

# THE MILLENNIUM: PREPARATION FOR THE FINAL AEON

by

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Revelation 20:1-10 contains details about the apocalyptic transition between the initial parousia and the establishment of God's eschatological kingdom. The concept of a millennium is only found in this chapter of Revelation. All other New Testament books that feature the parousia present the picture of an avenging Messiah returning to immediately establish his righteous kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the Revelator suggests that before this can happen, the judgement of the spiritual powers and rebellious nations must be executed and evil must be permanently annihilated.<sup>2</sup> The information about the millennium in this chapter is even unique to Revelation. In all the other places where John discusses the eschaton, the Saints are apparently ruling with Christ in heaven. However, here he records that at the end the millennium, the saints live in a restored earth in the New Jerusalem.

The exegesis of Revelation 20 is often obscured by hermeneutical considerations which have resulted in three general readings of this passage: amillennial, postmillennial, and premillennial.<sup>3</sup> Amillennialism states that the era of the millennium commenced with the incarnation and will end with the judgment at the parousia. Postmillennialism predicts a millennial age that is initiated by the universal triumph of the gospel over other religious forces and culminates with the return of Christ. Unlike the other millennial views, premillennialism understands the millennial events of Revelation 20 as taking place after the parousia and before the final judgement. My preliminary analysis leads me to the conclusion that the Revelator means to convey a premillennial view.

## Structural Considerations

The solution to the millennial debate lies in determining the parameters of the vision narrative. This task is complicated by the overall structure of Revelation which is comprised of a collection of visions that are sometimes recapitulative.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jurgen Roloff comments: "Certainly Paul speaks of Christ finally eliminating the evil powers after his Parousia so that everything can be returned to God's rule (1 Cor. 15:20-28), but he knows nothing of two resurrections or of a reign of earthly peace between them." (*The Revelation of John. A Continental Commentary*. Trans. John E. Alsup [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 224).

<sup>2</sup>Gerhard A. Krodel notices, "Thus Christ's parousia signifies not only the marriage of the Lamb (19:6-8), attested through hallelujah choruses in heaven and on earth, it also involves clearing the earth of all anti-God forces." (*Revelation* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1989], 325).

<sup>3</sup>For an interesting summary and comparative interpretation governed by these three readings see Steve Gregg, *Revelation. Four Views. A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 458-83.

<sup>4</sup>J. Webb Mealy, *After the Thousand Years. Resurrection and Judgement in Revelation 20* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 60, rightly accounts for the repetition of themes with his reminder that Revelation was originally heard and not read.

Trying to construct a consistent chronology in Revelation may seem as frustrating as picturing the logic behind Ezekiel’s “wheel within a wheel” vision. There is no apparent coherent chronology as the revelator shifts easily between the present and different facets of the future. His characteristic rhetorical indicator, *kai eidon*, has no predictable progression.<sup>5</sup> These obstacles notwithstanding, an understanding of the structure of Revelation is essential to the interpretation of any of its constituent parts.

Many of the problems with interpreting Revelation 20, stem from the interpreter’s determination about the place of the chapter in the rhetoric of the Apocalypse. As Deere recognizes, “The exegesis of Revelation 20... is determined largely by the interpreter’s view of the immediate context of 19:11-20:15. Does this section indicate a chronological progression from beginning to end, or does 20:1-6 recapitulate details in the book given before 19:11?”<sup>6</sup> A number of commentators suggest that the passage can only be understood via a hermeneutic governed by recapitulation as they draw parallels with earlier chapters, that generally focus on the apocalyptic battle between good and evil forces.<sup>7</sup> While I admit that the unique structure of Revelation provides premises on which recapitulationists can build an argument, I feel that the evidence for a coherent chronology is stronger.

Rhetorical and literary analyses have demonstrated that Revelation 20 is a part of a linear chronological framework that begins in chapter 12 with the beginning of the Satanic rebellion and ends in chapter 22 with the restoration of Divine rule.<sup>8</sup> Chapter 12 provides details about the celestial confrontation between

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<sup>5</sup>Henry Barclay Swete warns against viewing the *kai eidon* as a chronological indicator, arguing that if the author intended such, he would have used *meta tauta eidon* (cf. 18:1; 19:1). (*The Apocalypse of St. John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968], 259). However, the author does not appear to have a set pattern as we see in 13:11 and 15:1 where the *kai eidon* is definitely intended to be understood chronologically. See also Wilfrid J. Harrington: “... “then I saw” links, loosely, a number of visions...” (*Revelation* [Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1993], 196).

<sup>6</sup>Jack S. Deere, “Premillennialism in Revelation 20:4-6,” *BSac* 135 (1978), 60. See also George Eldon Ladd: “A key issue in our understanding of the millennium is whether chapter 20 involves recapitulation, looking back from the end to the whole story of the church.” (*A Commentary on the Revelation of John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972], 261).

<sup>7</sup>James A. Hughes feels that chapter 12 provides an account of the heavenly millennial reign. (“Revelation 20:4-6 and the Question of the Millennium,” *WTJ* 35 [1973], 281ff). Eugenio Corsini suggests that both chapters 12 and 20 are intended to portray the defeat of Satan. (*The Apocalypse: The Perennial Revelation of Jesus Christ* [Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1983], 365-67). R. Fowler White posits that the events in Revelation 20:1-6 occur before the parousia. (“Reexamining the Evidence for Recapitulation in Rev 20:1-10,” *WTJ* 51 [1989], 319-44). For similar arguments see Harrington, 199.

<sup>8</sup>Pablo Richard recognizes “Chapter 12 and the present passage are paired to form an enclosure.” (*Apocalypse: A People’s Commentary on the Book of Revelation* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995], 149). This is also noticed by Gourgues who remarks “... everything described since chap. 12 finds its conclusion in chap. 20. The destiny of the faithful as well as that of the adversaries are determined for good.” (681) See also William H. Shea who sees these two passages as an *inclusio*: “This unique parallel between these two passages provides some evidence of an intent to connect the two narratives.” (“The Parallel Literary Structure of Revelation 12 and 20,” *AUSS* 23 [1985], 45); Derwood C. Smith, “The Millennial Reign of Jesus Christ. Some Observations on Rev. 20:1-10,” *RestQ* 16 (1973), 229-30; Jeffrey L. Townsend, “Is the Present Age the Millennium?” *BSac* 140 (1983), 212-13; Roloff, 223; and

good and evil when Satan was expelled from heaven and set up residence on earth, opposing any representation of God. The first six verses serve as a rhetorical *narratio* and highlight the two heavenly “signs” that serve as the protagonist and antagonist for the remainder of the passage.

Chapter 13 describes the “beast” agents through whom the Dragon accomplishes his plans. The beasts exercise so much control on the earth that they are able to limit the transactions of the saints. Probably in a bid to “keep hope alive,” the revelator occasionally sees a need to give his readers a glimpse of future glory in the dismal account of the rampant abuse by Satan and his agents. The first of these occurs in 14:1-5 where the destiny of the redeemed is heralded. Chapter 14:7-13 is dedicated to the final warning of those who have been deceived by Devil and his agents. 14:14-16 indicate the “reaping” of the righteous by “one like a son of man.” It is here that the parousia takes place in the narrative. After the righteous are reaped from the earth, 14:17-20 address the “reaping of the wicked.” These verses should probably be seen as a *transitus* by *narratio* that summarize the detailed information that follows.

