

The Facebook Commentary on Revelation
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Revelation Chapter 20

Rev 20 (Introduction and Structure)—

In Revelation 19 history as we know it seems to come to an end as the earth's various religious and political powers have disintegrated and Jesus has come to rescue His saints. But only three of the four great enemy powers (Babylon, the beast and the false prophet) have come to an End. The dragon has not yet been dealt with, so time must continue for a while. Instead of ushering in eternity, the Second Coming of Jesus (symbolically portrayed in Rev 19:11-21) sets the stage for a thousand-year period leading up to the ultimate end of suffering and sin (Rev 20:1-15). Why is such a period needed and what is its purpose? Stay tuned.

In Scripture, there is very little information about what happens after the Second Coming outside of the information provided in one of the most controversial chapters in the book of Revelation (chapter twenty). Many things in the passage are reasonably clear, but controversy continues to rage over the placement of the thousand years. Are they after the Second Coming? Are they before the Second Coming? Are they a recapitulation of the time between the First and Second Advents of Jesus? We will address the "when" of the Millennium after looking at the first part of the chapter verse by verse.

Chapter 20 can be divided into anywhere from two to four parts, depending on the interpreter. If one structures on the basis of the central character in chapter 20, Satan, this chapter portrays two main defeats of Satan. The first defeat is when he is bound for a thousand years (Rev 20:1-6). The second defeat is when he is thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:7-15). If one divides the chapter according to the sequence in time, there are events at the beginning of the Millennium (Rev 20:1-3), events during the Millennium (Rev 20:4-6) and events at the end of the Millennium (Rev 20:7-15). But the chapter also falls quite naturally into four parts. The first has to do with the binding of Satan (Rev 20:1-3), the next is the millennial reign of the righteous (20:4-6), then Satan's final attack on the camp of the saints (20:7-10), and then the final judgment around the great white throne (20:11-15). Of the two options, I prefer the four-part outline.

The first part continues from the conclusion of Revelation 19. While Babylon, the Beast, and the False Prophet have been dealt with in Revelation 17-19, the fate of the dragon has not yet been addressed. Revelation 20:1-3 tells in symbolic terms what happened to the dragon (Satan) at the Second Coming of Jesus. He is not destroyed, like the other three characters (which represent various human entities), but is imprisoned in the Abyss. The second part delineates the time period of a thousand years, including the fate of the saints, represented by the martyrs and the "blessed and holy ones" (Rev 20:4-6). The third part described in fairly literal language the resurrection and final fate (in the lake of fire) of those who have opposed God and His people (Rev 20:7-10). The fourth and final part circles back to the final judgment that precedes the destruction of Revelation 20:9-10, and closes with a retelling of the lake of

fire scene (Rev 20:11-15).

Rev 20:1—

I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the Abyss and a great chain on his hand. The Greek of this verse begins with “and I saw” (Greek: *kai eidon*), which is a very common phrase of transition in the book of Revelation (5:1; 6:1; 8:2; 13:1, 11; 14:1, etc.). This helps to distinguish the vision of 19:11-21 from 20:1-3. The binding of the dragon is a natural follow-on from the destruction of the beast and the false prophet. But, here it also introduces something new.

The identity of the angel has been much commented upon. Some have argued that the angel here must represent Jesus Christ, a form of angelomorphic Christology, Christ appearing in the form of an angel. They note the parallels between this passage and Revelation 1:18, where the “son of man” figure is clearly identified as the One who died and rose again, which must be Jesus Christ. Only the One who has power over hell and death could be stronger than the Devil. The Devil, who was once the most powerful of all created beings, must be inferior in power to the one who binds him. On the other hand, angels in Revelation are often delegated by Christ for central roles in the narrative (Rev 1:1; 5:1-4; 14:6-12), so this angel is operating with the authority of Christ. See my comments on the angels of Rev 8:3-4 and 10:1-6, which I suspect represent Christ. If we allow that Michael, the archangel, could be a reference to Christ, then the identification of this angel with Christ is not surprising. See comments on Rev 12:7.

I saw an angel coming down out of heaven. . . . John here saw an angel “coming down from heaven” (Greek: *katabainonta ek tou ouranou*), which implies that he has a commission from God. The “coming down” translates the Greek present participle (*katabainonta*). The angel is seen in motion, descending from heaven. This language recalls the glorious angel of Revelation 18:1, who is also coming down out of heaven (Greek: *katabainonta ek tou ouranou*), but this is not the same point in time. The angel of Revelation 18 descends before the destruction of Babylon, this scene is after. The same exact phrase is found also in Revelation 10:1, referring to that angel holding the little scroll.

. . . having the key of the Abyss and a great chain on his hand . . . There are other important parallels. In Revelation 9:1 a star “had fallen” (Greek: *peptôkota*) out of heaven. But the parallel is even more striking in that the star (9:1) and the angel both have the key (Greek: *hê kleis, tên klein*) to the Abyss (Greek: *abussou*-- 9:2 and 20:1). The Abyss (sometimes translated as “bottomless pit”) is opened in Revelation 9 and sealed in Revelation 20. It is also the place from which the beast arises in 11:7 and 17:8. The mention of a key reminds the reader of Revelation 1:18, where the son of man has the keys (plural) of Death and Hades. The key to the Abyss was in the hand of the fallen star in Revelation 9:1, it has here been transferred to a divine angel who will be the one to bind Satan, rather than release him.

There are four definitions of Abyss in the Bible that may be helpful to understanding this passage. First, the Abyss can refer to a place where the devil and his angels (cf. Matt 25:41) are confined so that their activity is restricted. In Luke 8:31 the demons plead with Jesus not to send them into the Abyss. To seal the Abyss (Rev 20:3) would in some way a stop to demon activity on the earth. Second, in the early Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Abyss

(LXX: *tês abussou*) is the word chosen to translate “the deep” (Hebrew: *tehôm*), which is a reference to the dark depths of the water-covered earth before creation (Gen 1:2, cf. 7:11; 8:2; Prov 8:27-28). These waters were uninhabited (“void”) and had no consistent shape (“without form”). Hence the Abyss can represent the empty and unshaped condition of the planet before creation. Third, the language of Genesis 1:2 (“without form and void”—Hebrew: *tôhu wa bôhu*) is repeated in Jeremiah 4:23. There the condition of the earth before creation is applied to the empty, ruined land of Israel during the exile to Babylon (Jer 4:23-30). So while the language of Abyss is rooted in the ocean depths, it can also apply to a ruined and uninhabited landscape. Fourth, in Romans 10:7, the Abyss is the grave, the abode of the dead, a place which Jesus Christ Himself “went to” between His death and resurrection. We will explore these definitions further in Rev 20 (Excursus on the Millennium).

The concept of the Millennium has interesting echos with the Isaiah Apocalypse in the Old Testament (Isa 24-27). God’s covenant with humans has been irrevocably broken (Isa 24:5, 17-18, cf. Gen 9:16-17), and the divine order has been disrupted. As a result, Isaiah describes a worldwide, ecological disaster that completely devastates the planet (Isa 24:19-21). It will become empty of inhabitants (Isa 24:1-3), a city of “formlessness” (Isa 24:10), an echo of the Hebrew *tôhu* of Genesis 1:2. Isaiah describes the earth being returned to its pre-creation condition. At that point both the heavenly and the earthly enemies of God (Isa 24:21) will be imprisoned in a dungeon (Isa 24:22, NIV) for “many days” after which they will be punished. Interestingly, the LXX of Isaiah 24:22 has “visited” (LXX: *episkopê*) instead of “punished” or “called to account” (Hebrew: *yiphaqdu*). The LXX reading is compatible with the release of Satan and the nations in Revelation 20:7 while the Hebrew of Isaiah 24:22 is compatible with the fate of the unrighteous in 20:9-10, etc. To summarize, Isaiah implies that the desolation of the earth will be followed by a period of confinement before the final punishment of evil occurs. This is strikingly similar to the Millennium of Revelation 20.

. . . and a great chain on his hand . . . It is interesting that the angel in this passage carried a great chain “on his hand” (Greek: *epi ten cheira autou*) rather than in (Greek: *en*) his hand, as per the usual translation (KJV, RSV, NIV, ESV). This suggests a chain of great size, balanced “on” the hand and hanging down on both sides. Elsewhere, the mark of the beast is also “on” the hand rather than “in” the hand. It is a great chain” (Greek: *halusin megalen*) because of the strength of the one who is to be bound by it. The purpose of the chain is to tie down the dragon for a thousand years. Both the key and the chain should be understood figuratively. This is strong language of restraint and confinement. Although different words are used, 2 Peter 2:4 speaks about fallen angels who are held captive with (ESV) “chains (Greek: *seirais*) of gloomy darkness (Greek: *zophou*)” (ESV) in a hellish place the Jews called Tartarus (*tartarôsas*).

Rev 20:2—

And he seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. The terms “dragon”, “serpent”, “devil”, and Satan are parallel in Revelation (see also Rev 12:9), demonstrating that a single character or entity can be referenced with a number of different symbols. Satan is represented as the dragon, the devil,

and the ancient serpent. Satan is as fierce as a fiery dragon, as cunning and subtle as a serpent, the slanderer/accuser of God and His people, and the adversary of all that is good and right in the world. Reference to the “ancient serpent” recalls the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden. While the serpent in Genesis is not identified as Satan in so many words, the references here and in Revelation 12:9 underline that it was Satan, in the guise of a serpent, that deceived the pair in the Garden. The deception of the serpent/Satan at the beginning paves the way for the reference to deception in Revelation 20:3. Attention to the beginning of the biblical story holds the key to understanding how the story ends. Deception implies that at one time a person held the correct view, but was tricked or deceived into adopting a false view. Unmasking deception proves to be at the heart of the final conflict as described in Revelation 20.

. . . the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan . . . Since “devil” (Greek: *diabolos*) is related to the word for slander, all these images underline that the character of Satan is focused on bending the truth. Combined with verse 3, these titles for Satan are a full repeat of the titles in Revelation 12:9 (see comments on Rev 12:9). In Revelation 12, the dragon is cast out of heaven to the earth (Rev 12:12-13). He has no more influence in heaven (12:10). Here the dragon is further limited by being bound and sealed up in the Abyss (cf. Rev 20:3). Note that the verbs here and in the following verse are all in the active voice. There is no passivity here, heaven is taking dramatic action that will lead eventually to the end of the cosmic conflict. The period of this confinement is a long one, listed as a thousand years (Greek: *chilia etê*). The five references to the thousand years alternate between indefinite (“a thousand years”) and definite (“the thousand years”—Greek: *ta chilia etê*). The shift seems random according to the use in each context.

And he seized the dragon . . . The word for “seized” (Greek: *ekratêsen*) is different than the word used for “captured” (Greek: *epiasthê*) in relation to the beast in Revelation 19:20. This operation in 20:2 is different from the previous, the dragon is not finally destroyed, as is the case with the beast, the action limits his deceptive behavior. The metaphor is one of “binding” (Greek: *edêsen*). As we will see, the binding is to a world in which there is no one left to deceive. Satan is given a thousand years to ponder what he has done. Events at the end of the thousand years (Rev 20:7-9) demonstrate that no matter what God does, Satan will not repent. He has become incorrigible. In much of Revelation 20 (verses 1-3 and 7-10), Satan is center stage in the drama. He is clearly an important figure in the cosmic conflict, his role is worthy of major attention as the drama comes to an end.

Tonstad (*Revelation*, 287) notes that the language of seizing and binding was used in the ancient world for apprehending criminals. Satan has long professed that he is speaking the truth and acting in an appropriate manner, it is God who is the deceiver and criminal. But Satan’s true character as a criminal is here exposed. And these theme coheres very closely to the theme of deception, as we will see in verse 3. It is clear that the one who can seize and bind the dragon is superior in power to him. As noted in the comments on verse 1, the angel who seizes and binds the dragon is either Christ Himself or an angel with authority directly delegated by Christ. Since the unlocking of the Abyss in Revelation 9:1 released a demonic plague upon the earth, the locking of the Abyss here is a reversal of that action. Satan is restrained or hindered from acting in ways that he had been permitted to act before.

. . . **and bound him for a thousand years.** The concept of a Millennium or thousand-year period is found in the Bible only in Revelation 20. This term could be understood in three different ways. One is literally, a period of a thousand years at some point in history. The second option is to understand it according to the year-day principle (see Rev 12:14 [Excursus on the Year-Day Principle] for a discussion of the principle), in which it would represent a period of 360,000 years. The third option is to understand the thousand years figuratively, meaning that it would represent a long, but indefinite period of time. Few, if any, have adopted the second option, so most views of the Millennium either see it as a thousand year period, before (Post-Millennialism) or after (Pre-Millennialism) the Second Coming of Jesus, or as an indefinite period more or less bounded by the first and second advents of Christ (Amillennialism). See Rev 20 (Excursus on the Millennium)-- for an extensive exploration of these possibilities. Locating the time of this binding of Satan provides the clue for the beginning of the Millennium.

There are a number of thematic parallels to the binding of Satan elsewhere in the New Testament. John 12:31-32 refers to the cross as a time when the prince of this world “will be cast out”. A similar concept is placed in past tense in the age of the Spirit, “the prince of this world has been judged” (John 16:11). Matthew 12: 26 and 29 refer to the binding of the strong man, which seems to be a reference to Satan. And 1 John 3:8 suggests that the purpose of Jesus coming into the world was to “destroy the works of the devil”. Revelation 12:10-11 underlines the idea of the death, resurrection and enthronement of Christ as the time when “the accuser of the brothers” is cast out. References such as these have encouraged Amillennialists to see the thousand years as a figurative period beginning with the cross and the enthronement of Christ. But such a reading may not end up making as much sense as one might think at first glance.

Rev 20:3-- He threw him into the Abyss, locked it, and sealed it over him in order that he might not deceive the nations any more until the thousand years were finished. After these things he must be released for a short time. Throwing (Greek: *ebalen*) Satan into the Abyss anticipates his being thrown (Greek: *eblêthêsan*) into the lake of fire in 20:14. The same Greek verb (Greek: *eblêthê*, 2x) is also used for him being thrown out of heaven in Revelation 12:9-10. In Revelation 9:1 the Abyss is the place ruled by the “angel of the Abyss”, otherwise known Apollyon or Abaddon, Greek and Hebrew words for destruction. While symbolic, these seem to be other names for the dragon or Satan (as is confirmed by Luke 10:17-20), who is clearly in view here in Revelation 20. If Satan is equated with the fallen star of Revelation 9, he is there permitted by God (given the key to the Abyss) to escape the Abyss along with his demonic locust/scorpion companions to cause havoc upon the earth. Here he is locked back into the Abyss with a key and a seal, as if in a prison (Rev 20:7).

As noted earlier (comments on Rev 20:1), the Abyss is clearly a place where Satan and his demons are confined. Sealing Satan up is the reversal of the previous action. In the past Satan has exercised his power to imprison God’s faithful ones (Dan 6:17; Matt 27:66). In the Millennium he gets to experience what it is like to be on the receiving end of his agenda. Another parallel to this passage is Genesis 7:16, where God “imprisons” (LXX: *ekleisen*) Noah

and his family in the ark for their protection from the dangers outside.

. . . **in order that he might not deceive the nations** . . . The natural meaning of the negative aorist subjunctive of “deceive” (Greek: *mê planêsê*) is that a probable deception will not even begin to happen. There will be zero deception on the part of Satan during the thousand years. The purpose of locking up Satan (“in order that”—Greek: *hina*) is to completely prevent his deceptions upon the nations. The mention of deception reminds the reader that deception is the very essence of Satan’s method of operation. He is seen to do that in Genesis 3:1-5 and he continues doing so throughout human history until this confinement prevents him. Deception is so much a part of Satan’s character that one could say that whenever Satan deceives it is a case of Satan being Satan. Deception is at the center of his character, he is a liar from the beginning (John 8:44), and it is also at the center of this narrative. Stefanovic (*Revelation*, 577) notes that the deceptions of Satan lie behind all the deceptions perpetrated by the religious and secular powers of this world (Rev 13:10-17; 18:2-3; 19:20). If the nations are destroyed at the Second Coming (2 Thess 1:6-10) and the righteous are taken to heaven with Christ (1 Thess 4:15-17, cf. John 14:1-3), Satan’s confinement is symbolic of the fact that there is no one left on earth to deceive. The Abyss, in that case, would actually be a desolated earth, rather than a specific place of confinement on that earth.

