

REVELATION CHAPTER 20

SUMMARY OF THE STRUGGLE

THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE NEW TESTAMENT PERIOD

PART 1. Revelation 20:1-3. SATAN IS BOUND FOR A THOUSAND YEARS.

(1) Explanation of symbols.

The symbolic picture in chapter 20:1-3 is concerning the binding of Satan on earth. The symbolic picture is of a mighty angel seizing the dragon, binding him with a great chain, throwing him into the Abyss, locking and sealing the Abyss for 1000 years in order to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the 1000 years were ended. After the 1000 years Satan must be set free for a short time.

20:1 And I saw (*Greek: horao. opsomai, eidon, heoraka*)(*ao*rist) an angel coming down (*Greek: kata baino*)(*present*) from heaven (*Greek: ouranos*). The phrase “And I saw” appears seven times: three times in section 6 (19:11,17,19) and four times in section 7 (20:1,4,11; 21:1). Every time it introduces *a specific vision which points to the very end of this age*. ‘The end of this age’ is the final period in the history of the world stretching from Christ’s first coming to his second coming.¹ The phrase puts the visions into a certain relationship with one another, but note, *without expressing a linear chronological order!*

Although Christ reveals himself during the Old Testament period as ‘the Angel of the Lord’ (Zechariah 1:8-13; 3:1-7; Malachi 3:1-5), he is never called ‘an angel’. God commands angels to worship Christ (Hebrews 1:6). While God calls angels ‘servants’, he calls Christ ‘God’ and says that his kingdom will last forever (Hebrews 1:7-8). Because in the whole New Testament it is Christ who binds Satan (Matthew 12:29; John 12:31-32), the symbolic action of this angel here represents Christ binding Satan during his first coming! Christ possesses the key, that is, the authority to lock and unlock the events in history (1:18; 3:7-8). Christ gave the fallen star (the fallen angel, Satan) authority to unlock the Abyss with a view to torment the unbelievers (9:1-2; cf. 11:7). Likewise Christ gave an ordinary angel authority to lock the Abyss with a view to curb the evil influence of Satan (20:1-3).

having (*present*) the key (*Greek: kleis*) to the Abyss (*Greek: abussos*) and holding (*Greek: echo*)(*present*) in his hand (*Greek: cheir*) a great chain (*Greek: halusis*). The Abyss is generally contrasted with the sky and earth and refers to the depth of the sea (Psalm 33:7; 107:26)². It is commonly pictured as a place deep under the earth, connected to the surface of the earth by a shaft. It is the abode of the dead (Romans 10:7); the abode of demons (9:1-12; Luke 8:31); the abode of the angel or king of the demons (9:11); the dungeon where the devil is kept (20:3); and the abode of the beast, the final antichrist (11:7; 17:8). The Abyss is capable of being closed with a lid that is locked and sealed (20:1,3). And it can only be opened with ‘the key’ which God provides, that is, by God’s permissive decree (9:1). A key is a symbol of authority and power to decide and rule (cf. 1:18; 3:7-8). Only by Christ’s permissive will is Satan not hindered to carry out his evil plan in unbelievers (cf. 9:4).

While in Revelation 20:3 Satan is pictured as being shut up in the Abyss with respect to his deceiving the nations, in Revelation 9:1 Satan is pictured as having received authority and power (the key) over all those in the Abyss, to let them out in order to harm people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads (9:4). Thus with respect to people that are sealed and with respect to the proclamation of the gospel to all nations in the world, Satan is bound! That is a great encouragement for Christians! But brings great harm to people who are not sealed. That is a warning for non-Christians! Of course this authority and power given to Satan is only insofar God permits him. Absolute authority and power in heaven and on earth belongs to God in Christ (Psalm 146:10; Matthew 28:18)!

The Abyss must be distinguished from Sheol (Hebrew) or Hades (Greek) in the sense of the state of the dead (Matthew 16:18; Revelation 1:18) or in the sense of the grave (the place of the bodies of those who have died) (Acts 2:27,31). However, the Abyss is identical with Sheol or Hades in the sense of the place of destruction (Abaddon)(Job 26:6) or hell (the place of the spirits of unbelievers who have died (Matthew 11:23; Luke 16:23-24). And the word Abyss must be distinguished from the word ‘Tartarus’ (2 Peter 2:4), which the Greeks regarded as a subterranean place lower than Hades (the abode of the dead) where divine punishment was meted out. This was also how Jewish apocalyptic literature regarded Tartarus (cf. Job 41:24 in the Greek translation of the Old Testament).

Before the final judgement day hell is called the Abyss (9:2; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1-3,7; Luke 8:31). After the final judgement day hell is called the lake of burning sulphur (19:18; 20:14,15; 21:8).

The Abyss and the lake of burning sulphur are not quite the same, because no one is permitted to leave the last! The lake of burning sulphur is the place of eternal punishment for all the lost. Burning sulphur is symbolic of darkness and distress (cf. 9:17-18; 14:10-11).

20:2 He *once and for all times* seized (*Greek: krateso*)(*ao*rist) the dragon (*Greek: drakon*), that ancient serpent (*Greek: ophis*), who is the devil, or Satan and *once and for all times* bound (*Greek: deo, edesen*)(*ao*rist) him for a thousand (*Greek: chiliois*) years (*Greek: etos*).

¹ The ends of the ages (*Greek: epi sunteleia ton aionon*) is sometimes conceived as one period (*Greek: aion*) and other times as a series of distinct periods (*Greek: aionon*). It stretches from the close of the Old Testament period at Christ’s first coming (Hebrews 1:2; 9:26) to the close of the New Testament period at Christ’s second coming (Matthew 13:39; 24:3; Ephesians 1:10; 1 Corinthians 10:11).

² Walter Bauer, William Arndt, Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 1952, p.2

20:3 and he threw (*Greek: ballo*)(*ao*rist) him into the Abyss, and locked (*Greek: kleio*)(*ao*rist) and sealed (*Greek: sphragizo*)(*ao*rist) it over (*Greek: epano*) him.

In the beginning of the Bible Satan was symbolically a star, a created angel that fell into sin (cf. Isaiah 14:12) somewhere between the completion of the creation of the earth (Genesis 1:31) and the fall of man in Paradise (Genesis 3:1). At that time Satan swept a third of the angels with him in his fall (12:4).

At his first coming Christ bound Satan. The word 'bind'(Greek: deo) is exactly the same as in Matthew 12:29 and proves that *Christ bound Satan at his first coming* when he also established his kingdom (his sovereign reign in the hearts and lives of Christians) on this present earth (Matthew 12:28).

Christ bound Satan through his life and ministry on earth and consequently Jesus saw "Satan once for all time (aorist tense) fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). The word 'fall' never means 'descend or coming down', but always means 'fallen from a higher position' (8:10; 2:5) and is a symbol for 'destroying/ruining' (14:8). Thus, Satan lies on the earth as one that has fallen; as one that has been smacked down from heaven onto the earth" (9:1). He was smacked down with force and disgust. His lying smacked down on the earth describes his present state!

Christ especially bound Satan through his death and resurrection (cf. 12:5) and consequently Satan "once for all time (aorist tense) was hurled down out of heaven onto the earth" (the word 'hurled' is used three times in 12:8-9).

The fact that Satan is bound means that he is denied full control of the destiny of human history and of the nations within history. From Christ's first coming Satan has been *prevented from giving full vent* to his antichristian thrust

- via his anti-Christian governments and their persecutions (the beast out of the sea)
- via his anti-Christian religions, philosophies and sciences and their perversions (the beast out of the earth, the false prophet)
- via his anti-Christian culture with its seductions (Babylon the great, the great prostitute)
- via and all the people who have the mark of the beast.