As he goes into detail about the punishment of the wicked, John sees another “sign” (15:1) which he describes as “great and marvelous” since it indicates God’s vengeance upon his enemies. Now the righteous have been safely rescued, the seven angels of chapter 16 can pour out the last plagues, indicating God’s vindictive judgement on the wicked. Chapters 17-18 detail the judgement and perdition of the wanton woman, and the demise of Babylon.<sup>9</sup> Before the wicked are defeated, the readers are given another prolepsis of their destiny in 19:1-10, as they are reminded that while these terrible plagues are meted out, they have already been redeemed from the earth and are currently in heaven. Chapter nineteen describes the initial judgement and demise of the wicked as the rider on the white horse leads the heavenly host to victory.<sup>10</sup> The defeat of the nations is prefaced in a braggartly note as an angel standing in the sun invites the scavaging birds to enjoy the feast of the soon to be decimated enemy. The beast and false prophet from chapter thirteen are first captured and thrown into the lake of fire. Then comes the final annihilation of the wicked institutions and people in 19:11-21, as the heavenly hosts conquer the earthly armies, and put an end to the beast and false prophet who are thrown into the lake of fire.

With the punishment of the beast and false prophet, Satan alone is left to

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Ladd, 261.

<sup>9</sup>Smith sees chapters 17-18 as a recapitulation “... describing events that occurred before the pouring out of the seventh bowl and relating these events to those of John’s day.” (228) But see Ladd: “...chapters 18-20 appear to present a series of connected visions. Chapter 18 tells of the destruction of Babylon; chapter 19 tells of the destruction of the beast and the false prophet; and chapter 20 moves on to tell of the destruction of Satan himself—a destruction accomplished in two stages. Antichrist, the false prophet, and Satan form an evil triumvirate, and are closely linked in chapter 13.” (261)

<sup>10</sup>M. Eugene Boring sees 10:1-22:5 as the “final literary unit.” (“Revelation 19-21: End without Closure,” *PSBSup* 3 [1994], 68).

face divine retribution.<sup>11</sup> His end is detailed in chapter 20 which has four distinct sections.<sup>12</sup> He is symbolically bound and confined in the abyss for 1,000 years (20:1-3).<sup>13</sup> During the thousand years of Satan's imprisonment, the Saints in heaven are entrusted with the work of judgement (20:4-6). At Satan's release, he assembles his demonic hosts who had joined him in his banishment and attempts to wage war on the redeemed; however God himself has to put an end to this spiritual warfare and rains down a consuming fire on the rebels (20:7-10). The wicked dead are then resurrected, and receive their punishment (20:11-15). With this, Death and Hades are also terminated.<sup>14</sup> Only after the earth has been cleansed from all evil is the New Kingdom established (21:1-22:5).

### **Satan's Detention and the Commencement of the Millennium (20:1-3)**

Having established a chronological framework in which to place Revelation 20, I can now commence with my exegesis. I have already demonstrated that the chronology of chapter 20 does not allow for either an amillennial or a postmillennial reading.<sup>15</sup> The events take place after the parousia in the interim aeon, and not during the current aeon. By the end of chapter nineteen, all human life has been terminated from the earth. Now, in 20:1, as the interim aeon commences, John sees an "angel coming down from heaven" to the desolate earth. This is not one in a series of angels, but an angel who has a special commission as is indicated by his "having the key of the abyss and a great chain upon his hand." The angel's possession of the key to the abyss calls our attention to 9:1 when, as the fifth seal is being opened, a "star" comes from heaven and opens the shaft of the abyss to release the locusts.<sup>16</sup> While some have posited that the angels of chapters 9 and 20

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<sup>11</sup>See Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 359. Richard views Revelation 20 as the final episode in the story of Satan that is revealed in several stages throughout the book: Satan in heaven (12:1-6); Satan is thrown down to earth (12:7-12); Satan on earth (12:13-17; 13:2; 16:13-16); Satan is thrown in the abyss for a thousand years (20:1-3); Satan is destroyed (20:7-10). (148-49)

<sup>12</sup>Sydney H. T. Page refers to this as four "visions" ("Revelation 20 and Pauline Eschatology," *JETS* 32 [1980], 31-32). I am suggesting that this portion of the macro vision has four "sections."

<sup>13</sup>J. Hughes correctly refers to this section of the vision as a "prelude" to the millennium. (281)

<sup>14</sup>Notice the order of those who are sentenced to the lake of fire. The beast and the false prophet are thrown in first in chapter 19, then Satan is thrown in. Finally, death and Hades are thrown in. This is obviously a chronological progression. Inasmuch as the beast and the false prophet operate under the influence of the Dragon, they are separate entities, and are destroyed as such. To claim that the account in 20 is a parallel vision to 19 is to say that the Dragon, false prophet, and beast are one and the same.

<sup>15</sup>Review the response of Townsend, *passim*, to the amillennial argument in Arthur H. Lewis, *The Dark Side of the Millennium: The Problem of Evil in Revelation 20:1-10* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).

<sup>16</sup>That angels are symbolized by stars is established in 12:4.

are different,<sup>17</sup> since the two appear to have the same function, I see no reason to deny that they are one and the same.<sup>18</sup> This is the “angel of the key to the abyss” who—like other angels with important functions in Revelation—remains unnamed.<sup>19</sup>

John expects his auditors to be familiar with the abyss. The actual term, *abussos*, is used by the LXX to translate the Hebrew term for “deep” in Genesis 1:1. It conjures the image of a vacuous and desolate space that is thick with darkness. According to chapter 9, when the shaft to the abyss is opened, a dark smoke emerges from it that heavily clouds the sun and the air. It is so utterly dismal that even Luke’s demons beg Jesus to transfer them to swine rather than the abyss (Luke 8:31). It is not, as some suppose, the “... home of demons and unclean spirits.”<sup>20</sup> Neither, as Roloff recognizes, is it “... a place of punishment...” It is “... a place of banishment.”<sup>21</sup>

The angel’s specific purpose is made clear in verses two and three. First, he arrests “the dragon, the ancient serpent, the Devil even Satan.” These same epithets are used in 12:9 when the heavenly confrontation between Michael and the Dragon is described. *Drakon* (dragon) is his primary description—the megalomaniac with seven heads and ten horns who is the source of demonic authority through whom the beasts and false prophet operate. *Ophis archaios* (ancient serpent) takes us back to the Garden of Eden and the fall of humanity.<sup>22</sup> He is also called *ho Diabolos kai Satan*—not two names, but one. He is the Demonizing Satan—the arch deceiver who has cultic attraction. Since the fall he has been active in the work of deception. Acting as an *inclusio*, these epithets indicate the end of the struggle.<sup>23</sup> Here in chapter 20, there are no institutions for the *drakon* to control. There are no people to tempt.<sup>24</sup> And as soon as the angel accomplishes his task, not even the

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<sup>17</sup>Cf. Corsini, 364, and M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 305; Richard, 149.

<sup>18</sup>So Mounce, 360.

<sup>19</sup>Mulholland identifies the angel as Jesus (305); and Corsini claims that it is Michael (365-67). But see R. C. H. Lenski who once viewed the angel as Jesus but has since recognized his anonymity. (*The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943, 1963], 567).

<sup>20</sup>Walvoord, 290. See also Joachim Jeremias, “*abussos*,” *TDNT* 1.9-10. Ladd, 261; Lenski, 567; and J. W. Roberts who states: “By *pit* (Greek, *abussos*) is meant the spiritual underworld, the bode or stronghold of Satan (9:1; 11:7; 17:8).” (*The Revelation to John* [Austin, Texas: Sweet, 1974], 170).

<sup>21</sup>Roloff, 226.

<sup>22</sup>Moses Stuart allows for this interpretation, although he feels it more likely to be a parallel for *drakon*. (*A Commentary on the Apocalypse* [New York: M. H. Newman; Andover: Allen, Morrill, and Wardwell, 1845], 355).

