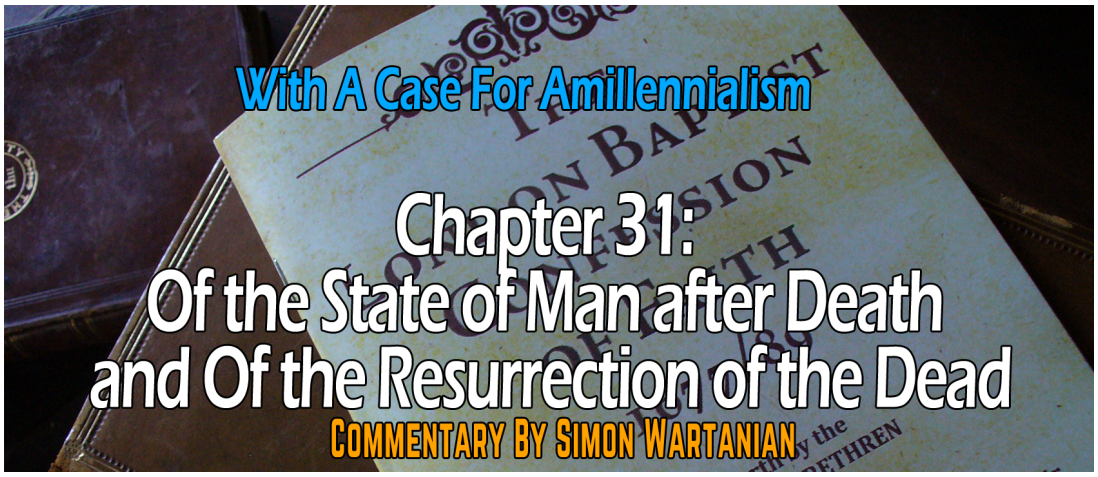
1689 Baptist Confession Chapter 31: Of the State of Man after Death and Of the Resurrection of the Dead - Commentary

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Chapter 31: Of the State of Man after Death and Of the Resurrection of the Dead

This chapter concerns itself with eschatology, which is the doctrine of the last things. It discusses questions concerning what happens after we die, the second coming of the Lord Jesus, and the resurrection of the just and unjust.

I hold to the Amillennial view of eschatology, therefore what is written here will reflect that eschatology. Basically, Amillennialism teaches that the thousand years of Revelation 20 are symbolic for the whole time between Christ's Ascension and Second Coming. When He comes that will be the end of everything. The rapture, general resurrection and final judgment will take place, then God will usher in the World to Come. There are neither multiple resurrections nor multiple judgments. There are no 7 years of Great Tribulation. There are no two peoples of God, Israel and the Church. Rather, the Church *is* the Israel of God. The promises of restoration and blessing pertain not to the Fallen World, but to the World to Come. We do not believe that the Bible teaches a golden age on this Fallen Earth.

In paragraphs 2-3 there is a case for Amillennial eschatology and a critique of Premillennialism throughout the sections.

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§1 The Intermediate State

1. The **bodies of men after death return to dust,** and see corruption; **1** but their **souls, which neither die nor sleep,** having an **immortal subsistence,** immediately return to God who gave them. **2** The souls of the **righteous being then made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise,** where they are with Christ, and **behold the face of God** in light and glory, **waiting for the full redemption of their bodies; 3** and the **souls of the wicked are cast into hell**; where they remain in torment and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day; **4** besides these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none.
    1. Gen. 2:17; 3:19; Acts 13:36; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22[1]
    2. Gen. 2:7; James 2:26; Matt. 10:28; Eccles. 12:7

3. Ps. 23:6; 1 Kings 8:27-49; Isa. 63:15; 66:1; Luke 23:43; Acts 1:9-11; 3:21; 2 Cor. 5:6-8; 12:2-4; Eph. 4:10; Phil. 1:21-23; Heb. 1:3,4:14-15; 6:20; 8:1; 9:24; 12:23; Rev. 6:9-11; 14:13; 20:4-6
4. Luke 16:22-26; Acts 1:25; 1 Peter 3:19; 2 Peter 2:9

The bodies of men after death return to dust (Gen. 3:19), the original substance, **but their souls…having an immortal subsistence** (i.e., a state of existence)…**neither die nor sleep** and **immediately return to God** (Eccles. 12:7). Our bodily death is not the cessation of our life. When our bodies die, our souls **immediately return to God Who gave them**. There is no period between our physical death and our returning to God. After our last breath, we **immediately** return to God. There is no period of waiting or soul sleep. But this returning to God of our souls does not mean we *remain* with God. Only the **souls of the righteous** now **having** been **made perfect**…**are received into paradise, where they are with Christ** (Heb. 12:23; Phil. 1:21-23). What a blessing and a privilege to be with Christ for all eternity. The One Whom we love and adore and to behold His face is the greatest blessing which we can imagine. We will likewise **behold the face of God in light and glory**, no longer afraid or trembling at His sight or in fear of our lives because of His glory. The souls of the righteous await in heaven the **redemption of their bodies** (Rom. 8:23) at the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The souls of the wicked on the other hand **are cast into hell** where they are **in torment and utter darkness** and await **the judgment of the great day** (Luke 16:23; 2 Peter 2:9). The word "hell" in this context is not really accurate as Hell describes the place of torment *after* the resurrection, where the wicked are cast in body and soul. What would be more accurate here is to say that the souls of the wicked are cast into *Hades* as the rich man was (Luke 16:23). The wicked are **reserved** for a greater judgment in both body and soul on that **great day** in Hell, which is the second death.

Finally, aside from Heaven and Hell, Scripture knows of no other place. Therefore, Purgatory does not exist and is unbiblical.

The body returns to the dust from whence it came, but the souls are immortal from the time they begin to exist; they cannot just disappear and go out of existence. They will exist without a body in heaven or Hades until Christ comes to end the world and bring in the New Heavens and New Earth. The elect then will receive a glorious body like that of Jesus and enjoy endless fellowship with the God Triune, while the reprobates will receive physical bodies just to be tormented in the lake of fire.

The Intermediate State describes the time between death and the resurrection of the body, this includes a discussion of the immortality of the soul, heaven, and Hades.

The Immortality Of The Soul

While people are buried and their bodies return to the dust from whence they came, their souls do not cease to exist, they are immortal. While the body decomposes and returns to dust, the soul of man lives evermore. It is important to define the usage of the word "immortal" and "immortality" here. This *immortality* which the souls of men and angels possess is obviously not like the *essential* immortality of God. In 1 Timothy 6:16 we read that God "alone has immortality". This speaks about God *essentially* and *by nature* having immortality. He ever was and ever will be immortal, i.e., undying. Albert Barnes noted on that passage that God has immortality "by his very nature, and it is in his case underived, and he cannot be deprived of it. It is one of the essential attributes of his being, that he will always exist, and that death cannot reach him".[2] But this word is often used in reference to men and angels, so what does it mean? It means that the souls of men and angels are undying from the moment that they come to exist. It means that the soul of man does not simply decompose or disappear after death, like the physical body does. Rather, the soul is unable to die, because God designed it to be so. There is no "must-ness" that the souls of man or of angels be immortal except that God had willed them to be so. It is not essential, as it is in the case of God, that our souls be immortal. Rather, this immortality is derived from God and is dependent upon His power. Louis Berkhof writes, 'the word "immortality" designates, especially in eschatological language, that state of man in which he is impervious to death and cannot possibly become its prey.'[3] The word "immortal", though it may be controversial to some, is used simply to indicate that the souls of men "neither die nor sleep", while their bodies sure do until the resurrection.

While the Bible does not have a statement saying "the soul of man is immortal," it very much, I believe, assumes and does not question it. For example, had the Fall not taken place, man would have lived forever in body and soul, but the Fall brought physical death to the body, yet it did not destroy the soul of man. The soul of man remained, but now in enmity with God, no longer walking in fellowship and peace with Him. Death is said to have come because of sin (Rom. 5:12; 6:23). Therefore, if sin had not come there would be no death. Notice that we're speaking here not only of the immortality of the soul, but of the body. If the Fall had not taken place and the time of probation was passed, then man would have been immortal in body and soul. Yet as it is, man did fall and bring spiritual and physical death into the world, yet this death is

never spoken of in terms of the cessation of the existence of the soul. The Bible, again and again, assumes the immortality of the soul. To say that death existed prior to the Fall is to insult God and His declaration that His creation was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). It is to make death, which is any enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), a friend. Death presupposes sin, but there was no sin prior to the Fall, therefore, there was no death. This means that if man had passed the time of probation, he would have eaten from the tree of life and lived forever in body and soul. This means that God's original design was for man to be immortal in both body and soul.

The immortality of the soul is also assumed when the Bible speaks of eternal punishment or bliss (e.g., Matt. 25:46; see also **chapter 32**). For how can a person be eternally punished or be eternally in bliss if their soul is not immortal? Christians are said explicitly to "put on immortality" at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:53-54). Our souls will be united to our glorified and immortal physical bodies. At that time, not only will our souls be immortal, but our glorified bodies will likewise be immortal and perfect. The immortality of the soul is likewise assumed when the Bible teaches about the resurrection of the dead (e.g., Acts 24:15). The souls of men do not go out of existence once they die, but they wait either in heaven or in Hades to their final fate.

Physical Death

Death brings the separation between body and soul/spirit. As we noted above, death would have not come if man did not sin. Death exists because of sin. In fact, the apostle Paul says that "death is the wages of sin" (Rom. 6:23; 5:12). Therefore, had there been no sin, there would not have been death. The Bible speaks in various ways about death. Sometimes it is said to be the termination of life (Matt. 2:20; Mark 3:4; Acts 15:26; 20:24; the word ψυχή [*psoo-khay*] being the word also for *soul).* Other times it is spoken in terms of separation of the spirit from the body (Eccl. 12:7; John 19:30; Acts 7:59; Jas. 2:26). Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. The physical body of man decomposes and returns to the dust from whence it came, yet his spirit/soul returns to the God who gave it. The soul of man does not cease to exist and decompose, rather goes either into bliss or into doom.

The Bible speaks of death in terms of sleep. In the beginning, this may seem to support the idea that the souls of men are unconscious until the resurrection and the judgment, but this is not the way that Scripture uses this word. Rather, I believe that when used in connection to death, sleep means death. But, why use this word if it is directly synonymous? Well, sleep is not exactly synonymous to death. When a man sleeps we assume that at some time he will awake, otherwise, we will say that he's in a coma, dead or something else. This means that the idea of sleep in connection to death assumes the idea that the one sleeping will one day awake. In other words, when the Bible speaks of people's death in terms of sleep, it assumes and it communicates thereby, that they will one day be raised. For example, in the resurrection of Lazarus, we have our Lord telling His disciples that "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep" (John 11:11), they understand Him to be speaking merely of normal sleep and that's why they say "if he has fallen asleep, he will recover" (John 11:12). They understood that sleep presupposed recovery or waking up, yet that was not the kind of sleep that the Lord Jesus was speaking about, rather, what Jesus meant is simply that "Lazarus had died" (John 11:14). Sleep, we see from here, means death, but it also expresses that this cessation of bodily existence is not forever, but that the body of man will one day awake. Paul also speaks of death in terms of sleep (1 Cor. 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thess. 4:13-15; 5:10). In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul is trying to answer the question of those who did not know what will happen to the believers who died before Christ's Second Coming. The answer of Paul is that the Lord Jesus, when He comes, will bring them with Him. They will come with the Lord Jesus and then the remaining Christians will be transformed and given a body like their Lord's. Paul taught the conscious existence of believers in the Intermediate State and not their sleep in various places (Phil. 1:21-23; 2Cor 5:6-8). For Paul, the idea of being asleep does not mean being inactive or in a state of non-existence until the resurrection and judgment. In fact, in the next chapter, the apostle says, "whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him" (1 Thess. 5:10). Awake means that we are still living this life, and a sleep means living in Heaven, in the Intermediate State. Notice that Paul does not merely say we live, but we live *with* Him. Life in the Intermediate State is a life with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible does not teach that soul sleep means the inactivity of the soul until the resurrection and the judgment. Rather, in using the metaphor of sleep for death, the Bible wants us to anticipate the resurrection of the body. Notice also that this expression of being asleep is only ascribed to believers. Unbelievers will not be happy when they are awakened, nor do they want to be awakened. Yet the believing will enjoy the endless benefits of the Lord and they are eagerly waiting for the resurrection of the body.

An interesting question arises between the relationship of death being the wages of sin and the death of Christians. The Bible teaches that Christians are justified and their sins have been washed away, so why do Christians still die? If it because death was something not covered by the atonement of Christ? Certainly not. The reason that Christians still die is because they still live in a fallen world, and death is used as an instrument by God as the last step of their sanctification. Death for unbelievers ushers them to unspeakable and endless doom, yet for the believing, death is the key to eternal bliss with the Savior. Although death is still bad and an enemy, yet even this dreadful enemy serves the purposes of God for His children's final sanctification and ushering into endless life. Louis Berkhof writes, "It is quite evident that the death of believers must be regarded as the culmination of the chastisements which God has ordained for the sanctification of His people. While death in itself remains a real natural evil for the children of God, something unnatural, which is dreaded by them as such, it is made subservient in the economy of grace to their spiritual advancement and to the best interests of the Kingdom of

God."[4]

A very important aspect of physical death is the fact that death fixes our eternal destiny. There are no second chances after death. Once you die, you will either go into the presence of God in glory or out of the peaceful presence of God into misery. Hebrews 9:27 declares, "And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment," this means that the judgment which fixes our eternal destiny, not the Final Judgment, comes directly after death. Matthew Poole noted on that passage:

> **But after this the judgment**: in order, after souls by death are separated from their bodies, they come to judgment: and thus every particular one is handed over by death to the bar of God, the great Judge, and so is despatched by his sentence to its particular state and place with its respective people, Rom. 14:12. At the great and general assize, the day of judgment, shall the general and universal one take place, Act 17:31, when all sinners in their entire persons, bodies and souls united, shall be adjudged to their final, unalterable, and eternal state, Rom. 14:10; 2Co 5:10; Jud 1:6; Rev. 20:11-15.[5]

Some take the judgment spoken of in Hebrews 9:27 to be the final judgment. To be sure, there is no definite article for "judgment" in the Greek and this is correctly translated by the ESV, in contrast to translations which supply a definite article (e.g., KJV, NKJV). The definite article makes the idea that this passage is speaking about the Final Judgment more appealing, yet the definite article is not in the original. But a stronger case that death fixes our eternity destiny can be made from Luke 16:19-31. There is a chasm that separates the saved in heaven and the damned in Hades in the Intermediate State. No one can cross over and this takes place after physical death. That's why death should be terrifying to those who do not know God and who have not obeyed the gospel of our Lord. There are no second chances. All that awaits those who have not put their trust in Christ is doom and misery.

The Souls Of The Righteous In Heaven

Already in the Old Testament believers were expecting a blissful existence with God after their physical death. David says, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Ps. 23:6; cf. Ps. 16:10-11; 17:15; 73:24; 115:18). He expects to ever live in the presence of God. He did not only live with and for God in his earthly life, but he believes that God's presence will always be with Him. He will dwell in His house and this is said at a time when the Temple was not yet built. Elijah is said to have "went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2Kings 2:11). Jesus shows that there will be a resurrection from the fact that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are living before the presence of God (Matt. 22:31-32; Luke 20:37-38).

But there is the greater revelation of this fact in the New Testament. There is general agreement amongst Christians that once they die, they will be in the presence of the Lord. **(1)** The Lord Jesus, before being crucified and going back to the Father, tells His disciples that He will go before them to prepare a place for them, and then come and take them to that place (John 14:1-4). The Lord Jesus, through His atonement on the cross and resurrection, made a place for His people, and then He comes and takes them in their death to Himself. **(2)** Paul says that it is better for him to die because dying is gain, why? Because in dying we will go to the place where the Lord Christ is (Phil. 1:21-23). To depart and to die is to be with Christ, which is better. **(3)** To another church, he writes that as long as we live in the body, we are away from the Lord. His greater desire is to be "away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). As long as we live our lives here, we are with the Lord and the Lord is with us, but it is not the same as being "at home with the Lord." Then we will see Him face to face and have close and direct communion with Him. **(4)** The Author of Hebrews says that Christians join in worship with those in heaven, which includes "the spirits of the righteous made perfect" (Heb. 12:22-23). In heaven, they reach sinless perfection, yet they still await the resurrection of their body. Notice that these are said to be the "*spirits* of the righteous", the Author is not speaking of a bodily resurrection, for that is after the Intermediate State is over and Christ has come back. **(5)** John describes the martyrs of the Lord Christ who were waiting until God's judgment would come upon the wicked who persecuted them. They are described as "the souls of those who had been slain" (Rev. 6:9). They were living in the presence of God, they were neither inactive nor in a state of soul sleep. These passages teach us that there is a better state of existence awaiting Christians after they die.

The Souls Of The Wicked In Hades

Sheol

The Old Testament does not directly say that much about the place of punishment, but this does not mean that it is entirely silent. There is an interesting discussion concerning the concept of *Sheol* in the Old Testament. The word Sheol is translated with hell, grave, and pit in the KJV. Strictly speaking, hell (*Gehenna*) does not yet exist. Hell is the place of *final* torment in body and soul. It is popular to speak of the wicked now going to hell, yet, strictly speaking, they go down to Hades, not Hell. Hell is the place of final punishment *after* the resurrection and final judgment. Both the righteous and the wicked are said to

go to Sheol (Gen. 37:35; Num. 16:30; 2Sam. 1:23; Ps. 49:15,16; 88:3; 89:48; Eccl. 9:10; Isa. 5:14; Hos. 13:14) and that's why in our modern versions (e.g., the ESV) it is never rendered with "hell", but either transliterated or rendered with grave. Sheol has two significations: the place of punishment for the wicked and the grave. Dr. Sam Waldron writes, based on several uses of the word Sheol in the Bible (Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 44:29-31; Num 16:30, 33; Deut. 32:22; 1 Sam. 2:6), that "Sheol, whatever more specific meaning it may take on, is that which is below. It is the place below."[6] This means that it is opposed to that which is above, heaven as it is sometimes contrasted with heaven (Job 11:8; Ps. 139:8; Amos 9:2).

It is not my desire to go into a long discussion on the interpretation of Sheol-Hades. No view on it is unanimous. The word Sheol generally refers to the grave or place of punishment for the wicked. The word is in many cases context-bound, and not a single definition can fit all of its uses. We've noted above that the souls of the righteous, even in the Old Testament, went directly into the presence of God. Therefore, when even the righteous are said to go to Sheol this does not have the connotation of them being in torment, obviously. In these cases, it seems that Sheol simply means the grave. In fact, the righteous are said to be delivered from Sheol (Prov. 15:24; Ps. 49:14-15). The righteous are delivered from the punishments of Sheol and they are delivered from the power of death. Dr. Waldron writes:

> Fifthly, the Old Testament teaches that the righteous are delivered from Sheol, in spite of the fact that in one sense the righteous die and go to Sheol, the grave (Prov. 15:24; Ps. 49:14-15). This requires us to distinguish between a place of punishment in the afterlife, from which the righteous are delivered, and the grave, which symbolizes it and from which the righteous in general are not delivered till the last day. Otherwise the teaching that the righteous are delivered from Sheol would have no meaning.[7]

It is important to note that when Sheol simply signifies the **grave,** only the body of man goes to the grave, the soul of man either enters into its Master's joy or into misery after death. The following passages, according to William G. T. Shedd, fit the meaning of Sheol as grave: 1 Samuel 2:6; Genesis 37:35; 44:31; Job 14:13; 17:13-14; Psalm 6:5; 88:3; 89:48; 141:7; Numbers 16:33; Ecclesiastes 9:10; Hosea 13:14. He says that "Sheol in the sense of the grave is invested with gloomy associations for the good, as well as the wicked".

There are places in the Old Testament where Sheol is described in a not so pleasant way and as a place of **punishment.** God's anger is said to burn in Sheol. Deuteronomy 32:22 says, "For a fire is kindled by my [God's] anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol". Sheol is denounced against the wicked. See Job 21:13; 24:19; 26:6; Psalm 9:17; 49:14; 55:15; Proverbs 5:5, 11; 7:27; 9:18; 15:24; 23:14. Notice also the following three passages which relate Sheol with Abaddon: Job 26:6; Proverbs 15:11; 27:20. Abaddon, which is translated with "destruction" sometimes, is the Hebrew name for Apollyon, who is said to be the angel of the bottomless pit (Rev. 9:11). William Shedd writes:

> There can be no rational doubt that in this class of Old Testament texts the *wicked* and *sensual* are warned of a future evil and danger. The danger is that they shall be sent to Sheol. The connection of thought requires, therefore, that Sheol in such passages have the same meaning as the modern Hell, and like this have an *exclusive* reference to the wicked. Otherwise, it is not a warning. To give it a meaning that makes it the common residence of the good and evil is to destroy its force as a Divine menace. If Sheol be merely a promiscuous underworld for all souls, then to be "turned into sheol" is no more a menace for the sinner than for the saint and consequently a menace for neither. In order to be of the nature of an alarm for the wicked, Sheol must be something that pertains to them alone...The Biblical Sheol is always an evil and nothing but an evil. When the human body goes down to Sheol in the sense of the "grave," this is an evil. And when the human soul goes down to Sheol in the sense of "hell and retribution," this is an evil. Both are threatened as the penalty of sin to the wicked, but never to the righteous.[8]

In summary, the word Sheol denotes the grave or a place of punishment for the wicked.

Hades

In the New Testament, the word Hades is related to Sheol. In fact, Hades is the Greek word which translated Sheol in the LXX. But there are questions about how exact the concepts are. Anthony Hoekema wrote:

> *Hades* is the usual Septuagint translation of *Sheol*. The meaning of Hades in the New Testament, however, is not exactly the same as that of Sheol in the Old Testament. Sheol in the Old Testament, as we saw, stood for the realm of the dead or, occasionally, the grave. During the Intertestamentary Period, however, the concept of Sheol underwent certain changes. In the rabbinical literature of this period, and in some apocalyptic writings, the view began to emerge that there is a spatial separation in the underworld between the godly and the ungodly; in some writings the word Hades began to be used exclusively for the place of punishment for ungodly souls in the underworld.[202] The New Testament use of the word Hades to some extent reflects this development.[9]

I share Dr. Waldron's skepticism about this concept of two compartments, see also William G. T. Shedd's critique and refutation of the two compartments theory as being pagan and not biblical (see below for the reference). Yes, to the Greeks and pagans Hades had two compartments, but the question is if Scripture agrees with this two-compartments theory. I believe that Dr. Shedd provides a very good biblical critique of that theory. That Hades denotes the **grave** may be seen from Acts 2:27, 31 which is a quotation from Psalm 16:10. That this refers to the grave is seen from the fact that it is a prophecy about the Lord Christ and believers, who are elsewhere said to be in the presence of God (e.g., Ps. 23:6; Luke 23:43). Furthermore, the idea of corruption and decomposition is closely associated with being buried in a grave. Christ's body did not see corruption, while David's did (Acts 13:36).

The word Hades may also denote the place of the wicked in **torment.** The Lord Jesus is said to have "the keys of Death and Hades" (Rev. 1:18). In Revelation 6:8 Hades closely follows Death. Those who become the prey of the pale horse, are killed by Death and swallowed up by Hades. In Revelation 20:13-14, Death and Hades are judged and thrown into Hell, i.e., the lake of fire. Only the wicked are cast into Hell. Hell contains the inhabitants of Death and Hades. That Hades is also a place of torment may be clearly seen from Luke 16:19-31. Without going deep in the passage let us simply note a few things:

1. Lazarus dies and is carried by angels to Abraham's bosom, which is Heaven, where Abraham is (Luke 20:37-38; Matt. 8:11).
2. The rich man likewise dies and is buried. There is nothing said about him being carried by angels anywhere. Rather, when he awakes he finds himself "in torment" (v. 23).
3. Lazarus, on the other hand, is in a place and state of bliss with his father Abraham.
4. The place where the rich man is said to be "Hades" (v. 23), a place where he is "in torment" (v. 23), a place where he is "in anguish in this flame" (v. 24, 25), a place where it is impossible to change your fate (v. 26). The rich man calls it a "place of torment" (v. 28).
5. That this passage speaks of the Intermediate State is seen from the fact that these events are explicitly related from the time of their lives on earth and then in the hereafter.

In this passage, we clearly see the rich man being in torment before the resurrection and final judgment, while Lazarus is in bliss and comfort in the bosom of his father Abraham. This is the place where all the wicked go to. The statement of the Confession, which says, "the souls of the wicked are cast into hell" is **technically incorrect and thus it should be revised** with, "the souls of the wicked are cast into *Hades*." Hell is currently a non-existent place. The place where the wicked go to is the same place which the rich man went to—Hades, a place of torment. Yet, after the resurrection, the body and soul will be sent into Hell (Matt. 10:28). Hades is said to be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14), therefore, it cannot possibly be identical to Hell (*Gehenna*, the lake of fire). The torments of Hades are in the soul, while the torments of Hell are in soul *and* body. The rich man's body remained in the dust and did not go with him into Hades, yet his soul was in torment, his soul was not in rest or in soul sleep, but in anguish. At the resurrection, he will be thrown into Hell with body *and* soul to receive his everlasting punishment.

I find this whole interpretation of what the nature of Sheol is and what relationship does it have with Hades to be an interesting discussion. But I do not in any way imply that I have reached a final conclusion on their meaning, yet I find myself persuaded by Dr. Shedd's thorough case. There is evidence from the New Testament (Luke 16:19-31) that Hades is called "a place of torment." Therefore, it is irrelevant to the point I wanted to prove under this section, which was that the wicked go directly into punishment after death, what the relationship is between Sheol and Hades and what their nature exactly is. It is sufficient that Luke 16 describes it as a place of torment. If you want to read more on the subject of Sheol and Hades check:

- Louis Berkhof. Systematic Theology. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Banner of Truth Trust. 1963). pp. 681-686.
- Anthony A. Hoekema. The Bible And The Future. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979). pp. 95-101. (He interacts with Berkhof)
- Sam E. Waldron. A Modern Exposition Of The 1689 Baptist Confession Of Faith. (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2013). pp. 493-498.
- William G. T. Shedd. Dogmatic Theology. Volume 2. (Originally published in 1888). pp. 591-609, 619-640. (This is thorough. Refutation of the two-compartments theory, Sheol means the grave or the place of punishment for the wicked, the righteous go to Heaven)

Dr. Shedd, concluding his study on Hades and Sheol, writes:

> From this examination of texts, it appears that Sheol in the Old Testament has the same two significations that Hades

has in the New. The only difference is that in the Old Testament, Sheol less often in proportion to the whole number of instances denotes “hell” and more often the “grave” than Hades does in the New Testament. And this, for the reason that the doctrine of future retribution was more fully revealed and developed by Christ and his apostles than it was by Moses and the prophets.
If after this study of the biblical data, there still be doubt whether Sheol and Hades.[10]

Another passage which speaks about the torments of the wicked in the Intermediate State is 2 Peter 2:9. There, we read that the unrighteous are kept under punishment *until* the day of judgment. They are said to be kept under punishment until the solemn day of judgment, as the angels and the present world are (2 Pet. 2:4; 3:7). They are under punishment now, but a greater punishment will they receive on the day of judgment when they will have to answer for every thought, word, and deed. There is no second chance after death (Heb. 9:27; the rich man and Lazarus) and that’s why it is important to heed the call of the gospel. We cannot escape God’s just punishment if we do not heed the gospel. The gospel is the way to escape from God’s wrath, otherwise, we stand naked before His holy wrath.

“There is no peace,” says the LORD, “for the wicked.”

(Isaiah 48:22)

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§2 The Parousia

2. At **the last day,** such of the **saints as are found alive,** shall not sleep, but **be changed;** **1** and **all the dead shall be raised up** **2** **with the selfsame bodies,** and none other; **3** although with **different qualities,** **4** which shall be **united again to their souls forever.** **5**
    1. 1 Cor. 15:50-53; 2 Cor. 5:1-4; 1 Thess. 4:17
    2. Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15
    3. Job 19:26-27; John 5:28-29; 1 Cor 15:35-38, 42-44
    4. 1 Cor. 15:42-44, 52-54
    5. Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:46

At the last day…saints that **are found alive** will be **changed** and not sleep, i.e., not die first (1 Thess. 4:15-17; 1 Cor. 15:50-53). They basically receive the resurrection body without first dying, but by being **changed** and transformed. As for those who are **dead**, they will **all** be **raised up with the selfsame bodies** which they had (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15), although their bodies have now **different qualities** (1 Cor. 15:42-44) which enables them to exist forever and their bodies **shall be united again to their souls forever**. The saints will receive a glorified body, while the wicked will receive a body in which they could be tormented forever.

In this and the following paragraph, I want to discuss the events which will happen at the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ from an Amillennial perspective. But first, let us get to know the various millennial views.

The Millennial Views

I admit that I consider myself in no way an eschatology expert, nor have I read various books from various views. I became a convinced Amillennial when I read Sam Storm’s Kingdom Come, up to that point I was unconsciously a Dispensationalist. That which follows I believe to be an accurate and general description of the various millennial positions to the best of my knowledge. There will obviously be some nuances with certain people, obviously. My purpose is not to give a detailed description, but a general description.

Historic Premillennialism

The word “pre” means before and the Latin word *millennium* means a thousand years, therefore, Premillennialism means before the thousand years. But, what is *before* the Millennium? The answer to that question is the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus. Premillennialism teaches that the Lord Jesus will bodily come back to earth *before* the Millennial Kingdom.

Premillennialism teaches that there will be a one thousand year reign of Christ on the earth where He will reign with His

saints according to Revelation 20. The Millennium is a time of peace and a time when many Old Testament passages about the restoration of Israel and peace will be fulfilled. The Millennium is not a time when sin or death will not exist, rather, their effects will noticeably be decreased as Satan will be bound for a thousand years.

Premillenniarians agree with Covenant Theology or New Covenant Theology that the Church is basically the Israel of God. God does not have two peoples, Israel and the Church, but only one people made up of both believing Jews and believing Gentiles, who are known as the Israel of God and the Church (in contrast to Dispensationalism). They believe that there will be a restoration of the Jews prior to the Millennium and Coming of the Lord Christ.

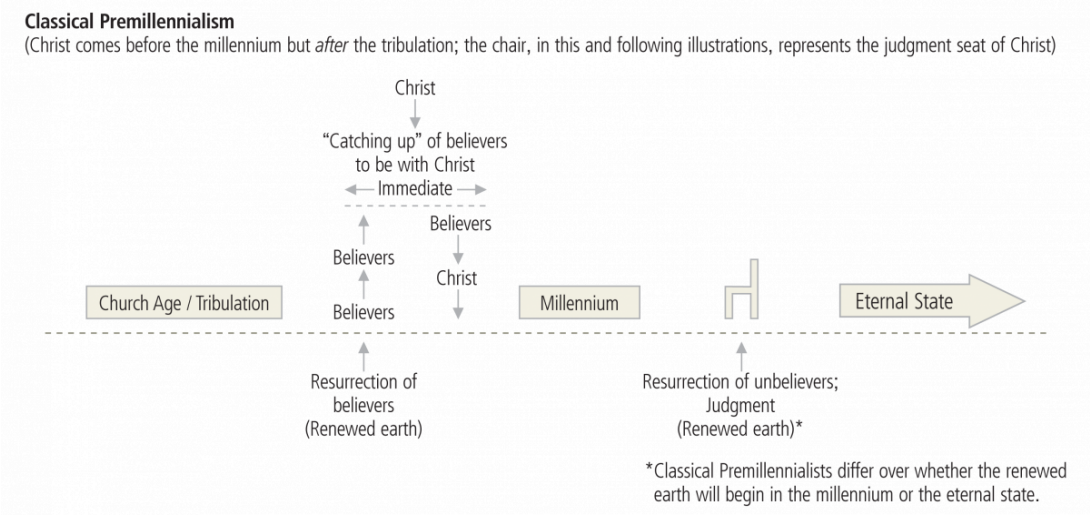
They believe that the believers, the Church, will go through the Great Tribulation which an indefinite time of persecution prior to the Rapture and Coming of the Lord. At the Rapture, Christ will come with all saints from heaven with resurrection and glorified bodies, and He will transform all living believers on earth so that they would have glorified and resurrection bodies. This is the first resurrection of Revelation 20:4-6. After this, Antichrist will be destroyed by the true Christ and Satan will be bound for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1-2). Then Christ will usher His reign upon the earth for a thousand years of peace and prosperity. But remember, sin and death are not eliminated, but significantly reduced in effect and power.

The Millennium will be populated by saints who came with Christ from heaven (both from the Old Testament and up to the coming of Christ), the saints who were transformed at the coming of Christ, unbelievers and those who have turned to Christ *after* His coming. There is a discussion among Premillenniarians as to the time of resurrection for those who came to faith after the first resurrection, I have heard that some say that they are directly raised after their death, or that they will be raised prior to the Final Judgment.

After the Millennium, Satan will be let loose and will try to destroy the Church, but God will intervene and send him to Hell and thus save His people. Then the wicked will be raised, and then all will stand before God in the Final Judgment after which comes the New Heavens and New Earth, although some believe that the New Heavens and New Earth start with the Millennium. According to Premillennial eschatology, the following things are to be expected:

1. The Evangelization of All Nations.
2. The Great Tribulation and Antichrist (Man of Sin).
3. The Conversion and Restoration of Israel.
4. The Second Coming:
    a. The Rapture
        i. The resurrection of all dead saints.
        ii. Transformation of living believers.
    b. Destruction of Antichrist.
    c. The binding of Satan.
    d. The inauguration of the thousand year reign of Christ.
5. The Millennium.
6. Apostasy at the end of the Millennium.
    a. Satan being loosed and leading rebellion against Christ.
    b. Satan and the wicked being destroyed.
7. The Resurrection of the wicked.
8. The Final Judgment.
9. The New Heavens and New Earth.

The following is a diagram of Premillennialism:



Premillennial Problems

I believe that Premillennialism is not supported by the statement of the **Confession** here and in the following paragraph. Moreover, there is no Confessional support for Premillennialism in any of the major Creeds and Confessions of Christianity. Paragraph 2 (the current) speaks of the Rapture, i.e., the resurrection of dead saints and the transformation of living believers as happening "at the last day". But clearly, in Premillennialism, the last day is separated from the Rapture by at least a thousand years! Actually, the Confession in this paragraph does not speak of the resurrection of the saints, rather, "all the dead shall be raised up", this is the General Resurrection. But Premillennialism knows of two resurrections: (1) the resurrection of all saints at the Rapture and (2) the resurrection of the wicked prior to the Final Judgment. These two resurrections are separated by at least a thousand years. There is also no mention of any Millennium in the Confession or of separate resurrections, rather, the resurrection of all people is said to happen at the last day. This is the Confessional problem of (Classic) Premillennialism.

As to the biblical problems, it must be first of all noted that the Millennium is spoken of nowhere in the Bible except in Revelation 20. In the **Old Testament prophecies** which are often appealed to, including Isaiah 2, 4, 65, nowhere do we get the idea that the Kingdom will be temporary. Most importantly, a literal reading of Revelation 20 is problematic, because the book of Revelation is *clearly* and by *its own admission* a symbolical book (Rev. 1:1 KJV "signified"). Numbers are everywhere used in a symbolical way, so, how do we justify making the number thousand to be literal? Amazingly, all the great things which Premillenniarians expect to happen in the Millennium, are nowhere mentioned in Revelation 20. For example: the restoration and conversion of the Jews; peace and prosperity; Christ reigning from the earth; glorified bodies inhabiting the earth together with fleshly bodies; a decreased influence of sin and death. These things are simply not mentioned in Revelation 20. All these things come from a literal reading of Old Testament prophecies, although they are nowhere said to be limited to a thousand years in the Old Testament, but the Premillennialist interprets them in this way. For more on Revelation 20 and its interpretation, **see below**.

Premillenniarians argue that the **binding of Satan** must have such an effect so as to decrease his influence upon the earth, and therefore there will be a decrease (though not total eradication) of sin, death, and unbelief. But we believe this is a misinterpretation of the binding of Satan, which is specific and not general. Reading the text carefully we see how the apostle describes the binding of Satan. In Revelation 20:3 the purpose for the binding of Satan is "so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended." It is not so that peace and prosperity will fill the earth or that sin and unbelief will decrease, rather, the binding is for a specific purpose. But if we want to know from what is Satan bound and withheld, we must read about what happens when he is *loosed* and no longer bound. In Revelation 20:7-10 we read:

> Rev. 20:7-10 And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will come out to **deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth**, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. 9 And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and **surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city,** but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, 10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Verse 3 says that "he might not deceive the nations any longer", but as we read the effect of him being set loose means that he will indeed deceive the nations so as to gather them against the Church, the People of God, we cannot say that Revelation 20 is teaching a general binding of Satan. Clearly, this binding is specific: he may no longer blind the nations.