The Abyss is locked and sealed over Satan, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore (which he did during the Old testament period)(Daniel 10:13,20). In the apocalyptic book of Revelation, binding Satan with a great chain, throwing him into the Abyss and locking and sealing the Abyss are not intended to be understood in a *literalistic* way. This description of the action is symbolic, but the result is literally true: Satan is prevented from doing certain things! His authority and power has been curbed, curtailed, restrained or limited. The binding (20:2; Matthew 12:29), the fall (9:1; Luke 10:18) or the driving out of Satan (John 12:31) at Christ's first coming did not remove Satan from the earthly scene. It bound him for a symbolic thousand years, that is, for an ultimate complete period of time, until Christ has carried out God's complete work of salvation of his people.

in order to keep him from still (*Greek: eti*) deceiving (leading astray)(*Greek: planaō*)(*sub*jective, *ao*rist) the nations until (*Greek: achri*) the thousand years were ended (*Greek: teleō*)(*sub*jective, *ao*rist). There is no mention that Satan is prevented from doing any evil on earth! The immediate context teaches that Satan is prevented from continuing to deceive the nations! Throughout the whole New Testament period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming Satan is prevented from destroying the Church as an institute proclaiming the gospel (11:3-6), but he is not prevented from continually attacking Christians (Ephesians 6:10-18). Satan is prevented from stopping Christians from proclaiming the gospel in every nation (Matthew 24:14), but he is not prevented from hindering the progress of proclaiming the gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18).

After that, he must (*Greek: dei*)(*present*) be set free (*Greek: luo*)(*infinitive, aorist*) for a short (*Greek: mikron*) time (*Greek: chronos*). See Revelation 20:7.

(2) Different views about the angel coming down from heaven (20:1).

A first view. The angel coming down from heaven is *Christ* (Gilmore)³. In the Old Testament the Angel of the Lord is God (Genesis 22:15-17; Hebrews 6:13) or Christ (Malachi 3:1). Some commentators maintain that the voice of the archangel is actually the voice of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:16; cf. John 5:25-29), that the archangel Michael represents Christ and maintain that only Christ is powerful enough to thump down Satan (Daniel 12:1; Revelation 12:7-8). They maintain that in Revelation 10:1 the mighty angel with the book in his hand must be Christ (10:1). And in Revelation 20:1 the angel actually possesses the key and is not given the key (1:5,18; 3:7). Therefore, the angel in Revelation 20:1 best applies to Christ.

Remarks. The term 'Angel of the Lord' is clearly distinguished from the other angels in the Bible.

The correct explanation. The angel is an ordinary angel coming down from heaven, but *his symbolic action represents Christ binding Satan* during his first coming (Greijdanus, Hendriksen)⁴.

³ John Gilmore. Probing Heaven, pp. 375-378

⁴ Greijdanus p. 292; Hendriksen p. 223

(3) Different views about Satan bound (20:2-3).

The futurist view. The activity of Satan is completely removed from the earth for a thousand years (Walvoord). Satan is at present *not bound*, but will be bound at Christ's second return *at the beginning of the future millennial kingdom* (Tenney)⁵. During the whole New Testament period Satan is the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Ephesians 2:2) and the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4). He claims that all authority and splendour of all the kingdoms of the world has been given to him (Luke 4:5-6). The whole world is under the control of the evil one (1 John 5:19).

While Revelation 20:1-3 does not say that Satan's angels (the evil spirits) are bound and cast into the bottomless pit, the *inference* is that they are, because they do not appear to be present on the future millennial earth (Larkin)⁶.

A second view. Satan has been bound at Christ's first coming *in an absolute sense, so that he can do no evil at all* (Milligan)⁷.

The correct explanation. Satan has been bound *at Christ's first coming* (at the beginning of the New Testament period) *in the sense that he cannot deceive the nations anymore*. His binding does not suggest that Satan can do no evil, but suggests that Satan's purpose to deceive the nations and keep them away from Christ has been *curtailed (curbed, restrained, limited)* (Greijdanus, Hendriksen)⁸. Only this explanation is in harmony with everything the New Testament teaches about Satan!

PART 2. CHRISTIANS REIGN WITH CHRIST FOR A THOUSAND YEARS IN HEAVEN (20:4-6)

The symbolic picture is of thrones on which are seated those who had been given authority to judge. They are among others the souls of Christians that had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and the word of God and the souls of Christians that have not worshipped the beast or his image and have not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. These souls of Christians 'lived' and reigned with Christ a 1000 years.

21:4 And I saw (Greek: *horao*)(*ao*rist) thrones (Greek: *thronos*) on which were *once and for all time* seated (Greek: *kathizo*)(*ao*rist) both (Greek: *kai*) those to whom judgment (the judicial verdict or sentencing to condemnation) (Greek: *krima*) had been given (Greek: *didomi*)(*ao*rist) and the souls of those who had been beheaded (with an axe)(Greek: *pelekizo*)(*perfect*) because of the testimony (Greek: *marturia*) of Jesus and the word (Greek: *logos*) of God *as well as* (Greek: *kai*) those who had not worshipped (Greek: *proskuneo*)(*ao*rist) the beast (Greek: *therion*) or his image (Greek: *eikon*) and had not received (Greek: *lambano*) *ao*rist) his mark (Greek: *charakma*) on their foreheads (Greek: *metopon*) and their hands (Greek: *cheira*). And they lived⁹ (rather than the translation: they came to life¹⁰)(Greek: *zao*)(*ao*rist) (*NOT ingressive aorist: they began to live again*) and reigned (Greek: *basileuo*)(*ao*rist) with Christ a thousand years.

(1) Explanation of the thrones (20:4).

• Where are the thrones?

Revelation chapter 20 does not say where these thrones are. Therefore we must look to the context (the book of Revelation) and the Bible. The word 'throne(s)' appears 47 times in the book of Revelation and besides the throne of Satan (2:13) and the throne of the beast (13:2), they all refer to the throne of God (Christ) which is always *in heaven!* (1:4-5; 3:21; 4:2,4; 5:6,7,13; 7:9,10,11,15; 12:5; 15:5 and 16:17; 20:4,11)(cf. Mark 16:19; Ephesians 1:3,20-23; Philippians 2:9-11; 1 Peter 3:22). Therefore it is most plausible that John sees these thrones *in heaven* and not on the earth! Heaven is the place where God (Christ) lives, reigns and judges! And those people who are given authority to judge together with Jesus Christ are also seated on thrones *in heaven*. 'Heaven' is not a physical place. Heaven is a spiritual reality which surpasses the physical reality and is wherever God (Christ) is now.

• From where does Jesus Christ reign?

In the entire book of Revelation Christ reigns over the universe from God's throne *in heaven* (Revelation chapters 5 and 12; cf. Mark 16:19; Ephesians 1:20-23; 1 Peter 3:22). After their physical death, the saints will live and *reign with Christ in heaven*.

(2) Explanation of the judges (20:4).

• From where will Jesus Christ judge in the final judgement?

At his second coming Jesus will descend *from heaven* and come on *the clouds of the sky* (1:7; Matthew 24:30). He will send his angels to gather the elect (the believers) (14:16; Matthew 13:39; 24:31), resurrect them (John 5:28-29) and snatch them up into the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:17) to meet and welcome him *in the air* (Greek: *eis aera*)(*indicates the direction 'up'*)(2 Thessalonians 1:10). He will sit on his throne of glory (Matthew 25:31) or judgement seat (2 Corinthians 5:10) or great white throne (20:11) from where he will judge in the final judgement of everyone that ever lived. Because the present earth and the starry sky (the physical universe) will flee from Christ's presence at his second coming (6:14; 20:11; cf. 2 Peter 3:10), his judgement throne will not stand on this earth.

• Who have been given authority to judge?

⁵ Larkin, Revelation pp. 175-176; Tenney, p. 89

⁶ Larkin, Revelation p. 91

⁷ W. Milligan, The Expositor's Bible, Vol. VI, p 913

⁸ Greijdanus, p 294; Hendriksen pp. 226-227

⁹ American Standard Version

¹⁰ New International Version

Christ conferred the kingdom to Christians (Matthew 21:43). They will eat and drink at his table in his kingdom (Matthew 8:11). Especially the eleven disciples of Jesus will sit on thrones judging 'the twelve tribes of Israel' (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:29-30). The twelve tribes of Israel most probably refers to all Christians (Galatians 6:16; James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1; Romans 9:6). And Christians in their turn will judge angels (1 Corinthians 6:2) and the non-Christian nations (2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4). Thus at the last judgement, the apostles of Christ will participate in the judgement of Christians and Christians will participate in the judgement of non-Christians (and probably fallen angels).

(3) Explanation of the souls (20:4).