The idea that a literal confinement of Satan would unleash a golden age on earth does not make sense to me. Even if Satan were completely restricted from deceiving today, most evil would go if human sinners themselves were not also restrained. As long as there are corrupt passions in the human heart, Satan’s complete absence would not make much of a difference. Human beings would continue acting on the basis of their fallen human nature. A flourishing human race in the absence of Satan flies in the face of reality unless some substantial change occurs first in the human race as a whole. The pre-advent judgment, setting the stage to remove those bent on evil, and providing the righteous with a safe place to process, learn and grow in heaven (cf. John 14:1-3) is the most likely context in which Satan is bound. Redeemed humanity cannot be on earth in Revelation 20:4-6. If they were, where are they in 20:7-8? If they are in heaven during the thousand years, they return to earth in the coming down of the New Jerusalem in 21:2. But more on this later.

In saying that Satan’s imprisonment is metaphorical of his exile on a desolate earth, I am anticipating the outcome of a fuller examination of the many questions that arise from the brief narrative of Revelation 20:1-3. Why is Satan confined so that he cannot deceive the nations? Do the nations still exist but he is confined away from them? Are the nations destroyed at the beginning of the Millennium and then restored at the end? This series of questions will be seriously dealt with in the Excursus on the Millennium, which comes after the verse by verse study of Revelation 20. What is clear at this point of our exegesis is that Satan is not allowed to continue deceiving the nations until the thousand years are finished. At that point Satan/the dragon “must” be released to resume his efforts at deception and destruction. There is a possible parallel here with the beast which comes up out of the Abyss (Rev 17:8). But the question does arise, why “must” (Greek: *dei*) he be released? Isn’t it sufficient for him to remain bound for eternity? What kind of necessity is at work here? If the issue between God and Satan were one of power, there would be no necessity for Satan to be released once he is captured

and confined. But, as we have seen, the real issue in the cosmic conflict is a question of God's character and government, so Satan's necessary release must play some role in the conclusion to that conflict.

Rev 20:4—

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and the word of God. These did not worship the beast or his image, neither did they receive the mark upon their forehead or upon their hand. And they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. Assuming a pre-millennial reading of Revelation 20, this would represent the fate of the "saints" (Rev 14:12; 18:24; 19:8; 20:9) at and after the second coming of Jesus. These particularly include the martyrs that gave their lives by resisting Babylon in the crisis of the end-time (Rev 13:15-17; 17:6). They are given thrones to sit on (recalling Rev 3:21 and 4:4) and they are engaged in a work of judgment. Who would be judged and what role redeemed humanity might have in such a judgment is not stated here. The resurrection of these martyred ones occurs around the same time as the chaining of Satan in the previous passage (Rev 20:1-3).

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them . . . The "And I saw" (Greek: *kai eidon*) signals another major break in the narrative. In this new part of John's overall vision John sees thrones, without naming the place where the thrones are set up. Being placed first, thrones are given a prominent place in this verse. This text is not talking about the throne of God, since the word thrones is plural in number. And "they" (Greek: *ekathisan*—third person plural of sitting) sat on them. Normally, such a construction has a previous antecedent in the text, but there is no obvious antecedent. It is clearly not referring to the angel and Satan in the previous passage (Rev 20:1-3). So the subject of the sitting must be found in what follows. There are two different Greek words for "sitting" in Revelation (*kathizô* and *kathêmai*). The latter form implies "enthronement" and is found frequently in chapters four and five. The former implies "appointment" and is found elsewhere in Revelation only in 3:21. This parallel strongly suggests that 20:4 is the fulfillment of the overcomer promise in 3:21. This is strong evidence that the beheaded ones are a part for the whole. They represent all the overcomers who now get to sit with Christ on His throne. The judges of this verse are not a limited group, they include all of redeemed humanity.

"They" refers to the "souls" of those who have been beheaded, those who did not worship the image or receive the mark. From an English language perspective the sentence could be translated, "The souls of those . . . were seated on thrones and judgment was given to them." When these come back to life at the Second Coming, they are granted to sit with Christ on thrones (see Rev 3:21). The "thrones" imply a certain authority to rule and to judge (cf. Rev 1:5; 5:9-10). God takes human beings so seriously that He shares His power and judgment with them.

. . . and judgment was given to them. The combination of thrones and judgement suggests an allusion to the judgment scene of Daniel 7:7-14. Judgment is not pronounced on "them", this expression (Greek: *krima edothê autois*) is a conferring to them of the authority to

judge. As translated by the Anchor Bible: “. . . they were given the authority to judge.” The language here is almost identical to that of Daniel 7:22 (“judgment was given to/for the saints”—LXX: *ten krisin edôke tois hagiois*). In Daniel the immediate context suggests that the judgment is “in favor of” the saints, who are being persecuted (Dan 7:21), but Daniel 7:27 asserts that the saints will receive kingdom and dominion, which would anciently include the authority to judge. The fact that the souls in Revelation 20:4 sit on thrones implies that this judgment is something they exercise rather than is exercised upon them. Such a reading also fits better in the New Testament context. Since “all judgment” has been entrusted to Christ (John 5:22), this judgment is not the whole, but a special part of it. See Rev 20:1-15—Excursus on the Millennium). The “was given” (Greek: *edothê*) is a divine passive, the authority to judge comes directly from God.

We have already noted Revelation 3:21, where Jesus promises the overcomers in the seven churches that they will sit with Him on his throne. In Matthew 19:28 (cf. Luke 22:30), Jesus promises His disciples that at the renewal of all things His disciples will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. So there is a sense that in a future judgment, followers will have the responsibility to judge those who have professed to be part of the people of God. This concept is expanded in 1 Corinthians 6:1-3. There Paul indicates that the “saints” are to judge the world, and that “we” (including himself and the Corinthians) are to judge angels. Like Revelation 3:21, this is much more comprehensive than a handful of martyrs judging, or just the twelve tribes of Israel being judged.

A major role seems to be set aside, therefore, for a judgment process during the Millennium that includes a central role for redeemed humanity. These earlier texts encourage us to read the souls who had been beheaded as the part for the whole. All the redeemed and resurrected believers throughout history are included in this group. Since this judgment happens at the beginning of the Millennium, it is not the same as the judgment at the end of the Millennium (Rev 20:11-15). This judgment is preliminary and partial, like the judgment that began before the Second Coming of Christ (Rev 14:7). See Rev 20:1-15-- Excursus on the Millennium for more detail. In the Old Testament, the concepts of reigning and judging often appeared together. The task of the Israelite king was to both reign and judge (see the classic example in Psalm 72:1-4).

If the cosmic conflict is a war of words over the character and government of God, resolution of the conflict will require a process of judgment that engages every person who ever lived. Tonstad expresses this well when he writes (*Revelation*, 288): “Wrenching existential questions, including the possibility that God may be at fault in relation to the world (Rev 5:1-4; 6:9-11), suggest that ‘the mandate to pass judgment’ is *retrospective* rather than *prospective*. The task is not to run the heavenly bureaucracy for a thousand years *prospectively* but to have a say about God’s conduct in the cosmic conflict (italics by Tonstad).” If previous iterations of judgment vindicated the followers of Jesus and enabled their resurrection at the beginning of the Millennium, this judgment allows the resurrected saints to have a role in examining the evidence and vindicating the actions of God in the cosmic conflict.

And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God. The words “souls” (Greek: *tas psuchas*) here does not

need to mean some disembodied condition after death, the word is often used with reference to the whole person, body, mind and spirit (cf. Gen 2:7; Psa 16:10-11). The use of “souls” in the context of martyrdom recalls the fifth seal (Rev 6:9-11). The souls under the altar were told to wait until their fellow servants would be “made complete” or the full number of martyrs is completed. See comments on Rev 6:11. Revelation 20:4 seems to be the fulfillment of that promise. This passage, therefore, along with Revelation 19:1-2, is a final response to the prayers of the martyrs during the fifth seal. Their desire for vindication has been achieved, and instead of being judged, the roles have been reversed and they are standing in judgment on those who judged them. I suspect they will also be asking the questions of theodicy during the Millennium: Why did God not intervene to save them from martyrdom? Why was their final vindication so long in coming?

A further parallel to this verse is found in Revelation 12:11. There the overcomers “did not love their lives unto death.” This is an evident reference to potential martyrdom, based on the authenticity of their testimony. What seals the parallel is the fact that “lives” (Greek: *tên psuchên*) is a translation of the Greek word for “soul” (in the singular). The singular is somewhat awkward (“the soul of them”), likely personalizing the concept; the soul of each of them. What is anticipated in 12:11 (set in the context of the cross and enthronement of Jesus) is seen in retrospect in 20:4.

The word for beheading (Greek: *pepelekismenôn*) is related to the Greek word for axe and was a common means of execution in the Roman Empire. It could also be inflicted with a sword. They were beheaded “because of” (Greek: *dia*) the testimony of Jesus and “because of” (Greek: *dia*) the word of God. I have repeated the “because of” in my translation of the passage to reflect the cadence of the original. This expression reflects the grounds or reason for their beheading. The word of God and the testimony of Jesus, as a package, seems for John to be a way of summarizing the gospel (cf. Rev 1:2, 9; 6:9). In the first Christian century, and throughout the centuries since, the gospel has been offensive to many people, resulting in persecution and martyrdom. It is not the gospel itself that leads to persecution, it is the reaction to the gospel that leads to persecution (cf. John 15:18-25).

These did not worship the beast or his image, neither did they receive the mark upon their forehead or upon their hand. While the judging saints probably include all believers present, past, and future, special focus is on those who passed through the crisis of the last generation, when the image of the beast sought to compel the whole world to worship itself on pain of death (Rev 13:15-17). They were martyred because they both refused to worship the image and they also refused the mark. They are like the great multitude who came out of great tribulation (Rev 7:9-14). Once again, these are not the whole of those who will be resurrected and ascend at the Second Coming (1 Thess 4:15-17), but John uses the part to represent the whole. All the saved who ever lived will be part of the first resurrection (Rev 20:5-6).

And they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The thousand years after the Second Coming of Jesus covers the same period reflected in Revelation 7:15-17. The great multitude there are “before the throne of God” and serve Him day and night in His temple. They are in continual contact with God and the Lamb. Here instead is the imagery of sitting on thrones and passing judgment. Putting the two images together enhances the role of

the redeemed in heavenly events during the Millennium. The great multitude of Revelation 7:9-17 are clearly in heaven (note the many parallels with the scene in Revelation 5). This reign of the resurrected saints occurs during the same period of time when Satan is bound on earth. The location of the martyred souls here is not stated, but presumably they are also in heaven. See Rev 20:1-15-- Excursus on the Millennium.

Rev 20:5—

The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. It would probably have been helpful, from a reader's perspective, if the second sentence came before the first, as the thought of 5b flows naturally as a summary of verse 4. In a real sense, verse 6 also follows naturally from verses 4 and 5b. In its present location 5b could give the impression that the first resurrection is the resurrection of the unrighteous referred to in 5a, but 5b is actually referring back to the resurrection of verse 4. 5a, then, is a parenthetical digression, interrupting the flow of verses 4-6. It makes brief reference to the resurrection of the unrighteous dead, everyone outside of those who come to life and "reign with Christ for a thousand years" (Rev 20:4). 5a prepares the way for the events of verses 7-15. The second resurrection, though not explicitly named as such, is not mentioned again, its results are described after the fact in verses 7 and 8. There are nations once again for Satan to deceive. 5a also prepares the way for 20:12-13, where the unrighteous dead are seen standing before the great, white throne.

The word for "rest" or "remnant" (Greek: *hoi loipoi*) is used in the plural for all the unsaved, those who are not raised in the "first resurrection". The use here is in relation to the unrighteous and in contrast to earlier reference like 11:13 and 12:17. See comments on Rev 12:17. Their resurrection is presumably the "second resurrection" even though that language is not used in this verse. Since the context of the first resurrection comes after the first mention of a thousand years (Rev 20:1-3), and the "second resurrection" does not happen until the end of the thousand years, the first resurrection comes in the context of the Second Coming (Rev 19:11-21) and is, therefore, at the beginning of the thousand years. As we have seen, Revelation 20:4 uses the part for the whole in naming the martyrs only as the ones who are resurrected and reign with Christ for a thousand years (cf. 1 Thess 4:15-17; Rev 3:21; 7:9-17). So the second resurrection is of the unsaved only.

Is the first resurrection bodily or is it to be understood in a spiritual sense, as resurrection from a life of sin (Rom 6:3-6) or from a state of depression? The concept of life from the dead can certainly be applied in a spiritual sense in the New Testament (cf. also John 5:24-25; Eph 2:5; 5:14). But the language chosen in Revelation 20:4-5 seems to exclude such a reading. For one thing, the Greek word for resurrection (*hē anastasis*) is not used in the New Testament for spiritual resurrection, it consistently means bodily resurrection at the second coming of Jesus (John 11:25; 1 Cor 15:12-13, 21, 42). The aorist indicative of "came to life" (Greek: *ezēsan*) is also best understood in terms of bodily resurrection (cf. Rom 14:9; Rev 2:8). The fact that their death was caused by "beheading" indicates that their death was bodily. If their death is bodily, their resurrection must also be a bodily one. The concept of two resurrections is hinted at in John 5:29 (cf. Dan 12:2) and is made much more explicit here. In

Daniel and John there seems to be one, single resurrection resulting in two different groups. The two resurrections here not only apply to two different groups, they also apply to two different points in time, one at the beginning of the Millennium and the other at the end.

This is the first resurrection. Some have suggested that the first resurrection is a spiritual one and the second resurrection is a literal one (this is an important concept for amillennialism). But no such distinction is made in Revelation 20. If the first resurrection is spiritual, then the second must also be spiritual, which does not seem to be the case in 20:7-15. The best reading is that the first resurrection is a literal resurrection of the righteous dead in association with the second coming of Jesus at the beginning of the Millennium. The second resurrection comes at the end of the Millennium and consists of those who will once again be deceived by Satan and participate with him in the attack on the beloved city (Rev 20:9). See Rev 20 (Excursus on the Millennium) for a deeper analysis of the function of the Millennium in the larger story of Revelation.

It is interesting that a first resurrection is mentioned and a second resurrection is implied. Likewise a second death is mentioned (Rev 20:6), but a first death is only implied. It is possible that the two concepts of death and of resurrection are somehow related. The resurrection of the righteous is a rising up from the first death, which is often in Scripture represented as merely “sleep” (1 Kings 2:10; 2 Chr 9:31; John 11:11-13; 1 Cor 15:51; 1 Thess 4:14; 5:6-10, etc.). The second resurrection is a rising up from sleep to judgment, ending with the second death (Rev 20:14). Those who rise in the first resurrection are blessed and holy because they will never taste the second death (20:6). Those who rise in the second resurrection will soon taste the death from which there is no resurrection.

Rev 20:6—

Blessed and holy is the one having a part in the first resurrection. Upon these the second death has no power. But they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with Him a thousand years. The first resurrection is at the beginning of the thousand years. It includes the martyrs and the judges on thrones, which we have seen includes all the saints of all the ages (see comments on Rev 20:4). The blessed and holy ones (Greek: *hagios*—the adjective form of the Greek word for “saints”—further evidence that the reigning of verse 4 is not limited to martyrs but includes all believers in Jesus—the “saints”) are the same group as verse 4, those who reign with Christ for a thousand years. Looking at the verse as a whole, there are three reasons why they are called “blessed” (Greek: *makarios*): 1) the second death has no power over them, 2) they will be priests of God and Christ, and 3) they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Blessed and holy is the one having a part in the first resurrection. This is the fifth of seven “beatitudes” (blessing pronouncements) in Revelation (the other six are in Rev 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 22:7, 14). According to Aune (*Revelation*, 1091), this is the only beatitude in all of Judeo-Christian Greek literature with a double predicate (“blessed” and “holy”). It seems to have been written specially for this particular setting. The priests of God and of Christ, who appear in the second part of the verse are here blessed with the blessing of Abraham that they are to share with the world (see below). The term “holy” also fits well with the designation as

priests. The miter of the High Priest in the Israelite tabernacle had an inscription on it, “holiness to the Lord” or “Yahweh” (Hebrew: *qodesh leyahweh*—Exod 28:36). So the priests of Israel were both blessed and holy, so are the faithful followers of Christ. They serve as kings and priests for the purpose of judging.

Upon these the second death has no power. The concept of “second death” is mentioned four times in Revelation (the other three are in 2:11, 20:14, and 21:8). This is the only reference in the Greek where the adjective appears before the noun (the attributive or ascriptive use-- *ho deuterios thanatos*). In the other three locations the adjective follows the noun (the predicate restrictive use-- Greek: *ho thanatos ho deuterios*). Both are normal uses of the adjective in New Testament Greek and can be translated with the same English words, as I have done in my translation of Revelation. If the second death is a “sleep” from which there is no resurrection, escaping the power of the second death means entering into the unending experience of eternal life. The word translated “power” here has the meaning also of “authority” (Greek: *exousia*). Second death has no power over the saved because it has not been authorized by God to exercise such power. Neither the second death nor the second resurrection emerge until the thousand years are finished.