Prior to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the nations were blinded and deceived by Satan in their idolatries, but as Christ the King of all the Earth came and ushered the New Covenant, Satan may no longer hold the nations in deception. Rather, Christ's gospel will march all over the nations and the elect of God will receive Him from all nations and not Israel alone. Christ is plundering Satan's kingdom. This is how Christ Himself explains the binding of the strong man, who is Satan, in Matthew 10:29. This does not mean that there will be no opposition to the gospel; there will be. But the gospel will go to all nations and Christ will save His elect from all four corners of the earth and not Israel alone. Furthermore, carefully looking at the text we see that this binding is specific to prevent Satan from attacking the worldwide Church. He is kept from that. When he is loosed from his prison, he will try to destroy the Church of God, but will fail in His attempt as Christ will destroy him. Therefore, I believe that the Premillennialist expectation of prosperity and peace, and all the other things which they expect, is not justified by the text of Revelation 20.

A greater problem still is the **apostasy at the end of the Millennium**. Those who will rebel against Christ and will go against the Church, their number is said to be "like the sand of the sea" (Rev. 20:8). While Christ is reining upon and over the earth in His glorified body, people, as much as the sand of the sea, are able to rebel against His reign. But that's not the only problem, the chronological reading of chapters 19-20 seems to give support that the Millennium in chapter 20 is *preceded* by the Second Coming of Christ in chapter 19. Well, if we read the Apocalypse in chronological order it may support that idea. But chapter 19 describes a great and a total slaughter of unbelievers:

> Rev. 19:17-21 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, 18 to eat the flesh of **kings**, the flesh of **captains**, the flesh of **mighty men**, the flesh of **horses** and their **riders**, and **the flesh of all men**, both free and slave, both small and great." 19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. 20 And the **beast** was captured, and with it the **false prophet** who in its presence had done the signs by which **he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast** and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. 21 And **the rest were slain by the sword** that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

Can somebody, in all honesty, tell me that "yes, there are tons of unbelievers who will survive this great slaughter"? It is pretty clear to the unbiased reader that this describes the total destruction of all the wicked. The description is very exhausting. But here comes the Premillennial problem: where do the "their number is like the sand of the sea" rebels come from at the end of the Millennium? The only ones remaining alive after this great slaughter are said to be Christ and His army (Rev. 19:19). Therefore, it must be taught that believers will populate the earth and bring children who will be unbelievers under the physical and glorious reign of Christ, so that their number at the end of the Millennium is "like the sand of the sea." And/Or one has to teach that it is possible to fall away from true and genuine faith.

I believe that **1 Corinthians 15:23-28** is a great passage for Amillennialism and a great passage against any form of Premillennialism. **See here** for a little more on this passage, but let it suffice to say that the passage teaches nothing of a Millennium, but more importantly to my purpose here, death is said to be the last enemy (v. 26). Christ will reign until He destroys the last enemy, moreover, Christ's reign is described to be hostile in that it is said to be a reign whose purpose is to "put all his enemies under his feet" (v. 25). When we go further in this chapter, in 1 Corinthians 15:50-57, Paul gives us a more detailed description of the coming of Christ and the Rapture. Verse 52 says, "the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed": this is the Rapture which will happen just before the Millennium, according to Premillennialism, and after the Millennium according to A- and Postmillennialism. The dead saints will be raised and the living saints will be transformed and given a glorified body like their Lord's. But then Paul goes on to say in vv. 54-56 that when "the perishable puts on the imperishable" the prophecy of Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14 will be fulfilled. The death of death is said to happen at the coming of Christ, at the Rapture. But this is not what Premillennialism teaches. The death of death in their eschatology happens *after* the Millennium. Death will exist in the Millennium according to their literal reading of Isaiah 65:20, though people will generally be able to live longer than today. But this is contrary to Paul's clear teaching that "death is swallowed up in victory" at the coming of Christ and at the Rapture (which is the same as the Coming of Christ, not a separate event separated by 7 years!). Premillennialism has the death of death a thousand years after the Second Coming of Christ and the Rapture, contrary to the apostle Paul.

These are some of the problems I see in Premillennialism.

Dispensational Premillennialism

Like Classic, Historic or Covenantal Premillennialism, Dispensationalism believes that Christ will come *before* the Millennium, but Dispensationalism differs significantly from Historic Premillennialism. For one, Dispensationalism prides itself in consistent literal interpretation, especially of prophecy. They reject that the Church is the fulfillment of Israel, as Covenant Theology teaches and Historic Premillennialism believes. They believe that Israel after the flesh is a separate people of God

from the Church. The Church is a mystery and a "parenthesis" in God's plan, the prophets of old did not foresee it. The original plan of God was to go on with Israel, but since they rejected the Lord Jesus, God went to get a people for Himself from the Gentiles, and then will turn back to His original people. The Church is known as the heavenly people of God, and Israel the earthly people of God.

Dispensationalism divides the history of the world into seven dispensations, i.e., periods of time:

1. Innocence (Gen. 1-3),
2. Conscience (Gen. 4-8),
3. Human Government (Gen. 9-11),
4. Promise (Gen. 12 – Ex. 19),
5. Law (Ex. 20 – Christ),
6. Grace (Resurrection of Christ – Rapture),
7. Kingdom (Rev. 19-20).

Unlike covenant theologians, both Presbyterian and Reformed Baptist, Dispensationalists see history as divided into periods of time and see a great discontinuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. We, 1689 Federalists, also see discontinuity between the Old and New covenants, but also a great deal of continuity in the promises of God. Some of the older Dispensationalists taught that there were different ways of salvation in each of these dispensations, but the Dispensationalists of the present reject that heresy.

A signature doctrine of Dispensationalism is the pre-tribulational rapture. They believe that the seventy weeks of Daniel mentioned in Daniel 9:25-27 are separated as first 69 weeks up to the coming and crucifixion of the Lord of glory and then the last seven years will continue in the future. In a sense, the prophetic clock of the seventy weeks of Daniel stopped ticking at the 69th week and will continue ticking in the future. The seven years or the last half of the seven years are known as the Great Tribulation. It is the general teaching of Dispensationalism that the Church will be raptured just prior to the Great Tribulation and the reign of Antichrist. At this time, Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel after the flesh and there will be a time of peace for her, namely, three and half years, where the Temple will be rebuilt and the old Levitical ceremonial system restored (priests and sacrifices!). But in the second half of the seven years, Antichrist will break his covenant and persecute the Jews. This is known as the Great Tribulation.

The Rapture is known as the secret return of Christ in which He will not fully return to the earth, but remain in the air to meet the believers whom He will snatch up. This is a secret and an imminent (could happen any moment) coming of Christ. Christ will either remain in the air or go back to Heaven with the raptured saints during the Tribulation, which will last for seven years, the first half apparently good and the second half, worse. The Rapture allows for the removal of the Church from the earth to Heaven and ends what is known as the Church Age or the "parenthesis" within God's plan, and therefore, God now can go back to His original plan with Israel. The Jews will be converted and be brought back to their Promised Land in accordance with Old Testament prophecies. The Old Covenant priesthood, sacrifices, temple worship will all be restored according to the literal interpretations of Old Testament prophecy. Sometimes, the Rapture is called the *first phase* of the Second Coming and the *second phase* will come at the end of the Tribulation when Jesus rescues Israel from Antichrist and destroys him. At the Rapture, Christ will come with all dead New Covenant saints giving them resurrection bodies and will transform all living believers of the Church and take them up with Him. The Church is removed from the earth, now the prophetic clock of Daniel's seventy weeks starts ticking.

So, after the Rapture comes the last seven years of Daniel's seventy weeks (Dan. 9:25-27) and at the end of that Christ Jesus returns to the earth. At this return, His feet will be touching the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4), destroys Antichrist, raises Old Testament saints, raises Tribulation saints (i.e., those who came to faith and died in the Great Tribulation), and ushers the thousand years of Christ's kingdom.

The Millennium is an earthly kingdom centered around Israel being in the lead and Old Testament prophecies being literally fulfilled. The Temple, priesthood, sacrifices and all that belongs to the Old Covenant, as foretold in the prophecies (e.g., Ezek. 40-48) will be restored. Christ will reign from a physical throne in Jerusalem over all the earth. Like Classic Premillennialism, the Millennium is a time of peace and prosperity, though this does not mean that all people on the earth are converted or that sin and death are eradicated. Rather, there is a clear decrease in unbelief, sin, and death.

After the Millennium is over, Satan will be let loose to destroy the believers, but Christ will destroy him and his followers and send them to the lake of fire. After that comes the resurrection of the wicked and the Final Judgment of all people. As with Classic Premillennialism, there is the question about the time of resurrection for saints who die in the Millennium, whether it will be during the Millennium or at the end of the Millennium. In the Millennium, believers with resurrection and glorified bodies will inhabit the earth with believers who come to faith during the Millennium with their normal sinful bodies, and with unbelievers in the flesh.

According to the Dispensational scheme, there are actually two second comings: one at the Rapture and one at the end of the Great Tribulation. There are also three or four resurrections:

1. the resurrection of dead New Covenant saints at the Rapture;
2. the resurrection of Old Testament saints at the Second Coming of Jesus;
3. the resurrection of Tribulation Saints;
4. the resurrection of the wicked at the end of the Millennium and last battle.

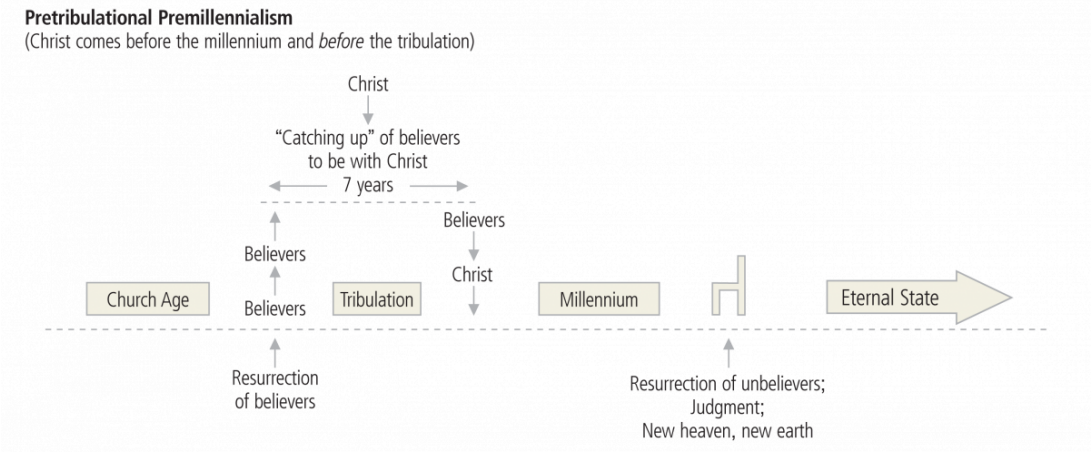
And then there is the question about the resurrection of Millennium saints. This is one of the most problematic aspects of Dispensationalism.

After the Millennium, the Last Battle, and the resurrection(s), the Great White Throne Judgment will take place, then the eternal state will be ushered in–the New Heavens and New Earth.

Although Dispensationalism is the most popular eschatology in the church nowadays, it is fairly recent from the 1830s in Church History. Furthermore, I believe that it is the weakest and most damaging of the four major views because of its novelty and separation of the singular people of God, among other things. The following is a list of events which Dispensationalists generally expect:

1. Rapture (phase 1 of the Second Coming):
    a. The resurrection of New Covenant saints.
    b. Catching up and transformation of the Church.
    c. Restoration and conversion of Israel.
2. The Seventieth Week Of Daniel 9 (seven years):
    a. Conversion of the 144,000 Jewish (evangelist) believers.
    b. Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel.
    c. Old Covenant worship and ceremonial system restored.
    d. Intense persecution of the Jews by the Antichrist in the last 3,5 years.
3. The Second Coming (phase 2 of the Second Coming):
    a. Armageddon/Destruction of Antichrist.
    b. The resurrection of the Old Testament believers.
    c. The resurrection of Tribulation saints.
4. The Millennium:
    a. Old Testament prophecies literally fulfilled.
    b. Old Covenant ceremonial system restored, with the Temple, priesthood, and sacrifices.
    c. Israel will be the head, and the Gentiles the tail.
5. The resurrection of the Wicked.
6. The resurrection of Millennium Saints (views are unclear).
7. The Final Judgment.
8. The New Heavens and New Earth.

The following is a diagram of Dispensational eschatology:



Dispensational Problems

In addition to the problems with Historic Premillennialism, which are common with Dispensationalism, I see the following problems with this system.

It is obviously a recent innovation starting with John Nelson Darby in the 1830s and is certainly not confessional. Dispensationalists reject Covenant Theology (**chapter 7**), the abiding validity of the moral Law of God (**chapter 19**), the Christian Sabbath (**chapter 22**), and the eschatology of the Confession (chapter 31) among other things. But the biblical problems are greater.

Two Peoples Of God

First of all, it's a novel idea that the Church and Israel are a separate people of God. From the earliest times of the Church, the Church saw itself as coming in place of Israel as the people of God. Dispensationalists derogatorily refer to this as Replacement Theology. Call it what you want, the Scriptures teach that the Church, Jewish and Gentile believers, are the Israel of God and the history of Christian theology up to Darby proves this. If you would read the old commentators, they would always refer to the Old Testament prophecies of restoration and prosperity as relating to the Church as the singular people of God. No doubt, a lot of the commentators saw also a latter-day restoration of Israel (e.g., John Gill does this very often), but not as a separate people of God. But there came a change with the prominence of Dispensationalism, and the promises of God to His Church were taken away and given to an earthly and fleshly people, i.e., only to physical descendants of Abraham. They contended that we must separate Israel and the Church. They are not one people, but two different peoples of God, one heavenly and the other earthly with two separate plans. To defend this novel teaching, Dispensationalists do not allow the New Testament to interpret the Old. It is our belief that the New Testament should take precedence over the Old, not because the Old was not inspired or the New is more inspired. Rather, it is our belief that there is a greater clarity in the New Testament than in the Old. The Old was filled with types and shadows, but in the New, we have the reality in Christ. Moreover, the interpretation of the apostles of the Old Testament is the correct interpretation of the Old Testament, not the "literal" interpretation of Dispensationalists. Let me give you a few examples.

In Galatians 3, the apostle Paul interprets the Abrahamic Covenant to have had promises made to Abraham to his singular Offspring who is Christ (Gal. 3:16). Then he goes on to say that "if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:29). Also,

> Gal. 3:7-9 Know then that it is **those of faith who are the sons of Abraham**. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." 9 So then, **those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham**, the man of faith.

It is the teaching of Dispensationalism that the Abrahamic Covenant forms the basis that Israel must remain as the people of God and is always entitled to the Promised Land, and that Israel has not yet attained to the (complete) fulfillment of that promise. But this is contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture that all the promises were indeed fulfilled to Israel (e.g., Josh. 21:43-45) which were made to the physical seed. Yet, as we saw, the seed or offspring which had the promises made to, according to Paul, was the Lord Christ. It was to Him and to Abraham that God made promises. Moreover, the true children of Abraham are not those who are physically descended from him, but those who share his faith. It is by faith that we are children of Abraham. Galatians 3:29 explains how we may be children of Abraham and thus heirs to the promises which were made to Abraham and to Christ. It is through Christ, the true and faithful child of Abraham, that we are made children of Abraham. Being a child of Abraham is a matter of faith, not of fleshly descent. The promises included that we will be the people of God and inherit the Promised Land. But Romans 4:13 teaches that the Promised Land is not limited to that land in the Middle East, but rather, it is the whole world. This is in accordance with one of the beatitudes of our Lord (Matt. 5:5). John the Baptist teaches that it is of no avail, contrary to Jewish opinion, that they have the favor of God and they will be in peace because they are physical children of Abraham, for God is able to raise children of Abraham from stones. Rather, the people should repent and have the same faith as Abraham (Matt. 3:9; Luke 3:8). The promises given to Jews after the flesh were conditioned upon their obedience through the Mosaic Covenant (e.g., Deut. 7:11-12). It is needless, for the student of the Bible, to mention the many places when Israel's prosperity and occupation of the Land are conditioned upon their obedience (see Deut. 32 for example; Lev. 18:24-28). The Abrahamic Covenant was not an unconditional covenant, but had the condition of being circumcised and obeying the law of God (Gen. 18:19; 26:4-5; Rom. 2:25). See for more **chapter 7** on the **Abrahamic Covenant**.

By being children of Abraham by faith, this means that we are also Jews by faith, entitled to the promises of God which are in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). In Romans 2:25-29, Paul teaches us that the one who is circumcised ought to keep the whole Law of God, otherwise his circumcision is useless. Therefore, circumcision obliges and binds one to obey the whole law. Circumcision is not a physical matter, but a spiritual matter. It is a circumcision of the heart, not the foreskin as expected from Old Testament prophecy about the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:25-27). Being a Jew and thus a child of

Abraham is a matter of the heart and *spiritual,* not *physical* descent. It is to be circumcised not (merely) in the flesh, but in the heart by the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:3). In a similar passage, written to the Philippians, Paul says that "we are the [true] circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3). To Gentiles, Paul says that they're the circumcision because they (1) worship God by His Spirit, (2) glory in the cross our Lord, and (3) they put no confidence in them being physical children of Abraham. "The circumcision" is the name given to the Jews who required Gentile Christians to be circumcised (see Acts 11:2-3; Galatians 2:11-14; cf. Acts 15:1). We learned also from above that being a child of Abraham is a matter of faith and not physical descent (Gal. 3:7-10, 29). Therefore, to be a true Jew after the will of God is to be circumcised not in the flesh, but in the heart according to the promise of the New Covenant.

Believers are also said to be the Israel of God in **Galatians 6:16**. The passage reads:

> Gal. 6:15-16 For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon **the Israel of God**.

Circumcision of the flesh gives us no entitlement to God, nor is it of any help if one does not keep the whole law. What matters is a new creation, which is the circumcision of the heart, not of the foreskin. This is essential. While the circumcision party wants to boast in the flesh (Gal. 3:13), Paul wants to boast in the cross of Christ, which is a stumbling block and foolishness (Gal. 6:14; cf. Phil. 3:3). And this is the rule which Paul is referring to in v. 16, for all those who do not boast in the flesh, but in the cross of Christ, and know that a new creation is that which matters: let peace and mercy be upon them.

At this point, the Dispensationalists are quick to note that Paul speaks about two groups in v. 16, namely, 1) those who walk according to this rule and 2) the Israel of God. They still understand that this refers to Israel after the flesh or believing Israelites. They argue forcibly that Israel is never used to denote anything in the Bible except the physical people who descended from Jacob. While this may be true, it does not exclude the fact that the apostle may be speaking not of Israel after the flesh. Moreover, the designation "the Israel of God" occurs nowhere else in the Bible. It is my belief that Paul is not referring to two separate groups here, but to one group with two designations. The Greek word καί *(kai,* G2532) generally means "and, also, even." The word does not carry in itself the separation between two groups. For example, Paul often writes, "God *and* Father of our Lord Jesus" (e.g., Eph. 1:3; Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 1:3; etc), but is one willing to say that Paul is speaking of different persons here? Obviously not. The word "and" does not carry in itself the implication that the writer is speaking about different persons or groups. The same is true with Galatians 6:16. The Israel *of God,* in distinction to "Israel after the flesh" (1 Cor. 10:18 KJV), is the true people of God. This is Spiritual Israel, in distinction to fleshly Israel (Rom. 9:6-7). Necessarily, if the apostle speaks of Israel after the flesh, it must mean that there is an Israel after the Spirit, otherwise, there would be no need to speak in this way. This is evident from Romans 9 that there is a separate Israel *within* Israel (Rom. 9:6-7).

To maintain that "the Israel of God" in Galatians 6:16 is believing physical descendants of Jacob is to present a disconnect in the argument of the apostle in this Epistle. Up to this point, he has argued that believers are entitled to the promises made to Abraham and Christ, and that they are children of Abraham because they are in Christ (Gal. 3:7-10, 25-29). In chapter four, he goes on to identify the unbelieving people of Israel with the Mosaic Covenant and with Hagar, as children of slavery. While he identifies the Galatians believers, Jewish and Gentile, as children of promise and children of freedom. We, believing Gentiles and Jews, "like Isaac, are children of promise" (Gal. 4:28). Why are we children of promise? Because we are not born according to the flesh, nor are we children of Abraham according to flesh, but according to the Spirit and promise. In Romans 9, Paul explains that there is an Israel which is separate from Israel. There is an Israel which is descended from Israel (Jacob), but they do not actually belong to Israel. But there is the true Israel, and this is the Israel who are not children of the flesh, i.e., physical descendants, but rather, they are said to be "the children of promise" (Rom. 9:8). This brings us back to Galatians 4:28 where the same designation is used when Paul was writing to a majority of Gentile believers. It is believers who are the true Israel of God according to Romans 9 and Galatians 4:28. They are the ones who are "counted as offspring" of Abraham and entitled to the promises made to him. The children of faith, like Isaac, are the children of God and the true children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is the reason that God's promises have not failed, because His promises were made to the true Israel of God made up of both believing Jews and Gentiles. God has only one people called the Church and the Israel of God.

Now we go back to our discussion. Not only the context of the Epistle, but also what Paul elsewhere wrote, supports our doctrine that Paul is not writing about two separate groups in Galatians 6:16, but a singular group. Also, by a reading of v. 16 which sees the conjunction "and" separating the Church from Israel, does this Israel actually walk according to the rule of circumcision of the heart is all that matters? If not, how is the same blessing given to believers who follow Paul's doctrine and to those who do not? Moreover, throughout the letter, he has been battling the false doctrines of the circumcision party, and promoting the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers, of them being children of Abraham and like Isaac, and at the closing of the passage, he would declare their disunity and separateness? This interpretation is forced because of a particular system, not because the context of the passage and teaching of the New Testament requires it.

The unity of the people of God is clearly taught in **Ephesians 2:11-22**. Without going into much detail, the passage teaches that Christ by His death has abolished the wall which separated Jews from Gentiles, and therefore, has created one new man from the two. There was a time when the Gentiles were 1) separated from Christ, 2) alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, 3) strangers to the covenants of promise, 4) without hope, and 5) without God. The Old Covenant was restricted to the nation of Israel, although it had a few Gentiles coming under it (Rahab, Ruth), but generally, it was made up of physical descendants of Abraham. They prided themselves in their heritage and in their fleshly circumcision and called non-Jews "the uncircumcision" (v. 12). Therefore, there was a time when all these five things were true of the Gentiles, but now it is different. Paul speaks of a time in the past. In v. 13 he says, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." The blood of Christ is that which has brought us near. We were at one time far off, but now we have been called by God (cf. Acts 2:39). We were "brought near by the blood of Christ" says the apostle. But brought near to what? Necessarily, since the apostle mentions nothing new, it must be that we were brought near to the five things which we were separated from. Therefore, 1) we are brought near to Christ *by* the blood of Christ, 2) we are made citizens of the commonwealth of Israel, 3) we are objects and entitled to the covenants of the promise, 4) we are with hope, and finally 5) we have God in the world. These are wonderful and gracious blessings for us who are in Christ, but let us focus on #2. If at one time we were alienated, but now are brought near to the "commonwealth of Israel" it means that now we are made citizens of Israel. If we are citizens, then we are Israelites by law. In fact, other translations say "citizenship" instead of "commonwealth", which is clearer (e.g., HCSB, ISV, NET). Not only is this consideration important in stating that the Gentile believers have become citizens of Israel, and thus Israelites, but what is also said in v. 19:

> So then you are **no longer strangers and aliens**, but you are **fellow citizens with the saints** and members of the household of God,

Notice that Paul here explicitly states what we implicitly drew from vv. 12-13. The Gentile believers have become fellow citizens of the Israel of God. Notice Paul's careful wording: they are not called Israel, but they called "the saints" and thus implying that unbelieving Jews are not "members of the household of God" nor are they citizens of the Israel of God. Rather the saints are those "who were near" and to whom the gospel was preached and who received it (v. 17). The way that "the dividing wall of hostility" was abolished, which separated Gentiles from Jews, was by the abolishing of the ceremonial law. The purpose was "that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace" (v. 15). This is against the Dispensational idea that God wants to have a heavenly people (the Church) and an earthly people (Israel), rather, the will of God is to have a singular people made up of both believing Jews and Gentiles, who are the Temple and dwelling place of God (vv. 19-22).

In conclusion, all these passages teach, contrary to Dispensational doctrine, that the Church is in fact, according to New Testament teaching, the Israel of God.

Literalistic Interpretation Of Prophecy

A lot of Dispensationalists equate literal interpretation with "truth." If you are interpreting a prophecy symbolically or as not pertaining to Israel after the flesh, you are spiritualizing and thus misinterpreting the passage. Well, the problem is actually that the apostles themselves "spiritualize" Old Testament texts. The clearest example of this is in **Acts 15**. In the midst of the controversy about the Gentiles and the Jewish church, James the half-brother of the Lord, stands up and says the following:

> Acts 15:13-18 After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. 14 Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to **take from them a people for his name**. 15 And **with this the words of the prophets agree**, just as it is written, 16 "'After this I will return, and I will **rebuild the tent of David** that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, 17 that the **remnant of mankind may seek the Lord**, and all the **Gentiles who are called by my name**, says the Lord, who makes these things 18 known from of old.'

This is very interesting! Not only does James here indicate that the Church was foreseen by the Prophets, indicating that he could cite more prophets if necessary, but also the engrafting of the Gentiles was predicted. This is from the prophecy of Amos 9:11-12, the only problem is that, literally interpreted, the prophecy teaches the restoration of Israel and the Davidic kingdom, not the inclusion of the Gentiles. This passage is problematic to Dispensationalists. The wording of the passage is likewise different. Here is a table which compares the translation of the ESV, the LXX in English and the words spoken by the apostle James:

Amos 9:11-12 ESV	Amos 9:11-12 LXXE	Acts 15:16-18
"In that day	In that day	"'**After this**

		I will return,
I will raise up	I will raise up	and I will rebuild
the booth	the tabernacle	the **tent**
of David that is fallen	of David that is fallen,	of David that has fallen;
and repair its breaches,		
and raise up its ruins	and will rebuild the ruins of it,	I will rebuild its ruins,
	and will set up the parts thereof that have been broken down,	
and rebuild it as in the days of old,	and will build it up as in the ancient days:	
		and I will restore it,
that they may possess the remnant of Edom	that the remnant of men,	that **the remnant of mankind**
		may seek the Lord
and all the nations who are called by my name,"	and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called,	and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,
	may earnestly seek [me],	
declares the LORD who does this.	saith the Lord who does all these things.	says the Lord, who makes these things 18 known from of old.'

Clearly, there are significant differences between the text of the Old Testament as given in Amos 9:11-12 and how James interprets it. Little regard will be given to the LXX, but I wanted to cite that so that it would be clear that he is not simply quoting the Septuagint. Noticeably, the "in that day" has become "after this", meaning that the prophecy pertains to the present time of the apostle James. What is even more, the purpose for the raising of the fallen "booth of David" is said to be so that the Israelites may "may possess the remnant of Edom" in the Old Testament, while James, inspired by the same Spirit Who wrote Amos 9, says "that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord". James has completely removed the Jewish rule over the Edomites from his interpretation. The fallen booth or tent of David was restored when Christ was raised up. Christ is the heir of David and He reigns as the King on David's throne in heaven. David's throne was also said to be the throne of the LORD (1Chron. 29:23) and that is where Christ is seated (Rev. 3:21). This is a prophecy, which in its Old Testament context and according to strict literal interpretation, pertains to Israel after the flesh, but the inspired James says that the engrafting of the Gentiles agrees with the words of this prophecy. This is a problem for Dispensationalism. But the clear implication here is that a prophecy, which in its Old Testament context pertained to Israel after the flesh, is applied to Gentile believers in Christ, the true Israel of God. More could be said about this passage, but every book on Amillennialism (or I guess most non-Dispensational books on Eschatology) deals with this passage against Dispensationalism.

Many other examples could be cited, but I will restrict myself to the last example found in **Romans 9:23-26**. The Holy Spirit says:

> in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—24 **even us whom he has called**, not from the **Jews** only but **also from the Gentiles**? 25 As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those **who were not my people** I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" 26 "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called '**sons of the living God**.'"

In its Old Testament context and according to literal interpretation this is a prophecy of mercy upon Israel and making of a covenant with them (Hos. 2:14-23). But the apostle applies this prophecy to the calling of the Gentiles who were not God's people, but since they have received mercy are called beloved and children of God. Here, the inspired apostle interprets a prophecy of the Old Testament pertaining to Israel after the flesh and applies it to Gentile believers.

The idea of interpreting prophecy and the Bible generally in a literal manner is appealing, but upon closer examination, we find that this is simply not how the New Testament interprets every Old Testament text. Obviously, we believe in the historical and redemptive hermeneutic method of interpretation of the Bible. The genre, context, and the book, among other things, determine if we have to interpret a passage in a literal way or a symbolic way. Moreover, we are not opposed to literal interpretation since that means that we have to interpret the passage *according to its literature*. We are opposed to a (wooden) *literalistic* way of interpreting prophecy since that is not how the New Testament interprets the Old Testament.

Restoration of the Temple Sacrifices

One would imagine that a simple reading of the book of Hebrews would destroy any idea of restoration to the Old Covenant ways of worship, but since one is committed to a literalistic interpretation of prophecy, one has to have the Temple and its sacrifices according to Ezekiel 40-48. To be sure, a lot of Dispensationalists would say that these things would *symbolize*

Christ and the sacrifices are *representations* of Christ's sacrifice and are not ways of attaining forgiveness. But this is contrary to the literal reading of bringing sin offerings and burnt offerings so as to make atonement for the altar in Ezekiel 43:21-26. Or the grain, burnt, and peace offerings so as to make atonement which are required in Ezekiel 45:15-16. This is also a return to the feasts of the Old Testament which the New Testament says were fulfilled in Christ (Ezek. 45:17; Col. 2:16-17). A literalistic reading of these passages does not teach that the sacrifices were symbolic or as tokens of remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ, rather, they were to make atonement, but that is obviously contrary to the New Testament (e.g., Heb. 10:4).

While I do not have a firm opinion on what Ezekiel 40-48 teaches, I must, because of the clearer light of the New Testament, reject any interpretation which brings the people of God back to the Old Testament shadows and sacrifices.

Multiple Comings

While Historic Premillennialism holds to a singular coming of Christ, they have misplaced the time of Christ's Second Coming. Dispensationalism, on the other hand, has multiple second comings of Christ. First, there is 1) the coming in the Rapture in which He does not touch the earth, called the *Parousia*; 2) the coming after the Tribulation in which His feet will touch the Mount of Olives, separated by seven years, called the Revelation and the Day of the Lord. The New Testament knows nothing of such a Second Coming. This is necessitated not because of the interpretation of passages touching upon the Second Coming, but because of a theological system. The Bible in many places speaks of the Second Coming with the definite article implying that it is a singular event (e.g., Matt. 24:37, 39; 1 Thess. 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1). Hebrews 9:28 teaches that Christ appeared the first time to bear the sins of His people, but He will "appear a second time" to save His people from this world. He will not appear a multiple of times, but a second time only, in continuity with the analogy between humans having to die once and then be judged. More will be said about this **below**.

Multiple Resurrections

There is 1) a resurrection of dead New Covenant saints at the Parousia or the Rapture; 2) a resurrection of Old Testament saints at the Day of the Lord at the end of the Great Tribulation of Old Testament saints; 3) a resurrection of the wicked at the end of the world. Then there is the question about the Millennium saints (those who came to faith and die during the Millennium) and the timing of their resurrection. There are at least three resurrections in the system of Dispensationalism. We believe that the Bible teaches a singular resurrection of both the just and unjust (as paragraph 3 of this chapter asserts). Moreover, this resurrection is connected with the Second Coming of our Lord.

That there is one general resurrection of all people is seen from passages such as Daniel 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15, 21; Matthew 22:31. Notice how the resurrection is spoken of here in the singular. Daniel speaks of many who are sleeping in the dust which will wake up. This does not mean that some will not be raised, rather, there will be a whole multitude of believers who will be transformed, but strictly speaking, not be raised. John speaks of "an hour," a definite point in time when *all* the dead will hear and come out either to *the* resurrection of life or to *the* resurrection of judgment. This judgment has as its subjects "all who are in the tombs" and its result is either in life or in judgment. Paul believes that there will be "a" singular resurrection "of both the just and the unjust" and that this is the "resurrection of the dead" which he believes in. The resurrection, according to Paul is general and its subjects are both the just and the unjust. The Lord Jesus likewise speaks of a definite and a singular resurrection of the dead (τῆς ἀναστάσεως τῶν νεκρῶν, *tes anastaseus ton nekron*). The clear and unambiguous teaching of the New Testament is that the resurrection is general, and not separate. Therefore, when we read passages that mention only the resurrection of the just or the unjust, we should not think that the writer is thereby denying the general resurrection. Such reasoning is not sound. The writers of Holy Scripture do not need to mention every event attached to the resurrection or the Coming of the Lord Jesus every time they say something about eschatology.

That the resurrection is connected to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus may be seen from 1 Corinthians 15:23. There, Paul teaches that the resurrection of the saints will take place when Christ comes. But, the Holy Spirit has taught us that there is a singular and a general resurrection of both the just and the unjust. Therefore, even if the passage does not speak of the wicked, we must assume by good and necessary consequence that this is also the "hour" for the resurrection of the wicked (John 5:28-29). Continuing from the passage in 1 Corinthians 15, we see that the destruction of all Christ's enemies, including the last enemy, is connected with His Coming, when everything will be subject to Him and the Son will subject Himself to the Father (1 Cor. 15:23-28; 50-57). Not only this, but this is the time for the Rapture, which is the resurrection of the saints and the transformation of all living believers at the time of Christ's Second Coming.

These considerations are sufficient to establish a singular resurrection of both the just and the wicked at the Parousia of our Lord.

Conclusion

There are perhaps a lot more troubling things about Dispensationalism which have infiltrated the Church, but this study is not actually meant to be a refutation of wrong views, but a case for the right view. To me, these are the biggest problems in Dispensationalism.

Postmillennialism

"Post" means after, and therefore, Postmillennialism is the teaching that Christ will return after the Millennium. Postmillennialism has a lot of nuances, but it is similar to Amillennialism in that it believes in a singular general resurrection, a singular judgment at the singular Second Coming of Jesus Christ. That which distinguishes Postmillennialism is in its optimism about the future. While Premillennialism is generally pessimistic about the future (especially Dispensationalism), Postmillennialism is very optimistic. The Postmillennial believes that Christians will take over the present world and have a clear impact on the culture so that, according to some writers, Christ will come back to a Christianized world. There are various forms of Postmillennialism and I admit that I do not know all the nuances. If my eschatology, which is Amillennial, would change, it would change to Postmillennialism.

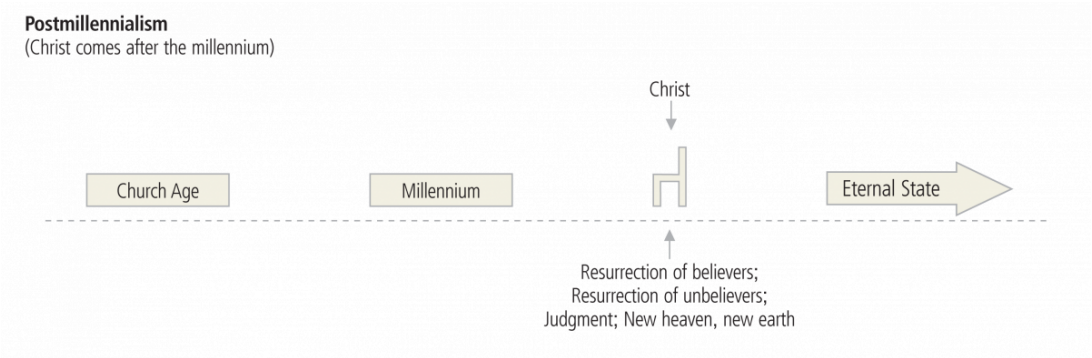
The most popular form of Postmillennialism in the Reformed world now is Theonomic and Preterist. Theonomy is the teaching that the Law of God must be applied to all things in the culture and this is not only speaking about the abiding validity of the moral law (as in **chapter 19**), but also the validity of the civil law which is said to expire by the Confession (**19:4**). Theonomists believe that the government should repent, receive Christ, accept Christ as King and they as subjects to Him. This is great. But they also have to use the judicial system as given to Israel in the Pentateuch. There are various nuances obviously, but this is the general idea that I get from Theonomists.