• **Where are the disembodied souls?**

John saw souls, not bodies. These souls are now *in heaven* (6:9-11). They were decapitated *on earth* with a double-edged axe according to Roman custom (cf. Romans 13:4). Or they had died a natural death at the end of their lives throughout which they had held on to Christ's testimony and God's Word (cf. John 8:31-32). The white robes and the resting of the souls (6:11) suggest a provisional kind of blessedness in heaven (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:1,8; Philippians 1:23) that looks forward to the physical resurrection of their bodies and the final judgement. Also in Revelation chapter 20 the souls wait for the physical resurrection of their bodies and the final judgement. In the book of Revelation the transfer (translation or conveyance) of their souls from the place where they died *on earth* to *heaven* where they reign with Christ is symbolically called 'the first resurrection'. The future physical resurrection of their bodies may then symbolically be called 'the second resurrection' (20:5; cf. 20:12a,13a).

(4) Explanation of the word 'lived' (20:4-5).

• **The Greek verb 'to live'(Greek: zao) has several different meanings in the New Testament.**

In Revelation 20:5-6 it means: The souls of departed Christians are spiritually resurrected in the sense of spiritually translated into the presence of God in heaven where they continue to live the regenerated life in heaven.

• **Other passages that teach that the souls of departed Christians live spiritually in heaven.**

"I am (present tense) the resurrection and the life. He who believes (present tense) in me will live (spiritually in heaven) (future tense) even though he dies (physically)(subjunctive mood, aorist tense); and whoever lives (spiritually on earth) (present tense) and believes (present tense) in me will never die (the second/eternal death)(subjunctive mood, aorist tense)" (John 11:25-26) He who believes in Christ, even *though he dies* (physically)(that is, *share in the first death*), *will live* (spiritually)(that is, *share in the first resurrection*). He will possess everlasting life in heavenly glory. And whoever lives and believes in Christ (that is, lives spiritually as a believer on earth) will (be resurrected physically)(that is, *share in the second resurrection*) and will never die (will never taste everlasting death)(that is, *will never share in the second death*) (John 11:25-26).

"If you live (present tense) according to the sinful nature, you will die (that is, *share in the second death*); but if by the Spirit you put to death (present tense) the misdeeds of the body, you *will live* (future tense, stressing certainty)" (that is, *share in the first resurrection*) (Romans 8:13b).

"He once and for all time (aorist tense) died for us so that whether we are awake (that is, *still live on the present earth*) (subjunctive mood, present tense) or asleep (that is, *share in the first death*)(subjunctive mood, present tense), we may *live* (subjunctive mood, aorist tense) together with him" (that is, *share in the first resurrection*) (1 Thessalonians 5:10).

The souls of those who died (physically, *that is share in the first death*) ... "*lived* (entered the real life, were translated or transferred into heaven)(that is, *shared in the first resurrection*) and reigned with Christ". If John had meant a physical resurrection he would probably have said: "They stood" (aorist tense) on their feet (11:11) and "they stand" (perfect tense) before the throne (20:12) instead of: "They lived". He is using the word 'live' in the sense of entering the spiritual life in heavenly glory after their physical death. "They lived" (aorist tense) means they share in the first resurrection (20:4-5). Then their life really begins! Then they are clothed with splendour (6:11). When Christians die physically, they are really blessed (14:13)!

• **Conclusion. Jesus speaks of the resurrection in three meanings:**

The spiritual resurrection into the Christian life on the old earth. The soul (or spirit) of the Christian is resurrected from spiritual death on this present old earth *before* his physical death in order to live the spiritual, supernatural life on this present old earth (the regenerated life *on the old earth*)(John 5:25).

The spiritual resurrection into the presence of Christ in heaven. The soul (or spirit) of the Christian is resurrected from living in his body on this present old earth *at his* physical death in order to live the spiritual, eternal life in heavenly glory (the regenerated life *in heaven*) (Luke 20:37-38; Revelation 20:4-6). In other words: his soul is translated, transferred or conveyed into heaven.

The physical resurrection into an immortal life on the new earth. The body of the Christian is resurrected from physical death on this present old earth *at Christ's* second coming in order to live the eternal life in a perfect spirit and perfect body like that of Jesus Christ on the new earth (the regenerated life *on the new earth*).

Revelation 20:4-5 speaks of Christians *who have died* physically. We may call this the 'first death' in contrast to 'the second death' in Revelation 20:5-6. They died physically either in violent persecution or as faithful and persevering

followers of Christ and his Word. This vision DOES NOT suggest that the souls of these people were “physically resurrected” and then interpret this to mean: that their bodies were physically resurrected and that they then (in their resurrected bodies) reigned with Christ *on earth*. But this vision DOES SAY that *the souls* (not bodies) of these people “lived” and reigned with Christ *in heaven* (not on earth).

The souls of believers are not physically resurrected, but are regenerated (“made alive” in Ephesians 2:5; cf. John 5:25) on earth. These souls live eternally, they cannot die and therefore cannot be resurrected (in a physical sense), but they can be translated (transferred or conveyed in a spiritual sense) from earth to heaven (6:9; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 8:55; 16:22). Thus the souls of Christians enter the fullness of life in heavenly glory at the physical death of their bodies. Revelation 20:4-5 does not speak of a physical resurrection, but of the spiritual resurrection in the sense of *the souls of Christians being translated (conveyed, carried) into heaven* (cf. John 11:25; Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:1,8) where they will reign together with Christ until they are brought with Christ at Christ’s second coming. Then also their bodies will be resurrected (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17).

(5) Explanation of those who participate in the reign (20:4,6).

Who sit on thrones and reign with Christ?

- The souls of those who had been given authority to judge participate in the reign. The apostles will judge the twelve tribes of Israel, which most probably refers to all Christians (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:29-30). And other Christians will judge angels (1 Corinthians 6:2) and the non-Christian nations (2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4).
- The souls of Christians who have been martyred participate in the reign. These Christians have been persecuted and even martyred on earth because of the testimony of Jesus and the Word of God. ‘The testimony of Jesus’ above all means the truth about God and himself about which Jesus Christ testified. The word of God’ means the truth found in the Bible. Thus, these Christians have been persecuted and even martyred because of who Jesus Christ is; because of what Jesus Christ has accomplished by his death and resurrection; because of what Jesus Christ taught (the Bible) and because of the call of Jesus Christ to repent and to reform one’s life (cf. 6:9). The testimony of Jesus may include the witnessing of Christians about Jesus Christ and his Word. Christians are persecuted and even martyred simply because they belong to Jesus Christ and associate themselves with Jesus Christ and his cause. In heaven they sit on thrones and reign with Christ.
- The souls of those who had not worshipped the beast participate in the reign. The words “and those (Greek: kai hoitines)(it denotes another group of people) who had not worshipped the beast ...” does not only characterise the previously mentioned martyrs, but also others who had died after living and serving the Lord Jesus Christ faithfully. Thus, not only the apostles and martyrs, but also the ordinary Christians who did not worship the beast and did not receive the mark of the beast sit on these thrones and reign with Christ after their physical death. These are Christians who died as a Christian, holding on to their Christian faith (cf. Philippians 1:21-24). At his second coming Christ will bring these souls with him and only at that time resurrect their bodies (1 Thessalonians 4:13-16; cf. John 5:28-29).

Non-Christians also die, but out of all people who die on earth, only departed Christians “lived and reigned with Christ a 1000 years”. Only they share in the first resurrection – that is, after they die physically, their souls are translated into heaven. Only they will never share in the second death – they will never be thrown into hell (2:11)! The rest of the dead (all the godless and the wicked people, all the non-Christians and unbelievers on earth) “did not live until the 1000 years were ended”. Only they do not share in the first resurrection (that is, when they die physically, their souls are not translated into heaven). Only they will certainly share in the second death (that is, their souls will be thrown into hell) (cf. Luke 16:22-23).

(6) Explanation of the nature of their reign (20:4,6).

- In Revelation 20:1-7 the departed saints reign with Christ, but there is no mention of an earthly kingdom of peace.

There is no mention about the nature of the reign of the saints with Christ. Therefore we must look to the context and the Bible.

According to the book of Revelation itself, the activities of the saints in heaven include the following:

The ransomed souls *sit* with Christ on his throne (3:21) or *stand* with him on Mount Zion (14:1). They will *see* his face (22:4).