There seem to be two main sources of the concept in Revelation, the Egyptian and the Targumic. In ancient Egyptian literature “to die the second death” meant the total destruction of the soul after bodily death. Since many Egyptian texts also speak of a “lake of fire”, the pairing of these two concepts in Revelation may well reflect an Egyptian origin and meaning. This would imply for Revelation that the second death is the final separation of the unsaved from God and His plans for the universe (Rev 20:14-15).

The concept of second death also appears six times in the Aramaic targums to the Old Testament (the Aramaic word “targum” means interpretation or translation). The written evidence we have for the Aramaic targums is after the time of Revelation. But the targums purport to be a writing down of oral translations from Hebrew into Aramaic occurring in synagogues where the chief language of the attendees was Aramaic and the Hebrew of the Old Testament was not widely understood. The Aramaic targums were not particularly literal translations but were often interpretive paraphrases. It is in these paraphrases (to Jeremiah 51:39, 57, Deuteronomy 33:6, and Isaiah 22:14; 65:6, 15) that the term second death occurs. In the targums, those who die the second death will not live in the world to come, they are excluded from further resurrection. It is the death of the soul, eternal separation from God. See extensive notes on the background of second death in Aune, *Revelation*, 1091-1093 (although I do not agree that Revelation 14:9-11 and 20:10 support his dismissal of the Egyptian meaning of second death in Revelation—see comments on Rev 20:10).

But they will be priests of God and of Christ. . . . The faithful overcomers are not only exempt from the second death but are called priests (Greek: *hiereis*) of God and of Christ. This echos the language of Revelation 1:6 and 5:10. The original commission to Israel was that they were to be a “kingdom of priests” (Greek: *basileion hierateuma*—Exod 19:5-6, cf. Isa 61:6), so this designation assumes that the church is an extension of Old Testament Israel in John’s mind (a similar concept is implied in Matthew 19:28 and Luke 22:30). To be a priest is to be in the presence of God and to represent God to others. It also means to be a receiving point at the

human level for the response of others to God. For Israel to be a kingdom of priests meant that it represented God to all the other nations and stood in an intermediary role between God and the nations. In the language of this text, the original mission of Israel, to bring the blessing of Abraham to the whole world (Gen 12:3), is extended also to the church (cf. Gal 3:6-9).

. . . and they will reign with Him a thousand years. This is a word for word repeat of the conclusion to verse 4, only substituting the pronoun (Him) for Christ. Repeating this clause prepares the way for verse 7 and what follows. The thousand years is possibly an allusion to the life spans of pre-Flood humanity, which fell slightly short of a thousand years (Gen 5:5, 8, 11, 14, etc.). In the Millennium and the New Jerusalem, Revelation offers a counterpart of Genesis' early chapters, reversing the effects of sin on the human race. This latter part of Revelation makes it a fitting conclusion to the canon of Scripture, bringing the world back to the original conditions in the Garden (Rev 22:2). The grand story of Scripture begins in a garden and ends in a garden city, the New Jerusalem.

While the text of Revelation is not clear whether this thousand-year reign occurs in heaven or on earth, Revelation 7:9-17 and 19:1-10 seem clearly in heaven and are parallel to the context of this verse. Perhaps a stronger evidence for the location of the millennial judgment is John 14:1-3. There Jesus speaks to His followers in the upper room just before His crucifixion. He informs them that He will be leaving (John 14:18—I understand this to be a reference to His ascension). But when He goes, He will prepare a place for them in His Father's house in heaven (John 14:2). He then promises to come again and receive them to Himself, "that where I am you may be also" (John 14:3, ESV). Note that Jesus does not tell them that He will return so He can be with them where they are, He tells them that He wants to bring them to where He is (in heaven). If the New Jerusalem is Jesus' Father's house, it only comes to earth at the close of the Millennium (Rev 21:2, cf. 20:9). The weight of the canonical evidence is that the Millennial reign of the saints will occur in heaven rather than on earth.

Rev 20:1-6 (Summary)—

These six verses focus on the beginning of the Millennium, the thousand years. The first act of the Millennium is the binding and imprisoning of Satan (Rev 20:1-3). If there are still human beings on earth at this time, the binding of Satan would somehow prevent him from interacting with the human race during the Millennium. More likely, the earth is desolate during this time. The saved are in heaven (John 14:1-3) and the unsaved have experienced the first death at the Second Coming or before (2 Thess 1:7-10; Rev 6:15-17). So the binding of Satan is figurative for being isolated from contact with humanity by the circumstance that all living humans are in heaven and he is confined to a desolate earth (more on this in Rev 20 [Excursus on the Millennium]).

Also at the beginning of the Millennium is the (implied) resurrection of the righteous to join the living saints in heaven for the purpose of judging and reigning (Rev 20:4-6). These king/priests sit on thrones with the authority to judge (Rev 20:4), they include the martyrs of the mark of the beast era (20:4), and they are eternally secure, since the second death has no power over them (20:6). They live and reign with Christ for a thousand years.

Rev 20:7-10 (Introduction)—

There is no special transition language at the beginning of verse 7 (such as “and I saw”), but this section is clearly a turn of the eras, marking the end of the Millennium and the beginning of the very final actions of the cosmic conflict. In this passage the focus moves from the righteous and the first resurrection to the unrighteous who come up in the (implied—Rev 20:5) second resurrection. Satan is released from his prison and goes out to deceive the newly-resurrected unrighteous nations over the breadth of the earth (Rev 20:8). Being the unrighteous of all the ages, they are numbered “like the sand of the sea”. They assemble in battle formations and march from all over the earth to surround the beloved city, also known as the camp of the saints. In the vision, fire immediately comes down from heaven and consumes them (Rev 20:9). At this point the devil who deceived them is thrown into the lake of fire, which was last seen at the end of chapter 19. This extremely brief narrative will have significant elaboration in the last section of Revelation 20 (verses 10-15).

Rev 20:7-8—

And when the thousand years were finished, Satan will be released from his prison, and he will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, whose number is like the sand of the sea, to gather them together for battle. The release of Satan from his prison (the Abyss in 20:1, 3) recalls the opening of the Abyss in Revelation 9:1, which also released demonic forces to range over the earth. The opening clause announces the end of the thousand years, which were the focus of 20:1-6. The beginning of 20:7 harkens back to both 20:4-6 and 20:1-3. It is the natural follow on from 20:4-6, which describe what is going on during the thousand years. In fact, it picks up on the exact wording of Revelation 20:5a—“the thousand years were finished” (Greek: *telesthê ta chilia etê*). This is probably a “framing repetition”, moving the narrative forward after the interlude of 5b-6. It is completing what was anticipated then, including the resurrection of the “rest of the dead”, which is not explicitly mentioned in verse 7. This resurrection results in a re-population of the earth, which had been desolate for a thousand years. This re-population of the earth is what makes it possible for Satan to “deceive the nations” once more.

Verse 7 also harks back to the binding of Satan in 20:1-3. The terms “thousand years” (Greek: *chilia etê*), “were finished” (Greek: *telesthê*), and “released” (Greek: *luthêsetai*) are all found in verse 3. What was predicted there is fulfilled here. The one difference is that verse 3 proclaims that Satan “must be released” (Greek: *dei luthênai*) and verse 7 simply states that Satan (mentioned in verse 2) “will be released” (Greek: *luthêsetai*). The passive of *luthêsetai* implies divine activity, as it did in Revelation 9:1, 3, and 5. It is another way of saying that God is the one releasing Satan from his prison. So this action serves a purpose in God’s plan. Why Satan’s release is “necessary” (Greek: *dei*) from God’s perspective will be explored a little later. An interesting difference between verse 7 and 20:1-3 is that the word for Satan’s prison (Greek: *tês phulakês*) is not found in the earlier passage, instead he is locked into the Abyss (Rev 20:1, 3). According to Aune (*Revelation*, vol. 3, 1093), ancient traditions suggested that demons released from confinement are far more dangerous than they were before (cf. Luke 11:24-26).

Verse 7 moves the reader to the events at the close of the thousand years. The verse

confirms what was said in 20:1-3, that Satan will be released from his prison. But what verse 7 does NOT say is expressed in 20:5, the "rest of the dead" are to be raised. J Webb Mealy has helpfully suggested that this unmentioned resurrection is mentioned in 20:13, where the sea, death and Hades all give up the dead that are in them. These dead are raised for the purpose of judgment and their fate after judgment is to join death, Hades and Satan in the lake of fire (Rev 20:15). So while a resurrection of the unsaved is not mentioned in 20:7-10, it is reasonable to assume that the "nations" of verse 8 are made up of the newly resurrected unsaved. This, of course, raises many questions that we will have to deal with at some point. Why "must" (Rev 20:3) Satan be released? Now that he can no longer deceive anyone, wouldn't it be better to simply leave him confined? Why are the unsaved resurrected, only to die once more? What is the point of this story?

. . . and he will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, whose number is like the sand of the sea, to gather them together for battle. Satan's confinement (Rev 20:3) restrains his freedom of action to "deceive the nations" (Greek: *plana ta ethnê*). Now that he has been released from his prison, that restraint is removed. He can once again go out "to deceive the nations" (Greek: *planêsai ta ethnê*) which are in the "four corners of the earth". The purpose of the deception is gather the nations to the beloved city in order to defeat it.

The theme of deceiving the nations is another parallel between this passage and Revelation 20:1-3. How can Satan deceive them again when his deceptions have already been exposed in a previous life (Rev 17:16)? He deceives them by the same method he used at the beginning, slander, a misrepresentation of the other side in the conflict. In the Garden, the serpent accused God of lying in order to restrict Adam and Eve's freedom. How does God respond to that lie? By demonstration and by judgment. In releasing Satan once more God demonstrates His commitment to the freedom of His creatures (Rev 20:3, 7). And in judgment (Rev 20:4, 12-13) the characters of all, including God, are fully revealed to all the watching universe. Satan uses his freedom to deceive once more and once more create mayhem. He demonstrates that he and those who follow him have become incorrigible, and that the consequences of their actions will be well deserved.

. . . the four corners of the earth . . . The mention of the four corners of the earth recalls similar expressions in the Bible and Jewish tradition. In Revelation four angels standing at the four corners of the earth are holding four destructive winds so that God's sealing work can continue until it is complete. In Isaiah 11:12, God promises to gather Israelites from the "four corners of the earth", meaning from every place into which they were exiled. In Jeremiah 49:36 God sends four winds from the four quarters of heaven to scatter the Elamites among every nation on earth. In Ezekiel 7:2-3, the four corners of Israel is a way of saying all of Israel, the whole country. In 4 Ezra 13:5 there is a final gathering of an innumerable multitude from the four winds of heaven to fight the man from the sea (4 Ezra 13:33-34). The core meaning for Revelation 20 seems to be that the four corners of the earth represent the earth in its entirety, including the remotest parts of the earth. The group being gathered is all the unsaved from all human history, all alive at one time and in one place.

. . . Gog and Magog . . . The phrase Gog and Magog is in apposition to "the nations"

earlier in the verse. They are one and the same thing. Gog and Magog were enemies of ancient Israel (Ezekiel 38-39), located far to the north (Ezek 38:6, 15; 39:2). The fact that the terms “Gog and Magog” are used here and not at all earlier in the book indicates that this gathering of all the nations is to be distinguished from the previous worldwide gatherings (Rev 16:13-14; 17:3). While the two gatherings are parallel, the first occurs in the lead-up to the Second Coming of Christ, whereas this gathering is a thousand years later. The first gathering is the final challenge to God’s sovereignty before His enemies all experience the first death. The challenge here occurs after the second resurrection, resulting in the unsaved’s final and complete elimination from the universe. See comments on Rev 20:7-8. This interpretation of the narrative fits with Jewish tradition, in which Gog and Magog appear only at the very extremity of the last days (*Jerusalem Targum* to Numbers 11:27; see also the *Qur’an* 18:94; 21:96).

Gog is evidently a personal name in Hebrew (1Chr 5:4). In Ezekiel Gog is the name of the prince of Meshech and Tubal and Magog is another name for their land (Ezek 38:2-3). Meshech and Tubal are also associated with Magog in the table of nations after the Flood (Gen 10:2). Gog was to come from “the remotest parts of the north” (Ezek 38:6, cf. 38:15; 39:2, NRSV) to threaten Israel after it had settled peacefully in the wake of their return from the exile to Babylon. Ezekiel’s picture of the future is different from the rest of the Old Testament prophets in that it portrayed a double-end time battle. All the prophets anticipated a major battle with the nearer nations around Israel in the context of God’s great in-breaking into history after the Exile. But Ezekiel anticipates that after the first battle, Israel would settle peacefully and safely and become prosperous (Ezek 38:8, 11, but cf. Jer 6:22ff.). The nations to the far north would see this recovered Israel as an opportunity to enrich themselves (Ezek 38:11-13). In Ezekiel’s account, God’s takes note of these ambitions (Ezek 38:14-19) and rains down fire upon Gog and Magog (Ezek 38:22; 39:6). Thus, the destruction of Gog and Magog is described in the kind of language we saw earlier in Revelation 19:19-21 (Ezek 39:4).

The parallels between Revelation 20 and Ezekiel are obvious. The mention of God and Magog (unique to Ezekiel 38-39 and Rev 20) makes the relationship between these passages a certain allusion. But there is one major difference between them. In Ezekiel, Gog and Magog represent certain peoples that lived to the far north of ancient Israel. But in Revelation 20 Gog and Magog represent the sum total of all the people alive on earth at the time, with the exception of the saints who are camped in or around the New Jerusalem (Rev 20:9). So John, as usual, has taken the literal and local things of Israel’s history and applied them in a worldwide, spiritual way to the context of the New Testament. Geographically based enemies of Israel now represent the people of the world in opposition to God and His people. Specific nations in opposition to Yahweh represent everyone on earth with a spiritual commitment in rebellion against God. And these unsaved hordes include all the unsaved who have ever lived.

While Gog and Magog as a pair occur in the Bible only in Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 20 (The LXX of Numbers 24:7 also translates “Agag” as “Gog”), there is a rich history of these names in Jewish tradition outside the Bible, much of which John would likely have been exposed to. In the *Sibylline Oracles* (3:319) Gog and Magog are names for the Nubians who accompanied Antiochus Epiphanes IV when he captured the temple in Jerusalem (168 BC). In the writings of Josephus (*Antiquities* 1:123) Magog was regarded as another name for the

Scythians, who lived in the Caucasus mountain region. In rabbinic sources the eschatological war is called “the war of Gog and Magog” (*bSanh.* 97b). In *Targum Ezekiel* 39:16 Gog is equated with Rome. For a much more detailed analysis of the Jewish backgrounds to this and other expressions in this passage see David E. Aune, *Revelation*, The Anchor Bible, vol 52c, 1093-1095).

. . . whose number is like the sand of the sea . . . The sand of the sea here may be a parody of God’s promises to Abraham and Jacob that Abraham’s seed would be innumerable, like the sand of the sea, the stars of heaven, or the dust of the earth (Gen 13:16; 22:17; 32:12, cf. Gen 41:49; Rom 9:27). The sand of the sea is also a metaphor for the descendants of David (Jer 33:22) and the population of Israel (2 Sam 17:11; 1 Kings 4:20; Isa 10:22; 48:19; Hos 1:10). But parallel to the usage in Revelation 20, “sand of the sea” is frequently used for an enormous army (Josh 11:4; Jdg 7:12; 1 Sam 13:5, cf. 1 Macc 11:1). The root meaning of the phrase seems to be “abundance” in general (Gen 41:49; Job 29:18; Psa 139:18; Jer 15:8; Hab 1:9, cf. *Prayer of Manasseh* 1:9; *Joseph and Asenath* 1:2; *Greek Apocalypse of Ezra* 2:32; 3:2). So the purpose of the phrase in this passage is to emphasize the enormous size of this gathering against the New Jerusalem. It is another way of saying a great multitude.

. . . to gather them together for battle . . . The Greek of this clause (*sunagagein autous eis ton polemon*) is an exact parallel to the language of Revelation 16:14. It is almost as if the author has forgotten about the previous battle. Not only so, the previous battle (Armageddon) ended in the complete destruction of the enemy powers gathered in 16:14 and all those who followed them. If the former battle takes place before the Millennium and this one after (the position of this commentary), then the question arises, If the nations are destroyed at the Second Coming (beginning of the Millennium), who are the nations in 20:8? They would be made up of the unsaved who “did not come to life until the thousand years were finished” (Rev 20:5a). That would mean that in these verses Satan gathers the nations for a replay of the battle of Armageddon, but this time after the thousand years. Why such a replay would be necessary from the divine perspective is a question we will deal with later.