Preterism is the teaching that *most* of the prophecies of the Bible have already taken place. This is to be distinguished from Full or Hyper Preterism, which says that the Lord Jesus has already returned in 70 A.D., the resurrection and judgment have happened. This is heresy and nowhere confessed by the Church. Rather, every major confession and creed of the Church expects the Second Coming of Christ, the resurrection and the judgment. This is not how I'm using Preterism here. Rather, the Preterism I refer to, sometimes called Partial Preterism, teaches that most of the book of Revelation was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and that's why its advocates argue for a date for the writing of the Apocalypse in the reign of Nero before the actual destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70. The "Great Tribulation" of Matthew 24 was likewise fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, and with this, I agree. This means that the persecution of the Church mentioned, among other places, in the book of Revelation was confined to the past. It is a thing that has happened and passed long ago. Therefore, it is now reasonable to expect a time of peace, prosperity, and Christianization of the world, if there will be no major persecutions of the Church until the end of the Millennium.

As to the nature of the Millennium, some old Postmillennialists believed in a literal one thousand year earthly kingdom of Christ when many Old Testament prophecies and promises in the Psalms will be fulfilled. Most on the other hand nowadays believe, like the Amillennialists, that the Millennium is the whole time between the first and second coming of Christ. They take the Millennium symbolically as indicating a long time when the world will be evangelized and Christianized. This will include advancement in the culture and the rise of the Christian worldview. Christ reigns from heaven with His saints over the world.

Postmillennialism is appealing because of its optimism and belief in Christ's power. They do not believe that the world will get better because of man's power, but because of God's promises to Christ and about Christ's Kingdom. They do not look to the mess that the world is in and say "see, Postmillennialism is wrong." Rather, what is encouraging is that they're trying to believe the promises of God about Christ's kingdom.

Postmillennialists expect a huge conversion of Jews in the future along with Gentiles. When Christ comes in glory at the end of the Millennium, all the dead will be raised, and all people will be judged. The following is a diagram of Postmillennial eschatology:



Postmillennial Problems

My problems with Postmillennialism are not much nor are they like my criticism of Premillennialism. The main issues have to do with Preterism, Theonomy, and its optimism. I simply cannot interpret the book of Revelation in a Preteristic fashion. I'm an idealist with the progressive parallelism view, therefore, I argue strongly that the Revelation was very relevant to the Church of old as it is relevant for the present time. Neither do I see support for Theonomy in the Confession. Obviously, we must take note and learn "the general equity" of the judicial law, but I do not believe that the New Testament teaches us to implement the laws given to Israel in our land, rather, we should submit to the laws of the land unless they're contrary to God's Law (**see here**). But I admit that Theonomy is not a field in which I have any interest at the present time nor that I have studied, but this is based upon my general knowledge.

I am optimistic because I firmly believe that God is absolutely sovereign and Christ is reigning over all the world, not just in the hearts of believers (as is so popular in Churchianity) and that His reign is one which is in the midst of His enemies (Ps. 110:2) and in which He will destroy all His enemies (1 Cor. 15:25-28). Therefore, this means that the rule of Christ is a hostile one. It is a rule for His Church and against His enemies. I believe that the Bible gives us a dose of both optimism and pessimism about the future. Amillennialists like to call themselves "realists," haha. Amillennialists appeal to passages as Matthew 13:24-30 where it is said, "Let both grow together until the harvest" (v. 30) to show that the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan will both grow together, side by side, until the harvest, which is at the end of the age. As each Kingdom grows, so the clash between the two will be greater and Christians should expect persecution from the world.

In my opinion, the problems with Postmillennialism that I see are compared to nothing with the problems with Premillennialism that I see.

Amillennialism

And now we move to the last and Biblical position (haha) commonly called Amillennialism. The "a" is a negative, like *A*theism which is a denial of the existence of God. Therefore, literally, Amillennialism means no-millennialism. But this wouldn't be true. We don't believe that there is no millennium. This name was given to us and not made by us. Though in a sense we agree with the name since we deny any idea of an *earthly* millennium, so in a sense, Amillennialism is the denial that there would be an earthly kingdom of God in the present world. But *we do actually believe in a Millennium*, we do not ignore Revelation 20. We believe that the Millennium and millennial reign is from heaven, not on the earth. Moreover, this Millennium is longer than a literal thousand years. Some have called Amillennialism *Realized Millennialism* and *Present Millennialism.* These latter two designations point to the present reality of the Millennium, and not to a future earthly millennium which we deny. Amillennialists hold to Covenant Theology or New Covenant Theology (i.e., the oneness of the people of God), and we are strong upon the hermeneutic that the NT should interpret the OT, and the Analogy of Faith.

The Church is the Israel of God and the subject of Old Testament prophecies. The Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled by Christ and His Church, which is made up of believing Jews and Gentiles. God has only one people the Church, which is the Israel of God (**see above**). Most of the prophecies which Premillennialists and Postmillennialists see as pertaining to the time of the Millennium, Amillennialists see as apply to the eternal state—the New Heavens and New Earth.

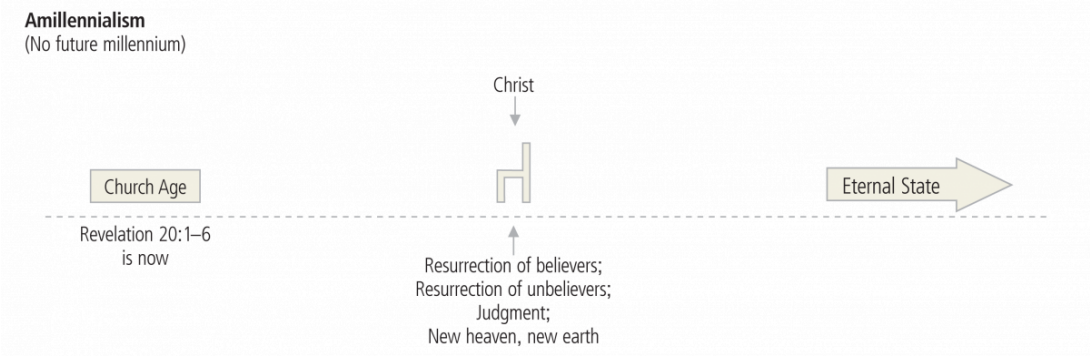
We believe that the correct and faithful interpretation of the Old Testament is the interpretation of the New. Both are inspired of God, but the Old Testament contains a lot of types and shadows, while the New Testament contains the realities and is a clearer revelation of God. We believe that the New Testament should take precedence in our understanding of Old Testament prophecies. Coupled to that, we believe that the hermeneutic of the Analogy of Faith. Simply stated, this is the teaching that we must compare Scripture with Scripture, and we must interpret the unclear in light of the clear. For example, no Amillennialist begins their case for Amillennialism with the book of Revelation. Rather, we try to go to clearer and direct passages which touch upon eschatology, and as we establish the didactic, clear and straightforward teaching of the New Testament, then we go to the Revelation. Revelation is clearly a symbolical book (Rev. 1:1 KJV "signified"), and therefore, we should start first with the clear teaching of the New Testament on eschatology and then, in light of the clear, move to the unclear and symbolical.

In many ways, I believe Amillennialism to be the simplistic eschatology of the New Testament. We believe that the Millennium and binding of Satan began with the death and resurrection of our Lord and will end when He will come back a second time at the end of the age. When He comes back, He will slay Satan and his horde, the resurrection of believers and unbelievers will take place, living believers will be transformed, then the Final Judgment, when all people will appear before the throne of Christ, will take place, and lastly, the Eternal State–the New Heavens and New Earth–will be ushered in. The following is an order of events from an Amillennial point of view:

1. The Last Battle/Armageddon.
2. The Second Coming:
    a. Transformation of all living believers.
    b. General Resurrection.

3. The Final Judgment.
4. Restoration Of All Things.
5. The New Heavens and New Earth.

The following is a diagram of Amillennial eschatology:



Amillennialism is very simple that even a child can understand it. In the following sections, I will lay a biblical case for basic tenants of Amillennial eschatology, which happen to correspond with the statements of the Confession in this chapter.

The Two Age Eschatology of the NT

Essential to Amillennial eschatology is the **two age model** of the New Testament. Basically, the New Testament teaches that there are two ages, 1) the present evil age, and 2) the age to come. The present age is characterized by sin and persecution for the Church, while the age to come is said to be the eternal state. In the words of the lyrical theologian, shai linne:

> The New Testament speaks of two ages, son
> That's the present evil age and the age to come
> This age has murder, hate, we yearn and wait
> The next age? A burning lake, eternal state
> (shai linne – The Millennium)

The following table contains all passages of the New Testament which speak of the two ages:

Verse	This age	The age to come
Matt. 12:32	…will not be forgiven, either in this age	or in the age to come (compare Mark 3:28-30)
Mark 10:30	…receive many times more in this time,	and in the age to come eternal life. (Luke 18:30)
Luke 20:34-36	The sons of this age marry…	but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection…neither marry… they cannot die anymore…equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection
1 Cor. 1:20	Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?	
1 Cor. 2:6	…although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away.	
2 Cor. 4:4	…god of this world (age) has blinded the minds of the unbelievers…	
Gal. 1:4	who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age…	
Eph. 1:21	…far above all rule and authority…not only in this age	But also in the one to come
1Tim. 6:17, 19	As for the rich in this present age…	treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future…
Titus 2:12	training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age	

From the above passages we may say that the present age is said to be an age in which:

- There is no forgiveness for the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit;
- Believers receive material blessings;
- Marriage is possible;
- The wisdom of the world is foolish;
- The wisdom and rulers of this world are doomed to pass away;
- Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers;
- Christ died to deliver us from this present evil age;
- Christ reigns far above all rule and authority;
- There are materially rich people;
- Believers should live godly lives and renounce ungodliness.

These passages describe qualities or characteristics of the Present Age which are temporal in nature. This Present Age is explicitly defined as "evil" (Gal. 1:4), this means that evil will remain the characteristic and quality of this age until it is over. On the other hand, we have the Age to Come. The Age to Come is an age in which:

- There is no forgiveness for the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit;
- Eternal life is in possession of the believer;
- Believers have attained to the resurrection and are sons of the resurrection;
- Believers no long marry;
- Believers no longer die;
- Believers are equal to angels;
- Believers are sons of God;
- Christ reigns.

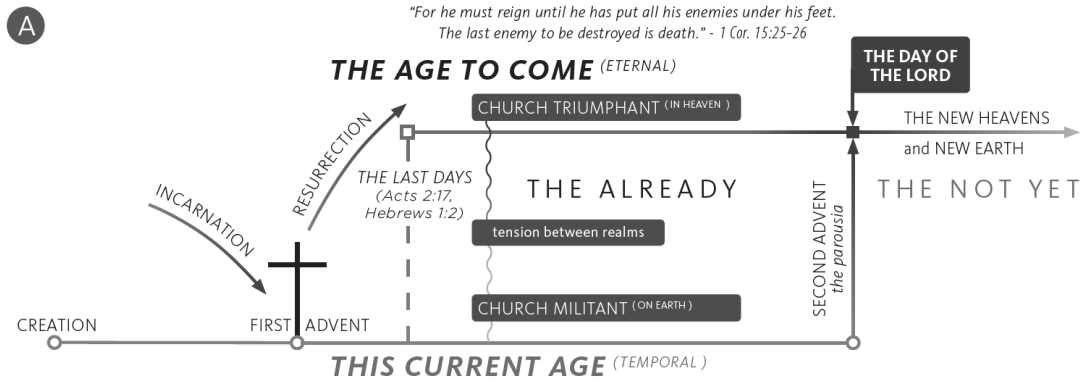
Clearly, in contrast to the qualities and characteristics of the Present Age, the Age to Come is described in non-temporal ways. The parallel account of Matthew 12:32 about the sin against the Holy Spirit says that the blasphemer would be guilty of "an eternal sin" (Mark 3:29). This means that Mark is equating the Age to Come with eternity. Moreover, eternal life is the reward of the Age to Come, and thus the age is eternal (Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30). The Present Age is an age when people get married, but in contrast, the Age to Come is an age where there will be no marriage, but believers will be like angels. Moreover, the Age to Come is an age in which the resurrection has already happened, i.e., it is *after* the resurrection (Luke 20:34-36). Most importantly, the Age to Come is said to be an age in which believers no longer die (Luke 20:36), which undoubtedly refers to a time after Christ's coming and the New Heavens and New Earth (1 Cor. 15:23-28, 53-55; Rev. 21:4). In contrast to the Present Evil Age, the Age to Come is an eternal age identified with the New Heavens and New Earth.

These are the only two ages with their characteristics and qualities which the New Testament teaches. There is here nothing said of a Millennium neither anywhere else in the Bible except the symbolical Revelation 20. But what is it that **marks the end** of the Present Age and the beginning of the Age to Come? It is the Second Coming of Christ. The implication from Titus 2:12-13 is that "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" marks the end as we seek to live "godly lives in the present age". We will no longer have to strive for godliness and against ungodliness, as our redemption in body and soul will be complete and all the wicked will be destroyed. We will no longer be able to sin and we will live in perfect righteousness with the Savior.

1 Corinthians 15:23-24 teaches that the resurrection of the saints (and by good and necessary consequence, of the wicked also) will happen when the Lord Jesus comes and then "comes the end". Christ's coming is that which brings the end (of this age). This is likewise taught in Matthew 13:39-40. This passage teaches that the harvest, which is the resurrection and judgment (Matt. 13:30), is said to happen at "the end of the age" and this is also the time when the weeds, i.e., unbelievers, "are gathered and burned with fire". Matthew 13:49 teaches that the separation between the evil and the righteous will happen "at the end of the age." This is the time of the Final Judgment which occurs at the same time of Christ's coming (as we shall see) and as the Second Coming of Christ is implied in the passage.

The believer finds themselves in between these two ages because they already experience blessings which are characteristics of the Age to Come as eternal life (Luke 18:30) and powers of that age (Heb. 6:5). This is known as the Already-Not-Yet tension of New Testament eschatology. In the present time and for 2000 years, we have been in the last days which first began on the day of Pentecost (e.g., Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; 2 Pet. 3:3), yet we still expect *the* last day. The Lord Jesus says, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17) and "the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:21; cf. Matt. 12:28), yet He taught us to pray "Thy kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10 KJV). The Kingdom of God is already a present reality with the coming of its King, nonetheless, there is a future aspect of it which we still expect even if the

Kingdom is already here. This is the tension of the Already-Not-Yet. The Kingdom of God is here, but it *not yet* fully here, i.e., not consummated. Eternal life is said to be a present reality (John 3:16), yet that is also an aspect of the Age to Come when the believer will be immortal in body and soul (Luke 18:30). The apostates in Hebrews 6:5 are said to have tasted the powers of the age to come, which most likely refer to the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit and miracles. These are things which are identified with the Age to Come, perhaps because they are means which God has given to the Church to bless her and conform her to the image which He has in mind, which will fully be realized in the Age to Come. The Christian believer finds himself in the time when the Age to Come, through the death and resurrection of Christ and through the outpouring of the Spirit, has already infiltrated this world, and the believer shares in its blessings. The following is a helpful diagram of the Two Age model and the Already-Not-Yet tension by Kim Riddlebarger:



The Two Staged Kingdom

The New Testament teaches that the Kingdom of God has come with the first coming of its King, yet, there is clearly a future aspect of the Kingdom of God. Amillennialists speak of the two stages of God's Kingdom, 1) the Kingdom of the Son, and 2) the Kingdom of the Father. As with the general New Testament eschatology of the Two Ages, so in the same way is the revelation of the Kingdom of God in two *stages* and *ages.* This is part of the Already-Not-Yet tension of the New Testament. We know that the Bible teaches that the Kingdom of God is already here (Luke 17:21; Matt. 12:28; Rom. 14:17), yet we still expect the kingdom in the future (Matt. 6:10). We believe that the Kingdom is revealed in two stages. The first is what we call the Kingdom of the Son, which has infiltrated this Present Age through the coming of the King of kings and Lord of lords, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 13:36-43

Matt. 13:36-43 Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." 37 He answered, "The one who **sows the good seed is the Son of Man**. 38 The **field is the world**, and the **good seed is the sons of the kingdom**. The **weeds are the sons of the evil one**, 39 and the **enemy who sowed them is the devil**. The **harvest is the end of the age**, and the reapers are angels. 40 Just as the **weeds are gathered and burned with fire**, so will it be **at the end of the age**. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will **gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers**, 42 and **throw them into the fiery furnace**. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the **righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father**. He who has ears, let him hear.

In Matthew 13:36-43 the Lord Jesus explains the Parable of the Weeds and from here we get a glance at the two-fold coming of the Kingdom of God. In v. 38, the Lord Jesus explains that the good seeds are the sons of the Kingdom, these are the believers who receive the gospel and produce its fruits. This means that there is in the present a kingdom of which they are sons of. As we move on, the Lord Jesus explains what will happen at the end of the age and how He will send His angels to "gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers" (v. 41). In this passage, the present Kingdom is clearly identified as the Son of Man's Kingdom. The angels will take away all the wicked as the world gets purified of all sin and lawlessness. As that is done at the end of the age, we read about the eternal state. After the separation between the righteous and the wicked happens (resurrection and judgment), the Age to Come kicks in and the Lord Jesus says that "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (v. 43). The second and final phase of the Kingdom, which is in eternity as is indicated by the throwing of the causes of sin into the fiery furnace (vv. 41-42), comes after the Final Judgment. In summary, we see that the time when the righteous and wicked together inhabited the earth was identified with the Son and called "His kingdom", i.e., the Kingdom of the Son. But after the Parousia, Resurrection and Final Judgment, when the wicked are removed from the earth and thrown into the fiery furnace, the righteous then will shine in the Kingdom of their Father. In this way, the second phase of the Kingdom is eternal and final, and is called the Kingdom of the Father.

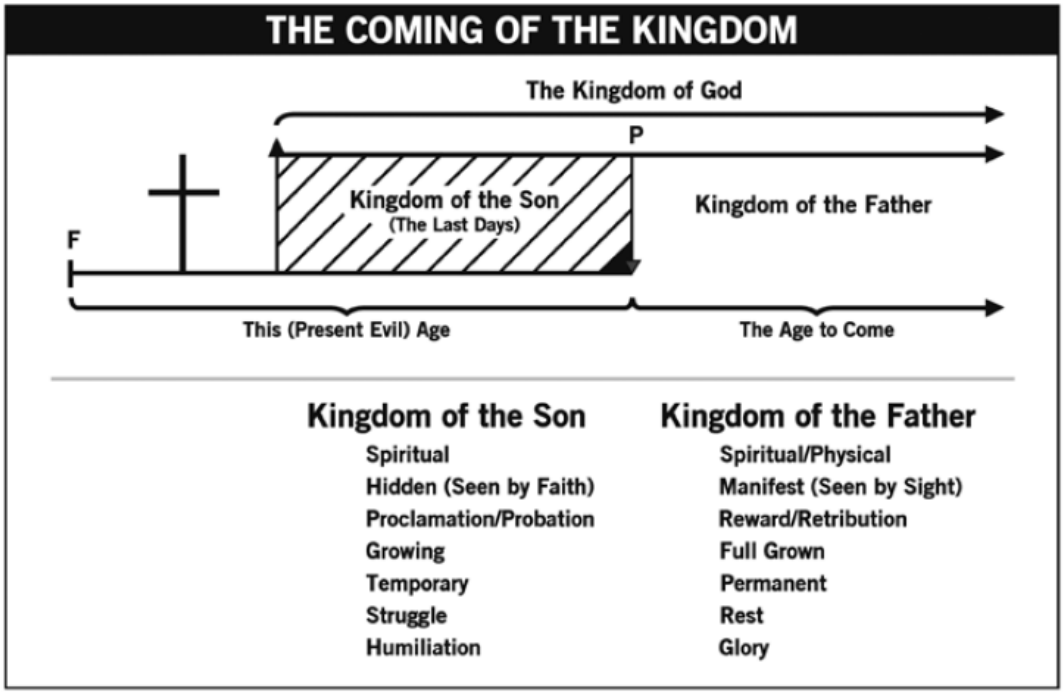
1 Corinthians 15:23-28

Another passage, which teaches the two-staged coming of the Kingdom is 1 Corinthians 15:

> 1 Cor. 15:23-28 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 **Then comes the end**, when **he delivers the kingdom to God the Father** after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For **he must reign until** he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. 28 **When all things are subjected to him**, then the **Son himself will also be subjected** to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

The first phase of the Kingdom is described in the necessity of the Son having to reign until He has destroyed all His enemies. As He rules, so He must exercise His rule over a kingdom which is the whole world, as all authority has been given to Him. Verses 23-24 teach that the "end" comes when Christ returns back, the dead are raised and when He delivers His Kingdom over to the Father. The end comes because Christ has brought all His enemies under His feet, then the task given to Him by the Father is complete and He delivers to His Beloved Father the Kingdom which was given to Him, which is now free of all sin. The work of the Son is completely accomplished. When everything is subjected to the Son and He has victory over His enemies, even the last enemy at His Second Coming, which is death, then He will be subjected to the Father. Here again, we have the two phases of the Kingdom of God as we did in Matthew 13. The Son will "deliver the kingdom [of the Son] to God the Father" (v. 24).

We see that the Kingdom of the Son is spiritual, consists of His heavenly reign and includes both the righteous and wicked in its sphere. But the Kingdom of the Father is eternal, physical, post-resurrection, post-judgment and consummated. We believe that Holy Writ teaches that the Kingdom of God is revealed in two stages and no more. One stage is temporal and spiritual, while the other is consummate, physical and eternal. For the interested student, I direct you to chapter 9 of Dean Davis's excellent book *The High King of Heaven*. He does a very good job and spends a considerable amount of time diving into many passages of the New Testament which teach the two-stages of the coming of the Kingdom. The following is a diagram provided by Dean Davis:



The Second Coming of King Jesus

There are three Greek words used in the New Testament to speak of the Second Advent of our King, and there is the expression of "the day of the Lord." We will take a look at each of these things.

Parousia

Amillennial eschatology teaches a singular, visible, physical, and glorious coming of the Lord Jesus Christ at the end of this Present Age. The word παρουσία (*Parousia,* G3952) means "presence" and "the coming, arrival, advent"[11], it is very often used in reference to the Second Coming of Christ, hence the popular word for the Second Coming is the Parousia. Acts 1:11 teaches us to expect the Lord Jesus to bodily return as He bodily went to Heaven. He will not return spiritually in the future, but in the selfsame glorified body in which He ascended to Heaven. He will come in glory and with His angels and saints (Matt. 25:31; 1 Thess. 3:13). He will come for the purpose of saving His people from this wicked world (Heb. 9:28), to be glorified in His saints (2 Thess. 1:10), and to judge the wicked (2 Thess. 1:5-9) among other things. Let us take a look at how this word is used in the New Testament.

Matthew

In Matthew 24:3 the disciples connect the coming of Christ with the end of the age saying, "what will be the sign of your coming [παρουσίας, *parousias*] and of the end of the age?" Throughout the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24-25), it does not seem to me that Jesus points out that the understanding of the disciples was wrong in connecting the Parousia with the end of the age. But obviously the nature of the coming which they had in mind was wrong. The word occurs three more times in the same chapter, "the coming of the Son of Man" (Matt. 24:27, 37, 39). The reference is definite as indicated by the definite article attached to this Parousia (ἡ παρουσία τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, *he parousia tou huiou tou anthropou*). This is not referring to a spiritual coming or a spiritual presence, but a definite advent of the Son of Man.

Paul

In **1 Corinthians 15:23**, the Parousia is connected to the time of the resurrection and transformation of the saints. In **1 Thessalonians 2:19,** the Parousia is said to be a day when Paul will be proud of the Thessalonians before the Lord Jesus. In **1 Thessalonians 3:13**, Paul prays that the Lord may establish the hearts of believers as blameless at the coming of Christ, indicating that it will be a day of judgment when the Lord Jesus returns, so that believers will not be condemned at His coming, but be glorified with Him (cf. **1 Thess. 5:23**). In **1 Thessalonians 4:15**, it is said that dead believers will be raised at the Lord Jesus' Parousia and living believers will be transformed. This is what is most commonly known as the Rapture and it is identified with the Parousia. Therefore, the Rapture and Parousia are one. The Amillennial understanding of the Rapture is not like the Dispensational in which it is a secret event, but the description which is given of the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4 is nothing like the Dispensational secret Rapture. Notice v. 16, "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a **cry of command**, with the **voice of an archangel**, and with the **sound of the trumpet** of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first." Secret is not the word to be used in such a noisy passage. In **2 Thessalonians 2:1**, the apostle Paul speaks about "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him". This is the Second Coming and the Rapture in which we will meet our Lord in the sky as He comes with the raised saints. The Second Coming is the Rapture of the Church (without the fictional baggage of Left Behind Dispensationalism). In **2 Thessalonians** 2:8, Paul says that the man of sin will be killed by the "appearance [ἐπιφανείᾳ, *epiphanea]* of his [Christ's] coming [παρουσίας, *parousias]."* The Man of Sin—the deceiver and Satan, will try to copy the Lord Jesus Christ and thus Paul writes of the "coming [παρουσία, *parousia*]" which will be in deception (**2 Thess. 2:9**).

James

James 5:7-8 speaks about "the coming of the Lord" for which Christians should patiently wait although it is at hand. Christians should endure the persecutions and the hardships which they face until the coming of the Lord. For James explains that the case of Christians who are being persecuted is like the farmer (being God) waiting until his fruits are ripe for the harvest. At the coming of the Lord, everything will be ready for the harvest, which is at the end of the age (Matt. 13:39-40). The Son of Man will send His angels to gather the good fruits to Himself and to burn the bad.

Peter

In **2 Peter 1:16** the apostle explains that because the apostles did not "follow cleverly devised myths" rather "we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" and that's why they should always recall his words (2 Pet. 1:15) about "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ". Peter spoke and wrote about the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus and that's why he deals with those who were questioning the very fact of the Second Coming. The scoffers in **2 Peter 3:4** will complain about "the promise of his coming" and that it is delaying, yet Peter explains that time is not a category to which God is subjected like we are (2 Pet. 3:8), rather, the reason that God is delaying is because He is waiting to bring all His sheep into His flock (2 Pet. 3:9). In **2 Peter 3:12** says that Christians should be "waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God [τὴν παρουσίαν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμέρας, *ten parousian tes tou theou hemeras*]". Interestingly, here the day itself is said to be *coming,* as it was identified to be "the day of the Lord" which "will come like a thief" in v. 10, which the scoffers were mocking. From this passage, we see that the Parousia is connected with the Day of the Lord.

John

Finally, 1 John 2:28 teaches that Christians should not be ashamed, but rather confident "at his coming", as long as they are abiding in Christ. Here again, the word is the same as we have seen in some passages before, ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ [*en te parousia autou*], "at the coming of His." When we are in Christ, we are doing His work and expecting our Master, and we want Him to see us doing His work when He comes back and not be idle slaves.

Definite Parousia

All the other uses of *parousia* are not in reference to the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 16:17; 2 Cor. 7:6, 7; 10:10; 2 Thess. 2:9; Phil. 1:26; 2:12), but about the "coming of Titus" (2 Cor. 7:6) and Paul's "presence" (Phil. 2:12). From all the technical uses of Parousia as referring to the Second Advent of Christ, we learn that this Parousia is a definite coming of the Lord Jesus back to earth. It is not "a" Parousia, but it is often spoken of with the definite article.

- Matthew 24:27, 37, 39 speaks of "**the coming** of the Son of Man [ἡ παρουσία τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, *he parousia tou huiou tou anthropou*]".
- 1 Corinthians 15:23 literally translated speaks about "**the coming** of His [τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ, *te parousia auton*]", but that sounds strange in English.
- 1 Thessalonians 2:19, similar to the passage above, speaks about "**the coming** of His [τῇ αὐτοῦ παρουσίᾳ, *te auton parousia*]".
- 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 5:23 speaks of "**the coming** of our Lord Jesus [τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ, *te parousia tou kyriou hemon Iesou*]".
- 1 Thessalonians 4:15 speaks about "the coming of the Lord [τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου, *ten parousian tou kyriou*]" at which the dead saints will be raised.
- 2 Thessalonians 2:1 speaks about "**the coming** of the Lord Jesus Christ [τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *tes parousias tou kyriou hemon Iesou Christou*]" and "our being gathered together to him".
- 2 Thessalonians 2:8 literally translated speaks about Christ killing the Man of Sin "by the appearance of the coming of His [τῇ ἐπιφανείᾳ τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ, *te epephanea tes parousias autou*]".
- James 5:7-8 speaks about "**the coming** of the Lord [τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου and ἡ παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου, *tes parousias tou kyriou* & *he parousia tou kyriou*]" which is at hand.
- 1 Peter 3:12 speaks about "the coming of the day of God [τὴν παρουσίαν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμέρας, *ten parousian tes tou theou hemeras*]" which Christians are waiting for.
- 1 John 2:28 literally translated speaks about "**the coming** of His [τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ, *en te parousia autou*]".

We see in these instances that the inspired writers did not speak about "a" coming of Jesus, but of a definite coming which they distinguished by the use of the definite article. There is a singular coming of Jesus Christ, those who contend that the coming of the Lord is not singular (e.g., Dispensationalists), must have very strong evidence to that effect, but do they?

Apokalupsis

The word ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalupsis*, G602) means "laying bear, making naked…a disclosure of truth, instruction…manifestation, appearance".[11] This is the word used in Revelation 1:1 and from whence the book gets the name, which is sometimes used, Apocalypse. In general, when we hear the word Apocalypse we think of things which are secret and which are hard to understand, but the meaning of the word is exactly the opposite. The word means an unveiling and revealing. Removing the veil and not making things more difficult or vague as it is often done in eschatology.

The word is used 18 times in the New Testament, but only 5 references are to the Second Advent of our King. In **1 Corinthians 1:7**, Paul says that Christians will not lack any gift (χαρίσματι, *charismati*) as they are waiting for "the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ [τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *tēn apokalypsin tou Kyriou hēmōn Iēsou Christou*]". As with the instances of the Parousia of our Lord, so likewise, His appearing and unveiling is also spoken with the *definite article*. In **2 Thessalonians 1:7**, the apostle speaks about Christians who will receive relief when "the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven [τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, *tē apokalypsei tou Kyriou Iēsou*]". This revealing or *apokalupsis* will be in "in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance", not on His people, but "on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (v. 8). In **1 Peter**

1:7, the apostle Peter speaks to persecuted Christians that the trials which the Lord has ordained for them are meant to test "the genuineness of your faith" which will result and be found "in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ [ἐν ἀποκαλύψει Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *en apokalypsei Iēsou Christou*]". Notice that in the original the definite article is absent although the translation of "the revelation" is necessitated by the context because there is only one "revelation" of Jesus Christ which the saints are waiting for and when they will receive honor from their Lord. **1 Peter 1:13** encourages persecuted Christians to be sober-minded and setting their "hope fully on the grace" that will be brought to us "at the revelation of Jesus Christ [ἐν ἀποκαλύψει Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *en apokalypsei Iēsou Christou*]." **1 Peter 4:13** encourages Christians to endure their persecutions knowing that they "share in Christ's sufferings" and therefore, as Christ suffered and then rose up as the conqueror ever rejoicing with all heaven for the work that He had accomplished, so likewise we will "rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed [τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ, *tē apokalypsei tēs doxēs autou*]". Notice how in all of Peter's uses of this word, the revealing of Jesus brings relief, grace and glory to the believers. The revelation of Jesus Christ for the believer is a revelation of His infinite grace to the believers.

In summary, the revelation or *apokalupsis* of Jesus Christ is a day of honor, glory, praise, grace, relief, and joy for the Christian, but the same could not be said for the unbeliever. For the unbeliever, it is a day in which He will come in fury (2 Thess. 1:7-8).

Epiphaneia

The word ἐπιφάνεια (*epiphaneia*, G2015) means "an appearing, appearance"[11] and it is found 6 times in the New Testament (2 Thess. 2:8; 1Tim. 6:14; 2Tim. 1:10; 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13). Let us examine each one of its uses since there is a question about which appearance they refer to with some passages. In the first passage we have:

> 2 Thess. 2:8 And then the lawless one will be **revealed** [ἀποκαλυφθήσεται, *apokalyphthēsetai*], whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by **the appearance** of his coming [τῇ ἐπιφανείᾳ τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ, *epiphaneia tēs parousias autou*].

Here we see that the Man of Sin will be revealed, interestingly Paul uses the word *apokalupsis* to communicate that idea, a word which was used of Christ's Second Advent (**see above**), showing that the Man of Sin will try to mimic the true Christ. But most importantly for our purpose, we see that Paul associates the appearance of Christ with His Parousia. The Appearing (*Epiphaneia*) and the Parousia are one and the same, they are not different comings. The Man of Sin will be destroyed by the *appearance* of the Son of Man's *coming.*

In **1 Timothy 6:14**, Paul charges Timothy to keep all that Paul has commanded him in the letter (the commandment) "unstained and free from reproach until **the appearing** of our Lord Jesus Christ [τῆς ἐπιφανείας τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *tēs epiphaneias tou Kyriou hēmōn Iēsou Christou*]". Timothy should continue following Paul's commands concerning elders, deacons, "fighting the good fight" and so on, until the coming of Christ. In **2 Timothy 4:1** Paul charges Timothy under oath in the presence of God and Christ "who is to judge the living and the dead" and "by his appearing [τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν αὐτοῦ, *tēn epiphaneian autou*] and his kingdom". His appearing will also bring the appearing and consummation of His kingdom. Paul charges Timothy by 1) God, 2) Christ, 3) Christ's Second Advent, and 4) Christ's Kingdom. In **2 Timothy 4:8** Paul says that "the Lord, the righteous judge" will reward him on "that Day" the "crown of righteousness", but the Lord will not only reward Paul, but "all who have loved his appearing [τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν αὐτοῦ, *tēn epiphaneian autou*]." At first reading this may indicate that this *appearing* is about the first appearing, but consulting v. 1 and seeing that the descriptions of both passages fit together. For example, in both verses, Jesus is described as Judge and also the use of the word appearing (*epiphaneia*). Paul is speaking about those who desire and love His Second Coming already! They are eagerly awaiting His Second Coming when His people will be vindicated, their enemies crushed, God glorified and they rewarded. Finally, **Titus 2:13** speaks to Christians about fighting against sin and worldliness as we await for "our blessed hope" which is "the appearing of the glory [ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης, *epiphaneian tēs doxēs*] of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ". Jesus Christ is described both as our Savior and as our God, and the day when He will come, He will come as such with all the glory that belongs to Him. This is the blessed hope as then our striving against sin and the persecution against us will stop. We will be granted relief, and all sin will be destroyed in our life. We will be perfectly free from sin. Our enemies and the enemies of God will receive their due punishment.

The only use of *epiphaneia* which is not in reference to His Second Advent is in 2 Timothy 1:10. Paul teaches that the eternal electing gift of God has now been manifested through "the appearing [τῆς ἐπιφανείας, *tēs epiphaneias*] of our Savior Christ Jesus". This could not be understood to be speaking of the Second Advent, but it could be easily understood to be speaking of the Logos becoming flesh (John 1:1, 14). Christ is in the same verse described as the one "who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel". We have passed from death to life and we have eternal

life (John 5:24; 1John 5:13). All these things were accomplished by the Lord Christ and will be fully consummated at His Second Advent. At the present, although we physically die, yet our death serves as the "train ticket" into God's presence. Death is an enemy which has been forced to serve for the good of God's people.

The *epiphaneia* of Christ is the blessed hope of Christians, which is His Second Coming, revelation, and appearing. On that day the Christians will receive a "crown of righteousness" when their "righteous Judge" will come. Until His appearing, Christians should follow God's commandments and keep them unstained.

The Day Of The Lord

The idea of the Day of the LORD belongs originally to the Old Testament and it speaks of a day in which God will act in favor of Israel and against her enemies. Many take almost all references to the Day of the LORD as belonging to the future, although it could reasonably be held that a lot of these "Days" belonged to judgments, which are now in the past on nations that are now gone. But the New Testament continues to use the idea of the "Day", but now we have identified whose day this is—it is the day of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, it was known as the Day of Yahweh, but the New Testament specifically identifies Whose Day it is (i.e., which Person of the Trinity). There are different expressions used, but all having the same meaning. The day is spoken of as:

- "the Day" (1 Cor. 3:13; Heb. 10:25),
- "the great day" (Jude 1:6; Rev. 6:17; 16:14),
- "the day of wrath" (Rom. 2:5),
- "the day of the Lord" (Acts 2:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10),
- "the day of our Lord Jesus" (2 Cor. 1:14),
- "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:8),
- "the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6),
- "the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10; 2:16),
- "the day of God" (2 Pet. 3:12).

