

The Coming of Jesus' Eternal Kingdom  
According to the Book of Revelation

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## Foreword

*“He...claims to be Christ, a king.” (Luke 23:2)*  
*“The apostles...never stopped teaching and proclaiming  
the good news that Jesus is the Christ.” (Acts 5:41-42)*

*“Look, he is coming with the clouds,  
and every eye will see him...” (Rev. 1:7)*  
*“The kingdom of the world has become  
the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ...” (11:15)*  
*“I am coming soon.” (22:7, 12, 20)*

**The core of Christianity is that Jesus is the King.** That is the meaning of His being the Christ, the One *Anointed* with God’s Spirit to rule. It was the constant message of the apostles. The coming of His prophesied kingdom is the great goal of history and the theme of the Bible’s last book. We will consider what the Revelation says about that process but start with biblical background about His kingdom. This study is designed for serious Bible students, though not for experts. It aims at accuracy and clarity even in the more detailed notes and appendixes.

**The grand turning point in Revelation** is when King Jesus comes back to rule. Reread above the sample references to His Second Coming as quoted from all parts of that book. From chapter 4 on, it tells of events still future and unfulfilled (“what must take place after this,” 4:1). Until chapter 19 events clearly lead to His coming but do not picture it.<sup>1</sup> That changes, however, in 19. He comes with “the armies of heaven...to strike down the nations...[and] rule them with an iron scepter [as] **KINGS OF KINGS** and **LORD OF LORDS**” (19:11-16). He kills His enemies, throws the Beast and False Prophet into the lake of fire and the devil into the Abyss (19:17 to 20:3). In “the first resurrection” saints rise to rule with Him, beginning with the thousand years mentioned six times in 20:4-6. This view is known as a “premillennial” Second Coming.

In this study I often interact with two systems of interpretation: amillennialism, represented by Riddlebarger and Waldron, and Dispensationalism, represented by McClain and Walvoord.<sup>2</sup> The former denies that the Lord will come back in glory before the millennium or that the millennium represents His future rule on earth. The latter, affirming both, is premillennial.

**Amillennialists** emphasize aspects of continuity in God’s revelation. However, based on their interpretation of the New Testament, they spiritualize many prophecies in both Testaments, especially those that favor Israel. Accordingly, they allege that the “thousand years” of Revelation 20 are not a future period but present. They call it a spiritual rule Jesus began at His first coming and still continues. They admit that chapter 19 pictures Jesus’ coming to rule but think chapter 20 returns to His first advent. How do they justify such a drastic jump in time? By claiming it to be a common pattern in Revelation 6-20. Various prophecies are parallel, they say, going back to the same starting time or reaching the same goal. I will later give evidence that the prophecies in Revelation are not parallel but consecutive and lead to a single climax.<sup>3</sup>

Amillennialists also deny that the prophecies about Israel in Revelation really mean ethnic Israel. Instead, they appropriate them for the church, which they confidently assert is now “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). It is true that Revelation often uses apocalyptic hyperbole and puzzling symbols. But even when an event is unclear, to whom it happens is usually obvious. The main characters appear repeatedly.

**Dispensationalists** try to interpret all the prophecies normally, even in Revelation. They warn that spiritualizing makes the Bible like an uncharted sea. God will never rescind His election of Israel or forget the special promises He made to them. Revelation supports their literal fulfillment. Dispensationalists are alert to distinct administrations of God’s grace over the centuries (dispensations). For example, God dealt differently with Israel before and after He gave the law, then after Messiah came. Seeing the millennium as God fulfilling promises to Israel, they are premillennial.

But they are so zealous to keep Israel and the church far apart that they twist some Scriptures and neglect others. I did that when growing up as a Dispensationalist. I thought that the predicted kingdom was for Israel but that the church has a higher and more heavenly calling. Back then we spent more time “rightly dividing” the Bible than analyzing biblical covenants. We considered some New Testament books to be designed mostly for “the Jews.” The Gospel of Matthew, for example, was too kingdom-centered to clearly present the gospel. Matthew seemed appropriate for the wrong dispensation!<sup>4</sup>

Through studying the kingdom, I modified my understanding of other doctrines. Now I advocate a mediating position, which I pray my friends in both camps will consider. For example, Messiah and all of God’s people have the same goal: the eternal kingdom. There is no distinction between a “heavenly” people and an “earthly” people; heaven will come to earth for us all. The kingdom will constitute a new heaven and new earth, beginning with its thousand-year (millennial) transitional stage. The church (*ekklesia*) is by definition the kingdom assembly, composed of all who will be glorified in order to inherit their diverse shares. In that assembly will be a recognizable redeemed Israel with its own unique share.

See also my “Revelation Study Guide” (self study with an optional textbook) and many other kingdom-centered studies at [www.kingdominbible.com](http://www.kingdominbible.com).

Except as noted, Bible quotations are from the New International Version, 1984 (NIV). KJV is the King James Version. NASB is the New American Standard Bible. All bolding is mine. As authorized by John 1:41, I usually change the royal title *Christ* to its equivalent, *Messiah*. I also sometimes use *Messiah* where Revelation refers to the Lamb.

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## General Introduction

*And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)*

*He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)*

The Book of Revelation prepares us for Messiah Jesus to come and rule eternally. To understand that book, there is no substitute for understanding God's kingdom, the main theme of the Bible. Kingdom doctrine gives meaning to all other doctrines and makes them harmonize. But we must distinguish what is biblical about the kingdom from what is just tradition. As usual, such study must begin in the Old Testament.

**Two aspects of the kingdom.** To use Alva McClain's terminology, we should distinguish God's universal kingdom and His mediatorial kingdom.<sup>5</sup> In this study the word *kingdom* without specifying will nearly always refer to the latter.

- **God's universal kingdom.** In this God rules from heaven over the whole universe: "The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all" (Ps. 103:19). God's heavenly throne, mentioned in nearly every chapter of Revelation, refers to that universal kingdom.<sup>6</sup> Innumerable angels constantly do His bidding; earth's history continually evolves the way He ordains. But in a sense, His universal kingdom itself has no history. It cannot draw near because it is always present. Its structure and principles do not vary. We are not waiting for God's universal kingdom but for the aspect next described.
- **God's mediatorial kingdom.** When this exists, God rules from an earthly throne and usually through earthly rulers. This kingdom can draw near. It has a long history of change, beginning at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19:4-6). "When Israel came out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of foreign tongue, Judah became God's sanctuary, Israel his dominion" (Ps. 114:1-2). In other words, the nation Israel became God's mediatorial kingdom at the Exodus.