They *pray* that God execute his just judgements on the wicked in the world (6:9-11).

They *serve* him day and night (7:15).

They *sing* a new song before his throne in heaven (14:3; 15:3).

They *praise* Christ for his true and just judgements (15:2-3).

They are given authority to *judge*, that is, to share in the final judgement of Christians, non-Christians, the non-Christian nations including Israel and the (fallen) angels (2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4)(Matthew 19:28; Luke 22: 28-30; 1 Corinthians 6:2).

Thus, they participate in the *reign* of Christ. How, is not specified (20:6)!

- During this symbolic period of 1000 years Christians do two things:

First, because Satan's power has been curtailed, the still living Christians *on earth* spread the gospel everywhere from nation to nation (Matthew 24:14; Philippians 1:22,27-30; cf. Revelation 11:3,7).

And secondly, because the departed Christians (souls) have been given thrones *in heaven*, they reign with Christ (cf. Philippians 1:23; Hebrews 12:22-24). The 1000 years, therefore, does not refer to a period of paradise for everyone on this present earth at the end of world history, but to a period of paradise for the departed Christians in heaven at the present time (2 Corinthians 5:1,8; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14)!

(7) Explanation of the thousand years (20:4-6).

The number 1000 is a symbolic number and only occurs six times *in one single passage in the Bible*. One rule of interpretation is that a difficult or obscure passage in the Bible must be interpreted in the light of all other very clear teachings in the Bible. New Testament eschatology must not be build around Revelation 20, but rather Revelation 20 must be interpreted in the light of all the other clear teachings in the New Testament.

• The 1000 years is not a literal number.

The futurist (premillennial, dispensational) view regards much of the book of Revelation as *a historic book* and consequently interprets many symbols and numbers *literally*. However, the book of Revelation is *an apocalypse* making use of symbols and numbers that must be interpreted *figuratively or symbolically* (1:1)! *The figures and symbols point to literal realities* that surpass the literal value of the figures and symbols themselves.

• The 1000 years is an ultimate complete period decreed by God.

The number "10" is a symbol for completeness on earth and the number "3" is a symbol for God. The number "1000" (10x10x10) years is symbolic of *an ultimate complete period of time, which God has decreed* for the unfolding of his eternal plan of salvation. It is a long time and yet a divinely limited time.

The symbolic 1000 years period clearly begins with the binding of Satan. The rest of the Bible clearly teaches that Satan was bound at Christ's first coming (Matthew 12:28-30; Luke 10:17-20; John 12:31-32; Colossians 2:15; 1:13; Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8; Revelation 12:5-11)! Thus, the 1000 years period *begins* at Christ's first coming! *During* the symbolic 1000 years period Satan remains bound on earth so that the still living Christians can spread the gospel to all the nations. And during that same 1000 year period the departed saints reign with Christ in heaven.

The symbolic 1000 years period clearly ends at Christ's second coming! At Christ's second coming the following will take place: the great tribulation will end with the final battle, when Satan and all his antichristian allies will be irrevocably beaten and removed from the earth forever (20:7-10); the general resurrection of the dead, the final judgement of everybody in the air and the renewal of all things (becoming the new earth and the new heaven) (20:11-15).

• The 1000 years does not follow the great tribulation, but ends with the great tribulation (20:7-10; cf. Matthew 24:21-25).

The expression "and those who had not worshipped the beast ...etc. (20:4)" is no proof for the futurist view that the 1000 years must *follow* the final days of the future tribulation period, as if the beast (antichrist) only operates in the future tribulation period. Throughout the whole New Testament period there are *many antichrists* (beasts)(1 John 2:18; 4:1,3; 2 John 7)! Throughout the whole New Testament period *believers have tribulation* (John 7:7; 15:18-21; 16:33; Matthew 5:10-11; 24:4-14; James 1:2-4; cf. 6:3-11; 18:20; 19:2)! And throughout the whole New Testament period believers will come *out of the great tribulation* (7:14)(the great tribulation here does not have the same meaning as in Matthew 24:21)! Thus, the 1000 years does NOT *follow* 'the great tribulation' mentioned in Matthew 24:21-25, but *ends* with this great tribulation and the second coming of Christ (Matthew 24:26-31).

'The great tribulation' of Matthew 24:21-25:

- is mentioned in the 1st section of the book of Revelation in Revelation 3:10
- in the 2nd section in Revelation 6:11b
- and is described in the 3rd section in Revelation 11:7-10
- in the 4th section in Revelation 13:8-10,14b-18
- in the 5th section in Revelation 16:12-16
- in the 6th section in Revelation 17:10b-18
- and in the 7th section in Revelation 20:7-10!

Conclusion: the 1000 years is another symbolic number signifying the messianic age, the gospel age or the whole New Testament period, that is the period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming!

The book of Revelation does not teach a future literal millennium at the end of world history, but rather *an inaugurated, realised or present millennium* in which we are now living!

21:5 The rest (*Greek: loipos*) of the dead (*Greek: nekros*) did not live (*Greek: zao, ezezan*)(*aorist*) (rather than the translation: 'they did not come to life') until (*Greek: achri*) the thousand years were ended (*Greek: teleo*)(*subjunctive, aorist, passive*). The meaning is not that the unbelievers and wicked people would only be physically resurrected after

the millennial kingdom. The conjunction ‘until’ denotes the end of a particular period of time¹¹. Until the end of the 1000 years they will not share in eternal life and they will not be spiritually translated (transferred, conveyed, carried) into heaven. When they die physically they are already lost and condemned (John 3:18,36)! They are not translated to heaven, but to hell (Luke 16:22-31)! At the general resurrection of the body they will be thrown *soul and body* in the lake of fire (20:11-15; Matthew 25:46; 10:28).

This is the first (*Greek: prote*) resurrection (*Greek: anastasis*).

In the Gospel of John the first resurrection begins here on earth when a person hears the voice of Christ and receives eternal life (he is born again, that is, *his soul or spirit is spiritually regenerated or resurrected* here on earth) (John 5:24-26).

And the first resurrection culminates when his body dies physically and *his soul (spirit) is spiritually translated* into the presence of Christ in heaven (John 11:25)!

In the Book of Revelation the first resurrection culminates in heaven when his body dies physically, but *his soul (spirit) is spiritually translated (conveyed)* into the presence of Christ in heaven (20:5-6).

While John 5:24-26 emphasises the beginning phase of the first resurrection *on earth*, Revelation 20:5-6 emphasises the latter phase of the first resurrection *in heaven*.

It is called ‘the first’ resurrection, because it is the most important and all controlling event for those who share in it. It means that they share in eternal life, blessedness and joy. In this life nothing is more important than rebirth (John 3:5-7; 5:24-26). And in death nothing is more important than going to be with Jesus Christ!

Nevertheless, non-Christians and unbelievers have no part in the first resurrection (20:4-6): their spirits are not born-again and their spirits are not translated into heaven when their bodies die physically. Unbelievers will perish and suffer eternal punishment (John 3:16; Matthew 25:46) in hell with their spirits (souls) and with their bodies (Matthew 10:28).

21:6 Blessed and holy (*Greek: hagios*) are those who have (*Greek: echo*)(*present*) part (*Greek: meros*) in the first resurrection. Those who participate in the first resurrection are blessed because they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (7:14), they have been redeemed from the earth (14:3) and because they finally died in the Lord (14:13).

Over them the second (*Greek: deuterios*) death (*Greek: thanatos*) has (*Greek: echo*)(*present*) no power (authority) (*Greek: exousia*).

In the Gospel of John the second death begins here on earth when a person remains spiritually dead (John 3:18,36).

In the Book of Revelation the second death reaches its final destination when the spirit or soul *and body* of the unbeliever is thrown into hell (20:14; 21:8; cf. Matthew 10:28; Mark 9:43-48).