All these expressions refer to the same thing, they are not referring to different "days", whether the length days should be taken literally or not is beside the point. It doesn't matter how long the "Day" is, what matters is what Scripture says about this day. We will take a look at a few passages and their input for our understanding of the meaning of the Day of Jesus Christ.

The "day of the Lord" is spoken of as coming like a thief in **2 Peter 3:10**. This means that it is a day that is not to expected or to known. The Lord Jesus Himself says that "concerning that day and hour no one knows" (Matt. 24:36; cf. Matt. 25:13; 13:34-35; Rev. 16:15), but this does not mean that we're in complete ignorance. **1 Thessalonians 5:2** expresses the same idea as Peter, but vv. 4-5 explain that since Christians are children of the *day,* the *Day* of the Lord will not surprise them like a thief, as it will for unbelievers. As we move further in the passage, we see that destruction will come upon unbelievers on the Day of the Lord (v. 3), and therefore, believers ought to be sober and awake, keeping watch until their Lord comes, because that which is a day of wrath for unbelievers will be a day of salvation for them (1 Thess. 5:9).

Whatever the interpretation of **1 Corinthians 5:5** may be, the day of the Lord is also described as a day of salvation for some (cf. 1 Thess. 5:2, 9). It is a day, according to **2 Corinthians 1:14**, on which Christians will boast over each other (cf. **Phil. 2:16**). This sounds like a day of judgment and reward, a day of joy, not only gloom for unbelievers. It is a day, according to **Philippians 1:10**, in which Christians must be pure and blameless, likewise indicating a day of judgment and reward.

Philippians 1:6 indicates that the work of God in the believers is brought to completion "at the day of Jesus Christ." That is the day on which all the work of redemption is completed, fully applied and brought to perfection in the believers. On this day, we have perfectly applied to us the complete work of Christ for His people on Calvary.

In **2 Peter 3:10**, the day of the Lord is described as coming "like a thief" in which even the cosmos ("the heavens") "will pass away with a roar" and fire. Not only the present fallen Cosmos will be effected, but "the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed." This means that people also will be judged on that day. It is a day of judgment, it is a day for the destruction of the ungodly (2 Pet. 3:7). For Christians, it is a day in light of which they should lead "lives of holiness and godliness" as they await the coming day of God (2 Pet. 3:11-12).

We see that the Day of the Lord is a day of judgment or more properly, **the Day of Judgment**, as the New Testament knows only of one day of judgment (e.g., Matt. 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36). But it is also a day in which Christians will be blameless and pure, i.e., not fall under God's condemnation (Rom. 8:1), but be glorified with and rewarded by Him (cf. Rom. 8:16-18). The day of the Lord is a day of wrath for unbelievers, but a day of salvation and joy for believers. But now let us look at the connection between the Second Coming of Christ the King and the Day of the Lord.

The Parousia, Apokalupsis and the Day of the Lord

I believe that the New Testament teaches that the Parousia, Apokalupsis, Epiphaneia and the different expressions of "the Day of the Lord" refer to the same thing—the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and to what will happen then. There are a few passages that connect the Second Advent with the Day of the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

> 1 Thess. 4:13-18 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about **those who are asleep**, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, **God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep**. 15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that **we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord**, will not precede **those who have fallen asleep**. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And **the dead in Christ will rise first**. 17 Then we **who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord** in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.
>
> 1 Thess. 5:1-11 Now concerning the **times and the seasons**, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves are fully aware that **the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night**. 3 While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then **sudden destruction will come upon them** as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and **they will not escape**. 4 But **you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief**. 5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 touches upon the Parousia, resurrection, Rapture and the Day of the Lord. Let us first start by noting the obvious: Paul had no verse or chapter divisions. Verse and chapter divisions are not inspired, therefore, we may see Paul's discourse from 4:18 simply continuing from 5:1. The ending of the chapter does not mean that the subject of the discourse is ended. As Paul addresses the problem which this church is facing, which is the question about what happens to those who die before Christ's Second Advent, he touches upon the Parousia and the Day of the Lord. Just as Jesus died and rose again, so in the same manner, all Christians who have died will certainly rise again. Therefore, the dead saints have not missed their chance of the resurrection or eternal life, but they will, in fact, come back *with* the Lord Jesus (1 Thess. 3:13; 4:14-16). Paul speaks of Christians who will be left alive "until the coming [τὴν παρουσίαν, *ten parousian*] of the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:15). The coming or Parousia of the Lord is described as His descending from heaven and is connected with the resurrection of the dead saints and transformation of living saints (1 Thess. 4:15-17). 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 speaks much of the same but in more detail.

As Paul treats the subject of what happens to dead Christians by going to the Parousia, resurrection, and transformation of all saints, so in the next chapter (he did not divide his letter by chapters) he writes about the *timing* of this event. Paul says that there is no need for the Thessalonians to be taught anything about the timing of the Parousia and the resurrection since "you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:2). There is no need for Paul to write to them about the unknown or unexpected character of Christ's Second Coming since they know the teaching of the Lord Jesus (e.g., Matt. 13:34-35; 24:36, 42-44; 25:13). But notice how Paul here connects the coming of the Lord and the resurrection with "the day of the Lord", thereby indicating that they occur at the same time, or are simply different names of the same event. It seems that Paul thinks of the Parousia and the day of the Lord as referring to the same reality and uses them interchangeably.

2 Peter 3:12

> waiting for and hastening **the coming of the day of God**, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

2 Peter 3:12 speaks about "the coming of the day of God [τὴν παρουσίαν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμέρας, *tēn parousian tēs tou Theou hēmeras*]" and thereby explicitly connecting the Parousia with the Day of the Lord. Not only does this lay the connection between the Day of the Lord and the Parousia, but the whole context of 2 Peter 3:1-13. The passage begins with Peter's response to the scoffers who will complain about "the promise of his coming [τῆς παρουσίας

αὐτοῦ, *tēs parousias autou*]". These scoffers will complain about why the Second Advent is delaying and thus doubt God's promise about His return. But these scoffers overlook God's sudden judgment of the ancient world with the Flood (2 Pet. 3:5-6). But they likewise overlook the fact that the present world is being stored up for judgment and fire (2 Pet. 3:7). They overlook the fact that God is not bound in time as we are and therefore, a day is like a thousand years and vice versa (2 Pet. 3:8). But in delaying "the promise of his coming", from the scoffer's point of view, what God is actually doing is saving His people (2 Pet. 3:9). Now Peter speaks of "the day of the Lord" which will come like a thief. This is that which they complained about. As the scoffers will complain about "the promise of his *Parousia*" at once and unexpectedly it will come upon them. What further strengthens the identifications of the day of the Lord with the Parousia is the similarity between 2 Peter 3:10 and 2 Peter 3:12. Let the ungodly be destroyed and let this world burn in fire; what we await is a "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2Peter 3:13).

Therefore, from these two passages, we see that the Day of the Lord happens on the same "day" that Christ comes back. The Day of the Lord is at the Parousia of Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:7-8

> 1 Cor. 1:7-8 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for **the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ**, 8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in **the day of our Lord Jesus Christ**.

The word *apokalupsis* is likewise connected with the Day of the Lord in **1 Corinthians 1:7-8.** Paul thanks God for the grace that was given to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:4) because God has blessed them in every way (1 Cor. 1:5) even in them not lacking any *charismata* until the *apokalupsis* of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:7), who has the power and the willingness to keep His people pure and guiltless "in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:8). As they wait for the Second Advent of our Lord, Christians will be kept pure and blameless until the day of the Lord, which indicates that the Day of the Lord is a day of judgment and reward, in which Christians will not be condemned or judged negatively to damnation. Paul connects the *apokalupsis* or "the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ" with "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Notice also the similarity of the expressions, which indicates that Paul is trying to connect the Second Advent of Christ with the Day of Christ. The revealing of Jesus Christ does not happen any other time that the Day of the Lord.

We have tried to argue above that the Parousia happens on the Day of the Lord, but we see here that the *apokalupsis* is likewise connected to the Day of the Lord. Therefore, we conclude that both the Parousia and the Apokalupsis refer to the same Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Summary Table Of The Day Of The Lord

This is a table which I made when I was reading Dean Davis's book. Basically, it points out when the essential things of eschatology happen, even things that we have not yet discussed.

Verse	Scripture
Judgment of the wicked	
Matt. 7:22-23	On **that day** many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord…I never knew you; depart from me…
John 12:48	…the word that I have spoken will judge him on **the last day**.
2 Pet. 3:10	But **the day of the Lord**…heavens will pass away…and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.
Mk 8:38	…ashamed of me…the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes…
General Judgment and Reward	
Rom. 2:5-6, 16	…**day of wrath** when God's righteous judgment will be revealed…He will render to each one according to his works:…on **that day** when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.
1 Cor. 3:13	each one's work will become manifest, for **the Day** will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.
Matt. 13:30	Let both grow together until the harvest, and at **harvest time** I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"
Matt. 13:49	…at the **end of the age**…separate the evil from the righteous.
Matt. 25:32, 46	Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another…And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."
Matt. 13:47-50	…sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at **the end of the age**… angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous…

2 Cor. 5:10	For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.
1 Cor. 4:5	…do not pronounce judgment before **the time**, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.
Rapture, Resurrection, Judgment, Restoration	
1 Cor. 15:23-28	…at **his coming** those who belong to Christ…Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power…death…
1 Cor. 15:50-58	…flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God…a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet…dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed…this mortal body must put on immortality…"Death is swallowed up in victory."…
Matt. 13:37-43	…The harvest is **the end of the age**…weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at **the end of the age**…Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father…
General Resurrection	
John 5:28-29	…**an hour** is coming…resurrection of life…resurrection of judgment.
Acts 24:15	…there will be **a resurrection** of both the just and the unjust.
Dan. 12:2	….sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.
John 11:24	…"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on **the last day**."
Day of Salvation & Reward for the Elect	
John 6:39	…raise it up on **the last day**. (vv. 40, 44, 54)
1 Cor. 1:8	who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the **day of our Lord** Jesus Christ.
1 Cor. 5:5	you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the **day of the Lord**.
2Tim. 4:8	…crown of righteousness…will award to me on **that Day**, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

The Rapture

We've pointed to our understanding of the Rapture and we've discussed the texts, but because it is such a hot topic and for ease of reference, I'll deal with the Amillennial understanding of the Rapture here. Anthony Hoekema writes, "Though the word *rapture* does not occur in our English translations of the Bible, it is derived from the Vulgate rendering of the verb 'caught up' (*harpagesometha*) in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, *rapiemur*."[12] The Rapture is not the favorite designation used by Amillennialists, but it is undoubtedly the most popular. Although we believe that the popular idea of the Secret Pre-tribulational Rapture to be unbiblical, yet we nevertheless believe that there will indeed be a catching up of believers in the future. The Dispensationalist and Left Behind idea of the Rapture is that of a secret event, which will occur prior to Tribulation years of Daniel's seventieth week. Christians will at once and in secret be taken up to be with the Lord. Christ will come back, but not fully. His feet will not touch the earth, but He will remain in the air. Then at once, in the twinkling of an eye, all believers will be zapped away before Hell is unleashed on earth and God goes back to His original plan with Israel. Such an understanding of the Rapture we deny.

We believe the Rapture to be the event which will happen at Christ's glorious Second Coming in which (1) all dead saints will be resurrected; (2) living believers will be transformed and given glorified bodies; (3) Christ and all His saints will descend to the earth. Notice that there is nothing said about the rapture being before the tribulation or before the Millennium. The Rapture is *after* the tribulation and *after* the Millennium. The Rapture is at the end of history and by reading 1 Thessalonians 4 we cannot call it secret in any sense to mean that people will not know what just happened.

1 Thessalonians 4

That the Rapture occurs at the Parousia of Jesus Christ is clear from 1 Thessalonians 4:14-15. The dead saints, which the Thessalonians were worried about, will in fact precede them and rise first in glorified and immortal bodies (1 Thess. 4:16). Then the Christians who are left alive until the time of the Lord's Coming, at the Day of the Lord, "will be caught up together with them [the dead saints who were raised] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17). Here we have the resurrection of the dead saints and the transformation of the living saints at Christ's Second Advent. Notice how the Rapture is described in v. 16:

> For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a **cry of command**, with the **voice of an archangel**, and with the **sound of the trumpet of God**. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

It seems as if Paul is intentionally stressing the obviousness and loudness of this glorious event. There can be here no idea of the Rapture being secret or people wondering what just happened and the world then going on for at least 1007 years. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul addresses the Rapture again, but in more detail, therefore, let us turn there.

1 Corinthians 15

Let us begin in 1 Corinthians 15:22-28. Paul explains that as Adam was a covenantal head and when he disobeyed God all who were represented by him died, so in the same way, as Christ is head of the New Covenant, all the elect of God will be made alive in Him (**see here**). As all Christians will be made alive in Christ, yet there is an order of how this will be done. First was the resurrection of Christ, then the resurrection of all Christians. This resurrection takes place "at his coming [ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ, *en te parousia*]" as Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (also using the word *parousia*), but as this takes place, Paul says, "then comes the end" (1 Cor. 15:24). This is a very different paradigm of the last things than what Dispensationalists tell us. After the Rapture, according to Dispensational eschatology, there will be the time of Tribulation, which will last for the seven years which correspond to Daniel's seventieth week, and the Millennium, which is a literal thousand year earthly kingdom in which Christ will rule from Jerusalem. Yet Paul says that after the Parousia of Christ and the resurrection, "Then comes the end". The "end" will come when Christ has destroyed all His enemies, including the last enemy and when He delivers His Kingdom to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28). This is likewise contrary to the Dispensational idea of the Rapture and of the Second Coming of Christ. The end is described to happen at the Parousia of Christ, before which time He was ruling in the midst of His enemies (Ps. 110:2) and at His coming, He had fully destroyed them and put them under His holy feet. But Dispensationalists argue that Christ will really rule as King in the Millennium and then He will subdue His enemies, and only at the end of the Millennium Death will be destroyed. But as we move further in the passage, particularly from v. 35, Paul will give more detail about the resurrection body which Christians will receive at Christ's Parousia. This is also the time for the resurrection of unbelievers, but their resurrection is to dishonor and judgment. We will come to that point **below.**

The resurrection body which Christians will receive at the Parousia of Christ will be as follows (1 Cor. 15:42-46):

What we had	What we will have
Perishable body	Imperishable body
Dishonorable body	Glorious body
Weak body	Powerful body
Natural body	Spiritual body

By speaking of a spiritual body, Paul is not saying that the resurrection is non-physical, but rather that the body will be *led* and *controlled* by the Holy Spirit, and not by the corrupt and sinful nature. Whether he is speaking of *natural* or *spiritual*, Paul is speaking of a *body.* At the resurrection, we will bear the complete and perfect image of "the man of heaven" (1 Cor. 15:49), even our Lord Jesus Christ. The perfect image of God will be restored and renewed in the redeemed humanity. Thus far Paul spoke of believers who were dead and who will come back with Christ (1 Thess. 4:14-16), but now he moves on to speak about those living at the time of the coming of Christ.

In verse 50, Paul states that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God". By referring to "flesh and blood" and then to the "perishable" body, Paul is speaking about the fallen man's body. Fallen man in his fallen body cannot enter God's Kingdom. This is a problem for Premillennialism (both Historical and Dispensational), which teaches that there will be people in the Millennium who (1) have glorified bodies; (2) believers with non-glorified bodies; (3) unbelievers still in the flesh, still roaming the earth which has become God's Kingdom and is full with the knowledge of the LORD. This is a problem that Premillennialists themselves recognize, and I believe that it is a very important critique of the Premillennial theory. Not to mention the fact that 1 Corinthians 15:23-24 knows of no such Millennium after the Parousia of Christ, but states after the coming of Christ is "the end".

The mystery is that not all will taste death, i.e., "sleep", yet "all will be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51). Notice how in the previous paragraph Paul clearly spoke about the resurrection of the dead, in fact, he begins his query by asking through the words of the skeptic, "How are the dead raised?" But now Paul says in v. 51 that not all will sleep, but all Christians will be changed. All Christians will have glorified bodies with the same imperishable, immortal and glorious qualities, yet the process to get there is different for some than others, depending on whether they're physically dead or alive at the time of Christ's return. Paul writes:

> 1 Cor. 15:52 in a moment, in the **twinkling of an eye**, at **the last trumpet**. For the trumpet will sound, and the **dead will be raised imperishable**, and **we shall be changed**.
>
> 1 Thess. 4:16-17 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with **the sound of the trumpet of God**. And the **dead in Christ will rise first**. 17 Then we who are alive, who

are left, **will be caught up together with them** in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

Notice the similarity between both passages, which clearly speak of the same event and describe the same reality. Paul says that this change will not take as much as a minute, but will be direct, “in the twinkling of an eye”. The timing of the resurrection and the transformation of Christians is said to be “at the last trumpet.” 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul calls it “the trumpet of God”, but the designation “the *last* trumpet” makes our case even stronger that the Rapture takes place at the end of history when Christ comes. In Revelation 8-11 we read of seven trumpets, it is said that “in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets” (Rev. 10:7). And when the seventh and final trumpet is blown, heaven declares, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). Then we read of the twenty-four elders saying, “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign” (Rev. 11:17). God has begun now to reign as the absolute and visible sovereign of all things. He reigns now as Sovereign of all things, but then He will be acknowledged by all as the Only Sovereign ruler of all things. Notice that an important piece is missing in the description of God, “who is and who was”. The Lord is spoken of as being in the present and in the past, but not in the future as in Revelation 1:4, 8. This is because the coming of the Lord God Almighty has already happened here in the Parousia of Christ. This is proven by vv. 18-19 which describe the judgment of the dead, the rewarding of God’s servants, and the final consummation. All this is to say that there is significance when Paul specifically speaks about “the last trumpet” (1 Cor. 15:52), which is seen as the trumpet which declares the End of the World. This adds more strengthen to our doctrine that the Rapture occurs at the end of history, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:24, and also that the Parousia happens at the End of the World.

The order in 1 Corinthians 15:52 is maintained as in 1 Thessalonians 4. First, “the dead will be raised imperishable” and then “we”, living Christians at the time of Christ’s Coming, “shall be changed.” Our change or transformation will happen by our body putting imperishability on, and our mortal body putting immortality on (1 Cor. 15:53). Strictly speaking, we cannot call this resurrection, since resurrection is clearly spoken of in this chapter to be out of the dead and to belong to the dead Christians, not the living. Rather, for living Christians at the time of Christ, we speak of their *transformation.* At the time of resurrection and transformation, the death of Death will occur, which is the last enemy (1 Cor. 15:26) and that is to happen at the Parousia of Christ (1 Cor. 15:23-26). According to Premillennialism, the death of Death comes at the end of the Millennium, not at the Second Coming of Christ and resurrection and transformation of the saints, as Paul teaches.

Meeting The Lord

We have seen that the Rapture is simultaneous with the Parousia of Christ and at that time dead Christians will rise and living Christians will be transformed to glorified bodies, but there is yet a last aspect of this Rapture. We indicated above at the beginning of this section that after the Rapture is not only the catching up of believers, but also of them returning with the Lord Christ to earth. In Dispensationalism, Christians are thought of staying with the Lord Jesus either in the air or returning back to Heaven. Yet we believe that after the resurrection and transformation of the saints, they along with Christ come back to the earth. This may be seen in two ways: (1) the meaning of a specific word and (2) the Parable of the Ten Virgins. To understand the meaning of the word, we will have to take a look at the Parable, therefore, these two points are treated as one.

The word ἀ π ά ν τ η σ ι ς (*apantesis*, G529), which simply means “a meeting, encounter” has also a technical meaning. It is used four times in Scripture (Matt. 25:1, 6; Acts 28:15; 1 Thess. 4:17), it is translated with “meet” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. It is believed that this word refers to the coming of an official dignitary and it is an official welcome of that dignitary in which the people go outside of the city to welcome him into the city. This is confirmed by the use of the word in Acts 28:15. As Paul is traveling to Rome, there came to him brothers “as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet [ἀ π ά ν τ η σ ι ν] us.” Then “we came into Rome” (Acts 28:16). These brothers went outside of the city to welcome and to bring Paul into Rome. Finally, the word *apantesis* is used in Matthew 25:1, 6, too. The wise virgins were the ones waiting for the Bridegroom and having oil with them for their lamps. On the other hand, the foolish virgins took no oil with them. But at a time which they did not expect, a cry came which said, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet [ἀ π ά ν τ η σ ι ν , *apantesin*] him.’ Then the foolish virgins realized that they had no oil for their lamps and begged the wise virgins for some oil, but the wise denied them (Matt. 25:7-9). As the declaration was made that the Bridegroom was here, as it is undoubtedly the Lord Jesus who is meant, the foolish virgins go to look for oil somewhere else. But the Bridegroom comes and takes the wise virgins with Him. Notice how in the declaration to meet the Bridegroom (v. 6), what happens actually is “those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast” (v. 10). Meaning, the wise virgins, who were ready for their Bridegroom, went to *meet the Bridegroom* and *together with Him went into the marriage feast*. They did not meet Him and that’s the end. They met Him and went together to the marriage feast, as we will (cf. Rev. 19:6-9). The same idea is, therefore, to be taken for the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4. The believers do not stay in the air or in Heaven, rather, they go back to the same place from whence they came, i.e., the Earth, welcoming the King of kings and Lord of lords. Bob Utley notes on v. 17, “This is the Greek word *apançsis*, which is used in the sense of meeting someone and then accompanying them (cf. Matt. 25:6; Acts 28:15). So

believers meet the Lord and return to a recreated earth with Him!"[13] Charles J. Ellicott writes:

> **To meet the Lord in the air.**—St. Chrysostom says: "When the King cometh into a city, they that are honourable proceed forth to meet him, but the guilty await their judge within." The phrase "in the air" certainly does not mean "heaven." The word "*air*") in itself properly signifies the lower, denser, grosser atmosphere, in which the powers of darkness reign (Eph. 2:2); but here it is only used in contrast with the *ground,* and means "on the way from Heaven whence He comes," of course not to *dwell* there, but to accompany Him to His Judgment-seat on the earth.[14]

Therefore, contrary to the Dispensational idea, Christians will not be zapped to be saved out of the Tribulation, but the "catching up" (Rapture) of believers will occur *after* the tribulation, and after the Rapture believers and the King Jesus will descend to the earth. In summary, the last trumpet is blown, Christ the Lord descends, the dead in Christ are raised, the living believers are transformed, then Christ comes back to the earth with all his holy ones.

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§3 The Resurrection

3. The **bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonour; 1** the **bodies of the just, by his Spirit, 2 unto honour, 3** and be **made conformable to his own glorious body. 4**
    1. Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29
    2. Rom. 8:1, 11; 1 Cor. 15:45; Gal. 6:8
    3. 1 Cor. 15:42-49
    4. Rom. 8:17, 29-30; 1 Cor. 15:20-23, 48-49; Phil. 3:21; Col. 1:18; 3:4; 1 John 3:2; Rev. 1:5

The **bodies of the unjust…**shall **be raised to dishonour** and for punishment (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29). But the **bodies of the just** shall be raised **unto honour** by **His Spirit** (Rom. 8:11; Gal. 6:8) and they will **be made conformable to His own glorious body** (Phil 3:21; 1John 3:2). We will finally be like Jesus not only in character but also in the quality of our body!

The General Resurrection Of The Dead

We believe that Holy Writ teaches a singular resurrection from the dead of both the just and the unjust. Our reasoning is very simple actually: for example, when we read of the resurrection of the just, as we often do in detail (e.g., 1 Thess. 4; 1 Cor. 15), we do not assume that just because the Holy Spirit did not mention the resurrection of the wicked that it will take place sometime later. Our main point is that Scripture knows of a singular resurrection of the dead and Final Judgment of all people. Therefore, when we read of the resurrection of the righteous with no mention of the wicked, we *assume* that the resurrection of the wicked will take place at the same time. Now let us look to the data which convinces us of a singular resurrection of all the dead. The passages which teach a singular resurrection are: Daniel 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15, 21. Let us check them out one by one.

Daniel 12:2

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

Daniel speaks of a time when those who sleep in the dust, i.e., the dead, will awake, but they awake to two different conditions. The one group will be happy that they're "awake", while the other will mourn the fact. Notice that the passage speaks of "many" who will rise, for a long time I wondered why Daniel spoke of many, but not all. John Gill writes, 'The word "many" is used, either because, as all will not sleep, so all will not be awaked; there will be some that will be alive and awake at Christ's coming, 1Co 15:51, or, as it signifies, a multitude, Ps 97:1 and so here the innumerable multitude of the dead, who are afterwards distributively considered; and indeed the word is sometimes used for "all"; see Ro 5:15'[15]. I believe his first explanation to be correct. There will be many at Christ's Parousia who will *not* rise from the dead, but be transformed at the Coming of Christ, therefore, it is technically true that "many" and not "all" will awake. As Paul says, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51). But notice how the passage teaches a singular resurrection of both the just and the unjust. Some, that is the righteous, will awake to everlasting life. The next passage says that "those

who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above" (Dan. 12:3), which is very similar to what Christ said will happen at the end of the age, "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:39-40, 43). This is the time for the resurrection and vindication of the righteous who have been persecuted by the wicked of the earth. Their lot is very different. Daniel says that some will awake "to shame and everlasting contempt." Notice the contrast between the two groups. Both are characterized as being "everlasting" with two antithetical conditions. One is of "life" the other is of "contempt." But both of these antithetical destinations or conditions of men will take place together at the same time. I mean, both the resurrection to life and the resurrection to condemnation will take place at the same time. There will not be an interval of a thousand years between them, but the resurrection spoken of here is a singular resurrection either to life or to contempt. This truth of the singular resurrection of the just and unjust is taught in the Old Testament and repeated in the New.

John 5:26-29

> John 5:26-29 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. 27 And he has **given him authority to execute judgment**, because he is the Son of Man. 28 Do not marvel at this, for **an hour is coming** when **all who are in the tombs will hear his voice** 29 **and come out**, those who have **done good to the resurrection of life**, and those who have **done evil to the resurrection of judgment**.

In John 5:26-29, we read about the authority which the Father has given to the Son. The Son is the Agent of Resurrection and Judgment. He has life in Himself and He has the authority to execute judgment. We have to deal with Him and stand before Him. He is not a mere prophet or a good teacher, this Jesus is our Savior, Judge, and God. The resurrection is pinpointed to *an hour* by the Lord Jesus. There will be "an hour" which is "coming when **all who are in the tombs** will hear his voice and come out". Their bodies will obey the voice of the Son of God, Who a few verses before is described to be the One who calls His people out of spiritual death (John 5:24-26). He is the Agent of spiritual resurrection, but also of physical resurrection from the dead. The hour of judgment and resurrection is coming when the Son of God calls all those who are in the tombs. They will all rise up or in the words of Daniel "awake" (Dan. 12:2), and as we saw in Daniel, they rise to two antithetical conditions. Those who have done good, i.e., the righteous, are raised to life—everlasting life. On the other hand, those who have done evil and remained in their sin, they will rise, but they will rise to judgment. The KJV says that the wicked will rise "unto the resurrection of damnation." The goal of the resurrection is so that they may be condemned. They rise again, they awake so as to be damned. Albert Barnes notes on v. 29, 'Those who have done evil will be raised up "to be condemned or damned." This will be the object in raising them up - this the sole design.'[2] Whether we should take the "hour" spoken of here literally as a period of 60 minutes or not is beside the point and by this, some try to throw smokescreens to the actual issue at hand, which is: both the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked happen at the same time. We cannot by amazing eisegetical gymnastics speak of the first part, i.e., the resurrection to life happening at the Parousia of Christ, while the second part, i.e., the resurrection to judgment, happening a thousand (after the Millennium) years after that Coming. That is simply not allowable by what our Lord says. He pinpoints an hour and says that this is the time when the resurrection of all the dead will happen. Some will try to argue that the "hour" mentioned in John 5:25 concerns the present age in which Christ will call His sheep to Himself, therefore, is it not possible that the "hour" of John 5:28 likewise refers to a long period of time? As a reply, I simply give you the words of Anthony Hoekema:

> Does the word "hour" as used in 5:28 describe a period of time which could be as long as a thousand years? I think not. For first, in order to be a parallel to what is said in verse 25, the resurrection of believers and unbelievers should then be taking place throughout this thousand-year period, as is the case with the regeneration of people during the "hour" mentioned in verse 25. But, according to the theory under discussion [Premillennialism], this is not the case; rather this theory teaches that there will be one resurrection at the beginning of the thousand years and another at the end. Of this, however, there is no hint in this passage. Further, note the words "all who are in the tombs will hear his voice." The reference would seem to be to a general resurrection of all who are in their graves; it is straining the meaning of these words to make them describe two groups (or four groups) of people who will be raised at separate times. Moreover, this passage states specifically that all these dead will hear the voice of the Son of man. The clear implication seems to be that this voice will be sounded once, not two times or four times…What Jesus is saying is this: At a certain hour in the future my voice will be heard; at that time all who are in the grave will come forth, some to the resurrection of life, and others to the resurrection of judgment. This passage clearly teaches a general resurrection of all the dead, both of those who have done good and of those who have done evil.[16]

In John 5:28-29 we have the doctrine of the general resurrection, which we contend for, stated very plainly before us. There is a time, which will be at the last trumpet, through which the Son of God will call all the dead to resurrection either of life or of judgment. I say "at the last trumpet" because that is when Paul places the resurrection of the righteous (1 Cor. 15:52). Since I believe that the Bible teaches a singular general resurrection, therefore, I believe that the wicked and righteous are raised at the last trumpet through which Christ will call all the dead.

Acts 24:15, 21

> Acts 24:15 having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be **a resurrection** of both the just and **the unjust**.
>
> Acts 24:21 other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: 'It is with respect to **the resurrection of the dead** that I am on trial before you this day.'"

The next two passages proving the general resurrection are found on the lips of the apostle Paul in Acts 24:15, 21. Paul has the hope in God that "there will be **a resurrection of both the just and the unjust**." Paul speaks about a singular resurrection (ἀνάστασιν, *anastasin*) of two groups. That is his hope and that is what he is essentially under trial for (Acts 23:6; 24:21). There will be "a" resurrection, not "there will be resurrections of the just and the unjust", but rather, "a resurrection". The resurrection is singular, but its objects are twofold. The first are the just, who will rise to everlasting life, as we learn from Daniel 12:2. Then second objects are the unjust, who will rise to damnation as we learn from John 5:29. In v. 21, Paul calls this doctrine of "a resurrection of both the just and the unjust" simply "**the resurrection of the dead**" and identifies it as the main point of contention with the Sadducees. Paul, by calling the resurrection of "both the just and the unjust" simply "the resurrection of the dead", shows that he believes the resurrection to be definite and general, having as its objects both the just and the unjust, not as the multiple resurrections of Premillennialism. Matthew Poole notes on Acts 24:15:

> *Both of the first and unjust;* that both sorts, even that all such, rise again at the last day, we have assurance given, Mat 25:32,33; Joh 5:28,29; which was also foretold expressly unto the Jews, Dan. 12:2, though it hath found so many since amongst them that have denied it.[5]

Timing Of The Resurrection

As to the timing of the resurrection, the Bible plainly states that it is at the coming of Christ (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 4:14-16; Phil. 3:20-21) and "on the last day" (John 11:24; 6:39, 40, 44, 54). If Scripture truly teaches that there is but a singular resurrection, as we have tried to show, then we could take the time indications for the resurrection of the just and apply them just as easily to the resurrection of the wicked. There is nothing more to say on this point.

Omission Does Not Equal Denial

It is very important to repeat this point which Amillennialists and Postmillennialists stress against Premillennialists: The resurrection of the righteous certainly does not entail that the resurrection of the wicked is separated by a thousand years. Our reasoning—my reasoning is very simple: 1) the Bible teaches a singular resurrection of both the just and the unjust (Dan. 12:2; John 5:26-29; Acts 24:15, 21); 2) the Bible stresses the glories of the believers' resurrection and says nothing of the resurrection of the wicked (Luke 14:14; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:35-58; Phil. 3:10-11, 20-21); 3) but the Bible teaches a singular general resurrection, therefore, the Holy Spirit is not denying the resurrection of the wicked at that time *by not mentioning it*. We do not have a biblical statement that denies the resurrection of the wicked at the time of the resurrection of the righteous. If we had that, I would not have been an Amillennial. We have statements in which the resurrection of the wicked is *omitted* at the time of the believers' resurrection, not *denied.* The distinction between omission and denial is very important.

The strongest passage against the doctrine of the general resurrection of all the dead is Revelation 20:5-6 where John speaks of "the first resurrection." We will examine this passage **below** when we come to the interpretation of Revelation 20, but let it suffice for now that there is nowhere in the gospels or Epistles spoken of multiple resurrections. The resurrection is spoken of as a definite event, having two groups as its objects. This is the clear and straightforward teaching of the New Testament. This is the light in which we must interpret the meaning of the "first resurrection" in the highly symbolic book of Revelation. We believe that the clear, didactic, and straightforward passages should take precedence in our understanding of the difficult, symbolical, and vague passages (**the Analogy of Scripture**). We should not go from Matthew through 3 John and see there the teaching of the general resurrection of all the dead, with no mention of multiple resurrections, and then when we come to Revelation 20 we change all that we have plainly learned. This we believe is simply not correct. We will try to give an interpretation of Revelation 20 **below**, but no more will be said of the first resurrection in this section.

The Final Judgment

Since the following chapter is dedicated to the **Last Judgment**, I will spare my longer thoughts for there, and give a brief case that the Final Judgment happens at the Parousia of Christ after the resurrection.

The Lord Jesus spoke of "the day of judgment" (Matt. 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36) and said that on it "people will give account

for every careless word they speak" (Matt. 12:36). It is a day on which we will give an account for our words, thoughts, and actions. We will stand before the throne of God to give an account. To be sure, at this time our eternal destiny is not at stake, neither the destiny of the righteous nor the wicked. Our destiny is fixed at our physical death, because then a judgment directly comes to determine our destiny (Heb. 9:27). What the "the day of judgment" does is determine *after* the resurrection of the body and the reunion between the soul and the body, the *condition* of eternity for us. Believers will go to the New Heavens and New Earth, while unbelievers will be thrown into the lake of fire. It is not possible that a believer be thrown into the lake of fire at the Final Judgment (e.g., Rom. 8:1), neither that an unbeliever will enter into the joy of his Master. Rather, the Final Judgment determines, for the believer, based on their works and faithfulness, the rewards in the World to Come (the New Heavens and New Earth).

For example, the Parable of the Ten Minas is on point in this. There is a "nobleman", Christ, who "went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom", Heaven, where He was seated at the right hand of God and to rule in the midst of His enemies (Ps. 110:1-2), and finally, He was to return (Luke 19:12). Before going, He gave His citizens a commission; He told them, "Engage in business until I come" (Luke 19:13). His citizens rebel against Him, these are the wicked who have not bowed the knee to Christ (Luke 19:14). But then this Nobleman returns and He calls on His servants to give an account of what they've done with what He has given them (Luke 19:15). There came a good servant who had made ten more minas than what his Master had given him. There came another who had made five minas. According to the number of minas that they had made, they received cities to rule over (Luke 19:16-19). This is the rewarding of the righteous. These people knew what the Nobleman and the King commanded them, and they wanted His favor and His glory. They worked for Him, for His glory, not so that they may get into heaven. In contrast, the third servant is an unbeliever. I cannot see how such a person can be described as a fallen believer or a weak believer. He clearly has a wrong view of his Master. He describes the Lord Jesus as, "a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow" (Luke 19:21). But the Lord Jesus says, "I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant!" (Luke 19:22). He is a wicked servant because He knew that the Master was a severe man, or thought so, but still didn't act upon that knowledge. This is not the nature of the believer, but the unbeliever to always disobey God. At His coming, the enemies of Jesus who did not want Him to reign over them, will be slaughtered (Luke 19:27). We see here the righteous receiving their rewards according to how they used the gifts which God had given them and their works, but the wicked condemned for their doing-nothing-for-God and obviously their unbelief.