**Old Testament history: The kingdom begun and developed, then suspended.** When God established His kingdom on earth, it was a great privilege for Israel and blessing for us all. Its story in the Scriptures is a vast and marvelous source of instruction (1 Cor. 10:11). He had chosen that nation in their forefather Abraham before they existed (Gen. 12:2)—and had created them as is narrated in Genesis. It was in the Exodus, as already noted, that He made them His kingdom. At Mt. Sinai He made a covenant with them, with the Ten Commandments as its heart (Exod. 20). It involved His coming to live with them as King. "Have them make a sanctuary for me," He instructed Moses, "and I will dwell among them" (Exod. 25:8). "Make an atonement cover of pure gold....Place the cover on top of the ark....There...I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites" (25:17, 21, 22). When they had constructed, set up, and

dedicated His sanctuary, “the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (40:34). Clearly the glory of that kingdom—and that covenant—was more than spiritual. The story of that kingdom occupies the rest of the Old Testament.

**The LORD’s “Anointed” Ones.** For centuries Israel had no king but the LORD. But Israel was unhappy with that; they insisted on having a human king. So the LORD chose Saul and had the prophet Samuel anoint him with olive oil. That symbolized God’s giving him His Holy Spirit and made him the LORD’s “Anointed One.” That title is *Mashiac* in Hebrew, the same as *Messias* in Aramaic, transcribed into English as *Messiah*. The equivalent title in Greek is *Cristos*, transcribed into English as *Christ*. (In other words, both *Messiah* and *Christ* simply pronounce in English the Aramaic and Greek words meaning “Anointed One.”) So Saul became the first Anointed One/*Mashiac*/*Messias*/*Messiah*/*Cristos*/*Christ*.

When the LORD rejected Saul, He had Samuel anoint David to be king. This made David the second “Anointed One” but not the last. Since the LORD made David’s royal house, throne, and kingdom eternal, *every royal successor in David’s line became the LORD’s “Anointed One.”* Each one was also called *God’s Son*, adopted as God’s royal heir, as God promised in the covenant with David. Those are precisely the same two royal titles Jesus acquired centuries later at His baptism. When the Holy Spirit (not just oil) came upon Him and “remain[ed] on Him” (John 1:32), He became the Anointed One. And God’s voice from heaven announced His adoption as the Heir: “This is My Son” (Matt. 3:17). For further study of each of these titles, see relevant appendixes in my “[Survey of Romans](#).” Also, see “[The Title Son of God](#).”

**The Old Testament kingdom suspended.** In its original form the kingdom came to an end. The prophet Ezekiel lived at that time, when Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and God’s “dwelling” on earth. Ezekiel saw the sign when God’s glory departed from the temple Solomon had built (Ezek. 10:4, 15-19). That initiated a long period, still going, “without king or prince” (Hos. 3:4).

**Prophecies of the kingdom’s future restoration.** Embedded with oracles about the kingdom’s suspension were many about its future restoration in the “day of the Lord.” Those prophecies were first spoken, then written. They pictured the coming kingdom as primarily spiritual but with many material and political aspects. It will exist on a transformed earth. Nearly every prophecy implied or stated that the nation of Israel will be converted—and saved in various aspects. No one should try to expound Revelation without understanding many such prophecies. Consider three in one book.

### Some prophecies in Daniel

- Daniel 2:31-45. The God of Heaven will crush the kingdoms of this earth and replace them with His own kingdom from heaven. The great kingdoms beginning with Babylon are represented by various materials in an “enormous, dazzling statue.” The kingdom of God/heaven

is represented by a heavenly rock that came down and “struck the statue [and] became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth” (2:35).

- Daniel 7:1-28. A boastful little horn on a terrifying beast gains power, then defeats and kills the saints for three and a half “times” (years; 7:25). But the heavenly court decrees the destruction of that beast. In its place, the “sovereignty...of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints” (7:27). The saints are led by “one like a son of man” (7:13).
- Daniel 9:24-27. There will be seventy *sevens* (KJV has *weeks*) of years leading to ultimate glory for Israel and Jerusalem (“your people and your holy city”). The six final blessings listed in verse 24 will signify the presence of God’s worldwide kingdom. The prophecy gives two stages of *sevens* arriving at “the Anointed One [Messiah], the ruler, [who] will be put to death and will have nothing.” The third stage is the final (seventieth) *seven*, which will include desolation before the glorious end.

**When the prophets fell silent** for four hundred years, godly Jews did not forget God’s many promises. There is lots of evidence how they understood them. We can read a clear example in Luke 1:67-79 from John the Baptist’s father, Zechariah. “Filled with the Holy Spirit,” he spoke of the Messiah soon to be born and what He will do for Israel. Does anyone really doubt that Zechariah foresaw restoration for his nation?

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people [through] a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David...to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear.

**New Testament Gospels: The kingdom had drawn near.** John the Baptist began preaching. His was the “voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the Lord’” (Isa. 40:3). John kept saying that the kingdom had “drawn near” (Greek, Matt. 3:2). Soon Jesus, then also His apostles, were preaching the very same message (Matt. 4:17; 10:7; Luke 10:9, 11). *None of these heralds defined the kingdom that had drawn near.*

**No definition was needed.** Neither John the Baptist nor Jesus tried to change the basic Jewish definition of the kingdom. Why not? Because it was correct, having come from the prophets.<sup>7</sup> Those who consider it wrong distort the meanings of Matthew 12:28, Luke 17:21, and John 18:36 to prove their point. Consider the apostles themselves. During the Lord’s entire ministry, both He and they preached the kingdom. Even in the forty days after His resurrection, “He appeared to them ...and spoke about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). After all of this the apostles still retained their Jewish definition. Just before He ascended to heaven, for example, they asked Him if it was time to “restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6).

To repeat, John and Jesus did not define the kingdom. Instead, they counted on their people’s understanding—based on the prophecies—as basically right. While proclaiming that the kingdom was near, Jesus said a lot about spiritual requirements for entering it (Matt. 5-7). But He

never denied its political and material aspects. In fact, most of the miracles He performed, such as, His healings, confirmed that it would have material aspects.