The gathering of hostile nations for battle against the people of God is a frequent theme in the Old Testament prophets and in Jewish apocalyptic tradition. In Joel 3:2, Zechariah 12:1-9 and 14:2, and Psalm 2:1-6, the enemy powers gather against Jerusalem. In Daniel 11:40-45 the King of the North camps against the “beautiful holy mountain”, also presumably Jerusalem. Ezekiel 38-39 fits into that larger theme with two differences. 1) There is no direct mention of Jerusalem, and 2) it is God, rather than the nations, who motivates the gathering of Israel’s enemies. In 1 Enoch 56:5-8 a group of angels incites the Parthians and the Medes to attack Israel. In the Dead Sea Scrolls the force opposed to the sons of light is called the “army of Belial” (1QM 1:1, 13). The author of Revelation seems quite familiar with these traditions, which references many local conflicts. He has drawn on these local traditions for imagery to describe Satan’s last attempt to defeat God in the cosmic conflict.

Rev 20:9—

And they marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints, the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and consumed them. The nations

newly deceived by Satan prove to be hostile to God and His people once again. The word for “marched” (Greek: *anebêsan*) literally means “went up”, which seems strange at first glance. But the same Greek word is consistently used for going up to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:3; Psa 122:1-4; Isa 2:3; Mic 4:2; Matt 20:17-18) and/or the temple (John 2:13-14; 7:14). Going up to Jerusalem reflects a geographical reality. Jerusalem is the high point on the main road from the coast to the Jordan Valley. So approaching Jerusalem normally involves a significant ascent in altitude. Likewise, when leaving Jerusalem or the temple people “went down” (Mark 3:22; Luke 2:46-51; 10:30; Acts 8:14-15). This is compatible with the interpretation that sees the “beloved city” in verse 9 as the New Jerusalem of 21:2. It is interesting that the word “marched” signals a shift of tense in the narrative. In verses 7 and 8 the main verbs are looking forward into the future (Greek: *telesthê, luthêsetai, exeusestai*), but in 9-10a they shift to the aorist indicative (*anebêsan, ekuklôsan, katebê, katephagen eblêthê*), signaling a point in past time. It is as if John was viewing this event as something in the far future and then suddenly viewed it as if it had already occurred. This may reflect the influence of the Hebrew prophetic perfect. The very last main verb of verse 10 (“they will be tormented”-- Greek: *basanisthêsontai*) shifts back to a future tense.

And they marched across the breadth of the earth . . . The word translated “breadth” (Greek: *platos*) generally means the width of an area or object (see Rev 21:16), but can also mean a flat area like a city square (Neh 8:1). The phrase “the breadth of the earth” (LXX: *ta platê tês gês*) describes the distance the Babylonian armies covered to get to Jerusalem and besiege it in Habakkuk 1:6. Here it means the width or breadth of the earth, emphasizing that these nations are coming from long distances away. They march from all over the earth to the “camp of the saints”, the beloved city.

. . . (they) surrounded the camp of the saints, the beloved city . . . The word translated “surrounded” (Greek: *ekuklôsan*) is commonly used in the ancient world for encircling a city with the intent of placing it under siege. The same word for “surround” (Greek: *kukloumenên*) is used in Luke 21:20 to describe the Roman siege of Jerusalem that began in AD 66 (cf. Luke 19:43-44). The intent of the nations seems to be to attack and conquer the city.

There is some ambiguity whether the “saints” (Greek: *tôn hagiôn*) here means angels or the people of God. In the LXX, “saints” (*hagiôn*) can be used with reference to angels (Job 15:15; Psa 89:6 [LXX: 88:6]; Dan 8:13; Zech 14:5). But in Revelation, as in Daniel 7:18-27, the term “saints” consistently refers to the faithful people of God on earth, who are persecuted by the enemy powers but triumph in the end (Rev 5:8; 8:3-4; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:8).

The word for “camp” (Greek: *parembolên*) can mean a fortified camp or army barracks (Acts 21:34, 37: 22:24; 23:10). It can also mean an army lined up for battle (Heb 11:34). The two phrases (“the camp of the saints and the beloved city”—Greek: *tên parembolên tôn hagiôn kai tên polin tês êgapêmenên*) are connected by a Greek *kai* (“and”). The Greek *kai* can mean “and” (the camp of the saints and the beloved city are two different things) or it can mean “namely” (the camp of the saints and the beloved city are two different terms for the same thing). If one reads the *kai* here as separating the two phrases one could think of the “camp of the saints” as drawn up in military array around the city to defend it. If one reads the *kai* as “namely”, “camp

of the saints” is another way of describing the beloved city. In that case the saints are being portrayed as inside the city, perhaps arrayed in a defensive posture. Either way, the enemy nations completely surround both the camp of the saints and the beloved city. “Camp of the saints” may echo “the camp of Israel” (Exod 14:19-20-- LXX: *tês parembolês Israêl*). In the Pentateuch, the word “camp” is used nearly 100 times for the Israelite encampment in the wilderness. Since the New Jerusalem is shaped in a perfect cube (like the Most Holy Place) a deliberate allusion to the wilderness camp in the Pentateuch is very possible.

The phrase “beloved city” (Greek: *tên polin tên êgapêmenên*) occurs also in *Sirach* 24:11, where it refers to Jerusalem (see similar expressions in Psalm 78:68 [LXX 77:68] and Jeremiah 11:15). The beloved city is not described in detail here, that description is primarily in Revelation 21. It appears that Revelation 20:7-15 and Revelation 21:1-8 are parallel accounts. They do not follow each other chronologically. So the scene in this verse is later in time than the city coming down from heaven (Rev 21:2). The city is here portrayed on earth (Rev 20:9), where it can be attacked by the nations. Just as the gathered nations includes all the unsaved of all the ages, so the beloved city contains all the saved of all the ages. For the first and only time in human history, everyone who ever lived will be alive to experience the final confrontation.

. . . and fire came down from heaven and consumed them. There is a strong tendency among interpreters to understand the fire of this verse literally as a punishment directly from God. They see such an outcome as a reflection of the justice of God. In their minds, punishing fire is an essential aspect of God’s character. And if the text should be taken literally, it has many parallels in the Bible. “. . . the Lord your God is a consuming fire” (Deut 4:24, ESV, cf. Heb 12:29). As Ezekiel writes in 38:22-23, ESV: “I will rain upon (Gog) and his hordes . . . torrential rains and hailstones, fire and sulfur.” And in 39:6, ESV, “I will send fire on Magog.” In Zephaniah 3:8 God is described as saying, “. . . in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed.” According to Aune (*Revelation*, vol. 3, 1099), there are several similar passages in the *Sibylline Oracles*, where streams of fire from heaven destroy the enemies of God.

The big question is this, are the biblical accounts of end-time destruction by fire meant to be taken literally? In the end, is direct action taken by God to destroy the wicked with literal fire? In favor of such a conclusion would be texts like 2 Kings 1:9-12. In this passage Elijah twice calls down fire from heaven to consume a band of 50 soldiers. And the language of 2 Kings is almost word for word the same as Revelation 20:9. The Greek for “fire came down from heaven and consumed them” (Rev 20:9) is *katebê pur ek tou ouranou kai kataphagen autous*. Nearly identical language is found in 2 Kings 1:12, ESV: “Let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty” (LXX: *katabê pur ek tou ouranou kai kataphagen auton kai tous pentekonta autou*). This parallel to a historical record in the Bible supports a literal reading of the fire from heaven in Revelation 20:9. Similar to 2 Kings 1:12 are Job 1:16, where “the fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them,” and Genesis 19:24, where “the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire.” If one takes all three incidents literally, one would be inclined to take the fire of Revelation 20:9 literally (cf. Lev 10:1-2; Num 16:35). With these, the Babylonian Talmud (*Zebachim* 116.2) is in agreement: “. . . they shall be killed with the burning of the soul, with a flame of fire, which shall come from under the throne of glory.”

But there is one fact in the biblical account that makes me reluctant to take the destructive fires of the end literally. Whatever the fire of Revelation 20:9 is, the result is second death. The fires of 2 Kings and Job resulted in first death, a death from which there IS a resurrection. But the fire of Revelation 20:9 results in second death, the death from which there is no resurrection. And there is only one example of second death in all the Bible, and that is the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. If Jesus had died of crucifixion alone, He would have died the first death. But it wasn't crucifixion that killed him, the Roman soldiers were surprised that He was dead so soon (John 19:31-34). Jesus' death on the cross is instead the model for the death of all those who finally perish in Revelation 20, it is the consequence of sin.

The death of Christ was not caused by fire, nor was it the result of a direct action from God (Jesus would have died already in Gethsemane had not the Father intervened to strengthen Him—Luke 22:43). God did not kill Jesus on the cross, His death was caused by a combination of the sin that was placed upon Him (1 Peter 2:22-24) and the absence of God's sustaining strength (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34), the same conditions that characterize the unrighteous at this final moment. As noted in Rev 15-18 (The Wrath of God) there are times in Scripture when descriptions of God's active judgments against sin turn out to be God allowing the consequences of sin to take their course (cf. Rom 1:18-28). Something similar happened at the cross (Rom 4:25, cf. Hos 11:7-8). God gave Christ up to bear the consequences of human sin. There is an end-time parallel to this perspective in 4 Ezra 13, a Jewish vision contemporary with Revelation. In 4 Ezra 13:8-11 a hostile force wages war with the man from the sea, who burns them up with a stream of fire. But the fire is interpreted allegorically in 13:21-56 (cf. Aune, *Revelation*, vol. 3, 1099). With this in mind, John here uses incidents and actions in the past to provide imagery for his vision of the future.

In harmony with that background, Sigve Tonstad (*Revelation*, 294) sees the fire of Revelation 20:9 as the light of revelation. In the context of the final conflict around the beloved city, God fully reveals the truth about His character (and glory) and the role that every person has played in the cosmic conflict, whether for good or whether for evil. In the full light of judgment (cf. Rev 20:12-13) the deceptions of Satan are fully exposed. All the unrighteous come to realize that they have been deceived and that they do not fit into a universe where selfless love is the central reality. As divine revelation opens to them, they come face to face with the darkest version of themselves and are filled with a sense of worthlessness and self-hatred. It is a mind-shattering ordeal and annihilation will seem a relief by way of contrast.

The glory of God's selfless character is not a weapon, it is life-giving to the righteous. But in the presence of sin, the full revelation of God's glory results in mental, emotional and physical anguish. Sin contains the seeds of the sinner's own destruction (cf. Ezek 28:18). The final battle, therefore, does not require God's active intervention. In despair, the combatants turn on each other and their army self-destructs as a result (cf. Ezek 38:21; 1 Enoch 100:1-3; Rev 6:4; 9:13-21; 17:16). It is, therefore, quite possible that the revelation of God's glory, which is portrayed in the Bible as a consuming fire (Exod 19:18; 24:17; Deut 4:24; Ezek 1:4; Dan 7:9-10; Heb 12:29), results in the self-destruction of sinners.

Earlier in my career, I would have strongly endorsed a literal reading of the fire and God's active role in the destruction of the unrighteous. But a clearer understanding of the cross,

where second death reared its ugly head for the first time, has caused me to question my earlier convictions on the matter. The destruction of evil does not require active intervention on God's part (I am not saying God NEVER intervenes in judgment—see Rev 15-18 [The Wrath of God]), sin contains the seeds of its own destruction (Ezek 28:18). Why insist that fire be taken literally in 20:9 when so many other elements of the chapter are clearly symbolic (cf. the fire in Rev 11:5)? Is the key to the Abyss a literal key (Rev 20:1)? Is the chain with which Satan is bound a literal chain (20:1)? Is Satan to be fully equated with a literal serpent (20:2)? Is Satan literally tied up or imprisoned for a thousand years (20:2, 7)? It seems to me that the nature of the fire is at least an open question. What it clearly teaches is that the destruction of evil will be sudden, certain, and complete. And that Satan will be swept away with all those he has led astray (Rev 20:9-10).

What about the universalist argument that the fire of this verse represents cleansing fire that will ultimately bring even the hardened sinners of this verse to repentance in the "lake of fire"? It is true that "fire" can be a metaphor for God's purification of people in the Bible (Prov 17:3; Isa 6:6-7; Mal 3:2-3; Rev 3:18). The question is whether or not that meaning of fire is the most natural one in this particular context. Revelation 20:9 says that the result of the lake of fire is that it "consumed" (Greek: *katephagen*) the unrighteous. And that fire results in second death (Rev 20:10, 14). The Greek word *katephagen* means to "eat down", the equivalent of the English to "eat up". This basic meaning concerns meeting bodily needs for nutrition (Gen 31:38; 41:4; Deut 28:38, 51; 1 Kings 16:4; Joel 1:4; 2:25; Matt 13:4; Mark 4:4; Luke 8:5; Rev 10:9-10; 12:4), particularly the bodily needs of animals. But the extended meaning, especially when associated with fire, is complete destruction or ending of life (Lev 10:2; Num 16:35-38; 2 Kings 1:10-14; Job 1:16; Psa 105:35 [LXX: 104:35]; Isa 1:28-31; Amos 7:4; Lam 2:3). It can even be a metaphor of killing with the sword (2 Sam 2:26; Jer 2:30; 26:14). With that in mind, second death would more likely refer to permanent extinction of life, rather than a stage along the way to redemption. If John had wanted to state that the lake of fire would result in the purification or conversion of all humanity, he could easily have said so. Instead, he chose language that points in a very different direction.

Rev 20:10—

And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and burning sulphur, where also the beast and the false prophet are, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. This verse alludes back to Revelation 14:10-11, where the third angel's message warns those who received the mark of the beast of the ultimate consequences of their actions. The final fulfillment of that warning comes in this passage. It also alludes to 19:19-21, where the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire.

In the book of Revelation the devil is also called dragon, ancient serpent, and Satan (Rev 12:9; 20:2). While the dragon was in some ways reminiscent of ancient Rome (Rev 12:3-5), at its root, the dragon represented Satan's activity using the nations and their alliances to resist God's rule on earth and in the universe. Satan is the key player in the unholy trinity of Revelation 13 and 16, along with the beast and the false prophet.

. . . where also the beast and the false prophet are . . . In this verse the dragon/Satan finally joins the beast and false prophet in the lake of fire (cf. Rev 19:19-21). While the two references to the lake of fire are clearly parallel, the position of this commentary is that the lake of fire events projected in Revelation 19 and 20 are separated by the thousand year period of the Millennium. See Rev 20 (Excursus on the Millennium). If the lake of fire is metaphorical, as is likely, the message here is that the devil and all his followers, including the systems that they established, will ultimately come to their end at the time of God's choosing. Since the beast and the false prophet were pre-*parousia* systems, those systems are no longer existing, even though those who engaged in those systems have here been resurrected to face final judgment and destruction. That the same "fire" can contain both individuals and systems encourages a metaphorical reading of the lake.

. . . who deceived them . . . I have translated "who deceived them" to make sense in the context. But the tense of "deceived" is actually a present participle, the devil who "deceives" (Greek: *ho planôn*) them (the nations or Gog and Magog). Since the deception preceded the nations' destruction in the previous verse, a past tense would make more sense in the context. But the present participle takes on the time of the main verb, so if the devil is cast into the lake of fire at the same time as the nations, the deceiving could be seen as an ongoing act at the moment of destruction. But, more likely, this is an example of John's imprecise use of Greek grammar, one of the so-called solecisms of Revelation.

And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and burning sulphur . . . In the book of Revelation the devil/Satan has tried in many ways to defeat the government of God, and in the process undergoes many defeats. He is defeated in his attempt to devour the male child (Rev 12:3-5). He is defeated in the war in heaven after the male child's ascension (Rev 12:7-11). He is then cast down (Greek: *eblêthê*) out of heaven (Rev 12:9-10). He fails in his pursuit of the woman in the desert (Rev 12:14-16). His war against the remnant of the woman's seed ultimately fails when his accomplices, the beast and the false prophet, are thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 12:17; 13:1, 11; 16:13-14; 19:19-21). The devil is then thrown into the Abyss in Revelation 20:3 (Greek: *ebalen*). Now, at the conclusion of the thousand years, comes Satan's last attempt to overthrow the government of God and those who are loyal to Him (Rev 20:7-9). When Satan is thrown (Greek: *eblêthê*) into the lake of fire, that act represents the final destruction of Satan and the entire rebellion that began when he, as the resplendent Lucifer, rebelled against God in the beginning (Isa 14:12-15). In the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1-3 was a hint that he might make a comeback. From the lake of fire there will be no comeback. Satan, sin, and sinners are no more.

. . . they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. While only the devil is here cast into the lake of fire, the plural "they" (implied subject of "will be tormented"—Greek: *basanisthêsontai*) includes the beast and the false prophet (Rev 19:20), and also the unsaved dead who were raised at the end of the Millennium (Rev 20:12-15). The phrase "day and night" at its root implies a 24-hour day. But in contexts like this it means action that takes place without ceasing (cf. Rev 4:8). That meaning is heightened by the reference to "forever and ever". Both here and in Revelation 14:11, the fire is described as going on forever and ever (Greek: *eis tous aiônas tôn aiônôn*), a never-ending, eternal fire. Beside the meaning of fire,

which we address elsewhere, the crucial element here is the meaning of “forever” (Greek: *aiôn*) in the Hebraic context of the Bible. Does the fire go on “forever” in the sense of endless years into the future? Or does the fire last long enough to accomplish its purpose, after which the “forever” fire goes out?