In Luke 12, the Lord speaks about the suddenness of His coming (Luke 12:39-40) and what will happen to the bad servants. He describes a servant who will treat his fellow servants bad because he sees that the Master is delaying in His coming, but when the Master comes, the bad servant will receive his due (Luke 12:45-46). Then we have the following:

> Luke 12:47-48 And that servant who **knew his master's will but did not get ready or act** according to his will, will receive a **severe beating**. 48 But the one who **did not know**, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a **light beating**. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

Romans 1 makes clear that everyone knows God and knows what is right and wrong, but they do not act according to it. Here, the wicked are judged according to the light of knowledge that they had of God's will. For one living in jungles of Africa, without knowing anything of Christianity, there will be a "light beating", but for someone going to Church, hearing the Word of God and rejecting Christ, there will be a "severe beating." The condition of severity or lightness is based upon the light of knowledge which they possessed and what they had done with it. This is what is determined at the Final Judgment, not the fact that they will go to Hell, but how bad Hell will be for them. To be sure, when we're speaking of a "light beating" we do not mean that Hell will not be bad, but it will not be as bad for some than others. Still, the gospel invitation goes out to all kinds of people, and God calls us to repent and trust His Son. That is how we get saved from Hell and from God's wrath, and brought into the joyous fellowship of our Master. Through faith in the Son, we are not only saved from God's wrath and Hell, but we become children of God and heirs to the New Heavens and New Earth. Therefore, as long as the gospel invitation goes, we should preach to people the reality of what awaits them in eternity and warn them of the dangers.

That the Final Judgment takes place **after the Second Coming** and at the **end of the present age** was seen in Luke 19:15, but also in Matthew 13:37-43; 16:27; 25:31-46; John 12:48; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; 2 Peter 3:10-13. All these passages clearly connect the general judgment of all men with the coming of the glorious Son of Man. We will have more to say on the Last Judgment in the **next chapter**.

The Restoration Of All Things

After the Second Coming comes the general resurrection, the final judgment and the restoration of all things. The restoration of all things is the time when every prophecy is fulfilled and the New Heavens and New Earth are brought in. It is the time when the Lord lifts from the earth the curse which He laid because of man's sin, and renews the whole cosmos to utter perfection. There are several texts which speak to this effect.

Acts 3:21

> Acts 3:18-21 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. 19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that **he may send the Christ appointed for you**, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive **until the time for restoring all the things** about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

God spoke through the prophets about the suffering of Christ and the subsequent glories (1 Pet. 1:11). Not only about that, but also about the time of restoration. There is a particular time in the future at which all that the prophets have spoken will come to pass. This will include the many prophecies pertaining to the future happiness of the church (e.g., Isa. 65:17-25). Notice how this time is said to be when Christ will be revealed from heaven. Heaven must receive Christ "until" the "time for restoration all the things…" Moreover, v. 20 is even more clear, the idea of the Second Coming of Christ is already present there, and v. 21 couples it with the restoration of all things. The word ἀποκατάστασις (*apokatastasis*, G605) means "restoration"[11]. According to William D. Mounce, the word means "a restitution or restoration of a thing to its former state; hence, the renovation of a new and better era, Acts 3:21"[17]. This word seems to support the idea not of the destruction of the present universe, but of the renewal and purification of the present universe so that it becomes the New Heavens and New Earth. Albert Barnes' note on this clause is very helpful:

> **The times of the restitution of all things** - The noun rendered restitution ἀποκαταστάσεως apokatastaseōs, does not elsewhere occur in the New Testament. The verb from which it is derived occurs eight times. It means properly "to restore a thing to its former situation," as restoring a "strained" or "dislocated" limb to its former soundness. Hence, it is used to restore, or to heal, in the New Testament: Mat 12:13, "And it (the hand) was restored whole as the other"; Mar 3:5; Luk 6:10. And hence, it is applied to the preparation or fitness for the coming of the Messiah which was to attend the preaching of John in the character of Elias, Mat 17:11; Mar 9:12. Thus, in Josephus (Antiq., Mar 2:3, Mar 2:8), the word is used to denote the return of the Jews from the captivity of Babylon, and their restoration to their former state and privileges. The word has also the idea of "consummation, completion, or filling up." Thus, it is used in Philo, Hesychius, Phavorinus, and by the Greek Classics. (See Lightfoot and Kuinoel.) Thus, it is used here by the Syriac: "Until the complement or filling up of the times"; that is, of all the events foretold by the prophets, etc. Thus, the Arabic: "Until the times which shall establish the perfection or completion of all the predictions of the prophets," etc. In this sense the passage means that the heavens must receive the Lord Jesus until all thrums spoken by the prophets in relation to his work, his reign, the spread of the gospel, the triumph of religion, etc., shall have been fulfilled. It also conveys the idea of the predicted recovery of the world from sin, and the restoration of peace and order; the con. summation of the work of the Messiah, now begun, but not yet complete; slow it may be in its advances, but triumphant and certain in its progress and its close.[2]

Romans 8:18-23

> Rom. 8:18-23 For I consider that the **sufferings of this present time** are not worth comparing with the **glory that is to be revealed to us**. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for **the revealing of the sons of God**. 20 For the **creation was subjected to futility**, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the **creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption** and **obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God**. 22 For we know that the **whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth** until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for **adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies**.

As Christians suffer at the present time, they should not focus on their suffering, but instead look forward to the glory which will be revealed to them in the future, as it was in the case of Christ (e.g., Heb. 12:2). Paul personifies the creation in saying that even the creation wants to break loose from the bondage of sin and the futility to which God subjected it. Not only man was cursed, but the whole creation was cursed *because* of man (Gen. 3:17). Paul says that "the creation was subjected to futility" (v. 20) and is in "bondage of corruption", but this bondage, by God's grace and design, is temporary. God subjected the creation to futility and vanity, in hope so as to restore and renew it in and through Christ. The futility spoken of is the same vanity which is so often spoken of in the book of Ecclesiastes (Eccl. 1:2, 4; etc.). The Greek word ματαιότης (*mataiotes*, G3153), is the same here as in the LXX of Ecclesiastes. It is defined as: "what is devoid of truth and appropriateness…perverseness, depravity…frailty, want of vigour"[11] by Thayer. The whole creation was subject to vanity, futility and depravity because of man's sin. But since the sin problem was solved by the Savior, so also the effects of sin on the world will be removed from the world by the Savior. There will be a time, Paul says, in which "the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (v. 21). The creation will share in the same liberty and freedom from bondage which the children of God share in, namely, freedom from the bondage of sin and corruption. The glory of the LORD will fill the whole earth and He will be its light.

Paul compares the post-Fall Creation to the pains of childbirth. These pains will stop with the birth of the child. This is the time when the children of God will also receive liberty from the bondage of sin in body and soul. In v. 23, Paul connects the personified longings of the creation and the real longings of the children of God together. They both want their complete redemption from sin and bondage, as they eagerly wait for that time when it will fully be accomplished and applied. Then our adoption will be consummated. We are adopted now, adoption is a present reality (e.g., Rom. 8:15). But Paul teaches here that there is also a future aspect of our adoption in glorified body and soul. The "redemption of our bodies" (v. 23) is the resurrection to life when our soul is united to our imperishable, immortal, and glorious body. That is the Christian hope. That is what Paul was hoping for (Acts 23:6; 24:21).

In this passage, Paul pinpoints the redemption of the earth at the same time of the redemption of God's children's bodies, i.e., the resurrection, which as we argued above happens at the Parousia of Christ. We deny the cultural conception of Heaven as being somewhere over the clouds and were "good people" look down on us. The promise of God is that the meek shall inherit the *earth* (e.g., Matt. 5:5) and that we will see God in our flesh (Job 19:26), not have bodiless existence for all eternity. To be sure, as we argued in paragraph 1, the Intermediate State consists in the bodiless existence of both the righteous and the wicked, yet at the resurrection, the body is united with the soul to form the whole and complete man as God designed us to be (Gen. 2:7). This is my Father's world. The Father will not leave this world to Hell, but will renew it and we shall live with Him upon this renewed Earth.

2 Peter 3:10-13

> 2 Pet. 3:10-13 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the **heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved**, and **the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.** 11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which **the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved**, and the **heavenly bodies will melt as they burn**! 13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Notice that the renewal of the present Cosmos is connected with the Day of the Lord, which is the Parousia of Christ. It is said to happen when (the day of) the Lord will come like a thief. Then fire will be used as a purifying agent to rid the world of ungodly men and expose all wickedness (2 Pet. 3:7). The earth will be dissolved and set loose from bondage to corruption by the purifying fire of God, not intending to annihilate the earth, but to purge it from evil. This is the reality that awaits our world. God is coming in fire and judgment upon the earth, but His promise to His people is a "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." As with the picture of childbirth (Rom. 8:22) and restoration/reparation (Acts 3:21), this does not entail complete discontinuity between the present earth and the future earth. Rather, the earth will be restored and perfected. It will be set free from futility and from the bondage to corruption, this, God will accomplish by His purifying fire. As Dean Davis writes on this passage:

> ...Peter is not looking for the annihilation of the natural world, only its purging and restoration. It is only the *form* of this present world that will pass away, not the world itself (1 Cor. 7:31). Just as the ancient Flood cleansed the earth of sinners and paved the way for a new world, so it will be in the Day of the Lord, only moreso. In the conflagration, Christ will erase from the natural order every scar of sin, so that out of the very fires that consume "the former things" new heavens and a new earth may emerge (Mt. 13:41-43, Luke 17:26f, 2 Pet. 3:3-6). Notably, Peter asserts that these fires are also ordained for the destruction of ungodly men (2 Pet. 3:7).[18]

The other passages on the New Heavens and New Earth (which we have looked at) seem to indicate not the destruction or annihilation of the present world, but its renewal. Therefore, I favor that understanding and try to interpret 2 Peter 3 in light of that, noting that Peter does not actually speak of the destruction of the world and agree with the words of Dean Davis.

Hebrews 12:25-29

> Heb. 12:26-29 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more **I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens**." 27 This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the **removal of things that are shaken**—that is, things that have been made—in order that the **things that cannot be shaken may remain**. 28 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a **kingdom that cannot be shaken**, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

The time which is here referred to is the time for the giving of God's Holy Law at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:18) and the passage alluded to is Haggai 2:6. The earth trembled and the people were terrified at the descent of God on Mount Sinai and of His mighty voice (Ex. 20:18-19). They wanted a mediator between them and God. Moses was the mediator for that covenant and

the one whom the people chose (Ex. 20:20), but now we have a greater Mediator (Heb. 12:24). In the time of Moses, the earth shook at the presence of God, but the promise of God is that there will be yet another shaking. A shaking not only of the earth, but of the heavens as well. Taking these two things together, the meaning is that God will shake the whole world—the heavens and the earth. The purpose of this shaking is the removal of the things which are temporary and are shakable. The end and goal of this shaking is that only the things which are eternal and unshaken may remain standing. Those things which are unshakable are identified with the kingdom which we have received, the New Heavens and New Earth. As with the previous passages, except maybe for 2 Peter 3, the renewal of all things is not described in terms of destruction, but of purifications. God will remove all sin and all that which is temporary and vain, but all things which are good and unshakable will remain standing. The New Heavens and New Earth which we await is characterized by righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13), which is an eternal and unshakable principle derived from and dependent upon the God Who is Himself perfectly holy and righteous.

Revelation 21:1-5

> Rev. 21:1-5 Then I saw **a new heaven and a new earth**, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, **new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God**, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, **the dwelling place of God is with man**. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will **wipe away every tear** from their eyes, and **death shall be no more**, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, **I am making all things new**.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

This passage comes after the Final Judgment which takes place in Revelation 20:11-15. After the Judgment, comes the restoration of all things and the introduction of the New Heavens and New Earth. John sees a new heaven and new earth when the old and present heaven and earth, i.e., Cosmos, passes away. The New Heavens and New Earth comes when Heaven joins with the Earth. The New Heavens and New Earth is literally *Heaven on Earth*. The New Jerusalem, which is identified with (the third) Heaven and the abode of God, is said to *come down* from above down to the earth, which is the abode of man (Ps. 115:16). The union of Heaven with the Earth is the New Heavens and New Earth. A voice from heaven declares that the Earth, now united to Heaven, has become the dwelling place of God, as God so designed the Earth to be from the beginning. Now the plan of God in creation, redemption, and restoration is fully accomplished. Man is meant to exist as body and soul, and dwell upon the Earth, not to exist without a body in the Intermediate State, however good and great the Intermediate State is. In the New Heaven and New Earth, God will be visibly manifest in the midst of His people. His desires to dwell with His people, as well as the desires of His people to dwell and see their God are now fulfilled in the New World. God will make all things new and that is the hope which we are waiting for. He is faithful and He will do it, we pray that His Kingdom and righteousness may soon come. Maranatha, Lord Jesus!

Simplistic Eschatology of the Gospel of John

The Gospel of John is simply my favorite Gospel because of its simplicity and yet profound depth. A lot of statements in the Gospel seem to be simple, but are filled with a lot of depth and could lead to countless hours of mediation. In many ways, I believe that the Gospel of John presents a simplistic New Testament eschatology. We read of the “last day” and an/the “hour” sometimes in John.

John speaks of the resurrection of believers taking place by the Son “**on the last day**” (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54), or as Martha says of the *general* resurrection, “I know that he [her brother Lazarus] will rise again in the resurrection **on the last day**” (John 11:24). Notice how Martha speaks of “***the*** resurrection” which is to take place on the last day. The resurrection is also pinpointed to an hour in John 5:28-29. There, the resurrection is of all who are in the tombs, both the righteous and the wicked, which is to happen at the hour which is appointed for that.

In John 12:48, the Lord Jesus says against those who reject Him and do not receive His word that “the word that I have spoken will judge [them] **on the last day**.” The testimony of Jesus’ words against them will judge them. In fact, the Lord tells the Pharisees that Moses, whom they pretend to follow, will rise to condemn them (John 5:45). The judgment is said to be on the last day. We have no reason at all in the entire Gospel of John to differentiate between several judgments. This is the Final Judgment, which follows the resurrection on the last day. This passage may be connected with John 5:28-29, which does not only teach the doctrine of the general resurrection of the dead, but also the Final Judgment. Notice that the wicked are not only raised, but they’re raised to a condition, namely, of judgment, condemnation or damnation. This would imply a certain judgment has occurred which has declared and made that to be so. The same is entailed for “the resurrection of life”, for the phrase does not merely mean that they came to bodily life, but also the quality of the life which they are raised to.

Notice how simple the eschatology of the Gospel of John is. He speaks of a certain hour and of the last day. There can be no

difficulty in identifying the connections which the apostle lays. He connects both the General Resurrection and the Last Judgment to happen on the same day. This is why I see the eschatology of this Gospel to be "simplistic." This is, by the way, the same writer who penned the book of Revelation. Neither in his Gospel nor Epistles, and for that matter nowhere else in the Bible, is there any mention of a temporal period of a thousand years whose condition is something between Fallen Creation and Restored Creation. Now we turn our attention to the crucial passage respecting the Millennium.

Passage	Resurrection	Passage	Final Judgment
John 5:28-29	"an hour" (general)	**John 12:48**	"on the last day"
John 6:39	"on the last day" (the elect)	**John 5:28-29**	"an hour" (general)
John 6:40	"on the last day" (the elect)		
John 6:44	"on the last day" (the elect)		
John 6:54	"on the last day" (the elect)		
John 11:24	"on the last day" (general)		

The Nature Of The Book Of Revelation

Before going into providing an interpretation of Revelation 20, we must, first of all, begin with a general look at the book itself, its nature and its parallel visions.

Symbolic

That the book is clearly symbolic no one will deny, yet some still contend (Dispensationalists) that we must (mostly) interpret the book literally unless we're told to interpret it symbolically. This is an interesting hermeneutic, as we shall see, the opposite is actually true. From the beginning of the book, we are told that it is a prophecy and it is symbolical. How are we told that? Let us read the first verse:

> Rev. 1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He **made it known** by sending his angel to his servant John,
>
> Rev. 1:1 KJV The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and **signified [it]** by his angel unto his servant John:

This book is a revelation and an unveiling about *Jesus Christ.* That is the title and goal of the book. The battles, struggles, and prophecies written in the book have as their goal to reveal the glory of Jesus Christ. This book is about Jesus Christ. This unveiling and revelation of the Lord Jesus, God the Father gave to His slaves, why? To show them what "must soon take place." The way that God did this, was by sending His angel to "[make] it known" to John. We will concern ourselves with "made it known" and "must soon take place" here. The following is largely taken from a commentary/thoughts that I was writing on the book of Revelation before I started focusing on the commentary of the Confession.

Made It Known

The KJV correctly gives the idea of the word "made it known" which it translates with "signified it." That directly tells us that this book of Revelation of Jesus is symbolic and that it was shown to John through visions. The Greek word for "show" and "signify" is σημαίνω (*semaino*), here the aorist, active, indicative, third, singular is used which is ἐσήμανεν. In this form, the word is used only in Revelation 1:1 and Acts 11:28. But the word σημαίνων *(semainon)* is used thrice in John's gospel:

> John 12:32-33 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 33 He said this to **show** [σημαίνων, *semainon*] by what kind of death he was going to die.

Here it signifies the crucifixion of our Lord. It pictures the crucifixion in the fact that crucified people were raised on a cross. It doesn't directly say anything of the crucifixion, but points to it through the imagery of being raised.

> John 18:32 This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to **show** [σημαίνων, *semainon*] by what kind of death he was going to die.

This is relevant to the previous verse discussed, but it is there that Jesus spoke of the kind of death he was going to die. Surely, it is elsewhere attested by Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels and in John (John 3:14; Matt. 20:19; 26:2; Luke 18:32-33; 24:7-8). The rejection of the Jews to put Jesus to death, which would have led to Him being stoned by stones, leaves the Romans the option to crucify Him as they did to a lot of people, which brings His word in John 12:33 to pass.

> John 21:18-19 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." 19 (This he said to **show** [σημαίνων, *semainon*] by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

This is the last place in John where the word σημαίνων [*semainon*] is used. Here, as in the previous references, it pictures crucifixion. The Lord Jesus didn't come upfront and say, "Peter you will be crucified just like me," but He pictured it for him and the disciples. We have already gotten an idea that this word is crucial to our understanding of the whole book of Revelation, that a wooden literal interpretation is impossible because of what the first verse in the book says. The word is defined as "to give a sign, to signify, indicate...to make known"[11].

Since this book is an unveiling in a vision, therefore it is not to be interpreted in a wooden literal manner, but symbolically as a vision should be interpreted. It does not mean that there are no literal or true things in the book. Nonetheless, the very first verse indicates that it is a vision. If we are to interpret it literally, i.e., according to its genre, we should interpret it with its genre in mind – visionary and apocalyptic. Furthermore, when we look at this part of verse 1, I will try to show an important parallel below with Daniel, which will point us in the right direction on the proper interpretation of the book and the time in which it will come to pass.

What we have here is the reverse of the Dispensational/Premillennial hermeneutic which was basically "interpret literally, unless told otherwise." Rather, "interpret symbolically, unless told otherwise" is our hermeneutic. G.K. Beale has said something along the lines of, "because I interpret Revelation 1:1 literally, I have to interpret Revelation symbolically." The literal interpretation of the very first passage—the introduction to the whole book—tells us that what we have to deal with is a vision and things which are signified to us, i.e., given in signs.

Things That Soon Must Take Place

Let's turn our attention to the most important word in this verse: **soon**. What does it mean, does it refer to the immanency of Christ's coming; does it mean that when these things in the Revelation begin to take place they will be completed very quickly; or does it mean that these things will come upon or start in the lifetime of the readers of this Apocalypse?

One must admit that a surface level reading will give the idea that John is trying to communicate that the contents of this book will come to pass very soon to those to whom it was written. Therefore, any futuristic interpretation of the book, has this difficulty to deal with. But let's dig a little deeper and search and see how this word is used in the NT. The word for *soon* used here is τάχει *(tachei),* which is the dative, singular, neuter of τάχος (*tachsos*), which means "quickness, speed"[11]. The HCSB translates the clause with "quickly take place"; the ISV with "must happen soon"; the KJV with "must shortly take place"; the NET Bible with "must happen very soon." I think the idea of quickness and immanency is clearly indicated in these translations. Therefore, we should understand that these things described in the Revelation were to come upon its first readers and were already beginning to come actually. There is no reason, other than taking the Revelation in a wooden literal manner and reading it chronologically, rather than cyclically, to have a problem with the quickness of Revelation. The word is used in the following places: Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7; 22:18; 25:4; Romans 16:20; 1 Timothy 3:14 with the idea of speed and swiftness. To be sure, two of these references refer to the Second Coming of our Lord which is still future (Luke 18:8; Rom. 16:20). As always context should help us define words.

This phrase is also found in the epilogue of the book:

> Rev. 1:1 ...to show to his servants the things that must soon take place...
>
> Rev. 22:6 ...to show his servants what must soon take place.

Thus, when we first start to read the book and also when we finish it, we have this said to us: the things in this book will shorty come to pass! This is further strengthened when we consider the words in verse 3:

> Rev. 1:3 ...for the time is near.

The time is near and the things shown to John must soon take place. This is clear evidence that these things that John saw were relevant to his first-century audience and were speaking to them (and I also believe to us). I reject the idea that basically chapters 1-3 are past and chapters 4-22 are still future, for the very fact that it ignores what is said about the urgency and speed that we get confronted with about the contents of the Revelation when we first read the book and also when we put it down. A very interesting parallel is found, not in the NT, but in the OT to this phraseology—in the book of Daniel specifically. It is no wonder for anyone who has read the Revelation to realize how deeply Old Testament saturated book it is and how many hundreds of quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament are made. In Daniel 2, Daniel interprets king Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the great image whose parts picture subsequent kingdoms in history. This image will be destroyed. There we read:

> Dan. 2:44-45 And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, 45 just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A **great God has made known** to the king **what shall be after this**. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."

This indeed is the Kingdom of God, which Jesus had brought with Him (Mark 1:15; Matt. 12:28; Luke 17:21). It was set up in the days of Jesus. It is a Kingdom not of this world (John 18:36). It was a stone (Matt. 21:44) cut by no human hand, i.e., it is a divine work and it shatters all others. Okay, nice, but this was the *interpretation* of the dream, now let's see the *dream itself* and the parallel that I wanted to point out:

> Dan. 2:28 but there is a God in heaven who **reveals** mysteries, and **he has made known** to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in **the latter days**. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these:

A special emphasis is laid upon the phrase "the latter days", which is the same as the phrase we often hear: the last days. The NT identifies the whole time between Christ first and second coming as the last days:

> Acts 2:16-17 But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 17 "'And in **the last days** it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;
>
> 2Tim. 3:1-2 But understand this, that in **the last days** there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,…
>
> Heb. 1:1-2 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in **these last days** he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

The parallel between Daniel 2 and Revelation 1 is in the following phrases:

LXX Daniel 2:28	Translation	Revelation 1:1	Translation
ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι	the things that must come to pass	ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι	the things that must come to pass
ἐπ'	In	ἐν	on
ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν	The last days	τάχει	soon

The parallel is seen in the fact that the Kingdom of God in Daniel 2 that would come in the last days, has already come in the person of the King Jesus and that the last days of Daniel 2 are the days of Revelation which were soon coming to pass. We also take notice that the way in which these visions, which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, were revealed were in symbolic and visionary form. Nebuchadnezzar got a dream of a huge statue and parts of it were world kingdoms and empires. This was not clear to him, this was symbolic. But when Daniel explained the vision and the symbolism, the symbols became clear to him. Those kingdoms were not literally part of the statue, and to have interpreted the dream literalistically would've been a great mistake. If we interpret the dream in a literalistic manner, one would not get the proper meaning of the dream which God gave to Nebuchadnezzar and which He also explained.

The book of Revelation is about two cities, the city of God and the city of man. The city of man has been defeated through the coming of the invisible Kingdom and the cross, but it does not want to admit defeat. It just tries to go after the offspring

of the woman (Rev. 12) and try to cause harm, the same way we see this struggle throughout the whole of Revelation, the world—the servants of Satan and Satan himself have already been defeated through Christ (John 12:31), but they don't want to admit defeat. They want to cause as much harm as they can. These are the last days for the city of man.

The last days of Daniel in which God will set up a kingdom that cannot be shaken have already come and we are in them now! What was future for Daniel, was at hand, quick and soon for John's readers. In Revelation, we read of the establishment of the present first stage of the Kingdom in Revelation 12. The book of Revelation is symbolical and speaks about the time since Christ's first coming and until the consummation. We now turn our attention as to how we should read the book.

Recapitulation

How are we to read the book of Revelation? It seems from 1:1 that we should understand that it is a vision and thus interpret it symbolically, rather than in a wooden literal way. But still, the question stands: How are we to read it? Are we to think that the chapters follow one another in fulfillment? What I mean is: should we read the book of Revelation chronologically? In other words, do the events of chapter *X* necessarily follow the events of chapter *Y*? I do not believe so.

I believe that the book of Revelation contains seven parallel visions, which describe the whole time between Christ's first coming and the consummation from different angles. We are speaking here of *parallelism.* The book of Revelation describes the events between Christ's first coming and second coming multiple times and from different angles. This is the *idealist recapitulation/parallelism* interpretation. According to this interpretation, the book of Revelation does not prophesy any specific events, other than those connected with the consummation, i.e., the Parousia, resurrection, judgment, and the New Heavens and New Earth. A lot of the symbols and the things written in the Revelation are non-temporal truths about the war between the Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God. I do not pretend that I fully understand the book of Revelation. I still have many questions. But I do say that I see a parallelism which I cannot deny. Most importantly, recognizing that the book of Revelation is symbolical, I come to it with all the clear and didactic teachings of the New Testament in mind and in the forefront to interpret the Revelation in the light thereof. Importantly, to say that the Revelation predicts no specific event (aside from those connected with the consummation) and the symbols are largely non-temporal so that they are as much true to its first readers as to us two thousand years later, is not to say that there is no chronological order at all. I also believe in *Progressive Parallelism.* This says that the visions or cycles of visions move progressively from the first to the Second Coming of Christ and each vision reveals more about the time in between and what will happen.

There have been generally seven parallel visions identified in the book of Revelation, corresponding to its manifold use of the number seven symbolically (e.g., Rev. 1:4; 4:5; 5:1, 6; etc.), which generally symbolizes completion and/or perfection. This means then that these seven visions show us the complete picture which God wants His servants to have for the time between the two comings of Christ. The chapters are generally divided in this way:

1. Vision #1: Revelation 1-3
2. Vision #2: Revelation 4-7
3. Vision #3: Revelation 8-11
4. Vision #4: Revelation 12-14
5. Vision #5: Revelation 15-16
6. Vision #6: Revelation 17-19
7. Vision #7: Revelation 20-22

This is generally how we see it, yet there may be some other way in which we speak about the extent of these visions. Some do not place chapters 1-3 as a vision and a cycle, and strictly speaking, vision 2 would be from Revelation 4:1-8:5, and not 4-7. The Recapitulation Position "holds that the various series of judgments are parallel descriptions of the same events. The pattern is identified within each series. Toward the end of each series, there is a description of judgment followed by a depiction of salvation (6:12-17 and 7:9-17; 11:18a and 11:18b; 14:14-20 and 15:2-4; 16:17-18:24 and 19:1-10; 20:7-15 and 21:1-22:5)."[19] The lines of division for some visions are easier than others. The best way to prove this parallelism is as Dr. Beale suggested, by the repeated judgments in the book. For a better treatment of this subject (and in connection to the Millennium) I refer you to G.K. Beale (Shorter Commentary, pp. 21-25), William Hendriksen (More Than Conquerors, pp. 16-23), Anthony Hoekema (The Bible and the Future, pp. 223-238), Dean Davis (High King Of Heaven, pp. 426-464) and Sam Storms (Kingdom Come, pp. 387-412).

Vision 1: Revelation 1-3

The first cycle describes the present age from the point view of the Church. It is:

- a time of persecution and struggle for the believers (Rev. 1:9; 2:2-3, 6, 9, 13, 19; 3:10-11);
- a time when false teaching will try to lead them away from the true gospel (Rev. 2:2, 14-15, 20,

24);
- a time when believers are to strive to be faithful to their Lord (Rev. 2:2-3, 10, 13, 24-26; 3:3, 8, 11, 20);
- a short time of persecution (Rev. 2:10; 3:10).

Although the Church Age (the time between the Ascension and Second Coming) is described to be a time of persecution, it is also said to be a short time of "ten days" (Rev. 2:10). It is our position that these "ten days" symbolize the whole time between Christ's Ascension and Second Coming. It has actually been about 2000 years up until now. Compared to eternity and the glories which are for the children of God, this period of persecution is like nothing (cf. Rom. 8:18-25). The time of persecution is seen to be short, but the time of the saints' reign is said to be a thousand years, which describes the same period but from a different angle. We will come to that later.

Vision 2: Revelation 4-7

In this cycle, we have a vision of God's glory and of His heavenly reign, sovereignty over all things and the ceaseless praise which He receives. In chapter 4, we receive a vision of the awesome glory of God and the ceaseless worship which He rightly receives. In chapter 5, we receive a vision of Christ after His ascension. Because of His sacrifice, He has received authority from God as the Mediator to execute His sovereign purpose. He is the only One who is able to take the plan of God in His hand and execute it. He is the only One who is worthy and He is the only One who is fit for the task because He is the God-Man. In chapter 6, after the Lamb receiving the scroll from the hand of the Father in Revelation 5:7, the Lamb starts to break the seven seals with which the scroll was sealed (Rev. 5:1), and the things described in Revelation 6:1-8:5 come to pass, which includes the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. As we move on with the breaking of the seals, we see the signs being intensified in their effects, this is especially true when the sixth seal is broken. When the sixth seal is broken we have the contents of Revelation 6:12-7:17 coming to pass which describe the doom of the wicked and the eternal happiness of the righteous. In this, we see a *Progressive Parallelism.* The visions are moving toward the end of the world. I believe that Revelation 6 clearly teaches the Final Judgment of Christ upon the wicked on the Day of the Lord:

> Rev. 6:12-17 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. 14 The **sky vanished like a scroll** that is being rolled up, and **every mountain and island was removed from its place.** 15 Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and **everyone, slave and free**, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from **the wrath of the Lamb**, 17 for **the great day of their wrath has come**, and who can stand?"

Wouldn't one without any presuppositions conclude that this is basically a description of the final judgment and destruction of the wicked? When the sixth seal is broken, the end of the world comes. Even the inanimate objects in the cosmos will react to the breaking of the sixth seal. Things will get weird not only on the earth but also in the heavens. Verse 14 points us to the direction that we must take this as a description of the Final Judgment. Why? Because that is how the Final Judgment is described Revelation 16:20, but more clearly and definitely in Revelation 20:11 and 2 Peter 3:10. This is the time, just before the coming of the New World, at which the present cosmos goes and the New comes (Rev. 21:1). Notice also the extent of those being subjects of the Lamb's wrath, they are said to be:

- the kings of the earth;
- the great ones;
- the generals;
- the rich;
- the powerful;
- everyone, slave and free.

Does it seem that John is clearly describing a universal judgment upon the wicked or am I being biased? Obviously, the unbiased reading will agree with me that this is a judgment upon all the wicked, all over the earth. They are terrified at the sight of the Lamb, which implies that this Judgment takes place at His Second Coming. The wicked will try to hide themselves from the wrath of the Lamb on "the great day of their [the Father's and the Lamb's] wrath", but it is impossible to hide from God. The chapter ends with a question, which seems rhetorical, but it is not. The next chapter describes those who can withstand God's judgment and wrath because they are sealed (Rev. 7:1-3).

Chapter 7 describes the Israel of God (Rev. 7:4-8) which John *heard* of (Rev. 4:7), which is the same "great multitude that no one could number, from every nation" which he actually *saw* (Rev. 7:9). The Israel of God is sealed against the wrath of God and therefore they will *not* be harmed, as the wicked will definitely be harmed and be subjects of God's terrible wrath, but

the Israel of God is protected by God from His wrath. The great multitude of the Israel of God celebrates with joy the enthronement of God and His Lamb upon the throne and His righteous judgment. The redeemed, the Israel of God, the great multitude, are said to come "out of the great tribulation" (Rev. 7:14). There is no need to think about the tribulation in Matthew 24:1-35 which is past, but the whole Christian life is described as a life of tribulation until we enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22). Not only that, but the book of Revelation recognizes that the tribulation is at the present. John speaks that those whom he is writing to are "partner[s] in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus" (Rev. 1:9). Jesus knew that the Church in Smyrna was in "tribulation", but their tribulation will be short (Rev. 2:9-10). The phrase "great tribulation" is used in Revelation 2:22 with reference to judgment upon Jezebel and has nothing to do with something in the future. The tribulation is the whole Church Age, but as the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan expand, the clash between the two will be greater. The believers' life on the earth is their "great tribulation" which they come out from. They are saved from this wicked world, chosen from before the foundation of the earth to have a part in Christ and His Kingdom.

The condition of the righteous in Revelation 7:15-17 is described in ways that correspond to the descriptions of the New Heavens and New Earth. Revelation 21-22 clearly speaks of the consummation and of the New Heavens and New Earth, therefore, observe the parallels:

Revelation 7	Revelation 21-22
15 "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and **serve him day and night in his temple**; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.	21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.
	22:3 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and **his servants will worship him**.
16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.	
17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and **he will guide them to springs of living water**, and **God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.**"	21:4 **He will wipe away every tear from their eyes**, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."
	22:1 Then the angel showed me the **river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb**

This clearly indicates that what is described in Revelation 7 respects the consummation and the New Heavens and New Earth, which come after the destruction of the wicked in chapter 6.

The **seventh seal** is given in Revelation 8:1-5, which brings God's wrath upon the earth and there is then the description which is so often connected with a theophany (appearance of God) in the Bible (e.g., Ex. 20:18; Deut. 4:11; 5:5; Rev. 4:5; 11:19; 16:18) and to judgment (Rev. 16:18). Such imagery of lightning, earthquake and so on, are mentioned toward the end of the next cycle of visions also (Rev. 11:19). There, it is clearly in connection with the consummation on the New Earth where God's Temple is, or more correctly, which *is* God's Temple.

We have seen in this cycle the judgment on the wicked and the everlasting bliss of the faithfulness upon the New Earth. But if we are reading Revelation chronologically, we should expect chapter 8 to speak about the everlasting bliss of the saints and what they are to do in the eternal state. Clearly, this is not the case.

Vision 3: Revelation 8-11

This section concerns the seven trumpets given to the seven angels, which I think is from **Revelation 8:6-11:19**. As every angel blows their trumpet, strange things start to happen upon the earth (I'm not yet sure how to interpret these). The symbols seem intensified in comparison to the previous seven seals. But notice that trumpets 1 through 6 bring partial judgments, not total judgment:

1. The First Trumpet: a third of the earth, a third of the trees, add all green grass was burned up (Rev. 8:7).
2. The Second Trumpet: a third of the sea became like blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed (Rev. 8:8-9).
3. The Third Trumpet: a third of the rivers and on the springs of water, many people died from the water (Rev. 8:10-11).
4. The Fourth Trumpet: a third of the sun, moon, stars is darkened. A third of the day is likewise kept from shining as is the night (Rev. 8:12).

5. The Fifth Trumpet: not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God for five months, but not kill them (Rev. 9:4-5).
6. The Sixth Trumpet: kill a third of mankind (Rev. 9:15).

The case is different with the Seventh Trumpet. Scripture says that "in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled" (Rev. 10:7). The sounding of the seventh trumpet brings the plan of God to fruition and completion. This sounds similar to Acts 3:21 and the restoration of all things mentioned there. The Seventh Trumpet is seen here as the last trumpet, which sounds the end of the world. This is, I believe, the "last trumpet" of Paul (1 Cor. 15:52; cf. 1 Thess. 4:16).

Chapter 11 takes us to a vision of the temple of God and the Two Witnesses. The Temple of God is the Temple which is spoken of in Matthew 26:61 (Jesus refers to Himself, actually, see John 2:19) and the Church as the Temple of God (2 Cor. 6:16; 2 Thess. 2:4). The Universal Church is the temple of God spoken of here, and the "court outside the temple" are the unbelieving within the Visible Church. The angel is to measure the true temple of God, but not the hypocrites. To measure them indicates that God sets the Church Universal especially under His care. God wants to *distinguish* the true Church, therefore He measures them and sets them apart. The true Church alone is safe from God's wrath. They may die because of God's judgment, but they will not taste His eternal wrath (Rom. 8:1). In other words, the bodies of the faithful may be subject to pain and destruction, but their souls are safe in the hand of God who will give them a new body at His coming. Here, the imagery of measuring is used while in Revelation 7 the saints of God are sealed so as to be protected from the wrath of God. Both pictures symbolizing the same thing.

The nations will trample the holy city, which is the Jerusalem of the fallen world system. By that, I mean the designation "the great city" given by John, which is "symbolically…called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified" (Rev. 11:8), which also persecutes His people. This trampling of the holy city is only for 42 months, which is the same as the 1,260 days in which the Two Witnesses prophesy (Rev. 11:3). While the Church is being persecuted, the Two Witnesses are still proclaiming the Word of the Lord.