**The kingdom was present in the King when He was here.** Throughout His ministry, the kingdom was present in Him and His miracles (but only that way). That explains a seeming paradox. Even while preaching that the kingdom had drawn near, He could also say that “it has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28) or “is in your midst” (Luke 17:21, NASB). In our time, of course, since He is physically absent, the kingdom is no longer present in that special sense.

**The kingdom “postponed.”** While the kingdom was still near—and even present in the King—Israel made it clear that they would reject Him. Matthew chapters 11-12 emphasize their scorn for both John and Jesus. Therefore, Jesus made a change in His teaching. He began to reveal in parables, so that only disciples would understand, “the secrets of the kingdom” (Matt. 13). Many modern Bible students think that those parables reveal a present form for the kingdom.<sup>8</sup> They are mistaken because of their own wrong assumptions. They suppose that since the kingdom had drawn near, it had to be inaugurated. If indeed it did begin, its present form is wholly “spiritual,” not at all material or political. In that case, it was certainly not what godly Jews had been led to expect.

But there is no need to think that the “secrets” parables revealed a purely spiritual kingdom. In fact, that meaning is quite unlikely, as seen in the following general factors. (a) Jesus spoke only on the disciples’ level of understanding, which foresaw a kingdom with many aspects. (b) They did not change their viewpoint after Jesus’ careful explanations.

With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, **as much as they could understand...** When he was alone with his disciples, **he explained everything.**  
(Mark 4:33-34; cf. Matt. 13:51-52)

What could they understand? What did they understand? Not a spiritual kingdom, which they never referred to in succeeding chapters. But something more in accord with prophecies and Jewish expectations. Not an unexpected kind of kingdom but an unforeseen interlude (in which we live). After the interlude, the puzzling and apparently paltry beginnings will eventuate in the grand consummation they expected. Understood that way, the secrets in no way showed a changed form of the kingdom but its postponement.

**Why was this interlude unexpected?** Simply because God had not previously revealed that Messiah would come twice. He had predicted both Messiah’s suffering and His glory (Luke 24:26)—but not His two comings. Therefore,

the prophets...searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Messiah in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you.... (1 Peter 1:10-12a)



## General Introduction

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As you saw above, the Lord did not reveal this interlude (and Second Coming) until after He was rejected. That is the main point of the secrets starting in Matthew 13. And that was what He clarified on the road to Emmaus:

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”<sup>9</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27)

But why did God not reveal sooner that Messiah would come twice? Because by being unaware of that fact, Israel would feel free to “disown” Messiah and kill Him. Although He showed His credentials, He also required Israel to repent. They did not really believe they were wicked or that Messiah had to suffer for them. They saw Him; they hated Him; they killed Him—and thereby fulfilled the Scriptures. “This is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer” (Acts 3:13-18).

**After the “secrets” were revealed, the kingdom was still future.** The secrets of the kingdom did not teach that it was inaugurated spiritually. After Matthew 13 it was still future. Jesus repeatedly linked it to His Second Coming. For example: “at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones...” (Matt. 19:28). In the final chapters of Matthew there is no clear indication of a present form, in spite of rare possible exceptions.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, Luke 10 informs us that the Lord continued also to refer to it as “near,” even in His long final journey toward Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps perturbed at such a claim, the Pharisees asked “when the kingdom of God would come” (Luke 17:20).

**It ceased to be near.** The last big stop before arriving at Jerusalem was in the Jordan Valley at Jericho. There Jesus told a parable (Luke 19:11-27) in which the kingdom was no longer near but only future. He will “bring” it when He returns from heaven. (See more about all this in Appendix A, p. 53.)

So the kingdom was no longer near during Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension. It would not be near again until certain things started happening (Luke 21:31). Early Christian writers saw the beginnings of those signs. Therefore, the earliest Epistle announced, “the Lord’s coming is near” (James 5:8). But no Scripture says that the kingdom has begun. It is still future even though we belong to it (Col. 1:12-13). We are His coming kingdom legally but not yet in actual fact. We are an “embryo” that will be “born” as the kingdom when He comes. “When Messiah ...appears ...then [we] also will appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4). New Testament Epistles prepare us for Jesus to return, establish His kingdom, and rule forever.

Jesus had promised to come back, and many expected that to happen in A.D. 70. In that year Jerusalem fell and the beautiful temple enlarged by King Herod was destroyed. But He did not

come, and twenty-five more years passed. So in A.D. 95 God sent a final word about Jesus and His kingdom.<sup>12</sup>

**Revelation, the kingdom coming.** The end of our waiting period and Jesus' coming to rule is the main focus of the Book of Revelation. This capstone book, the final message of Scripture, was passed on to us by Jesus the Messiah<sup>13</sup> through the apostle John (Rev. 1:1). It tells the relentless march of events that will lead to His coming and kingdom. Near the end, in 20:1-6, it provides an account of Jesus' kingdom being inaugurated.

The Bible's last prayer begs Jesus to come rule. "Yes," He promises, "I am coming soon" (Rev. 22:20, as in verses 7 and 12).<sup>14</sup> "Amen," we respond, "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20b). This prayer shows the spirit of the book it concludes. *It seeks the same result as the prayer our Lord taught us: "Your kingdom come" (Luke 11:2).* And its spirit is the same as the apostle Paul showed in his own last book and chapter. He also was longing for "Messiah Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead...in view of **his appearing and his kingdom**" (2 Tim. 4:1; see also vv. 8 and 18).<sup>15</sup> Is that coming and kingdom still important to us? Better believe it! It begins the eternal future we are preparing for (James 2:5; Gal. 5:21; Heb. 12:28).

**Contrasting views of Revelation 20.** No other passage in Revelation relates His starting to rule after coming in glory. But in effect there are two main views of that passage: premillennial and amillennial. The former teaches that the kingdom referred to there is still future and will start when Jesus comes back. The amillennial view, in contrast, says that the passage describes what started at Jesus' first coming. At that time He bound Satan, they say, and began His kingdom "in a form unexpected" (i.e., spiritual).<sup>16</sup> We will see why the premillennial view is better. However, we will also see something not all premillennialists realize: once Jesus' kingdom begins, it will never end.