<sup>23</sup>See Lenski “... these four names certainly intend to take us back to the identical four terms found in 12:9...” (568)

<sup>24</sup>J. P. M. Sweet suggests that “The reference to Genesis 3 prepares for the removal of the curse and recovery of the tree of life which is the theme of the next chapters.” (*Revelation* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979], 288).

fallen angels can be deceived by his thwarted plans.

After arresting the dragon, the angel binds him with the great chain. While the imagery is vivid, it is obviously intended to be symbolical. This angel has power over Satan and is able to render him inactive.<sup>25</sup> Satan is sentenced to remain in chains for a thousand years, and then he is cast into the abyss which is “locked and sealed over him.” While some have argued for the literal nature of the 1,000 years,<sup>26</sup> given the use of numbers in Revelation, it should more probably be taken symbolically to mean an unspecified—but definite—period of time.<sup>27</sup> Satan’s imprisonment is temporary in contrast to his destruction which lasts *eis tous aionas ton aionon* (20:10).<sup>28</sup>

According to verse three, Satan is imprisoned to restrict him from “deceiving the nations.” As Ladd recognizes, “The mention of the nations raises a difficult question. One would suppose from the preceding chapters of Revelation that the entirety of mankind had been involved in the struggle between Christ and the Antichrist.”<sup>29</sup> Ladd suggests that only those nations that had aligned themselves to the beast and false prophet had been killed in chapter 19, and “there apparently remain nations outside the scope of this struggle....”<sup>30</sup> He posits an earthly existence of saints with incorruptible resurrected bodies and the unrighteous with their corruptible bodies.<sup>31</sup> The problem with this interpretation is seen in Revelation 14:6-

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<sup>25</sup>See John F. Walvoord: “The intention is not to represent Satan as merely restricted but as rendered completely inactive.” (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ* [London & Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1966], 291).

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Stuart, 356; Walvoord, 295 (“It may also be faithfully held that all numbers in the Revelation are literal.”); Deere, 71 (“... the duration of the saints’ reign is a literal thousand years.”); and Townsend, 213-14.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. P. Hughes, 209; Ladd, 262 (“While we need not take it literally, the thousand years does appear to present a real period of time, however long or short it may be.”); Sweet, 288 (“...the period is symbolic – the seventh world-day...”); Lenski, 573; Harrington, 196; Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 235, (“Satan is bound for a perfect period.”); Page, 32. Symbolic numbers are used frequently in Revelation. Already we have seen the Revelator use 144,000 to define a number that he later describes as a “great multitude” (Cf. 7:4, 9). The symbolic use of chiliastic language is used by the Psalmist and Peter and is replete in apocalyptic literature. For a good survey of millennial thought in Jewish literature see Barbara Wootten Snyder, “How Millennial is the Millennium? A Study in the Background of the 1000 Years in Revelation 20,” *Evangelical Journal* (1991), 51-74. See also Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse. A Reading of the Revelation of John* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 93.

<sup>28</sup>As Talbert recognizes, the notion of binding evil powers before the eschatological judgement is not foreign to ancient Jewish thought. (91) See Isa 24:21-22; 1 Enoch 10:4-10; 18:12-16; 21:1-6; 54:5-6; Jubilees 5:10; T. Levi 18:12; Similitudes of Enoch 53:3; 54:4.

<sup>29</sup>Ladd, 262. See also Mealy, 238, and Krodell, 324 (“The anti-God nations have been eliminated already.”) Apparently, Mounce does not realize that he has contradicted himself when he states: “the purpose of this confinement is not to punish him but to prevent him from deceiving the nations.” (362) Earlier on he suggests: “Their (the armies of antichrist) destruction is complete. There now remains but one who must still meet a like fate—Satan himself....” (359) But see his explanation on p. 363.

<sup>30</sup>Ladd, 263.

<sup>31</sup>Ladd, 268.

12, where the message of the three angels goes to “those living on the earth and to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.” (14:6) The third angel warns the universe about the consequences of receiving the mark of the beast (14:9-11). According to this pericope (14:6-12), at the end of time, only two groups remain: those with the mark of the beast, and those with the seal of God. As we have seen, chapter nineteen details the defeat of those with the mark of the beast. With this in mind, Roloff is right with his straight reading of chapter twenty: “... the whole of humankind that does not belong to the salvation community is to be considered as already having perished in the messianic final battle.”<sup>32</sup>

So who are the nations? This question will be answered when I comment on verse eight. What is important here is the incapacitation of Satan. The emphasis is not so much on the status of the nations during Satan’s internment, but on what will take place after his release. In other words, he is not bound to prevent him from deceiving the nations,<sup>33</sup> but he is released for the purpose of deceiving the nations.<sup>34</sup> He is forced into a pre-creation environment as he abides in the “deep.” As Hartingsveld notes, “This incarceration serves as a pretrial detention until the day of judgement.”<sup>35</sup> At the end of the millennium, he will be released—but only “for a little while” (20:3).

### **The Saints Judicial Reign During the Millennium (20:4-6)**

The next section of the vision shifts its focus from the plight of Satan during the millennium to the activities of the righteous (20:4-6). The text itself does not specify where these events take place, which leads some commentators to argue for an earthly provenance.<sup>36</sup> However, as we peruse Revelation we see in 14:1-6 the image of the 144,000 redeemed, and they appear to be before the heavenly throne. Chapter seven also indicates the presence of the entire host of the redeemed before the throne of God. In fact, in 7:15, we are told that the multitude of the redeemed “worship him day and night within his temple,” while 21:22 informs us that in the earthly kingdom there is not temple. Further, as we look at 19:1, we see the “great crowd” of the redeemed “in heaven.” Indeed, it is not until chapter 21 that the New Heavens and new earth become a reality. Additionally, Morris notes that John “...uses ‘throne’ forty-seven times in all, and except for Satan’s throne (ii. 13) and that of the beast (xiii. 2, xvi. 10) all appear to be in heaven. It would accord with

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<sup>32</sup>Roloff, 227.

<sup>33</sup>*Contra* Morris, 235.

<sup>34</sup>See J. Hughes, 282.

<sup>35</sup>L. van Hartingsveld, *Revelation. A Practical Commentary* (Trans. John Vriend. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 81. See also Stuart, 356.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. Mounce, 360; Deere, 69-73.

this if he here meant a reign in heaven.”<sup>37</sup>

In his heavenly vision of the future, John sees thrones--symbols of authority and rulership (20:4). On these thrones are those to whom judgement has been given. In fact, their very position as rulers on thrones qualifies them to judge.<sup>38</sup> Stuart proposes that the ones on the thrones are Jesus, God, and special angels who comprise a “heavenly Consessus”, and whose task it is to vindicate the martyrs.<sup>39</sup> Others have suggested that the judges on these thrones are the twenty-four elders (11:16ff).<sup>40</sup> Indeed, as we look at 11:18, we see that they are concerned with the judgement as they remind God that his time has come to judge. However, the context demands that neither a heavenly Consessus nor the twenty-four elders have been entrusted with judgement. The interpretive basis for this pericope is the judgement scene of Daniel 7 where *to krima edoken hagiois upsistou* (7:22).<sup>41</sup> Although Walvoord thinks that “the interpretation of verse 4 is complicated by a lack of specificity,”<sup>42</sup> the referents are clear from the end of the verse and also verse 6: “they reign with him for a thousand years.” Who are the they? The following discussion will demonstrate that these are indeed the full number of the redeemed.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to the judges, John mentions another group of people--those who had been “beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God.” (20:4)<sup>44</sup> Much has been speculated about these martyrs. P. Hughes focuses his attention on the term *psuche*, and suggests that the group is comprised of dead “souls” who have either been martyred or died a natural death while resisting the beast.<sup>45</sup> However, this Platonic understanding of *psuche* is not true to the biblical usage of the word.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Morris, 236. See also similar argument in Krodel, 333-34. For a detailed argument in favor of a celestial reign see Michel Gourgues, “The Thousand-Year Reign (Rev 20:1-6): Terrestrial or Celestial?” *CBQ* 47 (1985), 676-81. See also Shea, 48; and J. Hughes who parallels chapter 20 with chapter 12 and suggests that the thousand years corresponds to the 1260 days. (284ff)

<sup>38</sup>Stuart, 357.

