom*](#), 278-279.

⁴⁵Smith, [*The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*](#), Rev. 20:5.

⁴⁶Peters, [*The Theocratic Kingdom*](#), 2:291.

⁴⁷"John does not directly refer to a second resurrection; a second resurrection is, however, correctly inferred both from the use of *prōtē* and also from the expression 'the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended' (Rev. 20:5)." —Johnson, [*Revelation: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*](#), 188.

⁴⁸Barnhouse, [*Revelation*](#), 381.

⁴⁹J. Dwight Pentecost, [*Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 396.

⁵⁰See Steve Lewis, *The Resurrection of Church-Age Believers*, www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Book_of_1st_Thessalonians/08_1Thess_4_13-18/webshow.htm#5.

⁵¹John F. Walvoord, [*Every Prophecy of the Bible*](#) (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1990, 1999), 464, 275.

⁵²"Matthew alone mentions this miracle. Nothing more is said about these people, which would be unlikely if they remained on earth for long. Evidently, these people were given glorified bodies; they appeared 'to many' (Mat. 27:53), enough to establish the reality of the miracle; and then they no doubt ascended to glory—a kind of foretaste of 1Th. 4:16." —John MacArthur, ed., [*The MacArthur Study Bible*](#) (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1997), Mat. 27:52.

⁵³See [*Events of the 70th Week of Daniel*](#)

⁵⁴"The chief problem relative to the resurrections at the second coming of Christ among premillenarians is the question of whether righteous Israel and Old Testament saints in general are raised at this time. A popular interpretation originating in Darby and his associates is that resurrection of Old Testament saints takes place at the same time as the rapture of the church, that is, before the

tribulation. This interpretation has been followed by such worthy expositors as William Kelly, A. C. Gaebelein, C. I. Scofield, and a host of others. Support for this interpretation is provided by three general arguments: (1) Christ died for Old Testament saints as well as for the church and therefore they are entitled to resurrection at the same time as the church, (2) According to 1 Thessalonians 4:16, the voice of the archangel is heard at the time of the rapture. Inasmuch as Michael, the archangel, is the special protector of Israel, his presence at the rapture would indicate Israel's resurrection. (3) The twenty-four elders of Revelation 4[±] are composed of both Old and New Testament saints and, inasmuch as these are pictured in heaven crowned and therefore rewarded in Revelation 4[±] before the tribulation, it would indicate that Old Testament saints as well as the church have already been raised from the dead. . . . [But], there are good reasons for reconsideration. The reference to 'the dead in Christ' (1Th. 4:16) by no means clearly includes all saints. The expression 'in Christ' is uniformly used in the New Testament, wherever it has theological meaning, as a reference to those who have been baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ, and is never used in reference to saints before the Day of Pentecost. It is significant that the word *saints*, a more general designation of the righteous, is not used but a technical expression, 'the dead in Christ,' is used instead. It would seem to indicate a limitation of the prediction to those [having been baptized by the Holy Spirit] who die in the present dispensation. . . . Over against the obscurity in the New Testament, however, is the fact that the Old Testament seems to place the resurrection of Israel after the tribulation [Dan. 12:1-2]."—Walvoord, [The Millennial Kingdom](#), 279-281.

⁵⁵Opinions differ as to whether this passage includes any reference to a literal, physical resurrection. The context of the passage argues against it: (1) The bones are seen laying on the surface of the ground; (2) The bones are said to be "the whole house of Israel" (Eze. 37:11); (3) The manner in which the resurrection occurs—stage by stage and in response to Ezekiel's command—is unlike any other physical resurrection recorded in Scripture.

⁵⁶There is a difference of opinion as to whether any believers are part of this resurrection. See commentary on [Revelation 20:12](#).

⁵⁷John F. Walvoord, [The Revelation of Jesus Christ](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1966), 307.

⁵⁸Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, [The Footsteps of Messiah](#), rev ed (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 376.

⁵⁹Tim LaHaye, "[A Literal Millennium as Taught in Scripture, Part 4.](#)" in [Pre-Trib Perspectives](#), vol. 8 no. 10 (Dallas, TX: Pre-Trib Research Center, February 2004), 2.

⁶⁰"The resurrection of the dead, [including] the wicked as well as the rest of the righteous who not being of the number of the martyrs had not already been raised to a share in the Millennial Kingdom."—Isbon T. Beckwith, [The Apocalypse of John](#) (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 161. "The wicked who had died from the time of Adam to Christ's second advent, and all the righteous and wicked who had died during and after the millennium, shall then have their eternal portion assigned to them."—Fausset, [The Revelation of St. John the Divine](#), Rev. 20:11.

⁶¹Barnhouse, [Revelation](#), 390.

⁶²Johnson, [Revelation: The Expositor's Bible Commentary](#), 189.

⁶³Luke 15:24, 32; John 3:3, 7; Gal. 6:15; 1Pe. 1:3, 23; 1Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 5:1, 18.