**Understanding the Book of Revelation.** Well, Revelation has a lot that is easy to understand. It talks about such familiar things as God Himself, Jesus as Priest and Ruler, God's mighty angels and suffering saints, and the coming of His glorious kingdom. But it also uses many symbols and figures,<sup>17</sup> For example:

- Jesus as a Lamb with "seven horns and seven eyes." (4:6)
- Locusts from the Abyss who painfully torture for five months but cannot kill. (9:2-5)
- The Beast from the sea who combines features of various animals, has ten crowned horns and seven heads, and demands universal worship. (13:1-8)
- The sheer variety of authoritative and awe-inspiring angels.

To some extent such symbols and figures are "apocalyptic" style, sometimes used in Old Testament books like Daniel, Zechariah, and Isaiah (e.g., Isa. 24-27). I will summarize Bruce Waltke's helpful description of that style: (a) It focuses on the end of the ages. (b) It has a dynamic method, such as, using an angel to interpret. (c) It presents dualisms, such as, the wicked and the righteous, the present and the age to come, and heaven versus the world. (d) It is directed toward

those who are oppressed. For example, it promises to resolve Israel's problems through blessings in the Holy Land. (e) It uses bizarre and/or cosmic images, which embrace the whole world, instead of plain history. (f) Its purpose is to produce repentance.<sup>18</sup>

Apocalyptic symbolism can be perplexing. But it can also reveal invisible powers and complicated relationships that we would otherwise miss. It can bring to life innumerable truths that prosaic lists would leave inert. Powerful and transforming! Yet, susceptible to many fanciful interpretations. How do we avoid mistakes? Mostly through starting with sound theology and constantly comparing many Scriptures. Above all by sticking with divine covenants and unmistakable promises.

**The Book of Revelation is permeated with the Old Testament.** It refers to many Old Testament events and characters and often quotes its words. My teacher in seminary, Lewis Johnson, alleged that in its 404 verses, 278 (75%) clearly refer to the Old Testament. He concluded that “we should never pose as an expert on the Book of Revelation if we are not familiar with the whole of the Bible, and especially the Old Testament.” When combined, the references, quotations, and allusions in Revelation make, as it were, a “sound from rushing waters” (1:15).<sup>19</sup> Often we must go back to their sources in order to unlock their meanings. But even when Revelation provides its own interpretation, it may leave an enigma.<sup>20</sup> It reveals the future but still trails mysteries.

Nevertheless, most of the divine plan and some of the final personages in Revelation seem clear enough. So here I will try to survey everything the book says about the kingdom. For example, does it affirm that the kingdom has already begun, or is future, or *both* present *and* future? Since our understanding will remain limited, some passages will still remain ambiguous. But I trust that the insights I pass on may make more of them specific.

**Limitations of this study.** We will deal mostly with aspects of the book which clearly affect kingdom doctrine, with special attention to chapters 20-22. Sometimes we will look at related passages in other books when they help to understand this one. A more complete study would consider the whole rich Bible background, to which I have referred in this introduction. For that, you may want to consult others of my writings, for example, on [Isaiah](#), [Kingdom in Gospels](#), [Matthew](#), the [Thessalonian Epistles](#), “[The Kingdom Will Come As the Prophets Predicted...](#),” and “[Will the Church Go Through the Great Tribulation?](#)”

## Prologue

### Revelation 1:1-3

*The revelation of Jesus Messiah, which God gave him to show his servants  
what must soon take place....The time is near. (Rev. 1:1, 3)*

**Revelation 1:1-3.** As revealed in this prologue, the following diagram shows the book's divine origin and its path of transmission.

**GOD → JESUS MESSIAH → GOD'S ANGEL → GOD'S SERVANT JOHN → GOD'S SERVANTS**

See my earlier explanations for changing *Christ* to *Messiah*. The words “of Jesus Messiah” may mean that what it reveals is both *from* Him and *about* Him. Note that this prologue twice indicates that all the events of this revelation “must soon take place” (v. 1). For “what is written in it...the time is near” (v. 3). That includes our Lord's very public and glorious coming to rule (v. 7). All of it is still near; that condition has not basically changed. For that reason, it is still urgent to read this book aloud to each other, which can be done in little over an hour. Unusual blessing is promised to “the one who reads...and...those who hear it and take [it] to heart.”

As in Matthew chapters 24 and 25, Revelation foretells various judgments before our Lord **comes in glory to rule**. Yet, it is that **glorious coming** which is repeatedly announced as our hope. Some agree He will come in glory but insist that our hope is earlier. Before that Tribulation, they say, He will come just for us. Before all those judgments and signs (an absolutely imminent coming), He will take us away in the Rapture! But that is a skewed teaching that fixes our gaze away from reality, a teaching never pictured in Revelation.

## Part I: Introduction

### Revelation 1:4 to 3:22

*Look, he is coming with the clouds,  
and every eye will see him... (1:7a)*

*“Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches.” (1:11)*

*“Behold, I am coming soon....I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you  
this testimony for the churches.” (22:12, 16)*

These words are quoted from the first and last chapters of the Revelation. They agree on the book's purpose and recipients—which are first stated and expanded in chapters 1-3. The purpose centers on Jesus' coming in glory to rule. (It can be no secret coming if “every eye will see him...and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him,” 1:7.) The recipients are the churches, who look for Him to come that way.

**1:4-20.** Chapter 1 focuses on the central Person of the book. It (a) sounds the keynote of Jesus Messiah's soon coming in glory and (b) features a vision of Him as High Priest now overseeing the churches. This vision paints the first of three major pictures of Him in the book: High Priest, The Lamb who was slain, and King of Kings & Lord of Lords (see Chart E at 19:11-16, p. 35).<sup>21</sup> The word for His kingdom (the final mediatorial kingdom) occurs twice in chapter 1. The way it is first used (1:6) is unusual in the Epistles and calls for careful thought.

**1:5. "Jesus Messiah, who is...the ruler of the kings of the earth."** This title, as you will see in the discussion under 1:6, is a sure promise but not yet in operation.

*The following explanation of 1:6 extracts from the fuller treatment in Appendix A, p. 53.*

**1:6. Jesus "has made us to be a kingdom and priests** to serve his God and Father." As noted above, this statement is unusual. In what way? In that only this verse and Revelation 5:10 seem to say that God's people are already Jesus' kingdom. Speaking of His kingdom as already present contradicts most of the biblical evidence. Many passages say or imply that we will enter that kingdom in the future.<sup>22</sup> Remember the example, mentioned in the General Introduction, of the last chapters of the Gospel of Luke. Starting with the Parable of the Minas (Luke 19:11-27), there are numerous references to the kingdom; but none considers it present or even near. They all assume it to be future, after the Lord has returned from heaven, just as the parable reveals.