The "holy city" spoken of here is the Church of God as in Revelation 20:9; 21:2, 10, 19. They will be trampled by the world and its system. They will suffer physical harm, but no spiritual harm will touch them. They will suffer as they remain faithful to their Savior who also suffered at the hands of wicked men. But the period of their suffering is limited to **42 months**; **1,260 days**; **a time, and times, and half a time**; which are **3,5 years**. The time for the suffering of the Church is a broken seven and a short time. It is an imperfect and incomplete attempt by the world to destroy the Church. It is said to be **ten days** in Revelation 2:10. The time of persecution and trampling for the Church is also the time when the Church prophesies and proclaims the gospel. This persecution will obviously intensify as the Church faithfully and unashamedly proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ. This 3,5 years of persecution has its basis in Daniel 7:25; 12:7, 11-12 and the persecution which the Jews suffered at the hands of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. This period which is noted in three ways in the Revelation is the same:

- 1,260 days (Rev. 11:3; 12:6),
- forty-two months (Rev. 11:2; 13:5),
- a time, and times, and half a time (Rev. 12:14).

In Revelation 12:6, 14, this 3,5 years period begins with the resurrection of Christ and the flight of the woman to the wilderness. The fact that it encompasses the whole period between the resurrection and the Second Coming is seen by the continued persecution of the people of God throughout the Church Age and their nourishment by God throughout the Church Age. There is not a problem with the idea that the 3,5 years and its other designations are symbolic, unless we are forcing a literal interpretation upon a clearly symbolical book, *and* ignoring the fulfillment of certain prophecies in the past and place them in the future (e.g., Daniel 9:25-27). This period of 1,260 days/42 months/3,5 years is described as a period of persecution for the Church (Rev. 11:2; 13:5), a period of prophecy and gospel proclamation (Rev. 11:3), and a period of nourishment by God (Rev. 12:6, 14). There is both the good and the bad in this period of time.

As we move on, we come across the Two Witnesses, which I believe symbolize the Church Militant. The Lord Jesus in sending His 72 disciples on a missionary journey back in Luke 10:1, told them to go "two by two". Moreover, they are also described as *witnesses*, according to Old Testament law, the testimony of two or three counts in court (Deut. 17:6; 19:15). The Church is the witness *against* and *to* the wickedness of the world. But not only this, fulfilling the criteria of two or three witnesses establishes the truth of what they are saying. These Witnesses are also described as "two lampstands" (Rev. 11:4). Revelation 1:20 teaches that the imagery of lampstands points to churches, therefore, the Two Witnesses which are also said to be "two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth" are the Church Militant, proclaiming the gospel throughout the 3,5 year period of the Church Age.

In v. 7, we read that the Two Witnesses, i.e., the Church is killed and conquered only "when they have finished their testimony", that is when the beast rises from the bottomless pit. There is a specific time when the Lord decides that the

world has had enough gospel proclamation to it, and He lets the beast loose from the bottomless pit. I cannot but comment here upon the similarity between Revelation 11:7 and Revelation 20:7, 9. Notice that in Revelation 20:1-2 Satan is said to bound in "the bottomless pit" or the abyss. In vv. 7-9, we have the release of Satan and then his attack upon the "the camp of the saints and the beloved city". In chapter 11, we have the beast coming out of the same place where Satan is bound, and doing the same thing that Satan will do when he is released. Isn't it that interesting?! Obviously, there are some differences in the descriptions, but the big points are in both texts. The Church will be weakened and apostasy will come, so that the Church will appear to be dead until her Lord comes to save her from the hand of the unholy trinity (the devil, the beast, and the false prophet).

The Church seemed or was dead only for 3,5 days, for a very short period. But then as the breath of God entered them, they stood on their feet and regained their power and God called them to Himself. I believe the reference "Come up here!" (Rev. 11:12) is to the Rapture of the Church, and it is no secret! The enemies of Christ and His Church will see the Church ascend to God, and they will run away from the judgment that will come upon them. Notice that there is nowhere in the chapter anything described that resembles a golden age after the Rapture of the Church, but rather, after the Rapture of the Church a tenth of the great city of the world falls, 7000 people die. Those who survived gave glory to God and finally the seventh trumpet is then blown.

As the seventh trumpet is blown, the Church declares: "The **kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ**, and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). The Kingdom of the World has fallen, but the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ has been firmly and physically established upon the earth. It is the kingdom of the world that *has become* the Kingdom of God. Notice that it does not say that the Kingdom of God came, but there is a switch in the text. The Kingdom of the World is switched for the Kingdom of God. There where the Kingdom of Satan was, becomes the place where the Kingdom of God is manifested and fills the whole earth. Then heaven falls to worship the Lord God Omnipotent calling Him the One "who is and who was" and "you have taken your great power and begun to reign" (Rev. 11:17). Notice first of all the omission of "who is to come" which is mentioned in Revelation 1:4, 8. The omission is understandable in light of Christ's coming being *past* in this passage. In other words, this passage describes what happens *after* the Parousia of Christ. At this time, the Lord Christ had already come and therefore, the dead were raised and judged. This passage then describes the eternal state. They do not expect God in the future anymore, but they remember God for His works in the past and in the present, for all the promises of God had been fulfilled at the time of the Eternal State. The seventh trumpet was blown and as it was said in Revelation 10:7, "the mystery of God", which "he announced to his servants the prophets" has been fulfilled when it was blown.

The words of the 24 elders continue in vv. 18-19 and notice how they speak in the *past tense.* They speak of the nations which "raged" and how God's "wrath came" (Rev. 11:18). Not only that, but "the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your savants…and for destroying the destroyers of the earth" had also already come at the time described. Heaven praises God at the consummation of all things for His judgments and His rewarding of all His servants. This is clearly the End of the World as we know it. Then in the last verse, we have a picture of heaven, the dwelling place of God, which now has become the New Earth (Rev. 21:2-4), containing the Ark of the Covenant within His Temple. This indicates that God has not forgotten His covenant and His promises made to His people. Then we have some "flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail" connected with the appearance of God and of these things.

Isn't it strange, we have already seen two Final Judgments in Revelation. The first one was in 6:16-7:17 and the second we just read about in 11:15-19. How could this be, if we should read the Apocalypse literally and chronologically? How many ends does the world have? Obviously one. But what do we do with, until now, two "End of the World" being described? The only satisfying solution to me is that they're both describing the same event. But if this is the case, then the book of Revelation is not to be read *chronologically*, but *cyclically*. Further proof for this is chapter 12.

Vision 4: Revelation 12-14

We just had a vision of the Last Judgment and the consummation of all things in Revelation 11:15-19 at the sounding of the seventh trumpet at whose time the mystery of God was fulfilled (Rev. 10:7). But the vision which we get in chapter 12 is very strange if the Apocalypse is to be read chronologically.

Chapter 12 describes the birth of a male child who is to rule all the nations. A great sign appears in heaven, which is a woman clothed with the sun, has the moon under her feet and is crowned with twelve stars, recalling Joseph's dream (Gen. 37:9). The twelve stars symbolized the twelve sons of Jacob who make up Israel, the people of God under the Old Testament. The woman here is the faithful remnant of Israel which lived close to God and was waiting for the birth of the Messiah. Satan, knowing that what God promised in Genesis 3:15 was about to come to pass, goes after the woman to destroy the child which is born of her. The woman gave birth to a child who was destined "to rule all the nations with a rod of iron" (Rev. 12:5). This is clearly the Lord Jesus Christ, but what does the birth of Jesus have to do with the Final Judgment and consummation we just read about with the blowing of the seventh trumpet? Obviously, we cannot read the visions of the Apocalypse chronologically. We clearly see that they present huge problems to us, such so that you would have to go from the Final Judgment and at once to the birth of Christ, which is very strange. It is strange only if one insists upon reading the

Apocalypse chronologically, rather than cyclically.

The Male Child is then "caught up to God and to his throne" before the Dragon was able to destroy Him. This is a reference to Christ's Ascension in which He was seated at the right hand of God (Rev. 3:21; Ps. 110:1; Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55; etc.). While the Male Child is caught up to the throne of God, the woman, still symbolizing the people of God, but now out believing Jews and Gentiles, flees to the wilderness, which is a place "prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days" (Rev. 1:6). 3,5 years was also the time of her persecution (Rev. 11:2) and testimony (Rev. 11:3, 7), but it is also the time when the Church is in the wilderness. This clearly is based upon the 40 years of wilderness wandering of Israel in which God provided for their needs. The Lord provided manna for Israel the whole time they were in the wilderness, caring for them and bearing them on His wings, but the day they entered Canaan was the day that the manna stopped (Josh. 5:12). The wilderness symbolizes also that this is a time of trial, as Israel was tried by the Lord. It is a time of difficulty, not easiness. Even though all these things are true, the wilderness is designed by God for the good of God's people, even if it does not so appear to us. It is for our nourishment.

War arises in heaven, which retells vv. 1-6 from the heavenly perspective. What we had in vv. 1-6 was what happened on the earth, but now we see what happened in heaven with the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. War breaks loose between Michael the Archangel (Jude 1:9) with the armies of the Lord, and Satan/the Dragon and his horde, wherein the Dragon was defeated. This was a result of Christ's death and resurrection which is celebrated in heaven. Notice also the fact that the attack was waged by Michael and the dragon "fought *back*". Michael attacked first because the Lord Christ accomplished redemption for His saints and for the brethren. As the devil was defeated, he was thrown out of heaven, so that he no longer has a place to come and condemn the people of God. He is called "the accuser of our brothers [who] has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God" (Rev. 12:10). Satan will continue to accuse us, but he is no longer able to accuse us before God. Prior to the atonement of Christ, Satan went to God and accused God of unrighteousness because of letting people into heaven without atonement (although for the saints before the death of Christ, the retroactive blood of Christ was applied to them, although the blood was not yet spilled). Yet as we here see, when Christ accomplishes His work of redemption there no longer remains a point which Satan can raise against God to accuse His people. Redemption has been accomplished and it has been applied for His people. He has made satisfaction for their sins, there is nothing to accuse God for unrighteousness. Satan will continue to accuse us, but we will be foolish to listen to him rather than to the Word of God which declares:

> Rom. 8:34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Notice that here the uselessness of condemnation for God's children is because of Christ's (1) death, (2) resurrection, and (3) ascension to intercede for us. Prior to the cross, Satan kept accusing the brethren before God, but after the cross, he no longer has a point and thus he is thrown out.

Satan is called "the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev. 12:9), but he does not deceive the children of God who are set free from slavery to him (2Tim. 2:26). In this vision, the devil is thrown to the earth, but in Revelation 20 he is bound in the abyss.

The throwing of Satan out of heaven inaugurates the Kingdom of God and the salvation of all kinds of people (John 12:31-32; Matt. 12:24-30). The old ruler of this world is cast out. He is no longer able to keep the nations blind to the light of the gospel, although he does indeed try and he is given power over those whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb (Rev. 13:3-4, 8). After speaking about Satan being thrown out of heaven down to the earth (Rev. 12:), i.e., in having no power and no point to accuse the brethren, heaven declares, "Now the **salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come**, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down" (Rev. 12:10). The coming of the Kingdom of God is connected with the casting out of Satan. In other words, if Satan was not cast or bound, the Kingdom of God would not have come, but since the Kingdom of God is, therefore, Satan is cast out of heaven and is bound as Matthew 12:24-30 teaches. The casting out of demons is connected with the "kingdom of God has come upon you" (v. 28) and the binding of the strong man to plunder his house (v. 29).

The saints conquered the dragon and Satan by not loving their lives even unto death, but by being washed in the blood of the Lamb and loving Christ with love incorruptible. Even though they were conquered and killed by the beast (Rev. 11:7; 13:7), yet they actually conquered the beast by the blood of Christ. Dying for Christ is an honor, and does not count as being conquered. In fact, it counts as conquering since we show the world that we do not value our lives as we value our love for Christ.

As the devil was thrown to the earth, he will now try to pursue the woman, the Church, whom God loves, so as to destroy her (Rev. 12:13; cf. Rev. 12:4). Then, as we saw in Revelation 12:6, as the woman flees to the wilderness, so also here in the second section of chapter 12, the woman is given "the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness" (v. 14), which further strengthens our idea that vv. 1-6 give an earthly perspective, while vv. 7ff give a

heavenly perspective to the effects of Christ's accomplishment of redemption. The time in the wilderness is said to be for nourishment (Rev. 12:6, 14), and for "a time, and times, and half a time" and "1,260 days", which is 3,5 years long. The dragon tries various ways to persecute the people of God (Rev. 12:15-17).

In Revelation 13, the **beast rising out of the sea** (Rev. 13:1) is given authority by God and allowed to conquer the saints (Rev. 13:7). Satan could not lift a finger against God's saints if it was not by His decree. Satan was given the authority to deceive the people of the earth (Rev. 12:9) and to lead them to false religions. But those over whom he was given authority were only the reprobate, and not God's elect. He will not be able to deceive the elect, as it is God who protects His own, Whom Satan cannot withstand.

Concerning the second **beast out of the earth** we also read that "it is allowed" by God to do his deceptions. Satan is not sovereign; God alone is absolutely sovereign. The second beast makes people worship the first beast out of the sea (Rev. 13:12). It looked like a lamb with two horns, and this is how the Lord Jesus is described in chapter 5 as a lamb with seven, not two horns, though. On the outside, this beast seems all nice and peaceful, but he speaks like a dragon. He is a deceiver who will be given power to perform miracles so as to lead people astray to false religion (Rev. 13:13-16). Moreover, the Second Beast gives the earth-dwellers the mark of the beast, which is the mark of ownership. The people of God are sealed on the forehead and that symbolizes their ownership by God (Rev. 7:2-3).

In contrast to the reprobate who had the number of their father, the devil, written on their foreheads or right hands, the children of Zion have the name of Christ and of the Father "written on their foreheads" (Rev. 14:1). They are identified with the same group as in chapter 7. They are said to be "144,000", which is not to be taken literally, but to be seen as 12 x 12 x 1000 = 144,000. The number twelve symbolizes the sons of Israel and the twelve apostles symbolize the New Testament Church (Rev. 21:14), and thousand is the number 10, which is the number of completion and perfection, multiplied three times, which is the number of God. 144,000 is the symbolic complete number of the people of God from the Old and New Testament times. Back in chapter 7, the apostle hears the number 144,000 (Rev. 7:4), but what he sees is "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Rev. 7:9). They are identified with Israel though they are not physical Israel, but are the Israel of God—Jew and Gentile.

The redeemed sing for the Lord His praises for delivering His people from their sins and their enemies. They are said to be virgins in whose mouths no lie was found because they were blameless (Rev. 14:4-5). They were not physically virgins, but spiritually virgin in that they had no other God, but Yahweh. Earlier in the book, sexual immorality was already connected with idolatry (Rev. 2:14, 20). Moreover, being a virgin does not entail that one is holier than a person who is not a virgin. Spiritual virginity is the ideal picture of purity and devotion to God. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:2, "For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ." He obviously does not mean that they were physically virgin.

Then an angel proclaims the eternal gospel to "those who dwell on earth" which is: "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water" (Rev. 14:6-7). The judgment against the wicked is pronounced here and is said to happen very soon. Another angel declares the fall of Babylon the great (Rev. 14:8), which is the city of man and is opposed to the city of God. A third angel comes to declare God's wrath upon all those who had the mark of the beast that they will drink God's wrath and will be tormented day and night (Rev. 14:9-11).

Finally, the consummation comes. As John looks, he sees "seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand" (Rev. 14:14). This is none other than the Lord Christ who is also said to be "one like a son of man" in Revelation 1:13 (cf. Dan. 7:13). It is He who will reap the harvest of the earth. He is described here as having come again, this is the Parousia. Some have difficulty in identifying Christ with the "one like a son of man" here because, this "one like a son of man" gets told what he is to do in v. 15, but the difficulty is removed when we note that the angel "came out of the temple", indicating, that he is coming with a word from God, and not merely a command from himself to the Lord Christ. The word from God is that Christ should "reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe" (Rev. 14:15). This is the time when God says, "now it is enough, no longer will the wheats and the tares coexist." This happens at the end of the age—the end of the world when Christ with His angels reaps the harvest of the earth, when the number of God's elect is complete (Matt. 13:38-40). Christ "reaps" His people to Himself, which is the Rapture—their resurrection and transformation. The wicked, on the other hand, are left on the earth also to be reaped, but then to be thrown in the fire, which was predicted by an angel in Revelation 14:9-11. The wicked are said to be grapes which are ripe (Rev. 14:18) and which will be thrown into "the great winepress of the wrath of God" (Rev. 14:18) to fulfill the words of the angel in Revelation 9-11. This winepress was "trodden outside of the city" (Rev. 14:20), i.e., outside of the New Jerusalem. In Revelation 19:15, Christ the returning King is said to be the one who "will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty." The 1,600 stadia of Revelation 14:20 is around 300 km!

This concludes the fourth cycle. We have already seen three depictions of the Final Judgment in the Apocalypse (Rev. 6:14-17; 11:18; 14:17-20).

Vision 5: Revelation 15-16

We have had the **seven seals** in chapters 6:1-8:5; we have had the **seven trumpets** in chapters 8:6-11:17; and now we have "**seven angels with seven plagues**" (Rev. 15:1). These plagues are said to be "the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished" (Rev. 15:1), which sounds similar to what was said about the seven trumpets (Rev. 10:7). After these plagues are poured out, the wrath of God will be finished and would have been satisfied. Heaven praises God for being the true God and the One who deserves all glory and honor. All nations will come to worship our God, for He is righteous and He is the only King of the nations (Rev. 15:3-4).

The *seven* angels with the *seven* plagues are given *seven* bowls filled with God's wrath (Rev. 15:6-7), through the pouring of which the wrath of God will be finished (Rev. 15:1). As one of the living creatures gives the seven angels the seven golden bowls of wrath, the sanctuary in heaven is filled with smoke, which prevents anyone from approaching ("no one could enter") God, for God is revealing Himself in all His indignation and wrath, and He will not be propitiated. No intercession is possible, for God is set on pouring and finishing His wrath upon the earth through the seven golden bowls given to the seven angels. The Seven Bowls bring the following effects:

1. The First Bowl: harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast (Rev. 16:2).
2. The Second Bowl: the sea became like blood and every creature in the sea died (Rev. 16:3).
3. The Third Bowl: the rivers and springs of water become like blood (Rev. 16:4-7).
4. The Fourth Bowl: the sun scorched people with fire and they cursed God and did not repent (Rev. 16:8-9).
5. The Fifth Bowl: attack upon the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. Those affected cursed God and did not repent (Rev. 16:10-11).
6. The Sixth Bowl: the great day of God the Almighty, Armageddon (Rev. 16:12-16).
7. The Seventh Bowl: "It is done" and great hailstones fell on people from heaven and they kept cursing God (Rev. 16:17-21).

These plagues in comparison to the Seven Trumpets (chapters 8-11) are no longer partial but they are complete and intensified. Of special interest are bowls six and seven.

The **sixth bowl** describes the final clash between the Church and the World. As the sixth angel pours his bowl, by that he makes a way for the World to come against the Church. The Euphrates is dried up so that the wicked multitude may march through the Euphrates to the camp of the saints (Rev. 16:12). Then three demonic spirits, signifying completion; or resembling the unholy trinity (the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet) from whence they come. These demonic spirits will deceive all who are under their control and who have the mark of the beast, in other words, the reprobates. They will assemble "the kings of the whole world… for battle on the great day of God the Almighty" (Rev. 16:14). Interestingly, this sounds very similar to **Revelation 20:7-9**, which describes what will happen after Satan is released. Even though the demonic spirits come out of the enemies of God, yet by God's decree and omnipotence, they must serve His ultimate purpose. They go to deceive the wicked of the earth and gather them for slaughter. The kings and armies of the world will think that they will defeat and destroy the Church, but they do not know that them being gathered is the work of God to destroy them and to vindicate His Church. The place at which the kings of the whole world are gathered is called "Armageddon" or Har-Magedon. The word literally means "Mount Megiddo," but the problem is, *there is no such mountain!* What we have is actually a *valley* of Megiddo. Sam Storms writes, "Megiddo was itself an ancient city and Canaanite stronghold located on a plain in the southwest region of the Valley of Jezreel or Esdraelon… The valley of Megiddo was the strategic site of several (more than 200, according to some estimates) significant battles in history (see Judg. 4:6-16; 5:19; Judg. 7; 1 Sam. 29:1; 31:1-7; 2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chron. 35:22-24). It makes sense that the vicinity would become a *lasting symbol for the cosmic eschatological battle between good and evil*. To put it simply, *Armageddon is prophetic symbolism for the whole world in its collective defeat and judgment by Christ at his second coming*. [emphasis original]"[20] G. K. Beale writes, based on 2 Kings 23:29 and 2 Chronicles 35:22 that "Megiddo became proverbial in Judaism as the place where righteous Israelites were attacked by evil nations."[21] Although this is a place where the righteous are attacked, it will also be a place where God acts to save His people. Therefore, Armageddon is not the literal "Mount Megiddo" which does not exist, nor the small valley of Megiddo.

This is the Last Battle, but it is not the only description in the book of Revelation. Notice the parallelism with Revelation 20:7-10—

Revelation 16 (Cycle 5)	Revelation 20 (Cycle 7)

14 For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the **kings of the whole world**, **to assemble them for battle** [the war, τὸν πόλεμον, *ton polemon*] on the great day of God the Almighty.	8 and will come out to deceive **the nations that are at the four corners of the earth**, Gog and Magog, **to gather them for battle** [the war, τὸν πόλεμον, *ton polemon*]; their number is like the sand of the sea.

What is even more striking is the use of the word "battle" in the Greek. The Greek word πόλεμος (*polemos*, G4171) means "a war, a fight, a battle", basically. But it sometimes also means a dispute or strife, as the word has come to us in the English "polemics." What we have before us in the Apocalypse is a real end-time battle, not a quarrel of words. What is interesting is that the word is used with the definite article in Revelation 16:14, τὸν πόλεμον (*ton polemon*), and therefore it speaks of a definite war or a battle which is to be fought. The word is used in Revelation 9:7, 9; 11:7; 12:7, 17; 13:7 without the definite article and it could be seen from these passages that no definite Last Battle is being described. But the word, with the definite article and in the same form is used three times in the Apocalypse, which indicates that those three times, in contrast to the 6 times when the definite article is absent, a definite and a specific battle is being described. τὸν πόλεμον (*ton polemon*) occurs in Revelation 16:14 (cycle five); 19:19 (cycle six) and 20:8 (cycle seven). Before establishing a definite linguistic connection, I tried to establish a contextual and a parallel connection between the visions of chapters 16 and 20. Therefore, translating 16:14 literally would be: "to bring them together to **the battle** of that great day of God the Almighty" (YLT). Revelation 20:8 would be: "to gather them together to **the battle**". "The battle" is also used in Revelation 19:19 which describes the Final Battle after the Second Coming of Christ. There, the literal translation with the definite article would be something like: "been gathered together to make **the battle** with Him who is sitting upon the horse, and with his army." In all three texts, we have the war/battle with the definite article and we have the idea of armies having been gathered against the Church.

Revelation 16 (Cycle 5)	Revelation 19 (Cycle 6)	Revelation 20 (Cycle 7)
14 For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the **kings of the whole world**, **to assemble them for battle** [the war, τὸν πόλεμον, *ton polemon*] on the great day of God the Almighty.	19 And I saw the beast and the **kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war** [the war, τὸν πόλεμον, *ton polemon*] against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.	8 and will come out to deceive **the nations that are at the four corners of the earth**, Gog and Magog, **to gather them for battle** [the war, τὸν πόλεμον, *ton polemon*]; their number is like the sand of the sea.

I believe that this twofold indication clearly indicates that the same event, from different angles, is being described in these three visions. While there is nothing said about the outcome of this battle in chapter 16, yet chapter 19 plainly records the slaughter which will result for the wicked. Though the implication of the text in chapter 16 is obviously that these wicked kings will be defeated. Now we turn our attention to the last plague.

As the seventh angels pours "out his bowl into the air," the voice of God from the Temple comes, saying, "It is done!" (Rev. 16:17) What is done? I believe the reference is back to Revelation 15:1 where it is said that these seven plagues will "finish" the wrath of God. With the outpouring of the seventh bowl, the wrath of God is finished and poured out upon the wicked. The phrase "it is done" occurs also in Revelation 21:6 with connection to the consummation of all things in the New Heavens and New Earth, therefore, "It is done" is not only a reference to the fulfillment or the finishing of God's wrath upon the wicked, but also a reference to the consummation. The intensity of the "flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake" points to the Final Judgment and a theophany (an appearance of God). Such imagery was used in Exodus 19:16-18; Psalm 77:18; Isaiah 29:6, but the intensity is unique to this passage, "such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake" (Rev. 16:18). As a result of this great earthquake, the great city of man, Babylon, was split into three parts. The cities of the nations over which "the kings of the whole world" (Rev. 16:14) reigned, fell. And finally, God made the great city, Babylon, the persecutor of the saints, "drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath" (Rev. 16:19). In the fourth cycle (Revelation 12-14), the worshipers of the beast and those who had his mark, were given to drink the wrath of God (Rev. 14:9-11, 17-20). Those worshipers of the beast belong to the city of man, Babylon the Great. In v. 20, we read "every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found", we also have a picture of the End of the World. This imagery is parallel to Revelation 16:14; 20:11, which we also argued concerns the Last Judgment and then in v. 20 we have the everlasting judgment of God upon the wicked in which they continue to curse God.

By this, the fifth cycle of visions is also concluded and up till now we had four descriptions of the Last Judgment (Rev. 6:14-17; 11:8; 14:17-20; 16:17-21)

Vision 6: Revelation 17-19

Chapters 17-19 focus on God's "judgment of the great prostitute" (Rev. 17:1), which is Babylon the Great (Rev. 17:5), the fallen and antichristian world system with whom "the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality" and "with the

wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk" (Rev. 17:2). This is the wicked and antichristian world system, which the followers of the beast are part of and are supporters of. Chapter 17 describes the nature of the fallen world system, Babylon the Great. John sees "a woman sitting on a scarlet beast" which was in the wilderness (Rev. 17:3). In this, the unholy trinity (the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet) are trying to mimic the Church, who was nourished in the wilderness by God (Rev. 12:6, 14). But this woman of chapter 17 is not the Church, she is "holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality" (Rev. 17:4). She is for everything which the Church and her Christ stand against. The name of the woman is "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations" (Rev. 17:5). Here we have the antichrist and wicked world system personified in a prostitute (Rev. 17:18), her prostitution and sexual immorality, which is not physical intercourse, but idolatry (cf. Rev. 2:14, 20). She leads the people who are part of her and belong to her, i.e., those who follow the beast and have his mark (Rev. 17:8), to idolatry and to persecute those who bear the testimony of Jesus. The water which she is seated on are the people that are under her influence and control (Rev. 17:15). She is the one guilty and "drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (Rev. 17:6).

Then John says that "ten kings" will receive authority merely for "an hour, together with the beast" (Rev. 17:12), which came out of the bottomless pit (Rev. 17:8) to be destroyed. This beast comes from the same place that Satan was bound in for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1-2, 7), and the same place whence the beast in the third cycle (Rev. 8-11) rises to "make war on them [the Two Witnesses] and conquer them and kill them" (Rev. 11:7). In both the third (Rev. 11:18), as well as the seventh cycle (Rev. 20:9-10), he rises so that he may be destroyed. Although he conquers and kills some of the saints, yet *they* have actually conquered him because they counted the testimony of Christ worthy to die for (Rev. 12:11). He has only destroyed their bodies, but God saves our souls and will give us a new glorified body. These foolish ten kings, symbolizing the complete rebellion of the world system against Christ, will make war on the Lamb by attacking His people, but "the Lamb will conquer them", why? "for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful" (Rev. 17:14). That's my King! They will try to attack the Church, but God, the only Sovereign, will thwart their plans and make them fight against each other (Rev. 17:16-17).

Chapter 18 describes the Fall of Babylon the Great, the world system, which is opposed to God. An angel comes down from heaven calling with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!" (Rev. 18:2). This is the same declaration that was in the fifth cycle (Rev. 14:8), which then brought the Final Judgment (Rev. 14:14-20). Contrary to the seeming beauty of Babylon the Great, the prostitute, at her fall she "has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit" (Rev. 18:2). Her nature is truly revealed at her fall. All the reprobate have become drunk with "the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality" and have followed her footsteps (Rev. 18:3). Then the Lord commands His people to go out of Babylon the Great and to not partake in her sins (Rev. 18:4; Isa. 48:20; 52:11; 2 Cor. 6:17) because her sins are "heaped high as heaven" (Rev. 18:5). This sounds like the judgment which the Lord brought upon Sodom and Gomorrah. He let righteous Lot escape before sending His fire upon the wicked. Although she has lived in splendor and luxury for so long, having a whole multitude of people as her followers, yet "in a single day…she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her" (Rev. 18:8). Her destruction will come in a single day and in a single hour (Rev. 18:8, 10, 17, 19), the same period in which the ten kings and the beast will receive authority (Rev. 17:12). Merchants mourn the fall of the great city, but they do not mourn the fact that she is judged, but that they no longer can buy from or sell to her (Rev. 18:11, 16-17, 19). While the people of the world mourn the fall of their "great city" (Rev. 18:18), the people of God rejoice: "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!" (Rev. 18:20). God is just and He has brought judgment upon the persecutors of the saints. The prayers of the martyred saints in the Intermediate State are now answered (Rev. 6:9-11) because God has brought judgment upon their persecutor (Rev. 17:6; 18:24). A definite judgment is pronounced against the great city of fallen man, Babylon the Great (Rev. 18:21-24).

Revelation 19 takes us to the Last Battle between the City of Man and the City of God. Answering to the word in Revelation 18:20, the great multitude in heaven rejoices because judgment time had come and God "has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants" (Rev. 19:2). Babylon is fallen and her fall is irreversible. God has brought judgment upon His enemies. In Revelation 19:6-9, we have the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Christ the Lord will come to consummate His marriage to His Church, which is His Bride (Rev. 19:7; Eph. 5:25-27). We are already His Bride, as a body, but the marriage has not been consummated yet. The Consummation, i.e., the marriage party, will be at His Second Coming. William Hendriksen explains the Jewish custom concerning marriage:

> We distinguish the following elements in Jewish marriage. First comes the betrothal. This is considered more binding that our 'engagement'. The terms of the marriage are accepted in the presence of witnesses and God's blessing is pronounced upon the union. From this day groom and bride are legally husband and wife (2 Cor. 11:2). Next comes the interval between betrothal and the wedding-feast. During this interval the groom pays the dowry to the father of the bride if this has not yet been done (Gn. 34:12). Sometimes the dowry is in the form of service rendered (Gn. 29:20).
>
> Then comes the procession at the close of the interval. The bride prepares and adorns herself. The groom, arrayed in his best attire and accompanied by his friends, who sing and bear torches, proceed to the home of the betrothed. He receives the bride and conveys her, with a returning procession, to his own home or to the home of his parents (Mt. 19:5; *cf.* also Mt. 25:1 ff.). When the groom had to come from afar, the feast was at times spread at the home of the

bride. Finally there is the wedding-feast, which includes the marriage supper. The usual festivities last seven, or even more, days.[22]

Christ has betrothed us to Himself (2 Cor. 11:2) and has paid the price for His bride, which was His life. But when He comes again, He will then consummate the marriage. He is now preparing Himself and making His Bride beautiful (Eph. 5:25-27). When He comes, He will come to consummate the marriage and celebrate the wedding-feast. At the end of the age, Christ will come with his friends, the angels (Matt. 25:31), to celebrate the marriage-feast and receive His Bride because she is ready (Rev. 19:7).

As Babylon fell and God was praised for His judgment, now God turns His attention to the false prophet and the beast. From heaven comes a rider who is seated on a white horse, symbolizing purity, who is called "Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war" (Rev.19:11). Without question this is "the Lamb [who] will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful" (Rev. 17:14). The description of the Lord Jesus, the Conquering Warrior God, is simply amazing. His judgments are righteous and His war is just. He will fight against the unfaithful and against His enemies, to put them under His feet (1 Cor. 15:23-26). In contrast to the "great red dragon" which had "seven diadems" (Rev. 12:3), the "beast rising out of the sea" which had "ten diadems on its horns", the Lord Jesus has "many diadems" (Rev. 19:12). He is called the Word of God, a title unique to John (John 1:1). His robe is said to be dipped in blood. This blood is the blood of His enemies, whom He will slaughter and it comes from Him treading "the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty" (Rev. 19:15). This is not your average idolatrous picture of Jesus. This Jesus is a mighty Warrior who wages war and conquers, for he is King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16). But he is not alone. He is coming with "the armies of heaven" who likewise ride on white horses (Rev. 19:14; cf. Matt. 25:31; 1 Thess. 3:13).

Then an angel calls to the birds to come to "the great supper of God" (Rev. 19:17). This idea of God calling to animals to feast on the flesh of His enemies and sacrificial language is from the Old Testament (e.g., Jer. 12:9; 46:10; Ezek. 39:17-20). The Lord Jesus will smite the nations with the sword coming out of His mouth (Rev. 19:15). He will smite them with His word, no difficulty is needed in destroying the destroyers of the earth. As the call to the birds goes out to come to feast upon the flesh of men, the beast and the kings of the earth come to wage the Last Battle. In v. 19, as in Revelation 16:14; 20:8, the definite article is used for "war", τὸν πόλεμον (*ton polemon*), which indicates that the reference is to a definite battle. Literally, the passage reads they "gathered to make **the war**." This could also be seen in reflecting on the parallels in these 3 cycles concerning the final war:

Revelation 16 (Cycle 5)	Revelation 19 (Cycle 6)	Revelation 20 (Cycle 7)
14 For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the **kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle** [the war, τὸν πόλεμον, *ton polemon*] on the great day of God the Almighty.	19 And I saw the beast and the **kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war** [the war, τὸν πόλεμον, *ton polemon*] against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.	8 and will come out to deceive **the nations that are at the four corners of the earth**, Gog and Magog, **to gather them for battle** [the war, τὸν πόλεμον, *ton polemon*]; their number is like the sand of the sea.

Clearly, what these passages are describing is what is commonly known as Armageddon (Rev. 16:16), the final clash between Satan and Christ. The war is waged against the Lord and His armies, but they are destined to fail, for the Lamb is a conqueror! The Beast gathers his followers, the kings of the earth (Rev. 17:12) and foolishly tries to conquer the Lamb. In all three cycles in the table above, this idea of the beast gathering the world against the Church is present. The beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire at this time (Rev. 19:20), and the rest, i.e., the kings of the earth and the people, "all men" (Rev. 19:18), "were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh" (Rev. 19:21). The Beast made divine claims, blasphemed the true God and persecuted His people (Rev. 13:1-15). While the False Prophet directed the people worship the (first) Beast and to follow him (Rev. 19:20). This is a description of an exhaustive slaughter of every single enemy of Christ and His Church. The birds of the air are called to feast upon "the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great" (Rev. 19:18), this is clearly the destruction of all the wicked from the earth.

Here again, we have a clear picture of the Final Judgment upon the wicked as in the previous cycles (Rev. 6:14-17; 11:8; 14:17-20; 16:17-21; 19:11-21).

Vision 7: Revelation 20-22

The final vision spans the time from the binding of Satan, Christ's ministry and ascension, to the Final Judgment and Eternal State. It was necessary to know something about the nature of the book of Revelation before diving into an interpretation of Revelation 20, the only text which mentions a Millennium. Let us summarize what we have seen up until now.

When a cycle ends with the Final Judgment, the next cycle does not go chronologically after the Final Judgment but treats the period of the Church Age (which is prior to the Final Judgment). This is clearly the case between chapter 11 (cycle three) and chapter 12 (cycle four). In chapter 11, we have the Resurrection and Final Judgment (Rev. 11:18), while in chapter 12 we begin with the birth of the Male Child, the Lord Christ. We see that we simply cannot read chapters 11 and 12 chronologically, but we must read them cyclically. Chapter 11 ends a cycle and chapter 12 begins another cycle.

We should also not forget the Final Judgment in chapter 6 and the eternal state for the righteous in chapter 7 of the second cycle. It is very strange when we read beyond Revelation 8:6 about the trumpets and how with the blowing of the seventh trumpet the mystery of God would be fulfilled (Rev. 10:7). What we just had in chapter 7 was the Eternal State and happiness of the righteous in the New Heavens and New Earth, so why does John, after that vision, give us more pictures of God's judgment upon the earth? These things obviously cannot be read chronologically.