. . . **forever and ever** . . . Behind the Greek of “forever” (*aiôn*) here lies the Hebrew word *’ôlam*. While *’ôlam* has the general sense of all subsequent time, it doesn’t carry the full weight of the Greek philosophical understanding of “forever” (all eternity beyond this point). When in 1 Samuel 27:12 the Philistine king Achish thought to himself, “David will be my servant forever”, “forever” (Hebrew: *’ôlam*; LXX: *eis ton aiônā*) to him meant as long as David and Achish both lived. It was a practical use of forever rather than a philosophical one. In 1 Kings 8:13, Solomon says that the house he built will be a dwelling place for Yahweh “forever” (Hebrew: *’ôlamim*). If he meant all future eternity, he was wrong, Solomon’s temple no longer exists. Isaiah 34:10 speaks of the smoke of Edom’s burning going up forever, which is not true in any absolute sense. See comments on Rev 14:11. So a Greek philosophical reading of Revelation 20:10 is not appropriate. The fire of this verse burns as long as necessary to accomplish God’s purpose, bringing the rebellion in the universe to a close.

Rev 20:9-10 (Excursus on the Fate of the Wicked)—

In today’s world there are a variety of attitudes toward the Bible’s picture of the end of sin and sinners. In particular there is conversation about the implications for the character of God of things like eternal torment of the unrighteous. Many ask, how can a God of love justify torment for eternity in reaction to (often seemingly trivial) mistakes made in a relatively brief time frame? On the other hand, there are those who are not troubled by issues of God’s character. For them, if God says that the wicked will be tormented forever and ever, they just believe it and don’t ask too many questions. To them, character of God issues are above their pay grade.

This seems to be the right place within a commentary on Revelation explore the “fate of the wicked”. If God will one day bring an end to sin and sinners in the universe, just how will He bring that about? In this brief excursus, I will explore some of the options interpreters have in understanding the meaning of “fire from heaven” and “tormented day and night forever and ever”. What follows is not carefully researched at this point, simply some off-the-cuff thoughts on the way to a more careful and helpful analysis in the future.

The most traditional and, in some sense, the most straightforward interpretation of Revelation 20:9-10 is to see the fire from heaven as literal fire sent directly by God to punish the unsaved. There are two major outcomes in such a reading. In one outcome, the punishment by fire is the onset of an eternal torment of the unsaved in literal flames. Sinners remain alive in the midst of the flames in order to continue experiencing this torment through the ages to come.

A second literal option is that God’s fiery judgment is the means by which sin and sinners are annihilated and cease to exist. This latter has probably been my default position through the decades, understanding that God needs to do strange and uncharacteristic things to eventually bring the sin experiment in the universe to an end. From the perspective of the

options offered in my earlier study on the wrath of God (see Rev 15-18 [The Wrath of God]), God's destructive intervention in this passage (Rev 20:9-10) can be squared with God's love in the following way. He is using active judgment in order to rescue his people from the imminent threat of a massive and hostile army surrounding the New Jerusalem (Rev 20:9).

A third option regarding the fate of the wicked is "apokatastasis." That is a transliteration of a Greek word for "restoration." It is often used as a code word for Christian universalism, the idea that in the end God will find a way to save everyone, including Satan. The most recent, and very powerful, expression of this view is the book "That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell and Universal Salvation", by David Bentley Hart, Yale University Press, 2019. In reading Hart's book I came away with the impression that this view is driven to some degree by a deterministic view of God (sometimes called Calvinism). If God is truly sovereign, then He is ultimately responsible for Lucifer and is therefore responsible for fixing the whole thing, including saving those who, in a sense, have been harmed by God's earlier actions. At the other end is the view that God values human freedom above all else (sometimes called Arminianism) and will respect the wishes of those who are settled in their opposition to God and the principles of His government. These are more likely to prefer "annihilationism" to universalism, feeling that universalism does not respect human freedom sufficiently. The universalist position is very attractive in many ways, and I would be fine with it if things turn out that way, but am not persuaded at this point. So that is not the direction I will follow in the rest of this Excursus.

A second approach addresses the concern many people have with God using something so painful and traumatic as literal fire to either destroy or torture the wicked. They would see this passage (Rev 20:9-10 and parallels such as Rev 20:14-15 and 14:10-11) using fire metaphorically rather than literally. In Revelation 20 fire is a symbol of the means God uses end sin and suffering in the universe without giving us a scientific and detailed analysis. For the annihilationists, God withdraws the gift of life from sinners in a way consistent with His character of love. The assumption is that they would have been miserable in eternity anyway (like sentencing an alcoholic to a place where there is no alcohol). For those in this group who believe the wicked are eternally conscious, the suffering of the wicked is not the pain and trauma of literal fire but an eternal experience of separation from God, self-recrimination, bitterness, and regret. While a metaphorical reading of the "lake of fire" is appealing in the light of Revelation as a whole (see comments on Rev 1:1), I'm not sure shifting the method of punishment helps much with the issues of God's character mentioned earlier.

The fires of judgment are often metaphorical in Scripture. Jeremiah 17:27 describes Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem as a divine judgment by unquenchable fire. While fire occurred during that conquest, it did not come from God and did not last "forever". According to Jude 7, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with "eternal fire" (*puros aiōniou*), but those fires are not burning today. As mentioned in the comments on Revelation 20:10, the smoke of Edom's burning (cf. Isa 34:10) is no longer going up. We know where Edom was, and there are no fires burning there now. In such passages "eternal fire" cannot be taken at face value. But if the "fires" of hell are taken metaphorically yet still last forever, the torment would be both very great and very lasting, even if not inflicted directly by fire. This does not help much with the character of God issues either.

A third option is to see the fire in this passage (Rev 20:9-10) as a metaphor of sin's self-destructive power when faced with a full manifestation of God's glory. God's glory is often described in the Bible in terms of fire. Daniel's vision of the heavenly throne room (Dan 7:9-10) describes God's throne as consisting of fiery flames and its "wheels" are ablaze in burning fire. A stream of fire issues and comes out from before God in the presence of a massive multitude of created beings. But the fire coming out of God's throne is not destructive, the heavenly beings seem to find it life-giving (see Rev 4:8). In Ezekiel 1:4 the throne of God is surrounded by a cloud, with fire flashing out from inside of it. In Ezekiel 1:27 this description is largely repeated and is defined as "the glory of the Lord" (Hebrew: *chebôd Yahweh*-- Ezek 1:28). So in Ezekiel 1, fire is a metaphor for the glory of God. Isaiah 33:14-15 asks, "Who will dwell with devouring fire . . . everlasting burnings"? The answer comes, "The one who walks righteously and speaks uprightly." The fire of God's glory does not harm the righteous, the glory of God is inherently life-giving, not destructive.

The fire of God's glory, however, is not a safe place for the sinner. God even says, "No one can look at my face and live" (Exod 33:20). It is for this reason that God has used a variety of means to shield His people from the fullness of His glory, as he did in the case of Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 33:18-23). Among the means God has used to shield human beings from the fullness of His glory were the sanctuary (Exod 25:8) and the incarnation of Jesus Christ (John 2:19-21; Phil 2:6). In the sanctuary, the glory of God was housed behind multiple curtains, which shielded His glory from view. On the rare occasions when the High Priest entered God's direct presence, he entered behind a thick cloud of incense. Likewise, the Shekinah glory of God was veiled from human gaze by the physical body of Jesus (Matt 12:6; John 2:19-21). So in the third option regarding the fire of God, the destruction of the wicked is not a result of the direct action of God, but rather of God removing the restraint with which he has interacted with His creatures. He no longer veils His glory, but allows the fullness of it to be experienced by all. In the full presence of God's glory, sinners self-destruct. This is stated explicitly with regard to the death of Satan in Ezekiel 28:18. Satan is destroyed when God brings a fire out from within him. Sin contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. In the words of Elbert Hubbard, "We are punished by our sins, not for them." No active retribution on the part of God is necessary.

As I mentioned above, my default position over the decades has been to take Revelation 20:9-10 literally. God pours out fire from heaven to destroy Satan and sinners outside the New Jerusalem. The position in the previous passage seemed to me stretching the evidence. But more recently, I realized something about the cross that revolutionized my thinking on the subject. Whatever we understand about the lake of fire and the destruction of the wicked, Revelation also calls it the Second Death. And only one person throughout the history of the universe has experienced the Second Death, and that is Jesus Christ on the cross. So it seems that the fate of the wicked is tied somehow to the death of Christ. And in Christ's case, the Second Death did not involve fire, nor any active retribution from God against sin. It was the Romans who were killing Jesus, not God the Father. But more than that, it was the presence of sin that was killing Jesus. The Roman soldiers were surprised that Jesus had died so soon, crucifixion was normally a long, drawn-out process. In fact, Jesus would have died in Gethsemane, had not the Father sent an angel to sustain Him (Luke 22:43). Jesus died, not by

the hand of the Father, but when the Father withdrew His life-giving support (Matt 27:46) and allowed the life-destroying power of sin to do its destructive work in Christ. I am coming to suspect that the death of the wicked will be like that of Christ on the cross.

What we learn from the cross is that the second death is way more complex than simply physical pain and physical extinction. As C. S. Lewis put it, the second death is the great divorce. God loves with an everlasting love (Jer 31:3). It is a relentless love, as expressed in the Hebrew word *chesed*. And the Hebrews described such love as the flame of Yahweh, that cannot be quenched (SoS 8:6-7). To be in the presence of God is to be in the presence pure, other-centered love, a heart full of forgiveness and welcome. But when that everlasting love is relentlessly resisted, the power of God's loving glory is no longer perceived as life-giving, it is perceived as a threat. Sinners become painfully aware of how out of harmony they are with the other-centered love at the heart of God's universe. They have spent their lives in bitterness, unforgiveness, and self-justification. Full awareness of the love and forgiveness they have rejected leads to unbearable emotional and psychological torment, the kind of anguish seen in Christ both on the cross and in the Garden of Gethsemane. At full intensity such shame and guilt crushes out the life of those bearing sin. While Christ's life was spared by special intervention in Gethsemane (Luke 22:43), at the close of the Millennium there will no longer be divine intervention to prolong life, just as there was none on the cross. It is not God that sinners should be afraid of, it is sin that should be feared.

If this perspective is correct, it clarifies one purpose of the Millennium. The "judging" (Rev 20:4) during the thousand years not only concerns the fate of the unsaved, it gives the opportunity for the saved to understand themselves as well as the actions of God in the cosmic conflict. It includes "the healing of the nations" (Rev 22:2). That means the saved will understand themselves better, they will understand each other better, and they will understand God better. As their understanding grows and their trust in God matures over the thousand years, God can gradually "turn up the light" of His glory, so the saved can more and more bask in its life-giving, exhilarating presence. By the end of the thousand years, they will be fully prepared to experience the fullness of God's glory, which will be on display at that time (cf. Matt 5:8—it is the pure in heart that will see God). And they will also be fully prepared to experience the extinction of the lost without losing their trust in the goodness and kindness of God. The "fire" (glory) of God will be the same for both righteous and unrighteous at the close of the Millennium. But to those who learned to love and forgive, it will be life-giving, to those mired in bitterness, lack of forgiveness, and self-centeredness, the glory of God will result in self-destruction, eternal extinction.

Not everyone will be excited about this latter approach, but it is appealing to me more and more. I am open to learn in what way this perspective might be flawed.

Rev 20:11-15 (Introduction)—

With the destruction of sinners and the devil in a lake of "fire" (Rev 20:10), it would seem that the only thing left for Revelation to say is the "happily ever after". And that is certainly coming in chapters 21 and 22. But first we have this strange appendix. There is another throne (Rev 20:11). There is another judgment (20:12). There is another resurrection

(20:13). And there is another lake of fire (20:14-15). Is this another Millennium after the Millennium? And if so, what purpose would it serve? I think it makes much more sense to see Revelation 20:11-15 as an appendix to 20:1-10. The context is the same, but the new vision fills in some of the details that are left unstated before, particularly what happens between the time the beloved city is surrounded by the wicked nations (20:9) and the time when they are destroyed. In verse 9 the narrative is so abrupt one could get the impression that the instant the besieging army arrives it is immolated by fire from heaven. But 20:11-15 tells a more elaborate story, filling in the details that were missing in the earlier narrative.

There was a judgment during the thousand years that is mentioned in 20:4. That judgment occurred after the first resurrection and took place among the righteous (20:4-6). A second resurrection, consisting of the unrighteous, is implied but not described in 20:6-7. The resurrection of the unsaved is described, however, in 20:13. The reason given for their resurrection is judgment. Everyone who ever lived is a part of the final judgment, either before, during or after the Millennium. Prior to the Second Coming and the onset of the Millennium comes the pre-advent judgment (Rev 14:7), determining who would be saved and who would not. At the onset of the Millennium, the saved are taken to heaven (at the Second Coming) and are engaged in a thousand years of judgment, coming to fully understand, not only the role of human beings in the cosmic conflict, but also that of God. At the close of the Millennium, and after the resurrection of the unsaved, there is a final judgment, when all things are clarified, even to the unrighteous. God does not close the conflict until all have come to understand the truth about God and the truth about themselves. Thus, the conflict over the character and government of God can be drawn to a close. Sin and sinners are no more (Rev 20:14-15). A new heaven and a new earth now come into play (Rev 21:1-8 and beyond). We will now look at Revelation 20:11-15 verse by verse.

Rev 20:11—

And I saw a great white throne and the one sitting upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. “And I saw” (Greek: *kai eidon*) again signals a break from what went previously. The word “throne” is found frequently in Revelation. It is a symbol of God’s right to rule the universe. The concept of a “great white throne” (Greek: *thronon megan leukon*), however, is unique to this verse, indicating a special purpose, the final judgment of earth’s history (Rev 20:12-13). The throne of grace (Heb 4:16) is now the throne of judgment. The throne is described as both great and white, a combination not found elsewhere in the Bible, although something similar does occur in the *Shepherd of Hermas* (1.2.2), where the visionary sees a “great white chair” (Greek: *kathedran leukên megalên*) rather than a great white throne. It is possible that John had Isaiah 6:1 in mind here, where Isaiah sees a throne that is “high and lifted up” (LXX: *hupsêlou kai epêrmenou*). It may also recall Solomon’s ivory throne which was raised up above the rest of the throne room a total of six steps (1 Kings 10:18-20; 2 Chr 9:17-19). See also Jesus’ “throne of glory” in Matthew 25:31. White (Greek: *leukon*) in Revelation is the color of perfection and purity. It likely represents the purity (accuracy and fairness) of the judgment which takes place in the following verses.

. . . the one sitting upon [the throne] . . . The “one sitting upon” the throne recalls earlier throne visions in the book (Rev 4:2, 9; 5:7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4). The phrase is quite Jewish in that it is a way of talking about God without actually uttering His name or title (like the divine passive). Here, as earlier (Rev 4:2, 4), John sees the throne(s) before his attention is drawn to the occupant(s) sitting on the throne. Aune notes that this vision reflects the “theophany form” which first describes the coming of the deity and then describes the reaction of nature to the divine appearance (*Revelation*, vol. 3, 1101). Examples of this form are found in both the Old Testament (Jdg 5:4-5; Psa 18:9-14; 77:16-19; Amos 1:2; Mic 1:3-4, etc.) and in early Jewish literature (*Sirach* 16:18-19; *Judith* 16:15; *Testament of Moses* 10:3-6; *Sibylline Oracles*, 3:669-681, etc.). The one sitting on the throne is normally a title of God the Father in Revelation (see also Daniel 7:9-14 where the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man are distinguished). But while the phrase is singular (Greek: *ton kathêmenon*), this should not be understood to exclude Jesus, who sits with His Father on the throne (Rev 3:21) and is destined to judge the nations (Matt 25:31-32).

. . . from whose presence earth and heaven fled away . . . The “earth” (Greek: *hê gê*) and the “heaven” (singular-- Greek: *ho ouranos*) are said to have “fled away” (Greek: *ephugen*) from God’s presence. The original is a bit awkward here. “From whose presence” (Greek: *apo tou prosopou*) is literally “from the face”, without an object. Implied is “from the face of . . . the one sitting on (the throne)”. The normal use with an object is frequent in the Greek Old Testament (see LXX of Exod 14:25; Josh 10:11; 2 Sam 10:13-14; 1 Chr 10:1, etc.). As a singular, heaven here likely represents “sky” rather than the starry universe. The glory of God that results in the destruction of the unrighteous also causes the dissolution of the planet and its surrounding atmosphere. In other words, they ceased to exist. As noted in other biblical passages, the heavens will vanish like smoke (Isa 51:6) and heaven and earth will melt and dissolve (2 Peter 3:10-12). This is the final destruction of the “old age”. Sin, sinners, and even the physical home of sinful humanity comes to an end. If this is correct, the New Jerusalem would once again be floating in space until the creation of a new earth and sky (Rev 21:1—also singular).