However, the second death has no power over those who have a part in the first resurrection. Believers in Jesus Christ will never be hurt by the second death (2:11)! They will never perish (John 3:16-18,36; 5:24; 10:28)! This is very encouraging for Christians!

but they will be (*Greek: eimi, esomai*)(*future*) priests (*Greek: hierous*) of God and of Christ and will reign (*Greek: basileuo*)(*future*) with him for a thousand (*Greek: chilia*) years (*Greek: etos*). At his first coming, Christ fulfilled the Old Testament Law (Matthew 5:17) and thus also the ceremonial law about the Levitical priesthood, the priests in the order of Aaron (Hebrews 7:11-28). Since that time every believer is a priest on earth (1:6; 1 Peter 2:5,9-10) and after his physical death he continues to be a priest in heaven (cf. 22:4). The task of priests is to worship and serve God.

(8) Different views about the 1000 years (20:1-7).

There are six views.

The view of historic millennialism (Hengstenberg, Keil, etc.)¹². The 1000 year period begins with Constantine or Charlemagne, etc. in the past history.

The view of historic premillennialism (George E. Ladd)¹³. The 1000 years period is a *literal* and physical future kingdom of peace *after Christ’s second coming*. Historic premillennialists believe in *one second coming* of Christ before the millennium. There will not be another return of Christ (the so-called rapture of the Church before or in the middle of the period of the great tribulation).

The view of postmillennialism (Lorraine Boettner)¹⁴. The 1000 years period is *a symbol* for the golden age of indefinite length at the end of the present gospel age *before Christ’s second coming*. The gospel age gradually merges into the millennial age as more and more people are converted and the world is being Christianized. It would be a period in which this present world would enjoy almost complete righteousness; evil in its many forms would be reduced to negligible proportions; Christian principles would be the rule; and the majority of people in all the nations would be converted. It ends at Christ’s second coming.

¹¹ Until (*Greek: achri*) means “right until the time when”. Acts 7:18 says, “They increased in number until the time when another king rose up over Egypt”. Cf. “Until Christ comes” (2:25) and “Until God’s words are fulfilled” (17:17).

¹² Cf. Hengstenberg, Keil, etc.

¹³ George E. Ladd

¹⁴ Lorraine Boettner

The view of dispensational premillennialism (Larkin)¹⁵. The 1000 years period is a *literal* and physical future kingdom of peace after Christ's so-called future second return (the so-called appearance of Christ with the saints). The millennial kingdom would nevertheless end in failure!

The view of symbolic future millennialism (Hoekstra)¹⁶. The 1000 years period is a symbol of eternity.

The correct explanation. The view of inaugurated, realized or present millennialism (Grijdanus, Hendriksen, Berkhof, Groenewald, Gilmore, etc.)¹⁷ The 1000 years is a symbol signifying the present messianic age (the gospel age or the whole New Testament period including the intermediate state between death and resurrection) before Christ's second coming. This period has already begun and stretches from Christ's first coming (12:5) to Christ's second coming (14:14-20)! The millennium (symbolic 1000 years period) has already begun at Christ's first coming (12:10) and will end with Christ's second coming (11:15)! We are presently living in this symbolic 1000 year period! That is why it is called inaugurated, realized or present millennialism.

Matthew 12:28-30, Luke 17:20-21 and most of the parables prove that the kingdom of God is already present from Christ's first coming and that the kingdom is growing until it reaches its future completeness and perfection, not before, but at Christ's second coming! Although the kingdom is growing in quantity (more and more people enter the kingdom all the time) and in quality (these people are more and more conformed to Christ's likeness), the kingdom in its final perfect phase will only come when Christ has destroyed all dominion, authority and power, when he has put all his enemies under his feet and when he has destroyed death (Matthew 25:34; 1 Corinthians 15:24-26)! The kingdom in its final perfect phase will come suddenly, unexpectedly and only by divine intervention at Christ's second coming! Then the kingdom will be the eternal kingdom in which God and Jesus Christ will reign on the throne forever and ever (11:15; 22:3; 2 Peter 1:11).

(8) Explanation of the first resurrection and the second death (20:5-6).

It is meaningful to compare Revelation 20:5-6 with John 5:24-29. Both passages speak directly or indirectly about two kinds of death and two kinds of resurrection.

• John 5:24-26

speaks especially of something that happens throughout the whole New Testament period. Jesus Christ speaks of the spiritual death of all people in the sense that no natural man is born again. And he speaks of *the spiritual resurrection of only believers* in the sense that one receives eternal life by hearing Christ's Word and by believing in the God who sent Jesus Christ.

• John 5:28-29

speaks especially of something that happens at Christ's second coming. Jesus Christ speaks of the physical death of all people in the sense that all human beings die physically. And he speaks of *the physical resurrection of only believers unto eternal life* in the sense that they live eternally with body and soul together with Christ in heaven and on the new earth. And he speaks of *the physical resurrection of only unbelievers unto eternal condemnation* in the sense that they are eternally separated from God. The believers and the unbelievers will be resurrected simultaneously.

• Revelation 20:5

speaks of something that happens throughout the whole New Testament period. John assumes the physical death (the first death) of all people in the sense that all human beings die physically. And he speaks of *the spiritual resurrection (the first resurrection) of only believers* in the sense that their souls (spirits) are translated (conveyed) into Christ's presence in heaven immediately at their physical death. The souls (spirits) of unbelievers however are not brought into the presence of Christ in heaven. Only at the second coming of Christ will they with their souls and bodies be brought to Christ in the air to be condemned to hell.

• Revelation 20:6

speaks of something that happens at Christ's second coming. John assumes the physical resurrection (the second resurrection) of all human beings on earth at the second coming of Christ. And he speaks of *the spiritual (and physical) death (the second death) of only unbelievers* in the sense that their souls *and bodies* are thrown into hell at the final judgement.

The expressions 'the first resurrection' and 'the second death' are figures of speech, called *an oxymoron* (Greek: oxus = sharp, moros = foolish). An oxymoron is a pointed combination of seemingly contradictory expressions forming a paradox. Examples of oxymorons are: 'born again' (John 3:3), 'a living sacrifice' (Romans 12:1), 'law of liberty' (James 1:25), 'living stones' (1 Peter 2:5), 'the first resurrection and the second death' (20:5-6).

In Revelation 20:5-6 there is a *paradox of consequence*. The paradox of consequence is that *the death of believers leads to a resurrection* (their physical death on earth leads to a resurrection of their souls/spirits into heaven). And the paradox of consequence is that *the resurrection of unbelievers leads to death* (their physical resurrection on earth leads

¹⁵ Larkin

¹⁶ H. Hoekstra, Bijdrage tot de Kennis en de Beoordeeling van het Chiliasme, p 120; A Kuyper, Sr. Van de Voleinding, Vol. IV, p 343

¹⁷ Grijdanus, Hendriksen, Berkhof, Groenewald, Gilmore, etc

to the second or eternal death in hell). Those who share in the first resurrection are the saved (born again). Those who share in the second death are the lost (not born again).

In Revelation 20:5-6 there is also a *paradox of sequence*. The paradox in sequence is that *the second death implies the existence of the first death (the physical death)*. Just as the physical death (the first death) is the result of the initial spiritual death of all people (Romans 6:23), so the second death is the final spiritual and physical death of only unbelievers! And the paradox of sequence is that *the first resurrection implies the existence of the second resurrection (the physical resurrection)*. Just as the spiritual resurrection (the first resurrection) in heaven is the result of the initial spiritual rebirth of only believers on earth, so the physical resurrection (the second resurrection) is the final physical resurrection of all people!

The paradox is that while all believers and unbelievers share in the first death (the physical death), only believers share in the first resurrection (the translation of their souls into heaven). The paradox is that while all believers and unbelievers share in the second resurrection (the general physical resurrection), only unbelievers share in the second death (the damnation in hell). *The first death and the second resurrection are singular historical events for every person, but the first resurrection and the second death last for all eternity for believers and unbelievers respectively.*

The difference between John 5:24-29 and Revelation 20:4-6 is that the spiritual resurrection in the Gospel of John is primarily the spiritual regeneration of Christians *on earth*, while in the book of Revelation it is primarily the spiritual translation (transference, conveyance, entrance) of Christians *into heaven* into the presence of Christ.

(9) Different views about the first resurrection and the second death (20:5-6).

The futurist view. The first resurrection is the *physical* resurrection of Christians and the second death is the *physical* plunge into hell of non-Christians (Larkin)¹⁸. The first resurrection is the final stage for Christians. The second resurrection implied is the *physical* resurrection of the non-Christians 1000 years later (Walvoord)¹⁹.