He went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once....A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king [Greek, to receive a kingdom] and then to return....He was made king [Greek, after receiving the kingdom]...and returned home. (Luke 19:11-12, 15a).<sup>23</sup>

Do not miss the clear indication in this parable of when the kingdom would begin. Not when the Lord gave His life to redeem many. Not when He showed Himself alive after He rose. Not when He ascended to the Father's right hand (in the "distant country" of the parable). Not when He poured out the Holy Spirit to start forming His church. But only when He returns. Accordingly, the kingdom is future not only in the rest of Luke but also in Acts and the Epistles, often obviously so. Acts 14:22 is an example: Paul and Barnabas were telling new believers that "we must go through many hardships **to enter the kingdom** of God." They were justified but not in the kingdom yet. Neither are we. The apostle Peter's last letter gives another clear example of the kingdom's futurity. Believers should add godly qualities to their faith, because those who do "**will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Messiah" (2 Peter 1:11).

This is only a little of the evidence that the kingdom is still future. Why then does Revelation 1:6 seem to contradict it by calling us the kingdom? The answer is that the title is proleptic—calling us now what we will be in the future. Jesus Himself is given a proleptic title in the preceding verse (1:5): "the ruler of the kings of the earth." Eventually He will rule all the kings,

but not yet. Revelation itself speaks of that activity as future: He “**will rule** all the nations with an iron scepter” (12:5). Then He will sit on “the throne of his father David, and...reign...for-ever” (Luke 1:32-33). He called it His own royal throne, which He will occupy when He returns (e.g., Matt. 25:31; 19:28). In Revelation 3:21 He clearly distinguished His future throne from His Father’s present throne (“my throne...his throne”). Seated on the latter, “**he waits** for his enemies to be made his footstool” (Heb. 10:12b-13; 1:13). Revelation tells how those enemies will be subdued and He can begin to rule.

So in what sense are believers already His kingdom? In the same sense in which He is already “ruler of the kings”—not as an historical fact but as a legal certainty. Or, to use the figure of speech in Appendix A, we are the coming kingdom in embryo, not yet born.

**1:7. “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him...and all the peoples of the earth will mourn....”** This clearly refers to Messiah’s coming in glory to reign, a major emphasis of the Revelation. Three times in the last chapter (22:7, 12, 20) He repeats the same promise, no doubt referring to His same glorious coming to reign. Though that coming is often anticipated in the book, its fulfillment does not take place until chapter 19.

**1:9.** The apostle John is our “brother and companion in **the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance** that are ours in Jesus.” Unless we already know what the kingdom is, this statement is ambiguous. One could conclude from it that Messiah inaugurated the kingdom in His first coming. But see the General Introduction to this study.<sup>24</sup> Early believers knew better; the kingdom was their goal. So they no doubt understood Revelation 1:9 in the same way as Acts 14:22: “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” Those two verses say the same thing, as seen in Chart A. Look down column 2. My title, “Present Difficulties,” refers to “the suffering” in Revelation 1:9, called “hardships” in Acts 14:22. Now look at the last column. My title, “The Future Goal,” refers to “the “kingdom” in both verses. Acts says “to enter the kingdom” because we are **not in it yet**. What must happen for believers to reach that goal is quoted in column three. “Patient endurance” (Rev.) means the same as “we must go through many” (Acts). Thus, persevering faith is what links our present difficulties with our final goal (cf. Heb. 3:6, 14; 10:36).

CHART A <b>The Future Kingdom in Revelation 1:9 &amp; Acts 14:22</b>			
REFERENCE	PRESENT DIFFICULTIES	ENDURED IN ORDER TO REACH →	THE FUTURE GOAL
Revelation 1:9	the suffering	→            →            → patient endurance	the kingdom
Acts 14:22	hardships	we must go through many	to enter <b>the kingdom</b> of God

**1:10. “On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit.”** Besides here, the Greek for “Lord’s” (*kuriake*) is used in “the Lord’s supper” in 1 Corinthians 11:20. In Revelation the NIV and most others take “the Lord’s Day” to refer to Sunday, as the occasion when John had these visions. That opinion seems correct; the same expression means Sunday in many early Christian writings. Others, however, think John has an unusual meaning for it, “the Day of the Lord.” They think John was moved by the Spirit to that future Day of judgment and triumph. But even if the term could mean that, it would not be appropriate at this place. John saw no visions pertaining to the Day of the Lord in chapter 1—not until after chapter 3.

Merrill C. Tenney observes that “in the Spirit” appears four times, in 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; and 21:10. He considers it the main structural key for this book. “Each occurrence of this phrase,” he claims, “locates the seer in a different place.”

The seer of Revelation under the power of the Holy Spirit was transported in consciousness to a new scene of action where spiritual realities and future events were disclosed to him, and where he received revelations that were not given under ordinary circumstances.<sup>25</sup>

Using “in the Spirit” as framework for the book is an interesting suggestion but seems forced and artificial. A better framework is in 1:19.

**1:19. “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now, and what will take place later.”** The last phrase is substantially repeated in 4:1. That supports the popular interpretation that 1:19 gives a chronological outline of the book in two or three parts:

- “What you have seen” either refers to John’s vision of Jesus, just described, or is a caption referring to the two parts that follow.
- “What is now” refers to the condition in which the seven churches existed as John wrote.
- “What will take place later” refers to end-time events described from 4:1 through chapter 22.

**Revelation 2-3** sketches seven representative churches for whom the book is written (1:11; 22:16). These were actual, historical churches—all in the first century—with differing characteristics.<sup>26</sup> The statement at the end (22:16) confirms that the whole book, not just chapters 1-3, is a “testimony for the churches.” The glorified Messiah is tending them as High Priest. They all anticipate His kingdom. (Neither He nor they are ruling yet.) He reminds them of His authority, such as, having the sword from His mouth (2:12, 16) and the key of David (3:7). He is “the ruler of God’s creation” (3:14), probably a proleptic title as in 1:5 and 1:6. He sits on His Father’s throne while waiting for His own throne (3:21). He knows each church profoundly and communicates with it. He makes promises to every overcomer, that is, every person with faith in Him (1 John 5:4-5). All will rule with Him. As in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12), these promises are the blessings of His coming kingdom. Note especially the ones I have bolded.