In chapter 16, we had the outpouring of the seventh bowl, of which it was said that it will finish the wrath of God (Rev. 15:1), and there is a description of the fall of Babylon and Hell for unbelievers. But chapter 18 goes on to describe the nature of Babylon, i.e., the world system and pronounces judgment upon her (chapters 18-19). How many times does God judge Babylon? In chapter 14 (the fourth cycle), there was a pronouncement of judgment against Babylon (Rev. 14:8), which just preceded the harvest of the earth, i.e., the Final Judgment (Rev. 14:14-20). In chapter 16 (the fifth cycle), we have God remembering "Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath" (Rev. 16:19). Well, wasn't Babylon already judged in chapter 14? Why is then God pouring out His wrath upon her in chapter 16? In chapter 18 (the sixth cycle), we also have a detailed judgment of Babylon. Just how many times is Babylon actually judged? Obviously once. These judgments which are described are not temporary, but final and irreversible. The most satisfying solution is that the cycles describe the same event (the Last Battle and Final Judgment) from different angles.

We had a clear picture of the Final Battle and the Last Judgment in chapter 19. The picture of total destruction of the wicked is as clear as and even more exhaustive than Revelation 6:14-17. Having seen that every cycle ends with the Final Judgment and/or Last Battle, what reason do we have to say that what we have in chapter 19 is the Second Coming and Parousia of the Lord Christ, and the Millennium in chapter 20, *follows—chronologically—that* glorious Second Advent? Everything that we have seen thus far shows us that each cycle ends with the Last Battle and/or Last Judgment. Therefore, isn't it reasonable to say that chapter 19 ends a cycle and chapter 20 begins another? Yes, I believe so. Chapter 20 **does not** chronologically follow the Parousia in chapter 19, but starts a new cycle beginning with the Church Age.

Some Objections/Troubles

A common objection against the idea that chapter 20 begins a new chapter by our Premillennial brothers is that Revelation 20:10 says that "the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet **were**". This indicates that the casting of the beast and the false prophet which is described in Revelation 19:20 happened before the Millennium, and before the casting of the devil in 20:10. It sounds like a decent argument except that it has no basis in the original text. The verb "were" in the ESV has no textual basis in the Greek. Literally, the passage reads, "and the devil, the one who deceives them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, **where also the beast and false prophet**, and they shall be tormented day and night forever and ever." There is no verb in the original in connection to the casting (or *time* of casting) of the beast and false prophet. If a verb is to be supplied it seems better to say "where the beast and false prophet *were cast*." This is in harmony with Revelation 19:20 which describes the slaughter of all the wicked and of the beast and false prophet, although it does not mention the devil. But simply not mentioning the devil does not mean that he was not cast with them. With the absence the verb "were" in 20:10, it seems all the more reasonable to conclude that the casting of the devil happens at the same time as that of the beast and false prophet. Most translations supply the word "are" here (e.g., KJV, NKJV, NASB, HCSB, NET), which is consistent with them being thrown at the same time as the devil.

If we see that the Final Battle is clearly described in chapter 19, which results in the destruction of all the wicked, including the beast and the false prophet and then we go to chapter 20 and read of "the war" (τὸν πόλεμον, *ton polemon*) with similar descriptions as in chapter 16 and 19, shouldn't we conclude that this is a description of the *same war* from *different angles*? If the false prophet and beast were thrown into the lake of fire at the end of the war, then Satan was also thrown into the lake of fire, even if the text does not mention it, because the parallel vision tells us so. The Premillennial argument from this passage has no basis in the text, and should, therefore, be discarded.

Also, another trouble is evaded when we understand chapter 20 to be describing a new cycle beginning with the Church Age, namely, the **rebellion toward the end of the Millennium**. I have written about various problems that I find in both forms of Premillennialism, Historical and Dispensational, above, but this is a problem which even some Premillennialists see. After the righteous reign and rule of Christ, when He was reigning in righteousness over (and upon) the earth, Satan will be released and will lead a rebellion against Christ the King. Satan is said to "deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea" (Rev. 20:8). All are agreed that this is the only place that the Apocalypse, much less the whole Bible, speaks about the Millennium. In chapter 19, we saw that the Final Battle came as a result of Christ returning (Rev. 19:11ff). In none of the cycles of Revelation are we given

a description of a temporary period of time after the Second Coming of Christ. After the coming of Christ, comes the Judgment (Rev. 19:11ff; 1 Cor. 15:23-28). Generally, Premillennialists agree that what is described in chapter 19 is the Second Coming and destruction of the wicked. Well, Wouldn't that mean that only the believers enter the Millennium? So the question now arises, whence came the nations which Satan deceived? Whence came Gog and Magog? Whence came this multitude whose "number is like the sand of the sea"? This is not a small rebellion, but an all-out war against Christ by a very large multitude. Is this how the righteous rule of Christ concludes? But where did they come from?

An option is to say that some in the Millennium fell from grace. This option is unbiblical, for the saints of God persevere (**see here**). Others say that this multitude must come from the seed of the believers who entered the Millennium. In other words, in the Millennium, after the Second Coming of Christ, believers will marry and bear children, and toward the end of the Millennium this unbelieving offspring of believers is like "the sand of the sea." This is problematic simply for the fact that Christ said in "the age to come" believers are not given in marriage, in contrast to this present age (Luke 20:34-35). Notice that Luke 20:35 connects the age to come with the resurrection, which Premillennialists believe happens in Revelation 20:4. Therefore, if the believers are raised, so also they are no longer given in marriage and the resurrection is connected with the age to come, contrary to the Premillennial idea.

That which ushers the Age to Come is the Second Coming of Christ at the End of the Present Age (Matt. 13:39-43; Titus 2:12-13; **see above**), which brings the Final Judgment and Eternal State. Basically, the Age to Come with the Second Coming of Christ, which is said to be an age in which there is no marriage. But Premillennialists teach that after the Second Coming of Christ there will be a thousand year earthly kingdom in which three types of people will coexist: 1) glorified believers; 2) believing offspring of believers; and 3) unbelieving offspring of believers, and there will be marriage. The timing of the rebellion is more consistent to happen just *before* the Parousia of Christ than a thousand years after His return.

Another question which we must answer if we insist on reading chapters 19-20 chronologically, is "**whom is Satan exactly deceiving?**" The nations were clearly destroyed by the Parousia of Christ in Revelation 19:11-21, so whom is he kept from deceiving? If we say the believers, then our answer would be wrong, for God protects us and Satan has no hold on us. While the whole world lies in the power of the evil one, and thus belongs to him, yet the apostle John says, "We know that we are from God" and thus are not deceived or under the power of Satan. Satan's imprisonment is keeping the wicked from rebelling against God and His Bride (as we shall **see below**), but how is he deceiving them, if all those who enter the Millennium are believers and that all the wicked were destroyed *prior* to the Millennium in chapter 19? This is another difficulty which the Premillennial view has which insists upon reading chapters 19-20 chronologically. But this is a difficulty which is evaded when we understand that chapter 20 begins a new cycle beginning with the Church Age.

Now that we have given reasons to understand that Revelation 20 begins a new cycle, we will deal with the interpretation of the Millennium from an Amillennial perspective.

Summary Of The Cycles In A Table

This is what we have observed from every cycle. Basically, aside from the first cycle, all the others have definite references to the Final Judgment. If the Final Judgment is described, then obviously the Resurrection has occurred, and in the same way, if the Final Judgment or Resurrection is described, then the Parousia has occurred.

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4	Cycle 5	Cycle 6	Cycle 7
Parousia	-	Rev. 6:16	Rev. 11:17	Rev. 14:14		Rev. 19:11	Rev. 20:9
Rapture	-		Rev. 11:12	Rev. 14:15-16			
Resurrection	-		Rev. 11:18				Rev. 20:13
Judgment	-	Rev. 7:12-17	Rev. 11:18	Rev. 14:17-20	Rev. 16:17-21	Rev. 18; 19:11-21	Rev. 20:11-15
Eternal State	-	Rev. 7:1-17	Rev. 11:15-19			Rev. 19:6-10	Rev. 21:1-5; 22:1-5
Last Battle	-				Rev. 16:12-16	Rev. 19:17-21	Rev. 20:7-10

An Interpretation of Revelation 20

I believe that Revelation 20 is the only basis for Premillennialism. All the prophecies coupled to the Millennium by Premillennialists nowhere mention that their fulfillment will last for a thousand years, but they are all put in the Millennium, although Revelation 20 does not mention the most characteristic aspects of the Millennium as given by Premillennialists. That is troubling to me. Basically, all the things about Israel being restored to the land, Jesus reigning in Jerusalem, the wolf lying with the lamb, the Temple being restored, Levitical worship system, there being peace, believers with glorified bodies co-existing with those who are still in the flesh are actually nowhere to be found in Revelation 20. All these things are put in the Millennium, but the only passage which mentions the Millennium says nothing of these things. Isn't that interesting?

I come to the text of Revelation 20 unashamedly saying that I come with my presuppositions. My simple presupposition is the Analogy of Faith, which is the doctrine that we must compare Scripture with Scripture and the unclear must be interpreted in the light of the clear. I believe that the Bible teaches that at the coming of Christ, all the dead will be raised, all men and angels will be judged, then comes the eternal state. The Second Coming of Christ will bring the end of the world

as we know it. The Parousia of Christ will not start a new epoch or a golden age in this world history. Having the plain teaching of the New Testament in mind, which nowhere mentions a thousand year reign of Christ, I come to Revelation 20. Moreover, I come to Revelation 20 with the Recapitulation view in mind, which I tried to show above. Now that I have stated my presuppositions, let us dive into the text.

> Rev. 20:1-10 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the **key to the bottomless pit and a great chain**. 2 And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and **bound him for a thousand years**, 3 and **threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him**, **so that he might not deceive the nations any longer**, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. 4 Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the **souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God**, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. **They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years**. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. **This is the first resurrection**. 6 Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! **Over such the second death has no power,** but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and **they will reign with him for a thousand years.** 7 And when the **thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison** 8 and **will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle**; their **number is like the sand of the sea**. 9 And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and **surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city**, but **fire came down from heaven and consumed them**, 10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Thousand Years

Throughout the book of Revelation, numbers are used symbolically, especially the number **seven.** We have the seven *spirits* of God (Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6), who is the Holy Spirit in all of His perfections and glory (Isa. 11:2). We have the seven *trumpets* (Rev. 8:2), seven *angels* with seven *plagues* (Rev 15:1), seven *angels* with seven *bowls* (Rev. 17:1), seven *churches* (Rev. 1:3, 11, 20), seven *lampstands* (Rev. 1:12), and so on. This number symbolizes completion and fullness, as the Lord created the whole world in six days and rested on the seventh. He did all His work and He rested in the span of six days, therefore, this number is symbolic for fullness and completion. The number **three** symbolizes God in Trinity. Satan tries to mimic and mock God by his Unholy Trinity—the devil, the beast and the false prophet (Rev. 13). The number **twelve** and its multiples (144,000 = 12 x 12 x 1000) is used to signify the complete number of the people of God (e.g., Rev. 7:4-8; 14:1, 3; 21:12). The number **four** is used to signify the earth with its four winds and season (e.g., Rev. 7:1; 20:8). The number **six** symbolizes fallen man, as man was created on the sixth day. He tries and tries, but fails to achieve rest and completion, which the number seven symbolizes. Each of the numbers used in the book have their symbolic value and are not used merely as numbers. Most interpreters would agree that numbers are used symbolically throughout the book of Revelation, but some insist upon understanding the thousand years as literal ten consecutive centuries.

We believe that the thousand years ought to be interpreted *symbolically,* as is the case for almost every other number in the book. Thousand symbolically stands for a long time, a time, which I believe, is now almost two thousand years long. To us, it may appear that a thousand years is nothing, but to the first-century mind, a thousand years is a very long time, and in this way the thousand years is used in chapter 20. John is not saying that Christ and His saints will reign only for a thousand years, but that they will reign for a very long time. Moreover, we should also not forget that the first-century believers lived with the expectation that Christ would have returned in their lifetime. Therefore, to say to them that Christ will come after a thousand years would have meant that Christ will come back after a very long period, not after a few years as they hoped. Dean Davis makes a few helpful observations upon the significance of the number thousand:

> As to its biblical use, the OT repeatedly employs the number 1000 to convey the idea of magnitude (Gen. 24:60, Ex. 20:6, Deut. 1:11, 32:30, 33:2, Psalm 68:17, Dan. 7:10). The NT follows suit (Heb. 12:22, Jude 1:14, Rev. 5:11). Notably, Revelation 7 equates the 144,000 eschatological Israelites (7:4) with “a great multitude whom no one could count” (7:9). All this invites us to see the thousand years as a symbol of temporal magnitude…As to its mystical meaning, we have discussed this earlier. 1000 = 10x10x10. That is, 1000 is the number of completeness (10) raised to a power of three, the number of the triune God. Therefore, in addition to magnitude, it symbolizes the designated space of time within which the triune God will complete his redemptive purpose; within which he will bring all of his chosen ones into the fold, after which the end shall come (Mt. 24:14). As we have seen, this is the supreme purpose of the Heavenly Reign of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ, and also of the Church Militant: the fulfillment of the Father’s good pleasure in the plan of salvation, which is the heading up of all things in and under his Son through the preaching of the Gospel (Eph. 1:10, 22, Col. 2:10).[23]

Another reason that supports the symbolic interpretation of the number thousand is that Revelation 20-22 forms the seventh

and final cycle of recapitulation in the Apocalypse, which extends from the resurrection to the Parousia.

The Binding Of Satan

> Rev. 20:1-3 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2 And he seized the **dragon**, that **ancient serpent**, who is the **devil** and **Satan**, and **bound him for a thousand years**, 3 and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that **he might not deceive the nations any longer**, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

The Usual Idea

An angel came from heaven to bind Satan, with a chain in the abyss, i.e., the bottomless pit. He is called "the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan". All these titles are synonymous and point to the deceiver of old. He was thrown into the pit and the pit was sealed and shut over him. It is at this point that the Amillennial interpretation becomes difficult to hold to for some. When hearing of the binding of Satan people simply think that this means the total cessation of activity for Satan. "If Satan is really bound, there wouldn't be so much evil around the world." How can we say that Satan is bound with all the undeniable wickedness and Satanic deception and works all over the world? If he is truly bound, then there would be nothing left of his activity on the earth, no? Since we clearly see the fruits of his work around the world, therefore he cannot be bound. He is said to be shut in the bottomless pit with a seal on it. Sounds convincing, right?

A Specific Binding

I am not convinced Revelation 20 teaches the total inactivity and binding of Satan. On the contrary, I believe that Revelation 20 teaches a *partial* binding of Satan. The idea that the binding of Satan will bring a decline in wickedness and apostasy, I simply do not find in Revelation 20. Let us look at the text more carefully:

> Rev. 20:3 and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, **so that he might not deceive the nations any longer**, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

The binding of Satan has a specific purpose which is to fulfill, namely, that his deception of the nations would stop. Nowhere in Revelation do we read that the binding of Satan entails the cessation of *all his activities* or that in result of that evil will decrease. This idea of evil decreasing because of Satan's imprisonment has a lot to do with the "the Devil made me do it" excuse. Most of the time Satan is not even involved in our choices. We have enough to deal with. We have the world and the flesh, which are able to do a great number on us, without the involvement of Satan. That Satan is kept from deceiving the nations entails that the gospel is now able to go throughout the earth (Rev. 6:1-2, the white rider is Christ and the gospel). Prior to the coming of Christ in the flesh, the whole world lay in the deception of the evil one. The only place where the light of God's Word and salvation shone was Israel. The people of God were a geo-political body from (almost exclusively) the nation of Israel. The other nations tried to and were oppressing the people of God, and were going on with their idolatries and the worship of demons (Deut. 32:17; 1 Cor. 10:20-21). But with the coming of Christ, the light of the gospel has come upon all kinds of men, and the Word of God is not limited to the nation of Israel, but will and should go out to all the four corners of the earth. The command of Christ is to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 18:19), not only of the nation of Israel. This, the disciples will be able to do because Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). The Lord Jesus explains that His miracle-working and the coming of the Kingdom of God entails that Satan was bound.

Matthew 12:29

When the Pharisees saw the Lord Christ casting out demons and healing, they accused Him of casting demons out through the prince of demons. In essence, what they're saying is that Jesus is of the devil and the casting out of demons is actually Him casting some of His servants to deceive the people into thinking that He's from God. The Lord Jesus tells these Pharisees that this is the unforgiveable sin (Mark 3:28-30; Matt. 12:31-32) and that would be Satan fighting against himself (Matt. 12:25-26). Rather, the reality is that the Kingdom of God has come. Matthew 12 says:

> Matt. 12:28-30 But if it is by **the Spirit of God** that I cast out demons, then **the kingdom of God has come upon you**. 29 Or how can someone **enter a strong man's house** and plunder his goods, unless he **first binds the strong man**? Then indeed he may **plunder his house**. 30 Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

A few things are to be noted here. **First**, notice how the Lord Jesus connects His miraculous works by the Holy Spirit with the coming of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, this indicates that the Kingdom of God is there where the Spirit is. Since the Spirit

is manifest with the Lord Jesus, this means that the kingdom of God has come upon you. **Second**, the analogy which the Lord Jesus draws to illustrate this point connects the coming of the Kingdom of God with the binding of the strong man. **Third,** the strong man is connected with Satan, whose kingdom Christ came to destroy. That Christ identifies the strong man with Satan is undisputed. Contrary to the accusation of the wicked Pharisees, Jesus is not in league with Satan. Rather, Jesus' miraculous works are Him entering enemy territory. The Pharisees who opposed our Lord were Satan's pawns and they were his children (John 8:44). Christ, who is the "someone" of v. 29, is said to enter the strong man's house, i.e., the world, which is fallen and filled with those who are under Satan's bondage (e.g., Eph. 2:1-3; 2Tim. 2:26). The goal of Christ in entering the strong man's house is to "plunder his goods". Christ recognizes that Satan is an enemy and designates him with "a strong man" so that none may think that Satan is easy to defeat or is powerless, rather, he is quite strong. Therefore, because he is strong, one cannot enter his house and plunder it while he is set loose. Therefore, Christ sees the necessity in *first* binding the strong man, and *then* plundering his house. Plundering his goods and his house entails delivering people from bondage to him, as the direct context of casting out demons indicates. What we, therefore, have in this passage is that Satan was bound from the time of Christ's ministry. Already at the time of Christ's preaching and miraculous ministry, Satan was bound. What is even more interesting is that both in Revelation 20:2 as well as Matthew 12:29 (and Mark 3:27, which is the parallel account) the same word, δέω (*deo*), is used. Christ is triumphing over Satan by spoiling his house and freeing those who were under his control and whom God has chosen (Col. 2:15). Christ sees a necessity in this text that for Him to free people from his bondage and to heal, Satan—the strong man—has to be bound. The parallel account in Luke 11:22 does not mention the binding of Satan, but says that Christ has attacked and overcome Satan (Luke 11:20-22). The binding of Satan entails Christ's attack upon Satan and His victory over him so that Christ is now able to spoil his goods.

John 12:31

> John 12:31-32 Now is the judgment of this world; now will the **ruler of this world be cast out.** 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

The judgment of the world and upon the ruler of this world has come at the time when Christ spoke this word. What was the occasion which caused Him to speak such a strong word? John 12:20-21 tells us that "some Greeks" came and said "we wish to see Jesus." The Lord Jesus connects the declaration of the casting out of Satan and the judgment upon the wicked world, with the coming of Greeks to Him and the voice of the Father spoken to Him (John 12:27-28), which ensures Him that God is dedicated to His glory and He will fulfill His purpose. Jesus being "lifted up from the earth" is connected with him "draw[ing] all people to [Himself]." Jesus uses universal language because His audience are no longer Jews only, but now there are Greeks who are seeking to see and speak with Jesus. In this point, Jesus sees a victory and a judgment upon the ruler of this world because those who are far off are being drawn near. This gives support to our initial thought that with the binding of Satan, the nations of the world may also receive the light of the gospel, and no longer remain under the bondage of Satan. When Christ sees non-Jews coming to seek Him, He directly speaks about the casting out of the devil and the judgment of *this world* (cf. John 16:11). Anthony Hoekema writes on this passage:

> It is interesting to note that the verb translated "cast out" (*ekball*) is derived from the same root as the word used in Revelation 20:3, "and threw (*ball*) him [Satan] into the pit." Even more important, however, is the observation that Satan's being "cast out" is here associated with the fact that not only Jews but men of all nationalities shall be drawn to Christ as he hangs on the cross.[24]

Luke 10:17-20 says:

> Luke 10:17-20 The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the **demons are subject to us** in your name!" 18 And he said to them, "**I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven**. 19 Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over **all the power of the enemy**, and nothing shall hurt you. 20 Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

In this passage, we have the disciples of Christ, not apostles only, after healing and preaching coming back to Christ filled with joy because demons obey them. Demons obey them because they come with the authority of Jesus and on behalf of Jesus. Demons obey Jesus because He has destroyed them and He has bound their master. In the return of the 72 who healed a lot of people and cast out demons, the Lord Jesus sees the effect of their work in Him seeing "Satan fall like lightning from heaven." He sees the crushing blow, which the Kingdom of God dealt to the Kingdom of Darkness through the ministry of the disciples *prior to the resurrection,* how much more after the outpouring of the Spirit?! Christ has given us authority over "all the power of the enemy", and therefore, the disciples of Christ should never fear as they enter the enemy's territory, knowing that Christ is King and in Him, we have authority over the enemy.

The Nature Binding Discerned From His Release

But lest we be understood to mean that everyone without exception will come to salvation because Satan is bound, let us look at the "little while" when Satan is loosed to learn from what He was bound. To learn more about what the nature of the binding is, aside from noting the purpose clause in v. 3, let us look at what happens when Satan is set loose. We read:

> Rev. 20:7-9 And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and **will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth**, Gog and Magog, **to gather them for battle**; their number is like the sand of the sea. 9 And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them,

We see here that the kind of deception which Satan is kept from at the present time of the Millennium is his deception of the wicked to gather them against the Church. In other words, Satan is kept from gathering the world against the Church so as to destroy her. That is what the text identifies the binding of Satan entails. When Satan is loosed, he will make the wicked march against the saints. Therefore, when He is bound, he is *not* able to do that. The effects of his being set loose show us the nature of his binding and as we saw, the teaching about the binding of Satan *in the present* is not restricted to Revelation 20, but is also found elsewhere in the gospels on the lips of Christ. We do not deny that the devil is active in the world (e.g., 1 Pet. 5:8), even blinding and deceiving the reprobates (2 Cor. 4:4). But what we affirm is that the devil is bound from successfully resisting the gospel when God's effectual grace comes and from gathering the world against the Church before the appointed time. The Devil *is* active in the world, but he is also bound. That is not strange, because Revelation 20 teaches a specific binding, not a total inactivity. That the deception of Satan at the end of the age leads to the Last Battle may also be seen from Revelation 16 (the fifth cycle):

> Rev. 16:14 For they are **demonic spirits, performing signs**, who go abroad to the **kings of the whole world**, **to assemble them for battle** on the great day of God the Almighty.

These demonic spirits perform signs so as to deceive the kings of the earth in coming against the Church at Armageddon. Deception is also assumed in the Last Battle described in chapter 19 (the sixth cycle):

> Rev. 19:19-20 And I saw the beast and the **kings of the earth with their armies** **gathered to make war** against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. 20 And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the **signs by which he deceived those who had received** the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.

Here also, the false prophet had deceived those who had the mark of the beast, i.e., the reprobate, into being gathered against the Church of God and His Christ. All these considerations synchronize well with our position that the binding of Satan is not absolute, but partial in that he is not able to successfully withstand the going-forth of the gospel and he is not able to make a worldwide attack against the Church, until he is released for a little while.

Revelation 12 and the Binding of Satan

I believe that there is a parallel concerning the binding of Satan in Revelation 12 told from a very different angle. In Revelation 12, we are told that the devil is thrown to the earth, while in Revelation 20 that he is bound in the abyss.

> Rev. 12:7-10 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels **fighting against the dragon**. And the dragon and his angels fought back, 8 but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 And **the great dragon was thrown down**, that **ancient serpent**, who is called the **devil** and **Satan**, the **deceiver of the whole world**— he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. 10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

In this passage, we see that in response to Christ accomplishing the work of redemption, Michael the Archangel and the hosts of heaven wage war against Satan and his legion, throwing them outside of heaven down to the earth. Then heaven declares that by the throwing of Satan outside of heaven "the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come" (Rev. 12:10). Like Matthew 12:28-29, this passage connects the coming of the Kingdom of God with the binding or casting out of Satan. But obviously, what we have here is not binding, but another kind of metaphor. In this vision, Satan is cast to the earth not bound in the abyss. I believe that both pictures are metaphorical, describing the

effects that the work of Christ has had on Satan and his kingdom. In Revelation 12, Satan is thrown to the earth to show that he is very far from God, who is in Heaven, and before whom Satan used to accuse the brethren. He will no longer appear before the face of God to accuse the brethren, for redemption has been accomplished and the Lamb, who propitiates the wrath of God against the elect, was slain. Satan no longer has any point with which he can accuse the brethren before God. Although Satan tries to destroy the saints, yet what he is actually doing is letting them conquer him by the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11).

The parallels between the two visions are noted by Kim Riddlebarger in the following table:[25]

Revelation 12:7–11	Revelation 20:1–6
(1) heavenly scene (v. 7)	(1) heavenly scene (v. 1)
(2) angelic battle against Satan and his host (vv. 7–8)	(2) presupposed angelic battle with Satan (v. 2)
(3) Satan cast to earth (v. 9)	(3) Satan cast into the abyss (v. 3)
(4) the angels' evil opponent called "the great dragon, . . .that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray" (v. 9)	(4) the angels' evil opponent called "the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan," restrained from "deceiving the nations anymore" (vv. 2–3), to be released later "to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth" (vv. 3, 7–8)
(5) Satan "is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short" (v. 12)	(5) Satan to be "set free for a short time" after his imprisonment (v. 3)
(6) Satan's fall, resulting in the kingdom of Christ and his saints (v. 10)	(6) Satan's fall, resulting in the kingdom of Christ and his saints (v. 4)
(7) the saints' kingship, based not only on the fall of Satan and Christ's victory but also on the saints' faithfulness even to death in holding to "the word of their testimony" (v. 11)	(7) the saints' kingship, based not only on the fall of Satan but also on their faithfulness even to death because of their "testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God" (v. 4)

Both passages teach a restriction in Satan's power. With so many parallels do we simply say that this is coincidental or the Holy Spirit did not want to show us a connection? In Revelation 12, he is thrown down to the earth, away from the presence of God, so that he is no longer able to accuse the brethren before Him. While in Revelation 20, he is bound and kept from deceiving the nations and to gather them against Christ and His Church. The period in the fourth cycle is said to be 1,260 days (Rev. 12:6; cf. Rev. 11:3 [third cycle]), 42 months (Rev. 11:2; 13:5), and 3,5 years (Rev. 12:14). These three periods symbolize the same time as the thousand years in Revelation 20. I know this sounds strange, but hear me out.

In Revelation 12, the period in which Satan is no longer able to accuse the brethren before God and in which the Church is nourished is 3,5 years basically. The Church finds herself in the wilderness, in a place of hardship, temptation, but also dependence upon God (Rev. 12:6; 14). This period is also the same in which the beast is given authority to persecute (Rev. 13:5). Therefore, this period had both the good parts (being nourished by God, proclaiming the gospel), and the less good parts (being in the wilderness, being persecuted). On the other hand, the period of Satan's imprisonment and restriction of activity in Revelation 20 is said to be a thousand years. A thousand years is a very long time, but let us notice also how the Millennium is described. It is a time when Satan is not able to deceive the nations, i.e., Christians will be successful in Evangelism and Satan will not make a worldwide attack against the Church. It is also a time when Christians rule with the Risen Lord. It is a time of plunder of Satan's house and a time of victory, therefore, the Millennium, from this angle, is seen as a long time. While on the other hand, in Revelation 12, it is seen as a short period of 3,5 years because of the wilderness and persecution. Both these visions describe the same period, but from different angles. If they were to describe the binding or casting off of Satan in the same words then that would merely be repetition. But what we have here is a revelation of more aspects about the restrictions which the Kingdom of Christ placed upon Satan and his horde.

The Present Reign Of Believers With Christ

> Rev. 20:4 Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also **I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded** for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and **those who had not worshiped the beast** or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. **They came to life** and **reigned with Christ for a thousand years**.

In this verse, Premillennialists believe that we have Christ reigning with the saints for a thousand years on the earth. We believe that we have here is the present reign of believers with Christ in the Intermediate State, i.e., in Heaven. There are several considerations which lead us to this view.

Thrones

John saw thrones on whom people were seated who were authorized to judge. It is interesting to note that every reference to

thrones in the Apocalypse is never to a throne *on this fallen earth*. The word is used 37 times and without exception, it does not refer to a physical throne on this earth:

- The throne of God in heaven (Rev. 1:4; 3:21; Rev. 4:2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10; 5:1, 6, 7, 11, 13; 6:16; 8:3; 12:5; 14:3; 16:17; 19:4-5);
- The throne of God on the New Earth (Rev. 7:9, 10, 11, 15, 17; 21:3, 5; 22:1, 3);
- The throne of Christ in Heaven (Rev. 3:21);
- The throne of Judgment (Rev. 20:11, 12);
- The thrones of the twenty-four elders in Heaven (Rev. 4:4; 11:16);
- Satan's throne in Pergamum (Rev. 2:13);
- The throne of Satan (Rev. 13:2; 16:10);
- *Questionable:* the thrones of the saints (Rev. 20:4).

Even the throne of Satan in Pergamum is a spiritual reference to the rampant idolatry of the city through which she has become the place where Satan reigns, but there was no physical throne on which Satan sat on the earth. This becomes all the more interesting when Premillennialists declare that the saints will reign with Christ *on this earth.* Let us be honest, nothing in the text says anything about the thrones being on the earth. Couple to that the fact that the word is never used in reference to a physical throne on this earth. Therefore, if John wanted to communicate the idea that the saints will reign on the earth, then it would have been necessary, seeing that the word is uniformly used in reference to spiritual thrones, thrones in Heaven, or the throne of God on the New Earth, that he would specify that these thrones were on the earth! The "literal" reading of the passage says nothing about the location of these thrones being on the earth. Rather, consistent with the use of the word in the Apocalypse, these thrones are in the heavenly realms. In the Millennium, we have the fulfillment of Paul's words to the believers:

> 2Tim. 2:11-12 The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, **we will also reign with him**; if we deny him, he also will deny us;

After enduring persecution and hardship, and maybe even dying for the sake of Christ, we will reign with Him who has power and authority over all the world (e.g., Matt. 28:18). Paul also says that we are seated with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). This present reign in Heaven is also in fulfillment of His promise in Revelation 2:26-27 and 3:21. The following portion is from a commentary/thoughts on the Revelation which I was working on.

Revelation 2:26-27

> The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him **I will give authority over the nations**, 27 and he will **rule them with a rod of iron,** as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.

This is a great promise to believers, it is pure grace which grants us such a promise. But what does it mean? When does its fulfillment take place? The Church at Laodicea receives a similar promise:

> Rev. 3:21 The one who conquers, **I will grant him to sit with me on my throne,** as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

We are told that we will reign in the New Heavens and the New Earth:

> Rev. 22:5 And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and **they will reign forever and ever.**

Believers are said to be reigning in the Millennium:

> Rev. 20:4 Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the **authority to judge was committed.** Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had

not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and **reigned with Christ for a thousand years.**

Psalm 2

I believe that one cannot understand what this verse is trying to communicate unless one understands what Psalm 2 says about the Messianic Kingdom. One cannot ignore the significance of the allusions that Revelation 2:26-27 makes to Psalm 2. One must understand *when* the Messianic reign takes place in order to interpret the fulfillment of this passage rightly. I believe that the reign of King Jesus is right now going on in Heaven. The Lord Jesus is the King upon David's throne now, not a future 1000 year earthly kingdom (cf. Rev. 1:5). I believe that the NT points to the fulfillment of Psalm 2 and the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom in the time of Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. When the Christians were persecuted for Christ's sake, they gathered together and prayed:

Acts 4:23-28 When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, 25 who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? 26 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the **rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed**'—27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

This portion quotes **Psalm 2:1-2** and places its fulfillment in the crucifixion of our Lord when the nations (Jews and Romans) raged against the Lord Jesus and crucified the Lord of glory. They plotted in vain as what they did was beforehand ordained for the glory of God. The Lord Jesus is reigning from the heavenly Jerusalem and Zion right now, and He will finally reign in the New Jerusalem – the New Heavens and New Earth:

Heb. 12:22 But you have come to **Mount Zion** and to the city of the living God, the **heavenly Jerusalem**, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,

In **Psalm 2:7**, this promise is given to the Davidic king:

Ps. 2:7 I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "**You are my Son**; today I have begotten you.

This promise, sometimes with some variation, is many times applied to the Lord Jesus throughout the New Testament the first time at His baptism:

Matt. 3:16-17 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "**This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased**."

See also Matt. 17:5; Act 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5

The Son is the unique Son of the Father. It is then significant that the Lord Jesus identifies Himself to the church in Sardis as the Son of God. First because of their association with Apollo (who was a son of Zeus), and second because the promise given to the Son of God is also extended to them. They will share in His kingly reign from Heaven. In **Psalm 2:8-12**, the peoples are warned to follow the Son, trust and believe in Him, if they don't want to come under His wrath and displeasure. The Lord Jesus is receiving the reward for His suffering. Indeed, all that the Father has given Him, He will save (John 6:37-40). He has ransomed and bought for God people from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev. 5:9). He will receive the reward of His suffering. He will destroy all His enemies, including Death at His coming (1 Cor. 15:24-28), but even now He reigns upon the throne of David as the only Supreme and as the "the ruler of kings on earth" (Rev. 1:5). Things may appear from the outside to be against Him, but He is the only Sovereign and King of this world, even in its fallen state.

The amazing thing is that we are granted to share in Christ's heavenly reign. All those who depart to be with Him are given this amazing promise to share in His heavenly reign. This promise is important in our understanding of the Millennial reign in Revelation 20:4. What drives me to this conclusion is that the NT points to the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom of

Psalm 2 in the present age, not in some future Millennium. But the present age is an age in which He will rule in the midst of His enemies until He has destroyed them all (Psalm 110:1-2; 1 Cor. 15:23-28). It's not a golden age. Thus, the reign that we are promised here is not in some future Millennium, but it is the reign going on now in Heaven, in which departed believers are granted to reign alongside Christ. This is seen from "**even as I myself have received authority from my Father.**" We have identified or at least I have tried to make a case, for the present kingly reign of Christ and that reign, refers to His spiritual reign from Heaven in the present age.

This is also consistent with the promise given in Revelation 3:21 to the Laodicean Church:

> Rev. 3:21 The one who conquers, I will grant him to **sit with me on my throne**, **as I also conquered and sat down** with my Father on his throne.

"…**as** I also conquered and sat down": this refers to His death and resurrection, not to a future Millennium. When Christ ascended to Heaven, He received the Kingdom promised to Him in Daniel 7:13-14 and sat upon the throne of Majesty. This happened when He ascended, and not some future Millennium. The enthronement is already past. Thus, those who conqueror are promised to rule with Him in the present age from Heaven. The Lord tells His beloved, those are–all those who conquer–that they will share in His reign, even as, just like He did after He ascended on high, not in an earthly Millennium, but in Heaven upon the throne of God. This promise is given to all believers. In both of these passages (Rev. 2:27; 3:21), note the "as I" which indicates that Christians will share in the present reign of Christ, not a future reign on the earth, just like He directly after His ascension sat upon His throne.

Rejoice, O saints for your great Savior and God has granted you this privilege to share in His heavenly reign! Praise Him, all you His people whom He loves!

Souls

Another argument to the fact that what we have in v. 4 is the present reign of believers in Heaven is the way in which they are described. John saw "the **souls** of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and the word of God…" He does not see them in their bodies, but in their souls, and he makes that clear by using the word "soul" and by describing them as those "who had been beheaded". The word ψυχή (*psuché*, G5590) is used 7 times in the book of Revelation and none of its references necessitate that we understand them as referring to something physical (Rev. 6:9; 8:9; 12:11; 16:3; 18:13, 14; 20:4). This point becomes stronger when we look to the parallel below to this vision.

Revelation 6:9-11 and the Present Reign of Believers

The vision in Revelation 20:4-6 has its parallel in the vision of the martyred saints in Revelation 6:9-11 with the breaking of the fifth seal, before the sixth seal which brings the Second Coming and the Final Judgment (Rev. 6:12-17).