<sup>39</sup>Stuart, 358.

<sup>40</sup>e.g. Walvoord, 296. I really don’t see how Walvoord bases his conclusion on 5:10.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. Roberts, 172; Krodel, 333.

<sup>42</sup>Walvoord, 296.

<sup>43</sup>Cf. Roloff, 227-28; Deere, 64; and Shea, 42.

<sup>44</sup>Robert G. Bratcher and Howard A. Hatton suggest that the syntax of the Greek demands that the martyrs be among those sitting on the throne. (*A Handbook on the Revelation to John* [New York: UBS, 1993], 287). See also Roberts, 173.

<sup>45</sup>P. Hughes, 211-212.

<sup>46</sup>Contra J. Hughes, 289ff. For the brief, yet definitive, study on the New Testament understanding of death, see Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul; or, Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1958).

As Ladd recognizes, “... it may well be that John actually envisaged two groups: a larger group of all the saints and then a smaller group – the martyrs – whom he singles out for special attention.”<sup>47</sup>

This group of martyrs had apparently been resurrected at the beginning of the millennium. The martyrs probably include those who under the fifth seal yearned for Yahweh to avenge their blood (6:9-10). The reward for the faithful is a chance to reign with Christ for the millennium. The martyrs do not reign by themselves, but with all others who sit on the thrones. Paul in 1 Corinthians shares the view that the saints will judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2).<sup>48</sup> In order to judge the world, it is assumed that the saints have already been vindicated themselves. It is taken for granted that the judgement that takes place during this period is an investigative precursor to the execution of judgement that is referred to in verses 11-15.

Not only do martyrs occupy the throne, but there is another group: “those who did not worship the beast or his image and did not receive the mark on their forehead or on their hand” (20:4). Some are tempted to view this phrase as a continuation of the martyrs’ description.<sup>49</sup> However, as a number of exegetes recognize, the *kai hoitines* in verse 4 lets us know that there is another distinct category mentioned, who are really the second subset of the judges.<sup>50</sup> They have heeded the warning of 14:9-12 and have resisted the beast.<sup>51</sup> They were rescued from the throes of the beast when the “one like a son of man” reaped them from the earth during the parousia (14:14-16). They never experienced death.<sup>52</sup> They are the ones described by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4 who are joined by the dead at the parousia. In distinguishing between the two groups described in 20:4, Talbert notes,

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<sup>47</sup>Ladd, 263.

<sup>48</sup>One may reasonably ask how the millennial judgement would fit in to Paul’s eschatology. If, indeed, Paul echoes an early Christian belief about the role of the saints in the judgement—one that finds precedent in Daniel 7—we can suppose that his apocalyptic vision is actually complemented by John’s. I find it strange that in his discussion of Revelation 20:4-6 and its relationship to Pauline eschatology, Page does not even mention 1 Corinthians 6:2. (35-40)

<sup>49</sup>e.g. Walvoord who refers to them as “tribulation saints.” (296) Also Hartingsveld, 82.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. Lenski, 579; Smith, 224; Swete, 262; Krodel, 333-34. But see Deere who opposes the ‘two group’ reading based on his subjective reading of *kai hoitines* in 1:7 and his understanding of *ezesan* as “came to life” rather than “live.” (65)

<sup>51</sup>Corsini, 373, et al., read too much into the text when they assume that Revelation 13:15 predicts the total annihilation of those who refuse to worship the beast.

<sup>52</sup>J. Massyngberde Ford suggests that the phrase is an interpolation and reasons—on the basis of *ezesan*—that this group was also dead. (*Revelation* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975], 349). However, the verb *zao* simply means “to live”, and does not carry with it the connotation of *anastasis*. Richard also has an interesting interpretation with his comment: “These [proleptic] martyrs who at this moment are still alive will one day die, but they also, because they are martyrs, hope to share in the first resurrection and in the thousand year reign.” (151-52)

“What distinguished them is that some are martyrs, some are not.”<sup>53</sup> And so together, the martyrs and the truly immortal, comprise the righteous elect who are entrusted with judgement.<sup>54</sup>

John informs us that the host of the redeemed “lived and reigned with Christ 1,000 years.”<sup>55</sup> A number of commentators understand *ezesan* to be a reference to “resurrection.”<sup>56</sup> However, *zao* should probably be translated simply as “live” since those in the second group are already alive and do not need to be resurrected.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, resurrection is implicit in the context for it is only natural to assume that the dead must be resurrected before they can live. The idea here is that the entire number of the redeemed—the “great crowd”—are now alive and enjoying their eschatological destiny. Part of that destiny involves the task of judging the world as they participate as co-rulers with Christ.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, the judgement lasts for the thousand years, after which the saints “gain possession of the kingdom” (Dan 7:22).

According to 20:5, the beheaded martyrs do not comprise all those who have died, since “the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended” (20:5). Who is included among *hoi loipoi*? On the surface, it appears that John leaves open the identification of the “rest.” P. Hughes, with his amillennial reading, sees “the rest” as “those who, in contrast to Christian believers who have died and whose souls live and reign with Christ within this span of **the thousand years**, end their present life in a state of impenitence and unbelief.”<sup>59</sup> Some premillennialists have suggested that only a select number share the heavenly reward, while the remnant await their reward at the end of the millennium.<sup>60</sup> However, it is clear that if those in heaven who have been entrusted with judgement include the righteous who were alive at the parousia and the resurrected righteous,

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<sup>53</sup>Talbert, 91. Mulholland also recognizes that this group has never seen death, but his amillennial reading hinders him from setting the scene after the parousia.. (309)

<sup>54</sup>Contra Richard who writes: “Those who do justice in 20:4 are the martyrs...” (151)

<sup>55</sup>Harrington, notes that the concept of a millennial reign during a messianic golden age was common in Jewish literature. Ford lists the “millennial” theories of a number of Rabbis. (353) She cites Herman L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, vol 4, Die Brief des Neuen Testaments und die Offenbarung Johannis, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Munich: Beckische, 1926), 823-27.

<sup>56</sup>So Richard who cites Revelation 2:8 as evidence for his interpretation. (150, note 6) See also Ladd, 265-67; Walvoord, 297; and Roberts who sees it figuratively as a resurrection of the martyrs “cause.”(173-74)

<sup>57</sup>Morris recognizes, “This is not the usual word for resurrection (though cf. Jn. xi. 25).” (237)

<sup>58</sup>In his comment on the judicial function of the saints, Stuart notes: “...*krima edothe autois* will mean for substance the same thing as *ebasileusan* in the latter part of the verse...” (357) See also Bratcher and Hatton, 287.

<sup>59</sup>P. Hughes, 213.