The correct explanation. The first resurrection is *the spiritual translation (conveyance)* of the souls (spirits) into heaven of Christians who have died as a consequence of their initial *spiritual* regeneration during their lives. They enter the intermediate stage between physical death and physical resurrection. And the second death is *the literal descent* of the bodies and souls of non-Christians into hell as a consequence of their remaining spiritually dead and unrepentant.

PART 3. THE RELEASE OF SATAN AND THE FINAL BATTLE (20:7-10)

(1) Explanation of the symbols.

The symbolic picture is that of the release of Satan “for a short time” (20:3). He goes out to gather the nations for the last battle. Satan and his army surround the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire from heaven devoured them and the Satan was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, to be tormented forever.

20:7 And when (*Greek: hotan*) the thousand years have been completed (*Greek: teleo*)(*subjunctive, aorist, passive*, Satan will be released (*Greek: luo*)(*future, passive*) (i.e. by God’s permissive will) from his prison (*Greek: phulakes*). The 1000 years consists of a long period of ‘the messianic age’ or New Testament period and is followed by a very short period of ‘the great tribulation’. The release of Satan marks the beginning of the great tribulation (Matthew 24:21-25; cf. 3:10; 11:7-10; 13:7-10,14-18; 14:5-13; 16:12-16; 17:10c-14; 19:17-21; 20:7-10). For the sake of God’s elect (the believers, Christians) this period will be very short (20:3; Matthew 24:21-22; cf. the symbolic 3½ days in Revelation 11:9).

The people on earth had continued to spurn God’s trumpet judgements and bowl judgements. They had refused to accept the gospel (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10) and they had refused to repent (cf. 9:20-21; 16:8-11). As punishment, God finally “gives them over” to Satan and his evil forces (cf. Romans 1:24,26,28). Due to the godlessness and wickedness of the non-Christian nations and the nominal Christian congregations on the earth God sets Satan free (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:5). Thus Satan and all his allies have an opportunity to openly reveal their hatred against God and God’s people in the final battle in history. We may not understand why God will release Satan, but we do know that God works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will. “The LORD works out everything for his own ends – even the wicked for a day of disaster” (Proverbs 16:4; Ephesians 1:11; cf. Isaiah 45:7; Romans 9:17,22). He works out everything for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28)!

20:8 and will go out (*Greek: exergomai, eleusomai, elthon, elelutha*)(*future*) to deceive (*Greek: planao*)(*aorist*) the nations (*Greek: ethne*) in the four (*Greek: tessares, tessarsin*)(*dative*) corners (*Greek: gonia*) (of the earth – Gog and Magog – to gather (*Greek: sunago*)(*aorist*) them for battle (*Greek: ton polemon*). In number (*Greek: arithmos*) they are like the sand (*Greek: ammos*) of the sea.

20:9 They ascended (*Greek: anabaino*)(*aorist*) across (*Greek: epi*) the breadth (*Greek: platos*) of the earth and surrounded (encircled)(*Greek: kukleuo*)(*aorist*) the camp (military headquarters)(*Greek: pampleole*) of God’s people and the city he loves (*Greek: agapao*)(*perfect*). Satan and his allies: the final antichrist (the beast) and the false prophet, will gather the hostile nations for the final battle against Christ and Christians. *Also the three last sections of the book of*

¹⁸ Larkin, Revelation pp 176-180

¹⁹ John F. Walvoord, “The Rapture Question”, 1979, p 208

Revelation are parallel and refer to this final battle just before or at Christ's second coming (the parallel references are: 16:14,16; 19:19; 20:8; cf. 11:7; 13:7). As in Ezekiel chapter 38 and 39 these nations are symbolically called Gog and Magog. There is no allusion that the nations that surrounded God's people refer to the peripheral nations like China and Russia. Satan's soldiers come from every nation on earth, are uncountable in number and surround God's people (i.e. attack Christians in every country of the world).

God's people, wherever they live on earth, are called the camp of God's people or the beloved city, and symbolize God's New Testament people that trek as aliens and strangers (cf. Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11) through the desert of this world just as Israel did before they entered the Promised Land. They are called *the city God loves*, a symbol reminding them that they are citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Galatians 4:26)! *The camp* during the desert journey of Israel and *the later city* of Jerusalem cannot be literally meant, because they never existed at the same time! The camp and the city are symbols of the Militant Church on earth, especially in the end-time.

In Revelation 11:7-10 the enemies of God will make war against the two witnesses, overcome them and kill them. They will be allowed to *destroy the Militant Church as an organized institute* that proclaims the gospel all over the world. They cannot and do not kill all individual Christians, because there will still be Christians at Christ's second coming (Matthew 24:40-41; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:10).

But fire came down (*Greek: katabaino*)(*ao*rist) from heaven and devoured (*Greek: katesthio, ephagen*)(*ao*rist) them. The battle is not described at all, but the outcome is recorded! At his first coming Christ had curtailed Satan's power, but he has not yet removed Satan from the earthly scene (Matthew 12:28-30; John 12:31-32; Colossians 1:13). But at his second coming Christ will destroy Satan and his allies with *one single knockout blow*! There will be no prolonged battle.

- With one great earthquake (6:12; 11:13; 16:18; cf. Ezekiel 38:19-20)
- with one slash of his sickle (14:16; cf. sword in Ezekiel 38:21)
- with a plague of huge hailstones (16:21; cf. Ezekiel 38:22)
- with one blast of fire from heaven (20:9; cf. Ezekiel 38:22)
- with the breath of his mouth and the splendour of his (second) coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8)

Jesus Christ (cf. the sovereign LORD in Ezekiel 38:17; cf. Mark 1:1-3) will overthrow and devour this symbolic Gog and the many nations with him (cf. Ezekiel 38:22)!

The Bible clearly teaches that all the wicked will be destroyed (ruined) at Christ's second coming (Matthew 13:39-43; 24:39; 25:31-33,41,46; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10; 2:8; 2 Peter 3:7,9-10; Revelation 19:17-21). Then Psalm 2:9 will be fulfilled. Christ's rule with the iron sceptre is not a continuous royal reign over a so-called 1000 year long kingdom, but *a climatic smashing* of all opposition at his one and only second coming! "He will dash them to pieces like pottery" (Psalm 2:9).

20:10 And the devil, who deceived (*Greek: planaō*)(*present*) them, was thrown (*Greek: ballo*)(*ao*rist, *passive*) into the lake (*Greek: limne*) of fire and sulphur where (*a relative pronoun*)(*Greek: hopou*) both the beast and the false prophet (had been thrown in the previous vision). They will be tormented (*Greek: basanizo*)(*future*) day and night for ever and ever. Satan will be thrown in the lake of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown (in the previous vision). This last sentence does not imply that Satan is only thrown into hell a long time (1000 years) after the beast and the false prophet. It only means that the fact that the beast (the antichrist) and the false prophet would also be thrown into the lake of burning sulphur had already been mentioned in the previous section of the book of Revelation (19:20).

But then suddenly and unexpectedly Christ's second coming will take place (cf. Matthew 24:27-31). Christ's second coming will be visible all over the world (1:7; cf. Matthew 24:27,30) and audible to everyone in the world (Matthew 24:31; John 5:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

(2) Different views about the final battle (20:7-10).

The futurist view. The final battle in Revelation 20:7-10 will take place *a 1000 literal years after* Christ's future second return. This last war of the Gog and Magog nations shows *the failure of man during the seventh dispensation (the millennium)* (Larkin)²⁰! "The release of Satan and the war against the Gog and Magog nations reveal that even the rule of absolute righteousness (by Christ) during the millennial kingdom is not sufficient to change men's hearts" (Tenney)²¹! Christ needs a 1000 literal years to beat up on Satan's supporters. Then at the end of the millennium, POW – Christ wallops all the wicked and Satan in one final blow.²²

The correct explanation. The final battle in Revelation 20:7-10 will take place *at the end of the New Testament period (the symbolic 1000 years)* just before the one and only second coming of Christ. This final battle is a parallel description of the final battle in Revelation 16:14,16 and 19:17-21. It is one single knockout blow (Gilmore)!

PART 4. THE FINAL JUDGEMENT DAY (20:11-15)

(1) Explanation of the symbols.