**Blessings of the Coming Kingdom  
For Each Overcomer, Revelation 2-3**

The right to eat from the tree of life (2:7)

The crown of life (2:10)

Exemption from the second death (2:11)

The hidden manna to eat (2:17)

A white stone with a new name written on it (2:17)

**Authority over the nations,  
to rule them with an iron scepter**  
(=authority like Messiah's, **2:26-27**)

The morning star (2:28)

To walk with Him, dressed in white (3:4)

To have one's name always in the book of life  
and acknowledged before the Father and His angels (3:5)

**A crown (3:11)**

To be always a pillar in the temple (3:12)

The names written on him  
of God, of God's city, the new Jerusalem,  
which is coming down out of heaven from God,  
and of Messiah (3:12)

**To sit with Messiah on His throne  
as He sat with His Father on the Father's throne (3:21)**



## **Part II: Judgments Leading to the Kingdom Revelation Chapters 4-19**

*You purchased men...and they will reign...*

*Worthy is the Lamb...to receive power...*

*Hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne  
and from the wrath of the Lamb!*

*For the Lamb...will be their shepherd...*

*The kingdom of the world has become  
the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah,  
and he will reign for ever and ever.*

*Now have come the salvation and the power  
and the kingdom of our God  
and the authority of his Messiah.*

*A male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter*

*The hour of his judgment has come.*

*All nations will come and worship before you.*

*Behold, I come like a thief!*

*Hallelujah!...He has condemned the great prostitute...*

*For our Lord God Almighty reigns...*

*For the wedding of the Lamb has come...*

*Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword  
with which to strike down the nations.  
He will rule them with an iron scepter.*

### **Introduction to Chapters 4-19**

Read the sample quotations (above) from this long section of Revelation. They illustrate the fact that it consists of judgments leading to Messiah's kingdom, as indicated in my title for Chart B. Next, look at the three subsections of that chart. The first subsection (chs. 4-5, column 2 in the chart) describes a court scene in heaven, with the Creator presiding. This court scene reaches a climax when the Creator gives to the Lion who is also a Lamb a sealed scroll to open. In the second subsection (chs. 6-18, column 3), the Lamb opens the seals in heaven and each one triggers severe judgments on earth. These seals open to seven trumpets and climax in seven bowls of God's wrath. In the third subsection (ch. 19), heaven rejoices at the victory and the Messiah comes to earth to rule.

<b>CHART B Judgments Leading to the Kingdom, Revelation 4-19</b>			
<b>Subsection</b>	<b>Chapters 4-5</b>	<b>Chapters 6-18</b>	<b>Chapter 19</b>
<b>Scene in Heaven</b>	Heavenly court in session	Judgments ordered in heaven which take place on earth.	Heaven rejoices that the kingdom can begin.
<b>Actions of Messiah</b>	Messiah gets the scroll.	Messiah opens the scroll. Seals, Trumpets, Bowls	Messiah comes down as King of Kings & Lord of Lords.
<b>Meaning of Subsection</b>	The Creator invites Messiah to rule over creation.	Messiah asserts His right to rule, bringing judgments on His enemies on earth.	Messiah comes to earth to rule.

**Will the church miss these judgments?** We have seen that the entire Book of Revelation is designed for the churches. Yet, the words *church* or *churches* are not used again after Revelation 3 until the last chapter. Why not? Some answer that the true church will not be on earth during the tribulation judgments—but will already be raptured and transferred to heaven. That is called the pretribulation Rapture view, that the Rapture (a) will occur before the Tribulation and (b) will take the church away. How important that would be for both the church and the world! How important it would be to relate it in this book designed for the church! But how perplexing for those who teach a pretribulation Rapture not to find it in the early chapters. (In fact, it is in no chapter as they picture it.) They can only infer that it must take place there. They base their two main arguments in Revelation on the following texts. But both arguments require questionable premises.

- In 3:10 the Lord promises the Philadelphia church to “keep you from the hour of trial.” Does that church represent all true believers? Does the promise require removal from the earth? In my “Revelation Study Guide” see the appendix “Does Revelation 3:10 Imply a Pretrib Rapture?”
- When John first looks into heaven in chapters 4-5, he sees twenty-four elders there. Are they human beings? Do they represent the church (or others, or both the church and others)? If they represent the church, must it all have gone to heaven? Under “Revelation 4-5” see my discussion “Who are the elders?”

**Saints on earth.** Such “pretrib” inferences are doubtful at best, because Revelation tells about many true believers on earth during the Tribulation (e.g., Rev. 7:13-14; 13:7, 10; 14:12-13; 18:4). Many, if not most, of them will be Gentiles. Will they not belong to the church? Some argue that if they did, the text would call them by that name. Not necessarily. Several New Testament books written for the church or churches do not use the words *church* or *churches* at all.<sup>27</sup> A related question is whether God would leave the church on earth during the “time of trouble for Jacob [that is, the nation of Israel]” (Jer. 30:7). Certainly Revelation gives us evidence to believe that He will. See the discussions at chapter 20 (p. 43) and Appendix B (p. 58).

On my website is a much longer writing with the same name as the appendix, "[Will the Church Go Through the Great Tribulation?](#)"

**The Tribulation three and a half years long.** We should realize that “the Tribulation” is more specific in the Bible than in theological and popular usage. In the Bible it refers to *the second half* of the seventieth “seven” for Israel, just before the Lord returns to rule. Look again at the brief summary of Daniel 9:24-27 (p. 6) in “Some prophecies in Daniel” in the General Introduction. Just when that prophecy reaches to Messiah and His death, it **leaves room for a gap** before the final *seven*. It says that the city will be destroyed and wars will continue. Indeed, Jerusalem was destroyed (in A.D. 70) years after Messiah’s death. History required the gap. But we are still waiting—during the gap—for the last *seven* of the prophecy. It will begin when the wicked “ruler who will come...will confirm a covenant with many.” (That ruler is the nearest antecedent to the subject of “will confirm.”) But “in the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation.” That abomination will inaugurate the Great Tribulation, as our Lord confirmed in Matthew 24:15-22. Since it will come halfway through the last *seven*, the Tribulation will last three and a half years (see also Dan. 7:25; Rev. 13:5; et al.). When not quoting Scripture, however, I will follow the popular usage and refer to the whole seven-year period.