<sup>60</sup>e.g. Harrington proposes that “They are there as representatives of the whole Church pictured as, distinctively, a church of martyrs.” (199)

it only stands to reason the *hoi loipoi* refers to the wicked dead, including those who suffered defeat in the final battle of chapter 19.<sup>61</sup>

John makes it clear that not all of the dead are resurrected at the beginning of the millennium. In referring to this as the "first" resurrection, he calls our attention to a second resurrection that takes place after the millennium.<sup>62</sup> If preconditioned by the notion of a Jewish expectation for a general resurrection, the concept of two resurrections may sound somewhat unorthodox. However, let's not forget Glasson's observation: "... it is difficult to find a single reference in the O.T. or in other B.C. writings to the Great Assize at which *all* the living and dead are judged."<sup>63</sup> As a precursor to his research results he declares, "... I have been unable to find in any pre-Christian writing, a clear indication of this all-inclusive forensic judgement."<sup>64</sup>

In spite of the lack of explicit pre-Christian texts that address a general resurrection, many feel that the traditional understanding must be protected. Consequently, In an attempt to harmonize John's view with the perceived "orthodox" view of a "general" resurrection, several interesting interpretations have been offered, that deny the possibility of two literal resurrections: (1) the absence of the specific phrase *deutera anastasis* for second resurrection, means that there is none;<sup>65</sup> (2) the term "first resurrection" describes the immortal existence of Christians after death;<sup>66</sup> (3) the "first resurrection" takes place at baptism;<sup>67</sup> (4) the "first resurrection" is to be understood figuratively: "The martyrs' reign with Christ

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<sup>61</sup>See Smith, 226.

<sup>62</sup>J. Hughes acknowledges: "The term 'the *first* resurrection' implies that there is a *second* resurrection." (299)

<sup>63</sup>T. Francis Glasson, "The Last Judgment—in Rev. 20 and Related Writings," *NTS* 28 (1981), 528.

<sup>64</sup>Glasson, 529.

<sup>65</sup>Morris comments: "He never speaks of the 'second resurrection' to correspond with the first." (238) Also Norman Shepherd: "A peculiar and obvious feature of Revelation 20 is the fact that there is no second resurrection named as such in the context...." ("The Resurrections of Revelation 20," *WTJ* 37 [1974], 35).

<sup>66</sup>Harrington states "For a faithful Christian death *is* resurrection." (200). See also Charles Homer Giblin, *The Book of Revelation* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 185; and J. Hughes, 290. Also Meredith G. Kline's rather fancy argument where he argues that *protos* means "old" and not "first." ("The First Resurrection," *WTJ* 37 [1975], 367-68). Using this logic he reasons, "If the second resurrection is a bodily resurrection, the first resurrection must be a non-bodily resurrection." (370) He explains further "For the Christian, to die is resurrection." (372) See the thorough critique of the article by J. Ramsey Michaels, "The First Resurrection: A Response," *WTJ* 39 (1976), 100-09.

<sup>67</sup>P. Hughes, 213-15. In light of his reasoning, I fail to see how Hughes can be so adamant about his claim that the first resurrection for the believer is physical and not spiritual. This view is also shared by Page, 37-40 and Shepherd, 37; and suggested by Corsini: "It is useless to debate the sense of the term, as it is clear from all that we have seen that John uses it in a purely spiritual fashion. The resurrection spoken of here is not only an eschatological reality but has already taken place, even before the coming of Christ." (379)

is the first resurrection”;<sup>68</sup> (5) the “first resurrection” is actually a series of ten divisions that began with Enoch;<sup>69</sup> (6) the “first resurrection” is the eschatological resurrection of the *zoe* without the *soma*;<sup>70</sup> (7) the “first resurrection” is only experienced by the martyrs.<sup>71</sup>

Space does not permit me to respond to each one of these arguments, but the brief response that follows will suffice to show that one fights a losing battle when trying to deny the doctrine of two resurrections in Revelation 20. It is indeed true that John does not use the words *deutera anastasis*, but the very presence of 20:11-15 make two resurrections an explicit reality.<sup>72</sup> The two resurrections are described in the gospel as the resurrection of life and the resurrection of damnation (John 5:29), and here we find that they are separated by a thousand year period.<sup>73</sup> Neither is there any reason to spiritualize or allegorize either one of these resurrections. Revelation does not share the view of a person’s spiritual transference to heaven after death. The use of *anastasis* (20:5, 6) leaves no doubt that a bodily existence follows the resurrection.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, the same verb used for the saints existence, *zao*, is used for Christ’s existence in 1:18 and 2:8.<sup>75</sup> And let’s not forget that some of the saints had never even died.<sup>76</sup>

That the first resurrection is to be preferred over the second is demonstrated by a beatitude: “Blessed and holy is the one having a part in the first resurrection.” The reason for the beatification is seen in the sentence that follows: “On these the second death has no authority.” Having already disturbed apocalyptic terminology

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<sup>68</sup>Roberts, 174. Emphasis mine.

<sup>69</sup>Roy L. Aldrich, “Divisions of the First Resurrection,” *BSac* 128 (1971), 117-19.

<sup>70</sup>See discussion in Lenski, 580-84. See also J. Hughes who concludes that neither resurrection is bodily. (280)

<sup>71</sup>Hartingsveld, 82 (“That which applies to all the believers... is granted to the martyrs a thousand years earlier, as compensation for the suffering they have endured for Christ’s sake.”).

<sup>72</sup>See Ladd who responds: “Two resurrections are implied in the twofold use of *ezesan*; and a second ‘resurrection’ is described if not labeled as such in vs. 12.” (268) Roloff suggests that John intentionally avoids the word “resurrection” for “... the dead who remain outside the salvation community...” (228)

<sup>73</sup>Townsend comments: “These two resurrections are discussed in more detail in Revelation 20 where only blessing is associated with the coming to life in 20:4 and only judgement is associated with the coming to life in 20:5 (which is developed further in 20:11-15).” (220)

<sup>74</sup>See Deere, 67. Townsend comments “In over 40 uses in the New Testament, with only one clear exception (Luke 2:34), *anastasis* always refers to bodily resurrection.” (219)

<sup>75</sup>See brief comment in Sweet, 289.

<sup>76</sup>But see Ladd who comments: “The New Testament does not elsewhere clearly teach a twofold resurrection, although it is implied in such passages as John 5:29 and 1 Cor. 15:24-25. Paul nowhere in his epistles speaks of the resurrection of unbelievers; he is altogether concerned with the destiny of those who are in Christ.” (268) Also Krodel who suggests that the reference in I Thessalonians 4:16 of the dead in Christ rising *first* is an indication that Paul also had a concept of two resurrections. (336)

by introducing the concept of two resurrections, the Revelator now declares that there are two deaths. After all, it only stands to reason that "... the term 'the *second* death' implies that there is a *first* death."<sup>77</sup> Fortunately, the concept of a "first death" is more easily explained than that of a "second resurrection." The first death is the natural biological death,<sup>78</sup> and is often defined in the Bible as a "sleep" (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13; John 11:11-14).<sup>79</sup> All who encounter this death will also experience resurrection (1 Thess 4:14-16; John 5:28-29; 11:24). The "second death" refers to the eternal death that is consequential to the lake of fire, from which there is no resurrection.<sup>80</sup> While some have attempted to spiritualize the nature of this death, it too involves the cessation of biological existence.<sup>81</sup>

The millennial saints are immune from the authority of the second death as they experience the reality of eternal life in the very presence of God. The Revelator reminds them of the added benefit that is afforded them of serving as priests for God and Christ and co-ruling with them.<sup>82</sup> They are finally able to realize their proleptic status endowed upon them when YHWH declared to Israel at the mountain "You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation." (Exod. 19:6) Responsibilities of rulership are also connected to the original status of humanity who was given dominion over all things (Gen 1:28). This special privilege will be experienced for the first time during the thousand years as the redeemed audit the records of the Divine court in preparation for the final aeon.