²⁰ Larkin, Revelation, p.192

²¹ Tenney, p 90

²² John Gilmore, pp. 367-368

The symbolic picture is of a great white throne. The present earth and sky (the universe consisting of stars) fled from the presence of the One sitting on the throne. All people who have ever lived and died are given up by death and Hades and stand before the throne (in the air)(1 Thessalonians 4:17; Matthew 25:31-32; Revelation 20:11-15). The books are opened and everyone was judged according to what he had done as was recorded in the books. Only those whose names were recorded in the book of life receive eternal life. All other people will be thrown in the lake of fire and burning sulphur. The final judgement day arrives only at the end of the symbolic 1000 years, the final battle and the general resurrection of the dead. At Christ's second coming four important events will take place: the final battle, the general resurrection of the dead, the final judgement of everyone and everything, and the renewal of the earth (and the universe).

20:11 And (then) I saw (*Greek: horao, opsomai, eidon, hearaka*)(*aorist*) a great white throne and him who was seated (*Greek: kathizo*)(*present*) on it. After Jesus Christ was resurrected and ascended to heaven he sat at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19) far above all authority, power and dominion (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:3,20-23; Philippians 2:9-11; 1 Peter 3:22). John sees this throne, not on earth, but *in heaven or in the sky*, that is, the place where God lives, reigns and judges! The One seated on the throne is Jesus Christ, because he is the visible image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15) and because God had entrusted all judgement to him (John 5:22; cf. Matthew 25:31-33; Acts 17:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

from whose face (presence)(*Greek: hou apo tou prosopou*) earth and sky fled (*Greek: pheugo, ephugen*)(*aorist*), and a place was not found (*Greek: heurisko*)(*aorist*) for them. The Old Testament prophets recorded the creation of the present heaven (universe) and earth and prophesied its end. On 'the day of the Lord', also called 'the last day', the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken (Matthew 24:29). The elements will melt (be dissolved, disintegrate) in fire and the earth with all its works will be laid bare (completely exposed)(2 Peter 3:10-13; cf. Matthew 10:26). The heavens would vanish like smoke and the earth would wear out like a garment (Isaiah 51:6; cf. Psalm 102:25-27; Matthew 24:35).

In the Bible the word 'heaven' has four meanings, dependent on its context.

- Literally 'heaven' is the universe or the starry heaven (Genesis 1:1; Matthew 24:29,35; Acts 2:19-20; Revelation 6:13; 8:10; 20:11).
- Literally 'heaven' is the sky (atmosphere) over the earth (Genesis 1:6-8; Matthew 11:23; Luke 10:18; Revelation 16:21).
- Figuratively 'heaven' is the abode of God (Matthew 3:16-17; 5:16; 6:9; 14:19; 16:1; Acts 11:5,10; Romans 1:18; Revelation 11:13; 16:11).
- Figuratively 'heaven' is God himself (Matthew 21:25; 13:31; Luke 15:18,21).

The present earth and heaven (universe with all its stars) would flee away (cf. 6:12-14; 11:13; 16:18-21; 20:11; 21:1). They would flee from the visible presence of the One sitting on the throne so that there would be no place for them. This does not mean that they would be destroyed or even annihilated. It means that they would have served their purpose in this present world history. They would have become superfluous, redundant and would have to make room for Jesus Christ. Because there would no longer be any place for the old earth and the old universe, there would also no longer be any place for people to flee to or to hide away from Jesus Christ. Everyone would then stand completely exposed before Jesus Christ (6:12-17; cf. Matthew 25:31-33).

The Old Testament prophets also prophesied the creation of the new heavens and new earth. See Revelation 21:1. The one and only second coming of Christ marks the end of this present age. It is the end of this present world history and the beginning of the final eternal state in the new heaven on the new earth. Christ's second coming does NOT usher in a millennium (i.e. a thousand year kingdom of peace on the present old earth). His second coming is the beginning of nothing less than God's eternal kingdom on the new earth within the renewed universe!

20:12 And I saw (*aorist*) the dead, great and small, standing (*Greek: histemi, steso, esteka, hesteka*)(*perfect*) before the throne, and books (*Greek: biblia*) were opened (*Greek: anoigo*)(*aorist*). There will be *only one general resurrection* of the dead. The Bible only speaks of the resurrection *in the singular*, never in the plural (Matthew 22:31; John 6:39-40; 11:24; Acts 24:21; Hebrew 6:2). Nowhere in the Bible do we read of two future physical resurrections. Nowhere in the Bible do we read of a resurrection of the bodies of believers 1000 years before another resurrection of the bodies of unbelievers. There is no indication that the physical resurrection depicted in Revelation 20:11-15 must be limited to the unbelieving dead.

All people that have ever lived, both believers and unbelievers, will be resurrected at the one and only second coming of Christ. "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). In John 5:28-29, Jesus says, "Do not be amazed at this, for *a time* (singular: not two times separated by more than 1000 years) 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." And in Acts 24:15, the apostle Paul says, "I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be *a resurrection* (singular) of both the righteous and the wicked."

It is these dead, great and small, that John sees in his vision (20:12). The souls of those who had died as believers will come with Christ from heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:14) and unite with their resurrected bodies. The bodies of still living

believers will be transformed to be like the glorious body of the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:42-44,50-53; Philippians 3:21). And all these believers with their renewed souls and bodies will be caught up together to meet Jesus Christ in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17), to welcome him and to marvel at him (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

Later that same last day, the angels will drive the unbelievers with their bodies and souls before Christ's throne of heavenly glory for the final judgement (Matthew 24:40b, 41b; 25:31-33). This day of the Lord will come suddenly and unexpectedly for everyone (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2). The believers will receive their eternal reward (Matthew 25:34-40; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15), but unbelievers will receive their eternal punishment (Matthew 25:41-46; 1 Thessalonians 5:9).

And another book (*Greek: biblion*) was opened (*Greek: anoigo*)(*aorist, passive*), which is (the book) of life and the dead were judged (*Greek: krino*)(*aorist*) according to (*Greek: kata*) their works as recorded (*Greek: grapho, egrapsa, gegrapha, gegrammai*=*perfect, passive*) in the books. The books are a symbol of the fact that God knows everything that every person has ever thought, said or done, both good and evil (Hebrews 4:13). At Christ's second coming each person will be rewarded according to what he has done (Matthew 16:27; Luke 12:47-48; Romans 2:5-11; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; cf. Ecclesiastes 12:14).

'The book of life' is a symbolic record of *all the elect in history*. They have been elected before the creation of the earth (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:9-10). They are being called effectively, justified and sanctified in time. The fact that they repent, believe and are born again in time proof that they belong to the elect before the creation of the earth (John 1:12-13; 17:2; Romans 8:33; 9:11-12; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:9-10). And they are finally glorified at Christ's second coming (Romans 8:29-30; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:1-3). The people whose names are written in the book of life will never worship the beast (13:8; cf. 17:8)! It is impossible to deceive the elect (these genuine believers) (Matthew 24:24)! No genuine believer will ever be lost (John 17:12)! They have the assurance that their names are recorded in the book of life (Luke 10:20) and will never be erased from it (3:5)! They will be gathered from every place on earth by angels at Christ's second coming (Matthew 24:31). They will not be thrown into the lake of fire (20:15; cf. John 5:24; 10:28), but will certainly enter the New Jerusalem on the new earth (21:27; cf. Matthew 25:34). This is a great encouragement for Christians!

20:13 And the sea gave up (*Greek: didomi*)(*aorist*) the dead that (were) in it, and death (*Greek: thanatos*) and Hades gave up (*Greek: didomi*)(*aorist*) the dead that (were) in them, and each person (*Greek: hekastos*) was judged (*Greek: krino*)(*aorist*) according to his works. At the one and only physical resurrection not one single person that ever lived will remain dead or in the place of death. Every single person will be resurrected at the same time at Christ's second coming (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15).

Every single person will be judged according to what he has done, whether good or evil (Romans 2:5-11). Unbelievers will be judged according to their knowledge (Romans 1:19-20; 2:12-16) and punished in proportion to that knowledge (Luke 12:47-48). Believers will not be condemned (John 5:24; Romans 8:1-2), but will be judged according to how they have lived their lives and how they have contributed to God's ministry (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Christians and non-Christians are in fact already judged when they die, because at their physical death they are already assigned to heaven or to hell (John 3:18,36; Luke 16:19-24). But on the final judgement day it will be *revealed publicly to everyone that God's judgements have been absolutely just and fair and very merciful* (16:5-7).