. . . no place was found for them. The “no place found for them” (Greek: *topos ouch eurethê autois*) recalls Revelation 12:8, the fate of the devil and his angels after the war in heaven (see comments on Rev 12:7-8). The identical phrase is found in the Greek translation of Daniel 2:35 by Theodotion, except there it is not referring to the whole planet, but to the fragments of the image which disappeared without a trace when the wind carried them away like the chaff from a threshing floor. The same expression is found in the Hebrew of Zechariah 10:9-10. God promises that the returning exiles will be so numerous that “no place is found for them” (Hebrew: *welô yimmatzê’ lachem*), meaning that the whole land of Israel will not be big enough to receive them all. Between the two Old Testament parallels it seems to me more likely that John had Daniel 2 in mind when writing out this vision than Zechariah 10. Earth and sky are not moving from one place to another, they no longer have a place to go. The implication of this phrase in Revelation 20 is that the old earth and sky will forever vanish to be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1).

Rev 20:12—

And I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before the throne. Books were opened, and another book was opened, the Book of Life. The dead were judged on the basis of the things written in the books, according to their works. Once again the verse opens with “and I saw” (Greek: *kai eidon*), which normally suggests a major break in the narrative. But the content of verse 12 seems closely related to verse 11. The only possible antecedent to “before the throne” (Greek: *enôpion tou thronou*) is the great, white throne of the previous verse. So the break here is not as decisive as the one at the beginning of verse 11 or the beginning of the chapter (Rev 20:1). So if one is inclined to make a division within 20:11-15, the best dividing point would be between verse 11 and 12-15. Verse 11 sets the stage and 12-15 describe what happens “before the throne”. Verse 11 tells us about the Judge. Verses 12-13 tells us about those to be judged, followed by their fate (20:14-15).

And I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before the throne. The concept of “dead standing” implies a resurrection, even though the author does not mention one right away. Those mentioned in this verse were once dead and are no longer so. That resurrection is described in some detail in verse 13. This is the “second resurrection”, implied but not stated in those terms in verse 5. In the pre-millennial view adopted in this commentary, the saved would not be categorized as “dead” at the end of the Millennium, as they were resurrected a thousand years before and have been reigning and judging for a thousand years in heaven (cf. John 14:1-3). The term “dead” at this point would only rightly apply to the unsaved, who died before and at the Second Coming of Christ and remained dead during the thousand years. These did not live again until the thousand years were finished (Rev 20:5). They rise for the final judgment (20:11-15), and for the final demonstration of their incorrigible opposition to God and his people (20:7-9).

“Great and small” is the reversal of a phrase that appears four times earlier in the book (Rev 11:18; 13:16; 19:5, 18). It is a more artistic way of saying “everybody”, or at least everybody within a designated group, in this case those resurrected unsaved. It includes the people who matter the most in human perspective and the people who matter the least. In the words of Matthew Henry, “None are so mean, but they have some talents to account for; and none so great, as to avoid having to account for them.” In the words of Barnes, “. . . the same idea might be expressed by saying, the young and old; the rich and poor; the bond and free; the sick and well; the happy and the unhappy; the righteous and the wicked; for all the human family might, in these respects, be considered as thus divided.” So “great and small” is one of several ways to talk about the whole. In this case it is talking about all the dead who were raised at the end of the Millennium to participate in the final judgment.

According to Aune (*Revelation*, 3:1101), the phrase “small and great” occurs more than thirty times in the Old Testament, while “great and small” occurs nine times. Since the righteous were raised at the beginning of the Millennium, “great and small” refers to all among the “rest of the dead” (Rev 20:5). All of the unsaved from the greatest to the least are present at this judgment. Where are the righteous in this picture? In 20:9 is the picture of a “camp of the saints” surrounding or inside the New Jerusalem, a military image in the context of the final attack against the beloved city. In this verse they would be surrounding the throne as witnesses

of the judgment, standing between the throne and the newly resurrected dead. So even though the primary concern of this judgment is the fate of the unsaved, it can truly be said, in the words of Paul, “. . . we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor 5:10, ESV, cf. Matt 25:31-32; John 5:22-23).

Books were opened, and another book was opened, the Book of Life. Notice that there are “books” (plural—Greek: *biblia*) and a “book” (singular—Greek: *biblion*). The “books” are the records of human deeds, they provide the evidence being examined in the judgment. The “book” (of life) contains the names of those who have been designated for salvation. The “books” have to do with the thoughts, intents, and actions of human beings. The “book” (singular) concerns what God has done and is doing in behalf of the human race. The “book” (of life) records the truth about God. The “books” record the truth about us. The “books” reveal the consciences of human beings, the inner thoughts they had sought to hide from others. The “book” reveals the mind of God, whose omniscience goes beyond the outward actions to discern the thoughts and the intents of the heart (Heb 4:12-13). The “books” show that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). The “book” shows that those who sinned and fall short are acceptable to God in Christ and by faith (Rom 3:24, 28).

. . . **the Book of Life.** In the Old Testament, the Book of Life referred to those who belonged to Israel and therefore deserved the blessings of the covenant. Sinners within Israel would be blotted out of the book (Exodus 32) and no longer counted as true Israelites. Those who lived in accordance with the covenant would be counted as righteous and listed in the book (Psalm 69). In Isaiah 4 the book of life contained the names of those living in Jerusalem (Isaiah 4). And in the book of Daniel, the roster of the book is expanded to the eschatological register of those saved in God’s kingdom (Daniel 12:1). To sum up, in the Old Testament, the Book of Life was expressed in three main ways; it included those who belonged to Israel as a nation, those who would be saved and those who would become part of the eschatological kingdom on the day of the resurrection.

Books being opened in the context of judgment appears to be a direct allusion to Daniel 7:10. In both instances the opening of the books is a divine passive (Dan 7:10, LXX: *êneôchthêsan*; Rev 20:12—Greek: *ênoichthêsan*). Extra-biblical Judaism was quite familiar with eschatological books of judgment as well (Jubilees 30; 1 Enoch 89-90; 97:3). The Book of Life is mentioned several times in Revelation (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:17). Some commentators suggest that if the Book of Life is involved in this judgment, it must be proof that the judgment involves the saved as well as the lost. In that case the “first resurrection” (Rev 20:5) would be a spiritual one. I will show why that doesn’t work in my upcoming Excursus on the Millennium (at the close of this chapter). In my view, the Book of Life is necessary for a judgment of the unsaved because it outlines not only God’s decisions, but everything that God has done to save each person who is willing. In the case of the lost, they are not lost because God did not do enough, they are lost because they rejected, or were indifferent to, God’s many attempts to heal them from the malady of sin. The Book of Life contains evidence of God’s actions and decisions, the “books” of record contain evidence of how each human being has responded.

The fact that there are “books” implies that God’s judgments are not arbitrary, biased, or unfair; they are based on recorded evidence. The use of books here is metaphorical, of

course. In the original context readers would have had scrolls in mind, later on codices (books like ours today) or perhaps libraries of books. More recently, one might think of heavenly hard drives, or, even better, the “cloud.” What is clear is that everything that happens or has ever happened is recorded in some fashion (in the mind of God?) and can be recalled as needed in the judgment. Perhaps these revelations from the divine cloud will come in a form more reminiscent of movies, where stories are told in a graphic way that cannot be ignored. Ellen White speaks regarding this passage of a “panoramic view” in which “appear the scenes of Adam’s temptation and fall, and the successive steps in the great plan of redemption.” GC 666 (sic).

What kind of process will occur in this judgment? Tonstad evokes the powerful words of Origen in response to such a question (*Revelation*, 298): “On the day of judgment, when face to face with God, in the purity and perfection of divine love, sin will manifest its own true nature with burning clarity. Sinners themselves will be their own accusers and the evil they have done will ignite within them, as a fever takes hold of a person who has indulged in bad food or intemperate, unhealthy behavior.” Ellen White writes in a similar fashion: “As soon as the books of record are opened, and the eye of Jesus looks upon the wicked, they are conscious of every sin which they have ever committed. They see just where their feet diverged from the path of purity and holiness, just how far pride and rebellion have carried them in the violation of the law of God. The seductive temptations which they encouraged by indulgence in sin, the blessings perverted, the messengers of God despised, the warnings rejected, the waves of mercy beaten back by the stubborn, unrepentant heart-- all appear as if written in letters of fire.” GC 666.

The dead were judged on the basis of the things written in the books, according to their works. It is not clear if the “books” here refers only to the books of evidence named earlier or if it contains both the books of evidence and the Book of Life. The books in this sentence are the evidence for the judgment of all the resurrected dead, so it is possible that the Book of Life is not included in the “books” mentioned here, but it will, in any case, play a role in the process as a whole. “The books” is another way of saying that in the final judgment human and divine memory will play an important role (Psa 56:8; 139:4; Mal 3:16), as will human consciences (Rom 2:15-16), the words of Christ when He walked on the earth (John 12:48), and the law of God (Gal 3:10—which tells all what they should have done), in the broader sense of Torah, not just rules, but the full revelation of God’s mind and character (Psa 139:16). Judgment will prove to be accurate in the light of the heavenly books. The heavenly books, in a sense, are another way of saying the collective memory of the universe. In the final judgment human beings are justified by faith, but judged according to their works.

Verse 12c is the fulfillment of the phrase in Revelation 11:18, the time to judge the dead (Rev 11:18). It is not indicated how long this judgment will be. It will certainly last long enough to complete its work. The “dead” are here judged “on the basis of” (Greek: *ek*) the things written in the books. The books provided the content “out from” which the judgment occurs. Tonstad argues that the judgment here is more revelatory than judicial (Tonstad, *Revelation*, 297), to help human beings to see their lives and the bigger picture from God’s point of view. There is much to commend in his perspective. Since the list of names in the Book of Life

indicates that decisions have already been made, the purpose of this judgment is not for God to make a decision, but to reveal the grounds for His prior judgments. And this revelation will impact all who are present on that occasion. Every lost human being will recall their own past actions and more deeply understand the twisted motives that they hid from themselves. Heavenly onlookers will more deeply understand the thinking of God in determining that one person is safe to save and another is not redeemable. The saved will understand more deeply why loved ones are outside the city and not inside. They will come to discern the kindness and patience of God in allowing the lost time and opportunity to change.

In a sense, God is as much on trial in this judgment as any human being. God “opens the books” to graciously allow the whole universe to examine His actions in the cosmic conflict and his decisions in the final judgment. All will understand themselves and God as never before. Perhaps this is what Paul was talking about when he wrote 1 Corinthians 13:12, ESV: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” In the light of overwhelming clarity, everyone who ever lived will come to declare “just and true are His ways” with conviction, not as a forced confession (Rev 15:3-4). To Him every knee will bow and every tongue confess (Phil 2:9-11). But for Satan and the unrighteous, I believe it will prove a fleeting conviction, sufficient to justify the ways of God before the universe, but not sufficient to overcome the habits of a lifetime and bring about substantive change in the lives of the confessors. For God, this confession changes everything. For the confessors, in the end, it changes nothing.

Rev 20:13—

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them, and everyone was judged according to their works. This verse describes the second resurrection, which was implied in the language of “first resurrection” earlier (Rev 20:5). Since the first resurrection applies only to believers, the second resurrection must be of those who were not believers and who, following the judgment, are destined for the second death (Rev 20:14). This is the “judgment of condemnation” mentioned in John 5:29 (cf. Dan 12:2). In John 5:29 the two resurrections are described as if they occurred at roughly the same time. In Revelation 20 it becomes evident that the two resurrections are separated by a thousand years.

The verse falls naturally into three parts, separated by the typical Greek word for “and” (*kai*). The first part is about resurrection from out of the sea, the second part about resurrections from the land (death and Hades), and the third part essentially repeats the last part of verse 12: Each of the dead were judged according to their works. Sea, death and Hades are all personified in this verse as agents capable of “giving up” the dead, as if they had dominion over all the dead that are in them. *Ethiopic Enoch* 51:1 (note also *Eth. En.* 61:5), written perhaps two hundred years before Revelation, described the earth, *Sheol* (the grave, the Hebrew equivalent of Hades), and hell all giving back their dead. So these images are not unique to Revelation.

This verse emphasizes the universality of the second resurrection in that the dead rose from both land and sea. Any place where the unrighteous dead are found, is forced to give

them back. No matter how they died, they are at this point in time raised to face the final judgment. After this time, there is no one who has ever died will not have also experienced a resurrection. And all will have been judged according to what they have done.

According to Stefanovic (*Revelation*, 582), there is a strong parallel to this verse in a non-canonical Jewish apocalyptic work from around the time of Revelation, Fourth Ezra. The earth will “give up” those who are asleep in it. The Most High will be revealed on the seat of judgment and judgment alone will remain. It also mentions that truth will stand and “recompense” will follow. So the judgment in Ezra is a time of great revelation of character (based on 4 Ezra 7:32-35). While the narrative of Revelation came to John in a vision, God met John where he was and couched that narrative in language familiar from the Old Testament and from the Judaism with which John was familiar.

. . . death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them . . . The pairing of death and Hades occurs four times in Revelation. Death is always listed first, indicating some pre-eminence over Hades. It can also be listed by itself (Rev 21:4, cf. 1 Cor 15:26). The first occurrence is in 1:18 where the Son of Man (understood to be Jesus) has the keys to both of them. So while they may terrify those who live on the earth, they are subject to Jesus’ control. Death is the domain of Satan, since death is the very opposite of life, which comes from God (see in Revelation the Tree of Life [2:7; 22:2, 14], the Book of Life [3:5; 13:8; 17:8, etc.], the crown of life [2:10], the water of life [7:17; 21:6, etc.] and the breath of life [11:11]). Hades as a term is not so much hell, as the grave, the abode of those buried on the land. Having the keys of death and Hades means that Jesus can unlock both of these realms in order to make resurrection possible. The rider on the pale horse is named death and Hades follows after him (Rev 6:8). So these concepts are personified in Revelation. The resurrection anticipated in 1:18 is accomplished in 20:13, as death and Hades give up the dead which were in them (cf. Hos 13:14). Then death and Hades are both brought to an end in the next verse (Rev 20:14). So death and Hades are metaphors of the ultimate consequence of sin and are shown to be both under the control of Christ and temporal.

. . . everyone was judged according to their works. This is almost an exact parallel to the last part of verse 12. In both cases all are judged “according to their works.” In addition to this parallel, “according to their works” can also be found in two other locations in Revelation. In the letter to Thyatira (Rev 2:23) a reward is given to each “according to your works”. The implication of that reference is that all will be “rewarded”, but some rewards will be positive and others negative, and these will be meted according to their actions of those being rewarded. In Revelation 18:6 it is Babylon who is repaid double according to her works. In Revelation 20 the focus is on the process of judgment, with the appropriate “reward” following afterward. In the two earlier passages, the focus is on the outcome more than on the process of judgment. This accords with the biblical principle that you reap what you sow and the “reward” will be appropriate to the crime.

Rev 20:14-15—

Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire, this, the lake of fire, is the second death. And anyone who was not found written in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of

fire. While not reflected in the translation, both death and Hades have the Greek article. This does not mean a definite article, specifying one particular death or Hades out of other options. Here the article is used to signal the abstract use. Death and Hades are here abstract concepts representing, on the one hand, the condition which is the opposite of life, and, on the other, the place where the dead are buried. Since death is a result of sin, the destruction of sin at the end of the Millennium must also include the destruction of death.

The lake of fire appears six times in Revelation 19-21. If the lake of fire is literal, then death and Hades, as personified entities, would have to be literal as well, which makes no sense. But here the lake of fire is a metaphorical way to describe the means by which death and Hades are brought to an end. The eternal torment language in Revelation is not chronologically eternal and the concept of "lake of fire" does not describe an endless, burning hell. The language is figurative and describes a place of endings. Through the "lake of fire" the unrighteous, the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, death, pain, and suffering all come to an end. The same fire is both an agent of death and an agent of death's destruction. When the fire goes out, all sin and its consequences will be no more.