## Revelation 4-5

**Revelation 4-5, the heavenly court.** In chapter 4 John is invited into heaven and “in the Spirit” goes there to start seeing “what must take place after this.” What he describes sets the scene for everything in chapters 4-19. Above all, he sees the Creator seated on His throne, surrounded by twenty-four “elders” and four “living creatures.” There are also innumerable angels (5:11). The living creatures imply God’s contact with, knowledge of, and authority over even the noblest aspects of the created world. The elders have thrones (4:4), crowns (4:10), harps (5:8), and “golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (5:8). The living creatures and elders lead in crescendos of praise honoring the Creator. He has all rights over everything He has created. In chapter 5 we are reminded that He made it *for someone*. In God’s hand is a scroll that can be opened (unrolled) only by one who is worthy to inherit (5:1-4). The scroll is probably the title deed to creation, in which God entrusts possession to the person worthy to rule. That person turns out to be Jesus, the “Lion of the tribe of Judah” (5:5; cf. Gen. 49:8-12). The next chapters (6 to 19) will be full of what happens as and after Jesus opens the scroll.

**Background in Daniel 7.** As pointed out by Alva McClain, God’s servant Daniel had seen the special court of Revelation 4-5 centuries before.<sup>28</sup> Read the following excerpts from Daniel 7, noting especially the words I have bolded, which reveal why the court will be convened. The coming Ruler is pictured as an individual (son of man) who also represents a group (the saints).

Thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat...Thousands upon thousands attended him...One like a **son of man**...approached the Ancient of Days and was

led into his presence. He **was given authority, glory and sovereign power**; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Then I wanted to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying...[and its horn that] was waging war against the saints of the Most High...until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints...and **the time came when they possessed the kingdom**...But the court will sit, and his [the “horn’s”] power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. **Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints**, the people of the Most High. (excerpts from Daniel 7:9-27)

So the purpose of the heavenly court is obvious, as was shown in Chart B. It is to punish God’s enemies and install His King to rule—to rule with all the saints He represents. The chapters that follow (Rev. 6-19) show the judgments leading to that kingdom. When these judgments are finished, all heaven expresses its joy (19:1-10). Then the “King of Kings” comes to earth, to “strike down the nations [and] rule them with an iron scepter” (19:11-16). At no point before that does Revelation show Messiah coming to earth to rule there. And though His actions in heaven have triggered judgments on earth, no passage before 20:4-6 shows Him actually ruling on earth.

**Who are the elders?** Most Dispensationalists identify them—or half of them—as the church raptured to heaven. Walvoord favors that view. However, he admits, “Probably most New Testament scholars today interpret the elders as angels.” Why do they think they are angels? One reason is what the elders “sing”<sup>29</sup> in 5:9-10 according to the currently preferred Greek text.<sup>30</sup> They sing about the redeemed ones as separate from themselves. Notice the words I have bolded, especially “**persons**,” which I have also bracketed to show it was added by translators.

9 And they sang a new song, saying:

“You are worthy to take the scroll

and to open its seals,

because you were slain,

and with your blood **you purchased for God**

**[persons]** from every tribe and language and people and nation.

10 You have made **them** to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,

and **they** will reign on the earth.”

This represents a Greek text revised from the one used by most versions until the twentieth century. Based on that previous text, KJV says in verse 9, “thou...hast redeemed **us**,” and in verse 10, “hast made **us**” and “**we** shall reign.” In that reading the elders have to be humans, a certainty removed in the revised text. Walvoord decides that “if the revised text is accepted...it removes absolute proof of the human origin of the twenty-four elders.” However, he continues, “it does not constitute specific proof that they are angels. It merely leaves the matter open” (p. 118). As a matter of fact, verse 10 in the revised text has good support but verse 9 does not.

Only a single Greek manuscript (A of the fifth century) leaves out “us.” So put it back into verse 9! There the elders include themselves (“us”) among the redeemed, whereas in verse 10 they sing about “them” as those they represent.<sup>31</sup>

Remember that the unrevised text gives “absolute proof” that the elders are human but the revised text “leaves the matter open.” Some say that even then they could not be angels, who would not have white raiment or crowns.<sup>32</sup> That reason is inaccurate; see Acts 1:10; 9:2; Revelation 15:6; and Colossians 1:16. It may be significant that the elders are always mentioned separately from angels, but so are the “living creatures.” Might they represent Israel, which had twenty-four elders in its supreme council and twenty-four heads of priestly orders? Walvoord says no, apparently because of his theology. “Israel’s judgment,” he explains, “seems to come at the end of the tribulation, not before.”<sup>33</sup>

My own view is that these elders are indeed humans. They represent all of God’s redeemed, who at the time of Revelation 4 will be found both in heaven and on earth. As representatives they can speak in third person about those they represent. The number twenty-four possibly represents a merger of twelve tribes of Israel and twelve apostles.<sup>34</sup> Both groups will be in the church and have access to the eternal capital (Rev. 21:12, 14).

**4:1 “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”** From here to the end of the book is “what will take place later” (1:19), that is, end-time events. Some argue for an additional hidden meaning in John’s moving from earth to heaven at this point. It suggests, they say, that the church will be raptured to heaven just before the final events. That interpretation attempts to rescue a theory with virtually no support in Revelation.

**5:5. “The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed and is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”** Here Jesus is given a double title, both of which document His right to rule.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, along with the Creator, He also becomes the object of heavenly and universal praise (5:6-14). The position of honor being granted to Him had been anticipated in Psalm 2. There He was called by three equivalent terms: the LORD’s “Anointed One” (Ps. 2:2), “my King” (2:6), and “my Son” (= Heir, 2:7).<sup>36</sup> Revelation 5 shows Him, in effect, asking what His Father had exhorted Him to ask in the psalm:

Ask of me,  
and I will make the nations your inheritance,  
the ends of the earth your possession.  
You will rule them with an iron scepter;  
You will dash them to pieces like pottery. (Ps. 2:8-9)

**5:6. “A Lamb [who] had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God.”** In these verses Messiah first appears in His second major form in this book (see Chart E at 19:11-16, p. 35). Though called a Lion, He appears as “a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain,” that is, showing the marks of having been slaughtered. His seven horns symbolize His royal

might. His seven eyes/spirits probably symbolize the fullness of God’s Spirit anointing Him as Messiah (Isa.11:2). He is able to rule and able to communicate the Spirit to others in “all the earth.”