### **The Destruction of Satan and His Allies (20:7-10)**

The revelator now focuses his attention on the period immediately following the millennium when Satan has been released from his prison (20:7). "When the thousand years ended" casts our mind to the same clause in verse 5 when it is stated that the rest of the dead are not resurrected until the completion of the thousand years. Until the universal judgement takes place, the new aeon cannot commence. Satan's release signals the beginning of the end of the preparation period as the saints complete their judicial responsibilities. Now judgement must be executed and the earth must be prepared for the final aeon when the New

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<sup>77</sup>J. Hughes, 299.

<sup>78</sup>See comments by Shepherd, 37.

<sup>79</sup>P. Hughes' spiritualizing leads him to suggest that as the first resurrection is experienced by a participation in the life of Christ, the first death is experienced by participation in the death of Adam. (215-16) Of course, even the casual reader would recognize that this conclusion is not evident in the text, and finds more credence in Paul's soteriology than John's eschatology.

<sup>80</sup>Cf. Ladd, 268.

<sup>81</sup>See the response to Kline's suggestion that the second death is a spiritual one by Michaels, 101.

<sup>82</sup>I agree--in principle--with Lenski's comment: "When each martyr's and each confessor's soul enters heaven it joins Christ and all his kings in the kingly rule. This, too, is why he is called "King of kings and Lord of lords." (583.)

Jerusalem will occupy the rejuvenated earth.

As already anticipated in verse 3, the sole purpose of Satan's release is to deceive the nations (20:8). The difficulty that is first sensed by the mention of the "nations" fits easily into the interpretive framework of those who see continued life on earth after the parousia.<sup>83</sup> However, it provides an apparent obstacle to the flow of the hermeneutic that has governed this study. If we are correct in our structural chronology, and the events have been sequentially linked from chapter 12,<sup>84</sup> then who are the "nations" if the host of the wicked have already been annihilated? Those who support a recapitulation literary structure suggest that this event parallels that of 19:17ff.<sup>85</sup> However, we have already rejected the possibility that John intends to convey the understanding that humans remain alive on earth during the parousia.<sup>86</sup> Others have suggested that the "nations" are the resurrected wicked, but this too can only be supported by a recapitulation theory since the second resurrection does not take place until verse 12? I am not opposed to recapitulation theories, but a cursory survey of the literature demonstrates their subjective nature. Not having the time to conduct detailed exegetical studies on form and structure, the original audience would not have had the luxury to analyze the Revelator's literary style.

An interesting alternative to the understanding of "nations" is provided by Krodel who looks at the mythical understanding of Gog and Magog.<sup>87</sup> John's use of Gog and Magog is obviously based on Ezekiel 38 and 39 where the prophet speaks of an eschatological battle that ends when Yahweh showers fire on the enemy whose flesh is consumed by scavengers. In apocalyptic literature, Gog and Magog are developed "... into mythlike symbols for anti-Messianic forces."<sup>88</sup> Gog and Magog are also featured in the apocalyptic thought of rabbinic literature.<sup>89</sup> Krodel suggests that "For John, the nations of Gog and Magog are an army of

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<sup>83</sup>e.g. Walvoord sees the "nations" as the descendants of raptured saints who are now given the freedom to choose evil. (302) The pessimistic result of this reasoning is seen when a large majority of the descendants choose to rebel against God. (ibid. 304-05) He concludes: "Thus ends also the false theory that man under perfect environment will willingly serve the God who created and redeemed him." (ibid., 305) This does not say much about the nature of his millennial Messianic kingdom.

<sup>84</sup>So Mounce, 373.

<sup>85</sup>See Lenski, 591f., Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation* (Leicester/Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1975), 193, and Harrington, 197-98, who feel that 16:12-16, 17:14-18, 19:11-21 and 20:7-10 are all snippets of the same story.

<sup>86</sup>Contra Ladd, 269, et al.

<sup>87</sup>Krodel, 337.

<sup>88</sup>Roberts, 175, cites Sibylline Oracles 3:512; 2 Esdras 13:34; Enoch 56:5-8; 90:13-15; Test. Jos. 19:8, et al.

<sup>89</sup>See Karl Georg Kuhn, "Gog kai Magog," *TDNT* 1.789-91.

demons from the netherworld.”<sup>90</sup> He suggests that this is the demonic army from the abyss in 9:1-11 that contrasts the heavenly host in 9:16-19. While not a widely accepted theory, this does make sense of the chronological problems often faced by those who see a sequential development in this chapter. It helps to explain how Satan’s millennial imprisonment helped to delay a celestial attack against the camp of the redeemed. It also helps us to fill a lacuna that exists in the execution of judgement. The text speaks of the punishment of the woman, the beast, the false prophet, Satan, and the wicked dead. However, nothing is said about the punishment of the angels who accompanied Satan to the earth.<sup>91</sup> This is the only vision that will allow us to witness the punishment of the demonic host.

It is also interesting to note that the “nations” are said to be “in the four corners of the earth.” This phrase is first used in 7:1 when the four angels hold back the four winds. Sweet suggests that “... [the four corners] may indicate the underworld, Satan’s prison, whose entrances are thought to lie at the fringes of the earth....”<sup>92</sup> Another indicator that the satanic army is derived from the netherworld lies in John’s account that they “*came up* upon the flat of the earth.” The image here is that they moved *up* from a lower dimension to the flat dimension.<sup>93</sup> No evil angel is excluded. All are summoned from their abode and deluded with false hopes by the master deceiver. The countless numbers of the wicked are gathered for battle. This is Satan’s last stand. He gathers together the host of evil angels who accompanied him in his banishment from heaven, and encourages them to make a final attack.

All the armies aligned to Satan surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city (20:9). Having established that the earth was entirely destroyed during the final stages surrounding the parousia, and having no record of any section of the world enjoying restoration, it should be assumed that the prophet has the New Jerusalem in view which is en route to earth in preparation for the final judgement.<sup>94</sup> Not being confined by physical bodies, Satan’s spiritual army prepares its celestial attack. However, before they are able to launch an assault, the demonic troops are consumed with fire from heaven. Krodel recognizes that in this confrontation, “No

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<sup>90</sup>Krodel, 337. See also Roloff, 228 (“[Satan] seeks [allies] among the demonic powers because the kings of the earth are no longer available to him (cf. 19:19-21).”); and Giblin, 188.

<sup>91</sup>Walvoord speaks of the fire prepared for “the devil and his angels” but does not speak of the fate of the “angels.” (304-05)

<sup>92</sup>Sweet, 291.

<sup>93</sup>Giblin suggests that they came from the abyss. (188)

<sup>94</sup>Roberts allows for this reading. (176) But see Ladd who posits: “... the saints in the millennium must have some center, and there is no difficulty in supposing that the millennial rule of Christ will have an earthly center in the holy city in the holy land.” (270) Ford suggests, “The corrupt earthly Jerusalem is destroyed and replaced by the millennial Jerusalem, ‘the beloved city,’ a term not used of the earthly Jerusalem in Revelation, and then this millennial Jerusalem is transformed into the heavenly Jerusalem.” (356) For other proponents of an earthly city see Giblin, 188-89; and Mulholland, 306-07.

battle takes place, for the battle has already been won by the slain Lamb....”<sup>95</sup> Recapitulationists, and even some linear chronologists view this as a pre-reference to the judgement of the wicked who, in verse 15, will be thrown in the lake of fire.<sup>96</sup> However, with our reading, a scenario like this would necessitate a *third* resurrection. It seems more probable that this scene portrays the end of the conflict between Michael and the Dragon, as the Dragon and his angels are finally consumed with fire. Indeed, wasn’t hell fire originally prepared “for the Devil and his angels?” (Mt 25:41)

As the evil host is being consumed, the devil is “thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and false prophet are” (20:10). The mention of the beast and false prophet proves the chronological development between chapters nineteen and twenty.<sup>97</sup> The metaphorical image is one of the lake continuously burning throughout the millennium with the two impersonal entities that have been deprived of power. Now the duo is joined by its commissioner, and all three are subject to torment.