⁶⁴"The order of events in the resurrection program would be: (1) the resurrection of Christ as the beginning of the resurrection program (1Cor. 15:23); (2) the resurrection of the church age saints at the rapture (1Th. 4:16); (3) the resurrection of the tribulation period saints (Rev. 20:3-5[±]), together with (4) the resurrection of Old Testament saints (Dan. 12:2; Isa. 26:19) at the second advent of Christ to the earth; and finally (5) the final resurrection of the unsaved dead [the second resurrection] (Rev. 20:5[±], 11-14[±]) at the end of the millennial age. The first four stages would all be included in the first resurrection."—Pentecost, [Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology](#), 411.

⁶⁵"As there is a life beyond this present life for the faithful, so a death beyond the death which falls under our eye for the wicked."—Richard Chenevix Trench, [Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia](#) (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1861), 111.

⁶⁶The King James Version translates both Hades and Gehenna—the Lake of Fire—as *hell*. They are actually two different places. The final destiny of the unsaved is the latter, an existence of eternal punishment: " 'Vita damnatorum mors est,' [death is a life of punishment] is the fearful gloss of Augustine."—Ibid.

⁶⁷Merrill F. Unger, [Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament](#) (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2002), Isa. 66:21.

⁶⁸Danker, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#), 483.

- ⁶⁹Merrill Frederick Unger, R. K. Harrison, Frederic F Vos, and Cyril J. Barber, [*The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988), s.v. "Gog."
- ⁷⁰Kenneth H. Cuffey, "[Gog](#)," in David Noel Freeman, ed., [*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*](#) (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1996, c1992), 2:1056.
- ⁷¹Ronald F. Youngblood and R. K. Harrison, eds., [*Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*](#) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995), s.v. "Magog."
- ⁷²McClain, [*The Greatness Of The Kingdom*](#), 187.
- ⁷³Fruchtenbaum, [*The Footsteps of Messiah*](#), 121.
- ⁷⁴Barnhouse suggests that the Gog of Ezekiel, by way of demonic powers, is brought back after the Millennium for this final rebellion: "Just as Satan entered into Judas (John 13:27), whether personally or through one of his mighty principalities and powers we do not know, and as Satan clothed the human being called the wild beast, with his power, his throne, and great authority (Rev. 13:2+), thus making him the Antichrist, so Satan possesses some princeling, perhaps named Gog, through one of his mighty angels who own his sway."—Barnhouse, [*Revelation*](#), 387.
- ⁷⁵Walvoord, [*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*](#), 303.
- ⁷⁶Danker, [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) 685.
- ⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 666.
- ⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 625.
- ⁷⁹James Strong, [*The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*](#) (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1996), G3925.
- ⁸⁰Barnhouse, [*Revelation*](#), 388.
- ⁸¹Johnson, [*Revelation: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*](#), 191.
- ⁸²William R. Newell, [*Revelation: Chapter by Chapter*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1994, c1935), 320.
- ⁸³Clarence Larkin, [*Dispensational Truth*](#) (Glenside, PA: Rev. Clarence Larkin Estate, 1918, 1920), 96.
- ⁸⁴Fruchtenbaum, [*The Footsteps of Messiah*](#), 520-521.
- ⁸⁵Concerning the eternal aspect of torment for the unjust: Ecc. c. 12:5; Isa. 66:24; Dan. 12:2; Mat. 3:12; 25:41-46; Mark 9:43-46; 2Th. 1:9; 2Pe. 2:17; Jude 1:13; Rev. 14:11+; 19:20+; 20:10+.
- ⁸⁶Barnhouse, [*Revelation*](#), 389.
- ⁸⁷Unger, [*Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*](#), Dan. 7:9a.
- ⁸⁸Newell, [*Revelation: Chapter by Chapter*](#), 328.
- ⁸⁹Arthur W. Kac, [*The Messiahship of Jesus*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 191.
- ⁹⁰Barnhouse, [*Revelation*](#), 391.
- ⁹¹Henry Morris, [*The Revelation Record*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1983), Rev. 20:11.
- ⁹²Walvoord, [*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*](#), 216.
- ⁹³Fruchtenbaum, [*The Footsteps of Messiah*](#), 522.
- ⁹⁴"As the term *general revelation* is historically and universally employed in evangelical theology, the term *general* is intended to characterize not the character of revelation under discussion, but the audience to whom that revelation is available. . . It is general in its scope; that is, it reaches to all people."—John F. MacArthur and Wayne A. Mack, [*Introduction to Biblical Counseling*](#) (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1994), 76.

⁹⁵Loraine Boettner, [*The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*](#) (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1932), 98.

⁹⁶John MacArthur, [*Revelation 12-22 : The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2000), Rev. 20:12.

⁹⁷Before the crucifixion. After the ascension they relocated from Hades to heaven.

⁹⁸Walvoord, [*The Millennial Kingdom*](#), 332.

⁹⁹Fausset, [*The Revelation of St. John the Divine*](#), Rev. 20:13.

¹⁰⁰Robert L. Thomas, [*Revelation 8-22*](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), Rev. 20:13.

¹⁰¹Seiss, [*The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation*](#), 481.

¹⁰²MacArthur, [*Revelation 12-22 : The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*](#), Rev. 20:14.

¹⁰³Seiss, [*The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation*](#), 479.

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