Revelation 6	Revelation 20
When he opened the fifth seal,	
	Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed.
I saw under the altar the souls	Also I saw the souls
of those who had been slain	of those who had been beheaded
	for the testimony of Jesus and
for the word of God	for the word of God,
and for the witness they had borne.	(for the testimony of Jesus)
	and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

So many parallels. Are they merely coincidental, just like the ones in Revelation 12:7-11 and 20:1-3? Obviously not. The wording is very similar and the ideas are likewise related. That Revelation 6 describes the Intermediate State is not disputed, therefore, since the wording is very similar, Revelation 20:4 likewise concerns the Intermediate State. Since we see the use of the word "soul" in Revelation 6:9 to mean disembodied believers, seeing those many parallels, we must supply the same meaning in Revelation 20:4. Revelation 6 gives the picture of the martyred saints who cry out to God for vengeance against their enemies (Rev. 6:10-11), while Revelation 20 shows that they are reigning together with Christ. These are different pictures, but not contradictory ones. In one sense, the saints want the Lord to come and bring vengeance upon their enemies, in another, they are resting as they are reining with Christ from Heaven.

Who Is Reigning?

Revelation 20:4 speaks about two groups: 1) "those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God"; and 2) "those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands." The first group are those who have died for the cause of Christ in any way, and the second group are simply Christians who are not martyrs. At any rate, both of them reign together with Christ. The promise to reign is to all conquerors (Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21), not merely to those who die for the Lord. Everyone in Christ conquers (Rom. 8:37; 1John 5:4).

The First Resurrection

> Rev. 20:4-6 ...**They came to life** and **reigned with Christ for a thousand years**. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. **This is the first resurrection**. 6 Blessed and holy is the one who **shares in the first resurrection**! Over such the **second death has no power**, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

The greatest difficulty in the Amillennial interpretation is its understanding of what the first resurrection actually is. The views generally are:

1. The saints' share in the resurrection of Christ (Sam Waldron);
2. Regeneration (Kim Riddlebarger, pp. 247-249, though he mixes views 2 and 3);
3. Entering Heaven (Herman Hoeksema; Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and The Future*, pp. 232-237; William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, pp. 191-192; G. K. Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, pp. 438-445; Dean Davis, *The High King of Heaven*, pp. 478-482; Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come*, pp. 451-466; Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case For Amillennialism*, pp. 242-249; David J. Engelsma; me).

Entrance To Heaven

I believe that the believer's entrance to Heaven constitutes the first resurrection. Before going into other considerations, let us simply note what we have already learned from v. 4. We have argued that the reign of believers is in the present and is in Heaven, in a disembodied state. Therefore, it would seem natural if we understand the "first resurrection" to be a reference to the believers' entrance into Heaven to reign with Christ. The believers come to life in the presence of God after they physically die and this constitutes a resurrection. Notice that this is the only mention of the resurrection in the book of Revelation, therefore, its meaning depends all the more upon the context. We also note that when the word "resurrection" is used by the apostle John in his Gospel, the context makes clear that he is speaking about the resurrection of *the body* (John 5:29; 11:24, 25). We have already argued that the scene in v. 4 takes place in Heaven with the *souls* of disembodied believers, not in their *physical* bodies. The issue here is actually determining where the thrones are located. We argued that they are in Heaven, in the presence of God. The present reign of believers is that of which it is said: "**This is** the first resurrection." The specific coming to life and reigning with Christ for a thousand years is defined as the first resurrection. Since I am no expert in Greek, the arguments concerning the tenses and other things are difficult for me in connection with the first resurrection, I admit. That's why I'm trying to shift the focus from the language being central, to the context being central in our understanding of this "first resurrection." The language is absolutely important, but since I am no expert, I don't simply want to quote things without thoroughly understanding them.

This is the only place where we read of a "first resurrection". Many other places simply teach a bodily resurrection of all humans from the dead (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). As I've stated at the beginning of the section on Revelation, I come with my presuppositions, which were: 1) I have the clear teaching of the New Testament in the forefront of my mind when I'm trying to understand the Apocalypse; 2) I have to interpret the unclear in light of the clear. In the teaching of Scripture, I find there to be taught a singular, general resurrection of all the dead—just and unjust. Moreover, these Scriptures teach that this resurrection takes place at the Parousia of Christ, after the Millennium, not before (**see here**). Therefore, when I find a clearly symbolical book (Rev. 1:1 KJV "signified it", **see above**), with its only mention of the resurrection speak of "the first resurrection", I can't simply assume that it is speaking of the resurrection of the *body.* It must be admitted that the "literal" reading of Revelation 20:4-6 nowhere finds a bodily resurrection, except if it is assumed to be the only definition of the word "resurrection." We have argued that v. 4 teaches the present reign of the disembodied believers from Heaven with Christ, and therefore, since this reign is called "the first resurrection", this must mean that the first resurrection is *not bodily.*

The Rest of the Dead

The believers came to life in *Heaven* and reigned with King Jesus from *Heaven.* On the other hand, the "rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended" (v. 5). The wicked will only come to life, i.e., come into the presence of God, when they are raised and when they are made to appear before God in judgment time. While contending for the

understanding of the first resurrection and of the coming to life as a bodily resurrection from the dead, the Premillennialist accuses the Amillennialists of interpreting two words in two verses very differently. They argue, with the words of Henry Alford:

> If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned, where certain ψυχαὶ ἔζησαν at the first, and the rest of the νεκροὶ ἔζησαν only at the end of a specified period after that 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 any thing. 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, then 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).[26]

This is a good, general hermeneutical principle, but the question that must be asked is: Does it apply universally? Clearly, it does not. Almost all Amillennialists have appealed to John 5:26-29 against "Alford's Dictum." There, although the word "resurrection" is not used, the implication is clearly that of a spiritual resurrection in the present time and then a bodily resurrection at "the hour" of resurrection. We see that the idea of resurrection is used multiple ways in the spaces of a few verses. G. K. Beale appeals to Romans 6:4-11 in which Paul speaks both of spiritual resurrection of believers and their union with their Lord in His physical death and resurrection. I'll quote Beale on vv. 10-11:

> Then Paul says, "the life that He [Jesus] lives [*zao*], He lives [*zao*] to God" (v. 10); "…even so consider yourselves…to be alive [*zao*] to God in Christ Jesus" (v. 11). Paul takes words like "death," "life" (*zoe, syzao*) and "resurrection" (*anastasis*) (the latter two words found in Rev. 20:4-6) and mixes two different senses of them in one passage: spiritual (pertaining to our present spiritual resurrection life in Christ), and physical, referring to Christ's resurrection (though *anastasis* is not explicitly used in a spiritual sense, it is clearly synonymous with *syzao* and *zoe*).[27]

Sam Storms cites the following passages against Alford's Dictum, 'John 2:18-22; 11:25-26; Matthew 8:22; Luke 9:24; John 6:49-50; and possibly 1 Peter 3:1; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 9:6; 2 Corinthians 5:21. Amillennialists have almost uniformly appealed to John 5:25-29 as a clear exception to Alford's dictum. Here a "spiritual" and a "physical" resurrection are spoken of in the same context.'[28]

Revelation 20:5 reads, "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection." The first sentence is of a parenthetical nature. The focus is upon the believing and their present reign with the Lord Christ. With the addition of this parenthetical sentence, John is indicating the thing which the unbelieving dead are not experiencing. Yet the passage says that the wicked "did not come to life until the thousand years were ended." Does that imply that they will come to life? Well, for Premillennialists who contend for the understanding of "coming to life" in both v. 4 as well as v. 5 meaning bodily resurrection, they do not take v. 5 in a "literal" sense. What am I saying? Notice that v. 5 describes what the first resurrection is with the words "**This is** the first resurrection."

Let us assume the Premillennial line of argumentation for a moment: The first resurrection is bodily and it is the believer's reign with Christ on the earth, and in this, the unbelieving dead did not share. The coming to life and reining is described as the first resurrection. Two things are included in the definition of "the first resurrection", both the coming to life, which Premillennialists believe is a physical resurrection, and reining with Christ. But there is a problem. If a "literal" reading should be followed and "they came to life" *consistently* interpreted in the same way in both v. 4 as well as v. 5, we would have a problem. What is exactly the problem? The problem is that v. 5 says that the unbelieving dead did not come to life "until" the thousand years were ended. Well, since the coming to life included reining with Christ and was called the "first resurrection" does that mean that the "rest of the dead will come to life" and reign with Christ after the Millennium? No Premillennialist says such a thing, and therefore they are not closely following Alford's Dictum. They insist that the first resurrection is a physical resurrection, but the first resurrection is explicitly defined as the saints' coming to life and reigning with Christ, yet they will not say that the wicked will come to life and reign with Christ after the Millennium. They are not being "literalists" or "straightforward" with the text.

That is a smaller problem for us Amillennialists as well, but the question must be answered: Does *until* imply a change of condition at its termination? Anthony Hoekema writes:

> The Greek word here translated "until," *achri*, means that what is said here holds true during the entire length of the thousand-year period. The use of the word *until* does not imply that these unbelieving dead will live and reign with Christ after this period has ended. If this were the case, we would have expected a clear statement to this effect. Note that we find the expression "until the thousand years were ended" also in verse 3 of this chapter. There, however, the

expression is followed by a clear statement indicating that something different will happen after the end of the thousand years: “After this he [the devil, whose binding has just been described] must be loosed for a little while.” In verse 5, however, the words “until the thousand years were ended” are not followed by another statement indicating that these dead will live or come to life after the thousand years are over.[29]

In a footnote, he gives the following examples:

On the use *of achri* as indicating a condition which prevails up to a certain point without implying that a different state of affairs will ensue after that point has been reached, note the following passages: Matthew 24:38 (the people of Noah’s day did not immediately stop eating and drinking after Noah had entered the ark), Acts 23:1 (Paul did not stop living before God in all good conscience after this day), Acts 26:22, Romans 5:13a (sin did not cease being in the world after the law was given), Romans 8:22 (the creation did not stop groaning in travail after the point to which Paul here refers), I Corinthians 4:11, Revelation 2:26.[30]

While we have a clear statement to the effect that the condition of Satan changed (i.e., he was set loose), there is no such thing to indicate that the wicked will share a first resurrection like the saints’. Even if we would take “until” to indicate a change after the Millennium, the prevalent teaching of Scripture would tell us that this concerns their bodily resurrection and appearance before the throne of Christ. But this, the Scriptures do not often call life, because it is an “existence” of torment and misery. But the better option is to take what is explicitly mentioned and that is, that the wicked do not share in the first resurrection and that they are subjects to the second death.

Luke 20:37-38

Although we admit that referring to the believer’s entrance to the Intermediate State in Scripture is not explicitly said to be a resurrection, we believe that a consistent reading of Revelation 20:4-6, in light of the rest of Scripture and its context, leads us to conclude that it is not a physical resurrection, but a spiritual resurrection. There is an example in Holy Writ where the Intermediate State is spoken of in terms of resurrection.

The Sadducees in our Lord’s time did not only reject the resurrection of the dead, but they rejected any existence of the soul after physical death (see Matt. 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8)[31]. Moreover, they accepted only the Pentateuch as authoritative and they contended that they did not find anything about the resurrection from the dead there. So they came with an exaggerated example to our Lord to trap Him about the resurrection. But how could they trap Him Whose Spirit inspired Holy Writ? They told Him about a hypothetical situation in which a woman is married and becomes a widow seven times, which they probably had used often to combat the Pharisees, saying, “In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife” (Luke 20:33). Our Lord teaches that in the resurrection and in the age to come, there is no marriage and being given in marriage, therefore there will not be husband and wife in Heaven (Luke 20:34-36). Then comes the text which we want to discuss:

Luke 20:37-38 But that **the dead are raised**, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the **God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob**. 38 Now **he is not God of the dead**, but of the living, for **all live to him**.”

To prove the resurrection of the dead, the Lord Jesus went to the Intermediate State. No doubt, the Patriarchs were in Heaven with God at the time of Moses. Basically, our Lord’s argument is: Since God is not the God of the dead; since He is called in the present (“I am”, Ex. 3:6; Matt. 22:32; Mark 12:26) the God of the Patriarchs; therefore, this must mean that they are living and their life in the Intermediate State proves the resurrection of the dead. The argument of our Lord is ingenious and compelling, so much so that the Sadducees no longer dare to ask Him anything (Luke 20:39-40). By using Exodus 3:6, He did not only refute their denial of the resurrection of the dead, but also their denial of the Intermediate State for the believers. What is even more, the Lord uses a passage that speaks about the Intermediate State to indicate that there will be a resurrection of the body, which the Sadducees denied. Our Lord argues from the Intermediate existence of the saints that the resurrection of the body will follow. Albert Barnes writes, ‘This passage does not prove directly that the dead “body” would be raised, but only by consequence. It proves that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had an existence then, or that their souls were alive.’[2] To prove the resurrection of the dead, our Lord’s appeal is not to some passage about the resurrection of the body (e.g., Dan. 12:2; Isa. 26:19; Job 19:26), but to the Intermediate State. Therefore, we see that our Lord sees the existence of believers in the Intermediate State as a resurrection, a resurrection of the *soul.* In this passage, we have a biblical precedence to understand the existence of the saints in the Intermediate State as a resurrection, though not of the body, but of the soul.

First And Second

Another important point to note concerning our understanding of the First Resurrection has to do with the ordinal "first", which anticipates a "second" and also the "second" death, which anticipates a "first" death. Therefore, to understand what the First Resurrection is, we must understand how these ordinals are used in Revelation. Are they communicating sequence or something else?

It is the position of Premillennialists that the "first" in the "first resurrection" indicates a sequence, and thus, there would be a second resurrection. The (leaky) Dispensational Premillennialists John MacArthur says, "The second kind of resurrection, then, will be the resurrection of the unconverted who will receive their final bodies suited for torment in hell."[32] He takes the second resurrection to sequentially follow the first resurrection (though a thousand years later), but to also be of a different nature suited for the wicked, i.e., non-glorified bodies. This Premillennial doctrine of multiple resurrections we deny and have sought to refute, and provide a positive case for a singular general resurrection (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; **see here**). The Lord Jesus speaks of "an hour" or "the hour" in which both the good and the evil are raised together, not separated by a thousand years (John 5:28-29). To say that the First Resurrection is physical is to teach multiple resurrections, whereas the Bible teaches "**a resurrection** of both the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:15). The straightforward and unambiguous teaching of Scripture is that of a singular general resurrection. Therefore, I do not come to Revelation 20, which is clearly symbolical, and overthrow all that I have learned about a singular general resurrection of all the dead in the non-symbolical and straightforward teaching of the Bible. I am open with my presuppositions and I am not ashamed to say that. The Book of Revelation has to be interpreted in light of the clear teaching of the *rest* of Scripture. As you have noticed, in trying to make a case for the Amillennial position, I left the treatment of Revelation 20 to the end. First, we looked at the straightforward and non-symbolical teaching of the Bible on the matter of eschatology, and then, in light of that, we came to the Apocalypse.

Dr. Poythress notes that "The language of the first resurrection obviously implies that there is a second. In this context, the first and second resurrections have a suggestive relation to the first and second death."[33] Therefore, to understand the nature of the First Resurrection we must inquire into the meaning of the Second Death. Just so that we make this clear, Revelation is the only place that speaks of a "second" death and of a "first" resurrection. The Second Death is mentioned four times in the Apocalypse (Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8) and in Revelation 21:8 it is clearly identified with the lake of fire, the place unbelievers go after the resurrection and judgment, or what is also called Hell. The Second Death is eternal death, after the resurrection, in the Eternal State in the lake of fire. From this the believers are safe (Rev. 2:11; 20:6). Their regeneration, as well as their entrance into Heaven, guards them against the Second Death, which is *spiritual* and everlasting death in the lake of fire. Well, since the Second Death has to do with eternal spiritual death in the lake of fire, we must assume that the *First* Death is *physical* death which sends unbelievers to Hades, and I don't think people will object to that. Since the Second Death has to do with everlasting death (not annihilation) of the wicked in the Eternal State, the First Death has to do with their temporary bodily death at the present time. If this is so then the First Resurrection synchronizes with the First Death, which we said is physical death. There is not a word in Revelation about believers being safe from the First Death. Both unbelievers and believers share in the First Death, but the results are radically different. While the believers reign with Christ in Heaven for a thousand years, the unbelieving dead stay dead, i.e., they do not experience any kind of spiritual resurrection. This gives us more reason to believe that the First Resurrection takes place on this side of eternity prior to the consummation of all things and the Eternal State.

It will be helpful for us to look at how the word πρωτος (*protos,* G4413), which simply means "first," is used in the Apocalypse. We believe that the word, when compared with a "second" or "new" is used in way of contrast as well as to indicate quality, and not sequence. This becomes clear in the very next chapter, which introduces the Eternal State. Dr. Beale writes that 'This contrast between physical or corruptible realities and incorruptible, eternal realities run through chs. 20 and 21. The qualitative distinction between the two resurrections is also suggested by the qualitative antithesis between the "first" (old) creation and second ("new") creation in 21:1, where the former was pre-consummate or temporary, while the latter is consummate and eternal.'[34] Therefore, let us take a look at the passage.

> Rev. 21:1, 4 Then I saw **a new** [καινὸν, *kainon*] heaven and **a new** [καινήν, *kainēn*] earth, for **the first** [πρῶτος, *prōtos*] heaven and **the first** [πρώτη, *prōtē*] earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for **the former** [πρῶτα, *prōta*] things have passed away."

Here the apostle sees the New World to Come and calls it "new", because "the first" world had passed away. Suffering and the old world have become "former" and "first" things, with the coming of the New World. He equates "the first" with the present world, with things destined to perish and pass away, while "the new" is that which is unshakable and everlasting. If we go back to our discussion on the first/second resurrection and the first/second death, then the first resurrection belongs to this world and will pass away, on the other hand, the implied *second* resurrection is that which belongs to "the new"

world. The second resurrection may be called “the *new* resurrection” which belongs to the Eternal State. Therefore, the word “first” when compared with “second” or “new,” is not used to indicate sequence, but *quality.*

The “first things” are destined to perish and pass away, while the “new” things and “second” things are everlasting and belong to the Eternal State after the Judgment. In Revelation 21, the alternative for the word “new” is “second,” which is used to refer to the eternal judgment of the wicked as the “second death” (Rev. 21:8). Their eternal death belongs to the order of the new and everlasting things, and not to the order of the former world. The apostle also describes the holy city, which descends from Heaven to earth as the “*new* Jerusalem” (Rev. 21:2) and that God is “making all things *new*” (Rev. 21:5). Meredith G. Kline writes:

> Thus “second” as well as “new” serves as the antithesis of “first.” Whatever accounts for the preference for “first” over “old” in describing the present world, the use of “first” naturally led to the use of “second” alongside of “new” for the future world, particularly for the future reality of eternal death for which the term “new” with its positive redemptive overtones would be inappropriate…The arbitrariness of the customary premillennial insistence that “the first resurrection” must be a bodily rising from the grave if the second resurrection is such is exposed by the inconsistent recognition by premillennial exegesis that, although the first death is the loss of physical life, “the second death” is death of a different kind, death in a metaphorical rather than literal, physical sense.[35]

The Premillennial understanding of the First Resurrection being the first in a *sequence* of multiple physical resurrections is therefore *invalid.* It ignores the way that the very context of the passage speaks about the “first” and “new” things and how these things are to be understood. They think that the “first resurrection”, which they believe is physical, necessitates a second physical resurrection of a different group. We believe that they introduce a new teaching to the Bible, from a highly symbolical book, about multiple resurrections and not just a singular, general resurrection the end of the age of all the dead as the same author teaches (John 5:28-29).

Dr. Kline gives two example outside of the Apocalypse in which *protos* is used to indicate quality and not merely sequence. In Hebrews, we read about the New and Old Covenants. In **Hebrews 8:13**, the Author clearly draws that contrast between the Old Covenant, which is passing away and the New, which is eternal (cf. Heb. 13:20). **Hebrews 8:7, 13** equates the first covenant with the “old” which is passing away, but Hebrews 8:8 contrasts the New against the First. Also, note the equation of the Old Covenant with “the first” and the New Covenant with “the second” in Hebrews 10:9. In these passages, the stress is not upon succession or sequential order of the New Covenant but upon the faultiness of the Old Covenant, and the everlasting and perfect nature of the New. The main point in these comparisons of the “old,” “first” vs the “new” is that of *quality*. In **1 Corinthians 15**, we have the contrast between “The first Adam” and “the last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45). This is not merely a reference of sequence, but obviously of *quality* and even *antithesis*. While the first Adam brought death to his posterity, the last Adam brings life to His posterity (i.e., His spiritual seed). The “last Adam” is not merely last in a sequence of many Adams, but He is last to indicate His quality and His work over against the first Adam. Therefore, Dr. Kline writes:

> Like Revelation 21, Hebrews uses “first” for an historical stage that passes away. Like Revelation 21, Paul uses “first” and its opposite in 1 Corinthians 15 for a twofold structure comprehensive of cosmic history. In none of these passages does protos function as a mere ordinal in a simple process of counting objects identical in kind. In fact, precisely the reverse is true in all three passages; in each case it is a matter of different kinds, indeed, of polar opposites. Whatever idea of priority still attaches to protos in these passages, it is thoroughly subordinated in all of them to the function of expressing in combination with an antonym (“new,” “second,” or “last”) a sharp antithesis.[35]

We have no reason to believe that this way of contrast and antithesis is changed from chapter 21 to 20. We have every reason to believe that it is so because even Premillennialists admit that the Millennial Reign of Christ happens prior to the Eternal State, and therefore belongs to the “old” and “former” things. If that earthly Millennial reign belongs to the present world, the use of “first” and “second” in the same passage (Rev. 20:5-6) becomes very interesting as those words are also found in chapter 21 (Rev. 21:1, 4, 5, 8). Therefore, seeing that these things do not merely speak about a sequence, but rather quality and antithesis, we believe that the First Resurrection belongs to this side of eternity in Heaven, while the second resurrection is the general resurrection of all the dead. The First Death is the physical death which is shared by all people (except those at the time of the Rapture), which believers are not exempt from. The First Death ushers the believer into a new existence as they reign with Christ in Heaven, while it ushers the unbeliever into conscious *disembodied* torment, waiting until the resurrection and judgment of the last day. We conclude with the words of Vern Poythress who writes:

> As the second death implicitly includes and accompanies an act of bodily resurrection, so the first resurrection implicitly includes and accompanies bodily death. We find an allusion to just this bodily death in 20:4, **the souls of those who had been beheaded**. The phrase refers to those who have suffered martyrdom for not worshiping the Beast. These are now disembodied souls living in the presence of God and of Christ, as represented in 6:9-10. The

important thing to see is that these souls are living, triumphant, because of their union with Christ and victory through his blood (12:11).[33] [emphasis original]

Blessed and Holy

Because of these things believers are blessed when they die. Revelation 14:13 says:

> And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: **Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord** from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may **rest from their labors**, for their deeds follow them!"

They are blessed because they rest from their sins and persecution and they are reigning with Christ. They have the fulfillment of the promise made to them in Revelation 2:26; 3:21. Their rest does not imply that they are inactive or that they are not reigning. Meredith Kline writes that "the biblical concept of sabbath rest includes enthronement after the completion of labors by which royal dominion is manifested or secured (cf., e.g., Isa. 66:1)."[35] The Church is also told by the Savior to "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10-11). The believers will receive this crown after their death. Moreover, as Revelation 20:6 says in connection with the Millennium:

> Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such **the second death has no power**, but they will be **priests of God and of Christ**, and **they will reign with him** for a thousand years.

They are blessed because they become priests, serving God and their Christ, but not only that. They are not merely servants, but they have the blessing of sharing in the heavenly reign of Christ over the world. They reign together with their beloved Savior. Their existence in the Intermediate State is blessed and they are now vindicated before God for the testimony of Jesus, which some of them have sealed in their blood. Even so, their final and *public* vindication awaits the last day.

The Last Battle

> Rev. 20:7-10 And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and **will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth**, Gog and Magog, to **gather them for battle**; their number is like the **sand of the sea**. 9 And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and **surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city**, but **fire came down from heaven** and consumed them, 10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Now that the Millennium is ended, Satan is released from his prison and all the restraints, which God had placed on him, are removed. He is free to do that which his heart has long desired: gather all the wicked to destroy the people of God. We again note the similarity in the description of the battle in cycles 5-7:

Revelation 16 (Cycle 5)	Revelation 19 (Cycle 6)	Revelation 20 (Cycle 7)
14 For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the **kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle** [the war, τὸν πόλεμον, *ton polemon*] on the great day of God the Almighty.	19 And I saw the beast and the **kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war** [the war, τὸν πόλεμον, *ton polemon*] against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.	8 and will come out to deceive **the nations that are at the four corners of the earth**, Gog and Magog, **to gather them for battle** [the war, τὸν πόλεμον, *ton polemon*]; their number is like the sand of the sea.

See how not only the wording, but also the descriptions are similar. This "war" or "battle" is spoken of in the definite article, and thus what we have is "**the** war" and "**the** battle," not merely "a" battle among many. In all three visions, the wicked are gathered against the people of God and their Christ. The enemies of Christ are designated as "Gog and Magog" in the seventh cycle and this is from Ezekiel 38-39. John either sees this battle taking place at the End of the World, or models the Last Battle upon this (now past) war. Dispensationalists are fond of attempting to guess which countries will attack Israel, but Revelation 20 says that Satan will "deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth", which he calls, "Gog and Magog." In other words, the enemies of Christ and of His Bride, are the whole wicked world, which are called Gog and Magog. This, therefore, I believe does not refer to particular countries in the future or countries which will be revived from the past, but designates all the nations at the four corners of the earth which will be deceived by Satan.

This rebellion against Christ and His Church is immense: “their number is like the sand of the sea.” It is not a small multitude which rebels against Christ, but a whole lot of millions or even billions, basically, all the reprobates living just before the coming of Christ. This is described as the “little while” (Rev. 20:3) in which Satan will strongly and harshly persecute the people of God throughout the world now that he is set loose. This is the time of “the man of sin” I believe and the time for “the rebellion” which must precede the Parousia of Christ (2 Thess. 2:3). Yet their rebellion and their attack against the Church will be stopped by the fire of Christ. As a side note, notice how the persecution of the Church is here intensified. The whole world is gathered against the Church of Christ, what the first readers had was the Roman government persecuting them, but that still wasn’t the whole world. But the persecution toward the end of the age will be a worldwide persecution against the worldwide Church.

As Satan and his horde foolishly try to destroy the Church, the Lord Christ, who loved His Church to death, will descend in fiery judgment to destroy them (Rev. 20:9). This synchronizes well with 2 Thessalonians which states that “the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming” (2 Thess. 2:8). We read also about the coming of the Lord to be with fire upon the unbelieving in the first chapter. There we have: “…when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess. 1:7-8). Satan and all his followers are thrown into the lake of fire to suffer eternal judgment (cf. Rev. 14:9-11).

The Resurrection And Final Judgment

> Rev. 20:11-15 Then I saw a **great white throne** and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And **I saw the dead**, great and small, standing before the throne, and **books were opened.** Then another book was opened, which is **the book of life**. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone’s **name was not found written in the book of life**, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

This we believe describes the Final Judgment of all men. This is the throne of Christ before which we must all appear (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). That the Person sitting on the throne is King Jesus may be seen from Matthew 25:31; John 5:27; 2 Timothy 4:1. This is the throne of Final Judgment after the resurrection, which all men must stand before to give an account about their works. This is not a judgment which determines their eternal destiny, but their *condition* in that eternal destiny, i.e., the measure of pain or reward. Notice that v. 12 speaks of two kinds of books. The first set of books, which were opened, contains the works of people on the basis of which they will be judged. While the other book, called “the book of life”, determined the destination of the person being judged (v. 15). That the Bible teaches a singular judgment we have briefly tried to show **above**. Therefore, if the Bible teaches a general resurrection of all the dead, followed by a singular final judgment of all men, then this must be the Final Judgment which is being described.

Our Premillennialist brethren contend that there is nothing said in vv. 11-15 about reward or about believers, but the text explicitly states that “if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15). As is usual with Premillennialist, especially the Dispensational variety, they take the omission of something as the absence of it in that which is being described. In other words, if the judgment does not explicitly mention believers, then believers are not subjects to this judgment. But we have clear places, for example, Matthew 25:31-46, where we have the judgment of both believers and unbelievers taking place at the same time of Christ’s coming (Matt. 25:31) and its subjects are both believers and unbelievers. Moreover, after the judgment comes the eternal state. The Lord says, “And these [the unrighteous] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:46). To make this text speak about a judgment prior to the Millennium is to read into it things which it does not say and it is not taking it “literally.”

The assumption seems to be that since we do not find a statement to the effect that “those who were found written in the book of life, went into the New Heaven and New Earth” or something of that kind, implies that the believers were not present at this judgment. The passage merely states that those who were absent from the book of life, which contains the names of the elect (Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 21:27), were thrown in Hell.

As to the location of this judgment, it seems to be somewhere in midair from v. 11, where “earth and sky fled away” (cf. Rev. 6:14; 16:20), nothing in Matthew 25:31ff states that the judgment takes place in Jerusalem or upon the ground. But the place of judgment is not a matter of concern. The point is that judgment is coming, it doesn’t matter where it takes place. We close with the words of Dean Davis on v. 15:

> John writes, “If anyone’s name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.” The rest of the NT fills in the meaning. If judgment were based on “the books” alone—upon the deeds done in the body—all would perish, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rev. 5:3-4; Rom. 3:23, Gal. 2:16). However, to the

saint's everlasting joy, the Father graciously and mercifully provided a way of salvation: the Lamb of God, whose righteous life and atoning death purchased men from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (5:9; John 3:16). Throughout the Era of Proclamation [the Church Age], the Church announced this way of salvation (11:3, 14:6). If anyone believed, his name was written in the Lamb's book of life (John 3:36, 6:47). Or rather, if he believed, he soon came to see that God had written his name in the Lamb's book of Life before the foundation of the world; that he had ordained them to eternal life (13:8, 17:8). However, he also saw that in order to inherit that life, he must "overcome" (2:17, 11, 17, 26, etc.); he must persevere in the faith (3:5; John 15:6, Rom. 11:22)—as indeed he will, through the preserving purpose and power of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (John 6:37-40, 17:15, Jude 1:1).[36]

Beyond Revelation 20

In chapter 21, we have the picture of the New World which the Father has promised us (2 Pet. 3:13). As elsewhere in the book, the Eternal State of the blessed comes after the time of judgment (Rev. 6:12-17 and chapter 7; Rev. 11:15-19). Now that this wicked world has passed away with its curses and problems (Rev. 21:4), the saints enjoy endless fellowship with the Lord their God. Heaven joins the Earth at the consummation of all things (Rev. 21:2, 10) and God comes to dwell on the Earth with His covenant people (Rev. 21:3). There is no need for a temple in the New Jerusalem, for the whole earth has become God's holy temple with His presence on it (Rev. 21:22). Revelation 21:24-26 indicates that there will be some continuity between the present world and the world to come, but explicitly denies the continuation of wickedness and sin (Rev. 21:27). The activity of believers is described as worshiping God (Rev. 22:3), seeing God (Rev. 22:4) and reigning "forever and ever" (Rev. 22:5).

The Lord Jesus then at the epilogue of the book calls His people to trust the words of this prophecy because the things described "must soon take place" (Rev. 22:6; cf. Rev. 1:1) and "the time is near" (Rev. 22:10; cf. Rev. 1:3). The Lord Jesus is coming and He is coming with judgment to give everyone that which their works deserve (Rev. 22:12). A blessing is pronounced upon those who wash their robes and that is the basis of them having "the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates" (Rev. 22:14). The element in which these robes are washed is undoubtedly the blood of Christ (Rev. 7:4; cf. Rev. 12:11), which was given to purchase them (Rev. 5:9). Their right is not in thanks to their works or in anything in them, but in the fact that their clothes are washed in the blood of the Lamb. But outside the holy city, the New Jerusalem, are the unbelieving who have not washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, and therefore do not have a right to enter the city (Rev. 22:15). The invitation is open to all whose hearts our God stirs: "Come" (Rev. 22:20).

Conclusion

I have gone beyond what I initially planned, but I think that I have made a decent and not a brief case for Amillennialism. Obviously, I have not treated a lot of things related to eschatology or dealt with other passages (e.g., Isa. 65:17ff; Matt. 24-25; 2 Thess. 2), but I do believe that I made a biblical case for the Amillennial understanding of eschatology and mainly critiqued Premillennialism. The chapter of the Confession had nothing to say about the Millennium or the Second Coming of Christ explicitly, but I thought it good to make a case here for Amillennialism and I must admit that I myself have also learned a whole lot. For those interested into delving more into Amillennialism, I recommend the following books:

- Sam Storms. Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative. (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor. 2013).
    - The book that convinced me of Amillennialism.
- Dean Davis. The High King Of Heaven: Discovering the Master Key to the Great End Time Debate. (Enumclaw, WA: Redemption Press, 2nd Printing 2014).
    - A comprehensive study of Amillennial eschatology. See **review here**.
- Kim Riddlebarger. A Case For Amillennialism: Understanding The End Times. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books. 2013).
- Anthony A. Hoekema. The Bible And The Future. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979).
- G. K. Beale, David H. Campbell. Revelation: A Shorter Commentary. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing. 2015).
    - The commentary on Revelation 20 is pretty good. I have not yet read it fully.
- William Hendriksen. More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation Of The Book Of Revelation. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House. 1967).
- Steve Gregg. Revelation. Four Views, Revised & Updated. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson. 2013).

He who testifies to these things says,

“Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

(Revelation 22:20)

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(1 Corinthians 16:22)

Footnotes

1. ^ *Many Scriptural references have been supplied by Samuel Waldron’s Modern Exposition of 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith which was apparently supplied by the Westminster Confession of Faith 1646.*
2. a, b, c, d *Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
3. ^ *Louis Berkhof. Systematic Theology. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Banner of Truth Trust. 1963). p. 673*
4. ^ *Ibid., p. 670.*
5. a, b *Matthew Poole. English Annotations on the Holy Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
6. ^ *Sam E. Waldron. A Modern Exposition Of The 1689 Baptist Confession Of Faith. (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2013). p. 496.*
7. ^ *Ibid., pp. 497-498.*
8. ^ *William G. T. Shedd. Dogmatic Theology. Volume II. (Originally published 1888). pp. 626-627.*
9. ^ *Anthony A. Hoekema. The Bible And The Future. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979). p. 99.*
10. ^ *Shedd, Dogmatic Theology II. p. 639.*
11. a, b, c, d, e, f, g *Joseph Henry Thayer’s Greek Definitions. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. See reference for the Strong’s number.*
12. ^ *Anthony A. Hoekema. The Bible And The Future. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979). p. 164, n. 3.*
13. ^ *Bob Utley. You Can Understand the Bible: Study Guide Commentary Series. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
14. ^ *Charles J. Ellicott. Commentary For English Readers. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
15. ^ *John Gill. Exposition of the Entire Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
16. ^ *Hoekema, The Bible and the Future. p. 241. Words within square brackets are mine.*
17. ^ *William D. Mounce. Dictionary. ἀποκατάστασις.*
18. ^ *Dean Davis. The High King Of Heaven: Discovering the Master Key to the Great End Time Debate. (Enumclaw, WA: Redemption Press, 2nd Printing 2014). p. 601.*
19. ^ *G. K. Beale, David H. Campbell. Revelation: A Shorter Commentary. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing. 2015). p. 22.*
20. ^ *Sam Storms. Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative. (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor. 2013). pp. 432-433.*
21. ^ *Beale, Revelation. p. 346.*
22. ^ *William Hendriksen. More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation Of The Book Of Revelation.*

(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House. 1967). pp. 179-180

23. ^ *Davis, High King of Heaven. pp. 473-474.*
24. ^ *Hoekema, Bible and the Future. p. 229. Words within square brackets are his.*
25. ^ *Kim Riddlebarger. A Case For Amillennialism: Understanding The End Times. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books. 2013). p. 229.*
26. ^ *Henry Alford. The Greek Testament. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
27. ^ *Beale, Revelation. p. 440.*
28. ^ *Storms, Kingdom Come. p. 452.*
29. ^ *Hoekema, Bible and the Future. p. 236.*
30. ^ *Ibid., p. 236, n. 14.*
31. ^ *Flavius Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews, book 18.1.4. Also Wars of the Jews, book 2.8.14.*
32. ^ *John MacArthur. The MacArthur Study Bible: English Standard Version. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2010). p. 1970.*
33. a, b *Vern Poythress. The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation.*
34. ^ *Beale, Revelation. p. 441.*
35. a, b, c *Meredith G. Kline. The First Resurrection.*
36. ^ *Davis, The High King of Heaven. p. 493. Words within square brackets are mine.*