The punishment received by the Devil and his cohorts is effective *eis tous aionas ton aionon*. This phrase is often translated, “for ever and ever,” but literally means “unto the ages of the ages.” Governed by the former translation, a number of exegetes reason that *eis tous aionas ton aionon* refers to indefinite torture.<sup>98</sup> However, this understanding is to be rejected since it is obvious that the language used in this context is strictly figurative. We already know that the “beast” and “false prophet” are fictitious entities through whom the dragon operates. As in 14:11 where the smoke of the torment rises into oblivion, John aims to show the eternal permanency of the punishment. So thorough is the annihilation of Satan, that humanity can be sure that “no adversary will rise up twice.” (Nahum. 1:9) In his comment on Revelation 20:10, Ladd recognizes: “It is obvious that this is a picturesque language describing a real fact in the spiritual world: the final and everlasting destruction of the forces of evil which have plagued men since the garden of Eden.”<sup>99</sup> An eternally burning furnace on the earth will only serve as an eternal reminder of sin and evil. Instead, this fire is intended to cleanse the earth of

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<sup>95</sup>Krodel, 337.

<sup>96</sup>Most recapitulationists view this as the same battle of chapter 19. However, it is unlikely that this scene is parallel to 19:17ff. In this chapter, the Devil summons the “nations” by himself, while in the previous chapter it is the beast and false prophet who lead the “kings of the earth” into battle.

<sup>97</sup>But see J. Hughes: “It is unthinkable that Satan would gather the nations if not through the beast and the false prophet.” (283)

<sup>98</sup>See Lenski for his sarcastic (some may say ‘hubristic’) remarks. (298f) Walvoord declares, “Thus the Word of God plainly declares that death is not annihilation and that the wicked exist forever, though in torment.” (304) In a footnote, Mounce, supports this reading: “While it may be difficult, it is nevertheless crucial that we take the text as it is rather than as what we might like it to be.” (374, note 12)

<sup>99</sup>See Ladd, 270-71. Sweet calls this language “liturgical”, and reasons, “Abstractions like the dragon and beasts can hardly be tortured....” (292) Also Harrington, 198.

corruption, hence the Revelator's insistence that the lake of fire and sulphur *is* the second death (Rev. 20:14; 21:8).

### **The Executive Judgement of the Wicked (20:11-15)**

The final phase of this section of the vision details the irreversible elimination of evil and its effects from the earth. While verses 4-6 concentrated on the redeemed, "... the focus of these verses is precisely on those whose names are *not* written in the book of life and who are raised up only to join Death and Hades in the lake of fire."<sup>100</sup>

As judgement is to be executed, it is not the jury, but the judge, who has center stage. John sees "a great white throne, and one sitting on it" (20:11). The judge is none other but God himself.<sup>101</sup> The jury has accomplished its judicial responsibilities and now God must execute judgement. God is introduced in His awesome splendor and his appearance is so terrible that earth and atmospheric heaven flee from his presence.<sup>102</sup> Here the image is conjured of the dissolution of the original creation.<sup>103</sup> "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen 1:1). Now, at the end, heaven and earth are dissolved. Ladd reasons: "... before the new redeemed order can be inaugurated, God's judgement must fall upon the old order; but this judgement is not one of destruction but the prelude to re-creation."<sup>104</sup> The dissolution of earth and sky is a part of the preparation for the final aeon. Indeed, the old earth and sky must be removed before the "new heaven and new earth" are established (Rev. 21:1).<sup>105</sup>

As the earth flees from the presence of God, the "dead" are exposed, and John sees them "standing before the throne" (20:12) It is to be assumed that the flight of the earth from the presence of God evoked the "second resurrection" in which all are included who were not raised in the first resurrection. We have already established that the second resurrection is reserved for the unrighteous.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Michaels, 106.

<sup>101</sup>Cf. Ladd, 271; Talbert, 97; Roberts, 177; Swete, 271; Ford, 359; and Roloff, 231. Walvoord, 305; Lenski, 601f, et al. identify the occupant of the throne as Christ.

<sup>102</sup>Mulholland sees the earth as a symbol of rebellion. (312) The dissolution of the earth from the presence of God also affirms our position that the millennial kingdom is a celestial one, else what would happen to the saints and the city during this period? But see Krodell who raises these questions and then declares them irrelevant. (338)

<sup>103</sup>See also Roberts who reminds us of similar teaching in Isaiah 40:8; 51:6; 2 Peter 3:6-13; Matthew 5:17; Hebrews 12:27 and Daniel 2:35. (177f) Also, Roloff, 231.

<sup>104</sup>Ladd, 272. See also P. Hughes, 218; Ford, 203; and Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse. The Book of Revelation*. Translated by George W. Schreiner (New York: Seabury, 1977), 210f.

<sup>105</sup>See Walvoord, 305; Hartingsveld, 84.

<sup>106</sup>While most commentators agree that the wicked dead are in view here, some interpreters incorporate both righteous and sinner among the dead who are raised in the second resurrection. See Mulholland who posits that verse 12 features the righteous dead and verses 13-14 the wicked dead. (312) Also Giblin, 193, and Lenski, 604f.

Now the wicked dead are temporarily afforded life so they can receive their sentence for the wages of sin. The saints who cannot be hurt by the “second death” are raised at the beginning of the millennium, hence, they themselves are not judged before the throne.<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, the evil doers are raised for the sole purpose of being judged. John declares that they stand before the throne of God as they await sentencing.<sup>108</sup> This court scene is reminiscent to the one in Daniel 7 when the evil kingdoms make way for the kingdom of God. Similar to the scene in Daniel, the object of judgement is not the general human populace, but the wicked. This is a resurrection of condemnation.<sup>109</sup> All those who would be vindicated have already been raised and raptured at the parousia.

As the “dead” stand before the throne, John notices that books (*biblia*) are opened. These books are distinguished from the “book of life” (*biblion*) that was also open. The *biblia* apparently contain an account of the righteous and unrighteous deeds committed by humanity. These are the same *biblia* seen by Daniel and featured in Jewish apocalyptic literature.<sup>110</sup> The *biblion* is the book of life which originally contained the names of every historical inhabitant of the world, but from which all the names of those who have done evil are deleted (cf. Exod. 32:32-33 and Rev. 3:5).<sup>111</sup> Mention of the “book of life” had been made since the time of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>112</sup> This is the book with the seven seals whose opening triggers the beginning of the end in chapter five. The fact that the book is sealed before the end indicates the completeness of judgement prior to creation.<sup>113</sup> Having already received a positive judgement, the saints during the millennium are simply auditing the judgement against the wicked and verifying the dead’s exclusion from the book of life.

In commenting on verse 12, Ladd asserts: “It is significant that the text does not intimate that anyone is saved on the basis of his good works.”<sup>114</sup> But how else

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<sup>107</sup>Glasson comments: “It is difficult to believe that those who had lived and reigned with Christ for 1000 years should be regarded as on trial at the close.” (529)

<sup>108</sup>See Walvoord, 306.

<sup>109</sup>Smith, 226.

<sup>110</sup>Cf. 1 Enoch 47:3; 90:20; 104:7; 2 Enoch 19:5; 4 Ezra 6:20; 2 Baruch 24:1; Apoc. Of Zephaniah 3:6-9; 7:1-8. For a survey of the judgement theme in apocalyptic literature see Glasson, 530-36.