. . . **this, the lake of fire, is the second death.** This statement seems to be an explanatory comment from John himself, interrupting his account of the vision. The lake of fire is defined as the second death. According to Aune (*Revelation*, 3:1091), the concept of second death is mentioned four times in Revelation (Rev 20:6, 14, 15; 21:8), but is not found in the rest of the New Testament, Second Century Christian literature or in pre-Christian Greek literature. As noted earlier (see comments on Rev 20:6), the source of the concept seems to be early Egyptian texts and is confirmed as a concept within Judaism by some of the Aramaic Targums to the Old Testament. The basic concept of second death seems to be the death of the soul, permanent separation from God and from life. How can death and Hades experience the second death when they haven't experienced the first death? It would seem to be further support for a metaphorical use of fire and lake of fire. The meaning is that there will be no more death (Rev 20:4) and no more need for a place to bury the dead (Sheol, Hades, the grave). The second death also brings about the end of death. Death is the last enemy to be done away with (1 Cor 15:26).

And anyone who was not found written in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire. This is an additional explanatory comment indicating that, along with the beast, the false prophet, the devil, death and Hades, anyone not found in the Book of Life will be thrown into the lake of fire. So the lake of fire is the metaphorical means by which evil and everyone that embraced it is brought to an end, so a new heaven and a new earth can be established (Rev 21:1).

In terms of chronology, verse 15 comes before verse 14, since death and Hades cannot be destroyed while any of the unrighteous (who are doomed to die apart from God's provision of salvation—Gen 2:16-17; 3:15) are still alive.

This is the last time in Revelation that someone or something is "thrown". Hail and fire, mixed with blood, are thrown to the earth in Revelation 8:7. A mountain is thrown into the sea (8:8). The stars of heaven are thrown to the earth (12:4). The devil is thrown to the earth as the accuser of the brothers (12:9-10, 13). A great millstone is thrown into the sea (18:21). The beast

and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire (19:20). Satan is thrown into the Abyss (20:3). The devil is thrown into the lake of fire (20:10), as are death, Hades, and everyone whose name is not written in the Book of Life (20:14-15). So 20:15 is the very last throw, and it is interesting, as Tonstad points out (*Revelation*, 299), that the word “forever” is not included here. There is such a finality to the final throw that “forever” would be inadequate as a description. Death, Hades, and all whose names were not written in the Book of Life will be as if they had not been. The old things are gone. The new has come (Rev 21:1).

Rev 20:1-15 (Excursus on the Millennium)—

Unlike some of the previous chapters of Revelation, chapter 20 raises lots of questions, when it comes to interpretation. We have explored some of the evidence that might lead us to answers in the verse by verse section we have just completed, but now I’d like to explore these issues more systematically.

1- What does it mean that Satan cannot deceive the nations? Are the nations still around and safe from temptation? Are they gone completely and therefore no longer accessible to him for temptation?

2- Where are the righteous during the thousand years? Where are the thrones on which the redeemed sit? Are these thrones in heaven or on earth?

3- Are the martyrs of 20:4 a special group or do they represent ALL the righteous?

4- Who is being judged during the thousand years? Why are they being judged?

5- When do the thousand years take place? Before or after the coming of Jesus? Or are they simply symbolic of the whole Christian era?

6- Does the lake of fire happen once? Does it happen twice? Is it in place throughout the thousand years?

7- Are the fires of destruction at the end of the Millennium literal or are they symbolic in some way? Does God take an active role in these judgments or does sin cause the unrighteous to self-destruct? Is it possible that the fires from heaven have a purifying effect, not only on the earth, but also on the unrighteous?

The critical questions that scholars usually tend to debate about are in number five. Do the thousand years take place before or after the second coming of Jesus? There are three main views in response to the two options: 1) Amillennial, 2) Pre-millennial and 3) Post-Millennial. The Pre- and the Post- are in relation to the Second Coming of Jesus. Does the Second coming of Jesus happen before (Pre-millennial) or after (Post-millennial) the Millennium.

In the Post-Millennial view, the Second Coming of Jesus arrives after a millennium of peace on earth, in which things progress and life gets better and better. This was a popular view in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when Enlightenment, evolution, education, and scientific progress seemed to be leading the world in a positive direction. Post-millennialism doesn’t match with the Bible texts that suggest the world will go through very difficult times just before the End (Luke 21:25-28; 2 Thess 2:8-12 and Revelation, chapters 13-19). But the main driver behind its relative demise was the fact that it didn’t match the reality of the Twentieth Century, with its many horrors, such as World War I, World War II, the Holocaust,

and the Cambodian Genocide. If Post-Millennialism is correct, the Second Coming of Jesus seems a long way ahead.

In the Pre-millennial view, the Second Coming of Jesus happens before the thousand years. The Second Coming is PRE-Millennial. The Millennium is a literal thousand years that follow the Second Coming. At the close of the Millennium, the final resolution of the cosmic conflict takes place. In the Amillennial view, on the other hand, the Millennium is not a specific period of a thousand years, as is the case with the other two views. It is a symbolic expression for the whole Christian era from the first advent of Christ to the Second Coming. For both Amillennialism and Post-Millennialism, the Second Coming of Jesus is after the close of the "thousand years". The difference is that in the Post-Millennial view, the Millennium is the last thousand years before Jesus comes. In the Amillennial view, the "thousand years" is a symbol for the entire Christian age, regardless of how long it lasts. I will take a closer look at the kind of biblical argument Amillennials use to make their case.

First of all, the Amillennial argument notes that elsewhere in the New Testament the judgment always takes place at the Second Coming, not beyond. Everything that in Revelation happens at the end of the Millennium, happens at the Second Coming in the rest of the New Testament. There is no additional period added-on after the Second Coming in these texts. To get a full sense of this, note everything that happens at the end of the Millennium, according to Revelation 20:7-15. At the end of the Millennium the devil deceives the world. He is then destroyed in a lake of fire, a place of final punishment. There is a throne of judgment, judgment according to works, and everlasting death. Herein lies the crucial argument of the Amillennial view: The final judgment is at the coming of Jesus and not a thousand years later. Elsewhere in the New Testament, everything the revelator said was coming after the Millennium is placed at the Second Coming.

Let's examine the evidence for the Amillennial view. First of all is the evidence of Jude 14-15: "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: 'See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.'" According to Jude, at the Second Coming there will be a judgment that convicts the ungodly regarding their ungodly works, very reminiscent of what happens at the end of the Millennium (cf. Rev 20:12-13). For the Amillennialist, this is evidence that the Millennium precedes the Second Coming and includes the entire Christian age.

A second evidence for the Amillennial view is 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10: "And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved." Here Satan deceives people with miracles, signs, and wonders and then is destroyed at the second coming (cf. Rev 20:7-9).

What about the concepts of the lake of fire and everlasting punishment, two more things that happen at the end of the millennium in Revelation 20? Amillennialists would point

to Matthew 25:41: "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" There is no hint in Matthew 25 of a thousand-year interval between the judgment at the return of Christ and this destruction of the devil and his angels by fire. A similar passage is 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10: "God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you." In this passage the blazing fire of punishment comes at the Second Coming, not a thousand years later.

What about the throne of judgment that we find in Revelation 20:11? Something similar is found in Matthew 25: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Matthew 25:31-32. "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." Matthew 25:46. At first glance this certainly sounds like the judgment at the great, white throne in Revelation 20. And, finally, there is Matthew 16:27: "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done." As you can see, the kinds of things that happen at the end of the Millennium in Revelation 20 are applied to the Second Coming in the rest of the New Testament. For Amillennialists, they is strong evidence that the thousand years is a symbol for the whole Christian era. At the end of the "thousand years" is the Second Coming and the Final Judgment.

A second argument for the Amillennial position is the two resurrections in John 5:22-30. The first is a spiritual resurrection that was already at work during the earthly ministry of Jesus. "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live." John 5:24-25, NIV. The resurrection mentioned here is present tense during Jesus' ministry ("has now come"). The "dead" here are the spiritually dead, those who are depressed and burdened with sin. For them, the words of Jesus are life-giving in the present. In a spiritual sense, they have crossed over from death to life.

Contrast this spiritual resurrection with the physical one described later in the same passage: "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out--those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." John 5:28-29, NIV. Notice that the resurrection mentioned here is in the future ("a time is coming"). This is not a spiritual resurrection, it has to do with those who are "in their graves." They will "come out" of those graves. For Amillennialists, John 5:24-29 describes the millennium of Revelation 20. It begins with the ministry of Jesus which had life-transforming qualities, truly spiritual resurrections. The

Millennium, in this view, begins with the spiritual resurrections produced by Jesus and ends with physical resurrections, both righteous and wicked. Note that there is no hint in John 5 of a thousand years between the resurrection of “those who have done good” and “those who have done evil”. Taking John 5 at face value would seem to support an Amillennial reading of Revelation 20. In such a reading, the first resurrection mentioned in Revelation 20:4 would be a spiritual one of those impacted by Jesus ministry and the apostles. The resurrection at the end of Revelation 20 would be a physical one of both the righteous and the wicked. For the Amillennialist the binding of Satan (Rev 20:1-3) happened at the cross. The result of that binding is spiritual resurrections. The spiritually resurrected believers are in heavenly places with Christ although they live on the earth (Eph 2:6). At the Second Coming is the final judgment, the resurrections of the righteous and the unrighteous, and the end of all things.

The third argument for an Amillennial position on Revelation 20 is a simple one. You don't base any doctrine on just one text (in this case, Revelation 20). The strength of the Amillennial view is that it makes use of the whole New Testament, it is not based on a single text. The weakness of the Amillennial view is that it interprets Revelation 20 in terms of how the concepts in the chapter play out elsewhere in the New Testament. It is a theological view. The question is whether that can be compatible with exegesis of Revelation 20 itself. Ideally, the results of exegetical study of a text will be compatible with a theological reading of the same text, but in Revelation 20 the results of the two methods diverge. This is often what makes a passage a “problem text”. The terms used in one text may have a different meaning in another context. In exegesis, the immediate context is taken seriously and seeks to understand the intention of the author for a particular text (like Revelation 20). In theology, the text is understood as part of a broader theme found in a variety of places in the Bible. When the results of the two methods diverge, exegesis should normally take precedence because the author has the right to define his or her own terms.

So the real question is: What does the book of Revelation teach about the timing of the millennium? Is it before or after the second coming? Does the Millennium begin with a spiritual resurrection of those who had been lost or spiritually dead before, or does it involve a physical resurrection of people who had died physically? I believe that an exegetical reading of Revelation 20 supports a Pre-Millennial position on the thousands years. The thousand years begin at the Second Coming of Jesus and extend to a final judgment in which all the lost will stand before the judgment seat of God. Let's look at the exegetical evidence for that.

While everything Revelation 20 puts at the end of the Millennium is associated with the Second Coming somewhere else in the New Testament, it seems to me that there is no question exegetically that the millennium is intended to be after the second coming in Revelation itself. A careful look at the structure of the book of Revelation makes it clear. Revelation 20 is part of a sequence of events running from chapter 12 through chapter 20. A number of new characters hostile to God enter the scene, beginning in chapter 12. The first is the dragon (Revelation 12), then come the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth (Revelation 13), and finally Babylon (Rev 14:8). These hostile characters then pass off the scene in reverse order to the sequence in which they appears. Babylon is destroyed in Revelation 18 (the destruction is celebrated in 19:1-6), the beast and the false prophet (the beast from the

earth) are destroyed in Revelation 19, and the dragon is first confined (Rev 20:1-3) and then destroyed (20:9-10) in chapter 20. So the sequence of Revelation 12-20 is interrupted by the Millennium, with the destruction of the dragon/Satan taking place in two stages, before and after the Millennium. The events of Revelation 13-19 clearly precede the Millennium.

How can a pre-millennial reading of Revelation 20 and the rest of the New Testament be reconciled? Some have described it this way. Prophecy often looks at the future as two dimensional, like the "wall" of mountains outside Denver. When you look at the Front Range of the Rockies from Denver, it looks like a huge, flat wall of mountains. It is a flat, two dimensional picture. But when you drive west into those same mountains, you find that they rise up to the snowy peaks gradually over dozens of kilometers. That is a three dimensional perspective.

Much of the prophecy in the Bible is two dimensional. For example, the first and second comings of Jesus were blended together in the Old Testament anticipation. In Isaiah 61:1-2 elements of Jesus' earthly ministry were blended with references to the final judgment at the Second Coming (the day of vengeance), there is no gap between them. When Jesus came to Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21), He applied the former to himself and left the rest out of His reading of the text. From His perspective the two dimensions had become three. Revelation 20 is three dimensional and apocalyptic (linear prophecy of the future), the rest of the New Testament is more general, and therefore two dimensional on this topic.

Further evidence that Revelation 20 comes after Revelation 12-19 is the fact that the resurrection of 20:4 includes martyrs that occurred on account of the death decree of 13:15. The first resurrection (Rev 20:5) includes those who died just before the Second Coming. This is not the spiritual resurrection of John 5:24-25, which was a present reality in Jesus' day. Those who come to life and reign with Christ for a thousand years are those who had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. The first resurrection comes after the final events of Revelation 13. The events of Revelation 13-14 precede the Millennium and the first resurrection of Revelation 20 happens after, or at least in the context of, the Second Coming. If Millennium begins with the First Advent of Christ (as Amillennialists suggest), then the end-time events of Revelation 13-14, 16-17 would have had to occur before the First Advent of Christ.

A further problem with the Amillennial position is the assumption that the first resurrection of Revelation 20 is a spiritual one, associated with the preaching of the gospel throughout the Christian era. This resurrection, then, would not be a resurrection from literal death and, therefore, the grave. But the language of Revelation 20:4 militates against that. First of all, the death of the martyrs in 20:4 is not a spiritual death. They were "beheaded" (Greek: *pepelekismenôn*). I am not aware of any place in ancient Greek where depression or the consequences of sin are described as "beheading". The people were beheaded because of the gospel and their faith in Christ rather than giving off the sense that they were spiritually dead before. A physical loss of life is what is being referred to. So the resurrection of 20:4-5 is not a spiritual resurrection, in the first resurrection, beheaded people are coming back to life (Rev 20:4). The people who come to life are not arising out of a state of spiritual death, but rather from martyrdom.

Further evidence for the physical nature of resurrection in Revelation 20:4-5 are the

specific Greek words used for resurrection in the passage. Speaking of the “souls who had been beheaded” the text says that they “came to life” (Greek *ezēsan*) and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. I am aware of no place in the ancient Greek where *ezēsan* (“came to life” aorist tense) is used as a metaphor for spiritual resurrection. The same is true for the Greek word “resurrection” (*anastasis*). It is consistently used for physical resurrection throughout the New Testament, as is the case in John 5:29, where Jesus is referring to resurrection from the grave in the hour that is coming. So seeing the first resurrection of Revelation 20 as a spiritual one is driven by a philosophical assumption rather than the evidence grounded in the language of the text itself. The Amillennial view, appealing as it is in many ways, does not conform to what is actually going on in Revelation 20 itself.

I would also like to deal with the argument that you don’t make major doctrinal decisions on the basis of a single text, in this case Revelation 20. But in actual fact, there are two other passages in the Bible that imply events taking place at some point after the Second Coming of Jesus. The first of these is 1 Corinthians 15:22-26 (NIV): "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ, all will be made alive. But, each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death." According to 1 Corinthians 15, there are three great resurrection events in the larger scheme of things. First is the resurrection of Christ. Then, when He comes, is the resurrection of those who belong to Him. And then come “the end”, when Jesus delivers up the kingdom to His Father, having put all enemies of the kingdom under His feet. At that time, the “last enemy”, death, is also destroyed (1 Cor 15:24-26).

What kind of time does Paul imply will occur between the resurrection of those who belong to Christ (1 Cor 15:23) and “the end” (1 Cor 15:24)? The Greek language of 1 Corinthians 15 is very instructive here. The three resurrection events come “each in his own order” (Greek: *ekastos en tō idiō tagmati*). They are sequential, with a period of time in between each event. The first resurrection event is that of Christ, then (Greek: *epeita*), those who are Christ’s at His coming, then (Greek: *eita*) comes the end (1 Cor 15:23-24). The Greek conjunctions *epeita* and *eita* imply similar periods of time. From the resurrection of Christ to the resurrection of those who are Christ’s at His Coming is now nearly 2000 years. The *eita* between the Second Coming and “the end” would imply a similar period of time. Paul’s language makes perfect sense here if he understood there to be a thousand years between the Second Coming of Jesus and the final resolution of all things. So 1 Corinthians 15, rightly understood, is compatible with a pre-millennial reading of Revelation 20. Taking the two passages together clarifies that all the righteous will be raised at the second coming and only the unrighteous are raised at “the end.”

There is also an Old Testament text that makes sense in the light of a period of time after the “end of history”. That text is found in Isaiah 24: "See, the LORD is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants--it will be the same for priest as for people, for master as for servant, for mistress as for maid, for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender, for debtor as for creditor. The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered. The LORD has spoken this word.

"The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left." Isaiah 24:1-6, NIV. This text sounds a lot like the Second Coming of Jesus until you get to the end of the chapter.

"The earth is broken up, the earth is split asunder, the earth is thoroughly shaken. The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind; so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion that it falls--never to rise again. In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days. The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously." Isaiah 24:19-23, NIV.