20:14 And (then) death and Hades were thrown (*Greek: ballo*)(*aorist, passive*) into the lake (*Greek: limne*) of fire, which is (*present*) the second death. Death represents *the separation of body and soul*. Hades represents *the state of separation or the places where the dead bodies are laying, that is, the graves*, wherever it may be on earth or in the sea. Those who died at sea represent those who died without a specific burial place or whose bodies could not be found. Both death and Hades are the punishment for the fall of man into sin (Genesis 2:15-17; Romans 5:12). Both death and Hades distort God's beautiful creation. Before Christ's second coming they have great power through war, famine, sicknesses and violent disasters (6:8).

But Christ holds the key to Death and Hades (1:18). Death will be the last enemy to be destroyed in history (1 Corinthians 15:26). At Christ's second coming every single person who ever died in history will be physically resurrected. And death and Hades will be conquered forever, will cease to function and will be thrown in the lake of burning sulphur (20:14; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:54-57)! This is a great encouragement for Christians! In the original paradise death was a possibility (Genesis 2:15-17), but on the new earth death will no longer be a possibility (21:4)!

20:15 And if (the name of) anyone was not found (*Greek: heurisko*)(*aorist*) written (*Greek: grapho*)(*perfect*) in the book of life, he was thrown (*Greek: ballo*)(*aorist, passive*) into the lake of fire. All people who genuinely believe in Jesus Christ will never be thrown into the lake of fire. Believers in Christ from all the nations in the world will inherit God's covenant promise to Abraham (Galatians 3:8-9,14). There will be an uncountable number of names written in the book of life (7:9), like the dust of the earth (Genesis 13:16), like the stars in the heavens (Genesis 15:5) or like the sand on the seashore (Genesis 22:17)!

The book of Revelation is a book of encouragement and a book of warning. Revelation 20:15 is a great encouragement for those whose names are written in the book of life! At the same time the book of Revelation is a warning concerning the irrevocable final judgement day and at the same time it is a final call to everyone who reads or hears what is written in the book of Revelation to repent and believe.

(2) Different views about the physical resurrection (20:12-14).

The futurist view. The futurist view believes in three different stages for the physical resurrection separated by more than 1000 years from one another:

- *the first phase of the physical resurrection* is the resurrection of (Christ and of) many holy people at Christ's resurrection (Matthew 27:52-53)
- *the second phase of the physical resurrection* is the resurrection of only Christians at the first return of Christ (the rapture)(20:5-6)
- *and the third phase of the physical resurrection* is the resurrection of only non-Christians, unbelievers and the wicked at the end of the millennial kingdom (20:12-14).

The correct explanation. The physical resurrection is the one general physical resurrection of believers and unbelievers at Christ's one and only second coming (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15).

(3) Different views about the final judgment (20:11-12,15).

The futurist view teaches that Christians would be judged at the first return of Christ (the rapture of the Church), that the Gentile nation would be judged for their treatment of the Jews at the second return of Christ (the revelation of Christ) and that the non-Christians, unbelievers, the godless and the unrighteous people would only be judged 1000 years later at the end of the millennial kingdom. According to them the final judgement in Revelation 20:11-12,15 is *limited to this last group* and takes place before the great white throne *at the end of the future millennium*.

The dispensational premillennial view teaches that there are *seven dooms of judgement*: four before the millennial kingdom and three after the millennial kingdom. The four dooms of judgements during the second half of the future tribulation period before the millennial kingdom are: of religious or ecclesiastical Babylon (the false Church) (17:1-18); of commercial Babylon (18:1-24); of the beast and the false prophet (19:20) and of the antichristian nations (19:21). The three dooms of judgements after the future millennial kingdom are: of Gog and Magog (20:8-9); of Satan (20:10) and of the wicked dead (20:11-15) (Larkin, Revelation p. 16).

The dispensational premillennial view teaches that the future final judgement would consist of four stages (Larkin, Revelation p. 178):

- *The first stage of the last judgement is the judgement of believers.* They would be judged for their works before *the judgement seat of Christ in heaven* at Christ's future first return (the rapture)(2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15).
- *The second stage of the last judgement is the judgement of the Jews.* They would be judged for their rejection of the Messiah during *the seven year future tribulation period on earth* (Revelation chapters 4-19; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10). The tribulation period is called 'a time of trouble for Jacob' (Jeremiah 30:4-8) and 'a time of distress for Daniel's people' (Daniel 12:1). The time has been "shortened for the sake of the elect" (Matthew 24:22). It is not stated where this judgement throne must be. Their judgement ends when the future tribulation saints are resurrected (7:14).
- *The third stage of the last judgement is the judgement of the Gentile nations.* They would be judged for the way they treated the Jews (regarded as Christ's 'brothers') before Christ's throne in heavenly glory at Christ's future second return (Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10). Dispensationalists think that *this throne must be one earth* (cf. Zechariah 14:4).
- *The fourth stage of the last judgement is the judgement of unbelievers.* They would be judged for their unbelief and wicked works before *the great white throne* at the end of the future millennial kingdom (20:11-15). While it is not stated where this throne is, it is *probably not on the earth*, because the earth would be renewed by fire. Dispensationalists think that because books are opened and the book of life is only mentioned in Revelation 20:11-15, this future final judgement must be different than the other three future final judgements. This future final judgement would be 1000 literal years after the first three future final judgements. That is not a problem for dispensationalists, because 1000 years for people is like one day for God (2 Peter 3:7-8). According to them 'the (one) day of the Lord' covers all these future final judgements (lasting more than 1000 human years).

Revelation 20:15 implies that there would comparatively be very few righteous people at the third stage of the physical resurrection (the resurrection of the unbelievers at the end of the millennial kingdom). They would probably be translated away from the renovation of the earth by fire. The wicked would lose their resurrection bodies in the flames that would consume the earth's atmosphere and exterior surface *and become disembodied spirits again*. They would spend eternity as disembodied spirits in hell (Larkin, Revelation p. 194).

Remarks.

- There is no biblical warrant to believe that all the Jews would be saved and that no Jew would be damned (Matthew 8:11-12; 21:43-44; 25:31-46; Luke 13:1-5; Romans 2:5-6,9-11. Romans 11:26 refers only to all Jews throughout the ages who believed in the God of the Bible and his Messiah).
- The fact that the books are only mentioned in Revelation 20:11-15 does not mean that they are not present in the Matthew or Corinthian passages. Compare the similar language: "The dead were judged according to what they had done" (Revelation 20:12) with "The Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels (the second coming), and then he will reward each person according to what he has done" (Matthew 16:27).

- The dispensational premillennialists are inconsequent when they acknowledge *the translation of souls into heaven* in Revelation 6:9-11, but deny the translation of souls into heaven in Revelation 20:4.
- The Bible teaches that God will destroy (not annihilate) both the souls and the bodies of the unbelievers in hell (Matthew 10:28).
- The teaching that the souls or spirits of the unbelievers would become disembodied spirits is pure fantasy and a gross false teaching!

The correct explanation. The final judgement has no phases, but takes place on the last judgement day at the one and only second coming of Christ and concerns believers and unbelievers, Jews and all other nations at the same time. It will take place *in the sky*, that is, where Christ is at that moment at his second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), because the old universe and old earth will be simultaneously judged (20:11; cf. Romans 8:19-21). The Bible teaches that all the wicked people will be destroyed in the sense of punished together at Christ's one and only second coming (Matthew 13:39-43; John 5:28-29; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10) and not 1000 years after his second coming.

Revelation 20:7-10 in the 7th section of the book of Revelation

- is parallel to Revelation 19:17-21 in the 6th section of the book of Revelation
- is parallel to Revelation 16:17-21 in the 5th section of the book of Revelation
- is parallel to Revelation 14:14-20 in the 4th section of the book of Revelation
- is parallel to Revelation 11:11-19 in the 3rd section of the book of Revelation
- is parallel to Revelation 6:12-17 in the 2nd section of the book of Revelation.