<sup>111</sup>See Walvoord: “...the book of life was originally the book of all living from which have been expunged the names of those who departed from life on earth without salvation...” (309) Richard notes that “The book of life is not a registry of works but is more personal in nature, and in Revelation it appears as a book that belongs to the Lamb.” (159)

<sup>112</sup>Exodus 32:32-33; Psalm 69:28; Malachi 3:16; Daniel 12:1; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Hebrew 12:23..

<sup>113</sup>See 13:8 and 17:8. Some see this as predestination (e.g. Roloff, 231).

<sup>114</sup>Ladd, 273. Ellul also states: “There is no correlation between the judgement of works and the gift of eternal life or rejection into death.” (212)

can one explain John's words? Throughout the apocalypse, John has demonstrated the importance of obedience for the "saints."<sup>115</sup> Indeed, the stated purpose of the parousia and consequent judgement is "to pay each person for his work." (22:12) One also remembers John 5:29, when in speaking of the two resurrections, Jesus states that "those who are *doing good (agatha poiesantes)*" will come forth to the resurrection of life, and "those who are *practicing evil (phaula praxantes)*" to the resurrection of judgement. This verse provides an exact parallel to the events of Revelation 20. Here we see that "At judgement it is not people's good deeds or intentions that count but what they can do; it is orthopraxis that saves us, not orthodoxy."<sup>116</sup>

As we move to verse 13, we see the Revelator stressing the universality of the final judgement. This verse would have been more appropriate before the one that precedes it, but is somewhat expegetical. John aims to show the totality of the resurrection.<sup>117</sup> Death, Hades, and the sea will release all of their dead. Death and Hades are here personified. Paul taunts the personified "death" in 1 Corinthians 15:55. Hades is understood as the Hebrew "sheol." This is the place of nothingness where the dead remained in an unconscious state. There is no activity in Hades. It should not be interpreted with the theological presuppositions that accompany the term "hell."<sup>118</sup> It is a cold dark holding place that is shrouded in dismal doom. The chill of Hades is thawed as the wicked are ushered before the judgement throne to receive judgement, "all according to their works." (20:13)

Having released their prisoners, Death and Hades no longer have a purpose. Hence, they too must be annihilated (20:14). Like the beast, dragon, false prophet, and evil angels, they have no place in the new aeon.<sup>119</sup> The Revelator records that they are thrown in the "lake of fire," where they join the Devil and their impersonal allies. Here the words of Paul join the Revelator in assent: "the last enemy to be destroyed is death." (1 Cor. 15:26) That the lake of fire is a metaphor is

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<sup>115</sup>Cf. 2:2, 19, 26; 3:2, 8, 15; 9:20, 21; 12:17; 14:12; 16:11; 19:9; 21:8; 22:11, 12, 14 (alternate reading). See comments in Krodel, 339-40 and Mulholland, 313f.

<sup>116</sup>Richards, 158. This does not compromise the New Testament teaching of Salvation by Grace through Faith. Talbert calls this "... a paradox that can be resolved only when one does back to one's own experience with God and finds divine grace and human responsibility bound together in an indissoluble union." (98) Boring states: "... we are judged on the basis of who we are and what we have done, and we are utterly and inescapably responsible. We are judged on the basis of who God is and what God has done; God is utterly and inescapably sovereign." (71) Mulholland agrees: "Unless one's name is written in the Book of Life, it appears that all the righteous deeds in the world will not suffice." (313) Harrington calls it the "mystery of salvation." (204) See also Walvoord, 306f; and Hartingsveld, 84. Page locates a similar paradox in the writings of Paul. (42)

<sup>117</sup>See Ladd, 273.

<sup>118</sup>So Walvoord, 307f., and Lenski, 608. Interestingly enough, Lenski also perceives a difficulty with this logic: "... when hades means hell, and the lake of fire also means hell, we may wonder how one can 'be thrown' into the other." (610)

<sup>119</sup>Cf. Krodel, 341; Ladd, 274.

demonstrated by its identification with the second death.<sup>120</sup> Inasmuch as the first resurrection results in *eternal life*, the second death results in *eternal extinction*.<sup>121</sup> It indicates the *terminus ad quem*—the utter termination of everything that enters its throes. After the beast and the false prophet are thrown into it, they are no longer mentioned as being alive. The same is true for Satan and his angelic host. Everything that encounters the lake of fire ceases to exist, and so Death and Hades are now eliminated from the sphere of reality.<sup>122</sup>

The apocalyptic saga is almost over. With the death of death, the only remnants of evil are the wicked dead who await their sentencing. Their doom has already been sealed by their works.<sup>123</sup> The Revelator gives the impression of a prolonged hearing in which each one of the accused is individually sentenced. Only those whose name is missing from the book of life qualify for eternal extinction (20:15). Before the sentence can be announced, the absence of the name from the “book of life” must be verified.<sup>124</sup> And so, although the fate of the unrighteous is already sealed, the meticulous formality of verification is conducted. As judgement is passed, the unrepentant sinner experiences the second death as s/he is symbolically thrown into the lake of fire.<sup>125</sup>

## Conclusion

Thus we have the rationale behind the millennium. It serves as the period for the purging of evil as the old aeon makes way for the new. John lets us know in no uncertain terms that the transition from old to new is by no means instantaneous. Following the defeat of the followers of the beast, the raptured saints must know that God’s judgement is just. Consequently, Satan is confined in the abyss so that the saints can audit the Divine court records without interruption. When their work

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<sup>120</sup>Roloff recognizes: “At issue here is not punishment but, as John observes in a clarifying postscript, eternal destruction—the lake of fire is the ‘second’ (i.e. eternal and final) death.” (232) See also Harrington, 205, et al, and our above discussion on verse 10. Some who opt for a literal reading of an eternally burning hell are forced to personalize such impersonal entities as the beast, false prophet, death, and hades. (e.g., Walvoord, 309.) But see Stuart who impersonalizes the duo, but holds that the second death is “... a state of *continued agony*.... The sufferings of those who undergo the second death, cannot be alleviated by expiring; for there is no expiring.” (373-73)

<sup>121</sup>Harrington reasons “...surely, the negation of eternal life is eternal death.” (205)

<sup>122</sup>See Stuart, 372. I am not sure on what basis does Krodel declare that “... their fate is left unspecified.” (341)

<sup>123</sup>Ladd comments, “Apparently no one was saved by his works—i.e., on the basis of the good things which he had done which had been recorded in the books (vs. 12).” (274) However, the very fact that the books condemn them means that their elimination from salvation depended on their works.

<sup>124</sup>Walvoord suggests that the process involves “... the careful search of the records to be sure that no mistake is made.” (309)

<sup>125</sup>Ellul reasons that it is not humans who are condemned in the second death, but their works. (213) He declares, “It is not theologically possible that there be damned men.... In the second death there are not men, there are not lives; there are the evil works of man....” (ibid.)

is finished, Satan is released, and in predictable fashion cons the fallen angels into thinking that they can gain control of the kingdom. As they prepare to attack the heavenly Jerusalem, Satan and his angels are exterminated by God. Now God himself appears, evoking the resurrection of the wicked who are summoned before the throne of justice. When the last sinner has been released from Hades, Hades and its companion, Death, are eternally destroyed. Without any external negative influences, the sinner stands before the Divinity and is obligated to take responsibility for her own actions. He is judged by his works and sentenced to eternal obliteration. As the last sinner meets her eternal destruction, the earth is purged from evil and its influences, and the preparation for the final aeon is complete. Now the New Jerusalem can be housed in its intended location. Now, “the kingdom of the world [can] become the kingdom of YHWH and his messiah....” (11:15) Now the saga can end. Or is it just the beginning?

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