While Isaiah 24 describes catastrophic events that would affect the whole planet, the powers opposing God in both heaven and earth are not dealt with at that time. Instead, they are "shut up in prison" to be punished "after many days". This is strikingly similar to the sequence of Revelation 20. There the earth is devastated by the events of the Second Coming (Rev 19:19-21), Satan and his angels are bound during the time of desolation but not punished, and they are finally punished after a thousand years. While Isaiah 24 does not speak in terms of a thousand years, the sequence of events is parallel. Isaiah 24 is compatible with a pre-millennial reading of Revelation 20. So I would argue that the best reading of Revelation 20, in light of all the evidence of Scripture, is a reading that understands the thousand years to be a literal period after the Second Coming of Christ and before the final resolution of all things.

I'd like to come back to another of the questions we raised regarding Revelation 20. Are the resurrected righteous of Revelation 20:4-5 in heaven or earth during the millennium? This is not obvious on the basis of Revelation 20 itself. But it is interesting that the Second Coming and beyond is associated with wedding language (Rev 19:7-8; 21:9-11). Hebrew weddings followed a special pattern, based on a rural agricultural context. When a young man plans to marry a young woman, he and his father travel from the father's house to the house of the bride and her father. There the engagement ceremony takes place. Then father and groom return to the groom's father's house when the groom "prepares a place" for himself and his future wife. The new house would be on a section of his father's farm. Meanwhile, the bride-to-be prepares herself for the wedding. When the day of the wedding arrives, the groom and his father return to the bride's father's house to collect the bride and her family and return to the groom's father's estate, where the wedding takes place.

Jesus seems to be alluding to Hebrew marriage customs in His promise to His disciples in the upper room. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." John 14:1-3, NIV. Notice the echoes of the wedding pattern described above. When Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection, He went there to prepare a place (the New Jerusalem?) for his earthly bride (His disciples/the

church). In the meantime, His bride was to prepare herself for His return. When Jesus comes, it does not say He comes to be with us where we are. Instead, He comes to gather us to Himself, so that where He is there we might be also. In other words, Jesus doesn't come to dwell on the earth during the Millennium, He comes to take His saints to heaven with Him, to live and reign there for a thousand years (Rev 20:4-5). The saints are not on earth during the Millennium.

So John 14 settles the issue of what happens to the righteous at the Second Coming of Jesus. All the righteous are taken to heaven to be with Jesus there. At the same time, all the unrighteous are destroyed at the Second Coming and they remain dead until the second resurrection at the end of the thousand years. At the second resurrection only the unrighteous are raised from the dead, in Jesus' words, "those who have done evil". That means that the earth is empty of human beings during the thousand years. Satan and his angels have no one to deceive, he is bound by circumstances, and the empty earth is his cage.

What, then, is the Abyss where Satan is locked up? Based on the above, it would most likely be the desolate earth. The term Abyss is used for an empty and unformed earth in Genesis 1:2. It is the abode of demons in Luke 8:31. It can represent a desolate landscape when all the inhabitants of a place have been taken away (Jer 4:20, 23-27), like Israel and Judah during the exile to Babylon. During the thousand years, the earth is empty of human inhabitants. The saved have ascended to heaven with Jesus (John 14:1-3) and the unsaved have been destroyed at the Second Coming (2 Thess 1:7-9). The nations that appear in Rev 20:7-8 have not been there throughout the millennium. They re-appear at the time of the second resurrection.

What is the purpose of this thousand years of waiting for another resurrection to occur? If the dead are not conscious during that time, what is the point of waiting? Why does God not deal with the whole thing at once? The answer would seem to lie in the word "judgment" (Greek: *krima*-- Rev 20:4). The purpose of the Millennium is as a time for judgment. Jesus said that the twelve disciples would sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28). Paul said that the saints will judge the world (1 Cor 6:2-3). Revelation says that the righteous will live and reign with Christ for a thousand years (Rev 20:4-6; cf. 7:15-17). The saints have already been judged or they would not be in heaven. But there will also be many surprises in the kingdom. In the words of Jesus, "Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." Matthew 19:30, NIV. People you expect to see won't be there and those you didn't expect to see will be there. It will be a time of learning, growing, and processing. Wounds will need to be healed because 1) loved ones are not there; 2) people you are looking for may not have made it; and 3) someone who gave you trouble may be there and you have to deal with that relationship. A time of recovery is needed in order to answer those questions and many other unanswered questions in the world today. It will be a time for the healing of the nations (Rev 22:2).

Not only so, the Millennium provides time for the saved to process all that God has done with them and with those they love. It is an important aspect for the ultimate health of the universe for all to see that what God has done in the plan of salvation was fair and right. The grand controversy cannot end until all the saved can say with conviction, "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of all the ages."

Revelation 15:3-4. With that pronouncement, the justice of God will be beyond question forever. I believe that statement reflects the thousand years of processing the redeemed have the opportunity to do during the Millennium. At the end of the Millennium, the unrighteous will be raised from the dead to demonstrate two things. First of all, they too will have enough information to make an appropriate judgment about God. They will acknowledge that God did all He could for them, but they made their own choices, leading to their own consequences. They will also demonstrate that, in spite of all the understanding gained in the final judgment, they retain only a desire to tear down and destroy what God has made good. In attacking the camp of the saints, the Holy City, they demonstrate that they would not be safe to save. They would not be safe to themselves and they would not be safe to anyone else. For some, eternal non-existence will be the best outcome for all concerned.

Some might ask, Is the lake of fire there during the millennium? The question is not answered in Revelation, but we may be able to have some sense of it. At the Second Coming, the unrighteous die the first death and the saints are taken to heaven. Satan is confined to the ruined earth for a thousand years while the saints are recovering from their ordeal and "judging" in heaven. At the close of the thousand years, the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven to earth, the unrighteous are resurrected, and Satan is released from his prison. He deceives the nations and attacks the holy city. The unrighteous are then judged and come to their end. The lake of fire plays a role in both the first and second death of the unrighteous, but it does not have to burn throughout the thousand years to accomplish its task. It is simply the instrument by which God removes evil from the universe and cleanses the earth for its new creation. "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Matthew 10:28, NIV.

Ultimately, what is the purpose of the Millennium? Why delay the final resolution of the great conflict for a thousand years? I think one can summarize the answer to these questions in one word, judgment. God's judgment is a multi-faceted operation over many eras of earth's history. In a sense judgment began on a small scale in the Garden of Eden, when God explained the consequences of sin to Adam and Eve and they were exiled from the Garden. God acted in judgment on a small scale many times throughout the Old Testament. But many prophecies predicted a great, end-time judgment in Israel's future (Ezek 39:21; Dan 7:9-14, 22, 26). The New Testament sees the fulfillment of that end-time judgment in five phases or stages.

The first stage of end-time judgment is judgment at the cross. Since Jesus represented the entire human race, His death on the cross is seen as a negative judgment on the whole human race in His own person (John 12:31-32; Rom 8:3). But His resurrection from the dead, therefore, also expresses a positive judgment on the whole human race (Acts 13:31-32; 1 Cor 1:20). In other words, the cross and the resurrection of Jesus together represent a collective judgment on the whole human race. In Christ, human sin is condemned to the death, but in Christ, all are also accounted acceptable to God. The entire human race is judged both positively and negatively in the person of Christ.

The second stage of end-time judgment occurs whenever the gospel is preached. According to Paul (1 Cor 15:3-4), the gospel is simply the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, according to the Scriptures. In other words, the presentation of the first stage of judgment itself

is the gospel. In Jesus Christ at the cross the entire human race was judged. The proclamation of that very message is the essence of judgment number two. When people hear that the entire human race was judged in the person of Jesus Christ, they realize that a decision to accept or reject the gospel is the most important decision they will ever make. And to not make a decision for or against the gospel is to make a decision. Every time the gospel (judgment number one) is preached people are either drawn closer to Christ or driven further away. (John 3:18-21; 5:24-25; Matt 18:18) So whenever the gospel is preached, judgment is taking place. People are making decisions that will affect their eternal destiny. The whole human race is judged, one by one, in the preaching of the gospel throughout the Christian era.

According to the New Testament, there is a third stage of judgment, judgment at the End (Acts 17:31). That is also a judgment on the entire human race, beginning with the dead and moving on to the living just before the Second Coming. This judgment will not pass a different verdict upon us than we passed on ourselves when the gospel was preached to us (John 12:48). The end-time, pre-Advent judgment ratifies the decisions we made when we heard the gospel. The primary beneficiaries of this judgment would be the unfallen universe, angels and other creatures that never sinned. When God opens the “books” of judgment, two vindications will take place. First, the character of God will be vindicated before the universe as each one gets to understand the full implications of all of God’s actions in relation to the human race. God allows His own creatures to pass judgment on the integrity of His actions, fully disclosed before the universe (Rom 3:4, cf. Rev 14:7). Second, our characters will be vindicated before the universe. The unfallen beings in the universe want to know if the neighborhood will still be safe when we move in. God allows the universe to examine our cases and satisfy themselves that we will be safe to save.

The fourth stage of judgment occurs during the Millennium. As noted in my comments on Revelation 20:4, in Matthew 19:28 (cf. Luke 22:30), Jesus promises His disciples that at the renewal of all things His disciples will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. So there is a sense that in a future judgment, the followers of Jesus will have the responsibility to judge those who have professed to be part of the people of God. This concept is expanded in 1 Corinthians 6:1-3. There Paul indicates that the “saints” are to judge the world, and that “we” (including himself and the Corinthians) are to judge angels. In other words, during the Millennium, the primary beneficiaries of judgment are the redeemed. They come to understand what the unfallen beings learn in judgment number 3, the integrity of God’s character and the wisdom of His decisions regarding who would be saved and who would be lost. The end result of judgment number four is the declaration by the saved, “Great and marvelous are Your works . . . just and true are Your ways. . . .” (Rev 15:3).

The fifth and final stage of judgment is the one at the end of the Millennium (Rev 20:12-13). That the Book of Life is part of that judgment is necessary because it outlines not only God’s decisions, but everything that God has done to save each person who is willing. In the case of the lost, they are not lost because God did not do enough, they are lost because they rejected, or were indifferent to, God’s many attempts to heal them from the malady of sin. So the character of God will also be vindicated in the fifth and final judgment (Phil 2:9-11). But this judgment primarily concerns the unsaved. It will help the lost to see their lives and the bigger

picture from God's point of view. Every lost human being will recall their own past actions and more deeply understand the twisted motives that they hid from themselves. In the light of overwhelming clarity, everyone who ever lived will come to declare "just and true are His ways" with conviction, not as a forced confession (Rev 15:3-4). So every one of the five phases of judgment play an important role in the final resolution of the cosmic conflict. As a result of the judgment the questions and challenges that have so long disturbed the universe will be resolved and all will reap the harvest they have genuinely chosen.

When it comes to the fate of sinners at the end of the Millennium, there are three main options, universalism, annihilationism and eternal torment. The more carefully one examines these options, the more it seems clear that none of them is exegetically compelling in the sense that any honest reader would see that the biblical data is perfectly clear, no questions asked. The "slam dunk" texts offered up by each position, when examined with care, require choices and assumptions that adherents of the other two views will find far from compelling. On the other hand, all three approaches are exegetically defensible, in the sense that one can select and order texts in a way that the position could be claimed as the biblical one and garner adherents in large numbers. In such a context, the believer/scholar is free to make theological commitments, guided the by Holy Spirit (at least in one's own perceptions). But it would be unwise to be so committed that one ignores evidence to the contrary. In the words of one of my mentors, Robert M. Johnston, "It isn't hard to have strong opinions on any topic as long as you are willing to ignore some of the evidence." So while I have my own theological commitments on this issue, I choose to treat those who disagree with respect and deference (6T121-123), sharing together in the hope that at least one of us might learn something. When minds close and neither side is learning, conversation is pointless.

When it comes to the issue before us, I am least attracted to the eternal torment position. To me, the concept of eternal torment, with or without literal flames, is repugnant and paints an awful picture of what God is like. I would never want to be the agent of eternal torment for my parents, my wife, or any of my kids or grandkids. Yet I am to believe that God has the capacity in His character to do exactly that to children of His that He knows far more deeply than we know each other. Am I more moral and gracious than God? I cannot believe that. And such a view does not seem compatible with Hosea 11:8-9, ESV: "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? . . . My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. ⁹ I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath." God's compassion is far greater than mine. Far be it from Him to torture His own children for eternity (cf. Gen 18:25)! God, like us, must avoid the appearance of evil. At the same time, many of the Nursing students in my Christian Beliefs class this quarter have a rock-solid commitment to eternal torment, which they support by many texts. Shall I treat them as ignorant fools? Or shall I recognize that they and I are on a journey together where there is the wonderful possibility that at least one of us might learn something? What kind of conversation might leave open the possibility that any of us might learn something? For those who appreciate Ellen White, 6T 121-123 is very instructive. So is 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

I am much more attracted to universalism and very interested in an aspect of it that

claims not to undermine free will. But I have not committed to that perspective for at least two reasons. First, I have difficulty getting my head around the idea of people having to deny who they have become in order to fit into a universe they never wanted. I would prefer that a God who loves me would allow me to determine my own future and accept the consequences of that choice. The idea of a free-will universalism is intriguing and I hope to study up on that option in the future. But at this point I find it hard to imagine that, given genuine freedom, everyone would end up choosing the same thing. But that's just me. I'll continue listening. Second, and much more important for me, is a practical issue. If we have three options and none of them is a slam dunk, which option has the least potential for damage. The eternal torment approach has driven many people away from God on the very face of it. Dangerous choice. Promoting universalism has many attractive features. But what if, in the end, it turns out to be wrong? Would it cause some people to relax in their pursuit of holiness because in the end it won't matter anyway? It would be tragic to arrive at St. Peter's gate (or more likely the great, white throne—Rev 20:11) and discover only then that you had one chance and you blew it off because you were counting on having some fun first and then fixing it later. Perhaps this argument is more trivial than I realize, but that is where I am today.

This leaves me with the annihilation perspective, in which God desires earnestly that all be saved (2 Pet 3:9) and waits so that as many as possible might be saved. But when all are satisfied that God has done all He can to change minds, and yet many are hardened in their opposition and rebellion, God puts/allows them to sleep in a way that has no waking up. On that day He will weep and so will the saved. But for all it will be the best possible outcome under the circumstances. Even after reading Santo's book I still don't see how universalism is compatible with creaturely freedom. The idea that every alcoholic will freely choose to spend eternity in a place that has no bars is challenging for me. It seems to require a level of determinism that for me is hard to square with love. It still seems to me that if universalism were John's intention, it would have been easy for him to say that, rather than cloak it in lakes of fire and second deaths. But the biblical evidence is ambiguous enough that I need to keep studying. I do also find some challenges in the annihilationist perspective, and I am working through some of those as I study Rev 20. But of the three options it seems to me the one with the least potential downside.

Rev 20:1-15 (Spiritual Lessons)— While the Millennium is a thousand-year period after the Second Coming of Jesus, one aspect of the Amillennial view seems correct. In a real sense, Satan was bound spiritually after the cross. Demons no longer have power over anyone when confronted in the name, the power and the blood of Jesus Christ. The ruler of this world (Satan) has truly been cast out (John 12:31). No believer in Jesus Christ needs to live in fear of what Satan might do to them. At the cross Jesus gained a decisive victory over the forces of Satan (Col 2:14-16). The power of eternal life is a present reality in Jesus Christ (John 5:22-25). Thanks to the cross Satan's power is limited on earth while the powers of heaven and the new age are alive and well here.

This may sound odd to you, but providing for a Millennium of time for human beings to sort things out tells me that God cares about our feelings, even in eternity. He gives us a

thousand-year period so that we can be satisfied with His justice, get used to the fact that some people are there that we didn't expect and others are missing that we expected to be there, and gain a deeper understanding of just how God made us, who we are, and the purpose that will bring us joy throughout eternity. We are given plenty of time to process our personal histories and all the feelings that arise from that past. The "judgment" will not be pain-free, but it will prove a necessary process on the way to the "healing of the nations" (Rev 22:2).

During the Millennium we will gain a deeper appreciation for who God is than we might ever have imagined. We will come to understand the role of God and the heavenly angels in every part of our personal biography. We will come to understand our own deepest motives and intentions. In the process, it will become clearer and clearer that God had our best interests in mind from the point of conception on. Everything He did was for our good. The thousand years will enable us to truly say, "Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways!" Rev 15:3-4. God will prove to be truly fair in spite of occasional appearances to the contrary. He allows all--including the redeemed--to understand His actions, question him, and check His work. We will find out exactly how our names got to be written in the Book of Life. While it hasn't gotten the press that other biblical issues have gotten, the human experience during the Millennium will prove to be a vital part of safeguarding the universe throughout eternity.