**5:9-10** In these verses the heavenly elders praise the Lion/Lamb. For the change to “us,” see my previous discussion.

“You are worthy...because...with your blood you purchased *us* for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and **they will reign on the earth.**”

Notice that He is worthy to rule partly because of His victorious death. By His sacrifice He has redeemed many others so that they can rule too—in a kingdom on earth, not in heaven. These are essential facts for all missionary motivation, a message that results in faith wherever it is preached (Rom. 10:8-15).

In Appendix A (p. 53) I discuss 1:6 and 5:10 as the only two verses that refer to the church as already a “kingdom.” It is called that in anticipation, as an embryo awaiting birth.

### Structure of Revelation 6-19

**Consecutive order.** Though there are flashbacks, forward glimpses, and parenthetical explanations, this subsection is mostly in chronological order. By the time of the sixth seal, everyone on earth is trying to hide from the wrath of God and wrath of the Lamb (6:15-17). When the seventh seal is broken, then the scroll can be unrolled. That is when the remaining divine judgments executing that wrath will be completed. Study the relationships of the judgments in Chart C.

CHART C													Three Series of Judgments in Revelation, Executing God’s Wrath						
<b>T h e S e v e n S e a l s</b>																			
1	2	3	4	5	6	<b>7 = The Seven Trumpets</b>													
						1	2	3	4	5	6	<b>7 = The Seven Bowls</b>							
												1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

**A nesting pattern.** As pictured in the chart, these three main series of judgments are not parallel but consecutive. The seven trumpets begin only after the last seal is broken, letting the scroll be opened. The last trumpet consists of all seven bowls. From this perspective all the trumpets are

“nested” in the last seal, and all the bowls are “nested” in the last trumpet. Each series grows out of the previous series and does not repeat it. Consider some evidence of that pattern.

1. The trumpets all sound after the last seal is broken. As soon as it is broken, there is a dramatic silence (8:1), preparing for the following judgments. In the silence (a) seven angels are given the trumpets and (b) much incense is offered to God, symbolizing many prayers about to be answered (8:2-4). All this preparation points forward in time, not backward. The first four trumpets afflict various aspects of the physical world, usually a third of each (a third of the trees, of the sea, of the sun, etc., 8:6-12). Then the last three trumpets are proclaimed as three “woes” still to come (8:13). All three are unique. The first woe does not kill but brings such pain that people “long to die but death will elude them” (9:6). The second woe “will kill a third of mankind” (9:15, 18).
2. The third and last woe, the seventh trumpet, receives great emphasis. It will bring the end: “There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished” (10:8-9). That mystery is made clear as soon as the trumpet sounds. Heavenly voices anticipate that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (11:15). I say “anticipate” because a number of events will still occur before the Lord actually descends to rule. (The verb “has become” is here proleptic.) That goal is reached only when all the bowls are poured out.
3. Without affecting the timeline, much supplementary information is added in chapters 10-14 (just before the bowls are poured out). These are special overviews and previews of persons and events in the Great Tribulation.
  - Some are key personages, as in the story in chapter 12 of “The Woman and the Dragon” (Israel and the devil). This has a flashback section with parts. First, it refers to an ancient angelic rebellion: the dragon’s “tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky” (12:3-4). Next, the dragon tried to kill Christ after He was born. The woman “gave birth to a son...who will rule all the nations,” but He “was snatched up to God” (12:5). Then the story moves forward to the Tribulation (12:6-17): the dragon tries to do away with the woman, but she is divinely protected until the end. Enraged, the dragon “went off to make war against the rest of her offspring...” (12:17).
  - Also there are symbolic foreviews of the final judgments and the Lord’s coming. “Fallen is Babylon the Great,” announces one angel (14:8), which judgment will take place under the last bowl (16:19). The harvest and the vintage of 14:14-20 preview events that will happen when Jesus comes (but do not preview the coming itself or His rule).
4. All seven bowls are poured out in quick succession. Several facts show that the bowls are final and not a repetition of earlier judgments.
  - They are identified as “the seven last plagues [in which] God’s wrath is completed” (15:1). Surely that makes them separate from and later than other judgments.

- They are a “package,” poured out one after another with scarcely a pause (ch. 16). The last bowl triggers the loud voice, “It is done” (16:17). That bowl includes the final destruction of Babylon (16:19), which is described with details in chapters 17 and 18.
- They are all poured out late in the Tribulation and the Beast’s rule. The first bowl brings “ugly and painful sores...on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image” (16:2). The fifth bowl is “poured out...on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom...” (16:10).
- They must all be poured out before the result anticipated for the seventh trumpet is complete. That is the Lord’s coming to rule, as celebrated in 19:1-10 and accomplished in 19:11 to 20:3.

*For the amillennial view of Revelation 20 and recapitulation theory, see Appendix D, p. 64.*

**Frequent Recapitulations?** You have just seen the basic pattern in Revelation, which pictures future consecutive judgments culminating in the Lord’s coming back to rule. That climax is sketched in chapters 19-20. Amillennialists deny that that is the pattern or that 20:1-10 is in the climax. Instead, they believe that the “thousand years” (millennium) began at the Lord’s *first* advent and is still proceeding. Look at their chronology. They recognize that at the end of chapter 19 the Lord has returned and defeated His enemies. He has killed their armies and had two of the three wicked leaders “thrown alive into the fiery lake” (19:19-20). But just when the narrative speaks of the third wicked leader, Satan, they say it jumps back in time to the first advent. Back then, they say, Christ bound Satan (20:1-3) and began a spiritual kingdom in which *spiritually resurrected* people rule with Him in heaven (20:4-6). How do they justify seeing such a jump back in the narrative? Riddlebarger says it is a common occurrence: “Revelation contains a series of visions, each of which functions like a different camera angle looking at the same event....This is what is known as ‘recapitulation....’”<sup>37</sup>

Riddlebarger does not try to prove recapitulations throughout Revelation. But he tries for two in chapter 20: (1) that 20:1-6 recounts the same events as 12:7-11 and (2) that 20:7-10 recounts the same battle as 19:11-21. I strongly recommend you compare those passages in context. You will see that the differences far outweigh the similarities.

Meanwhile, by making 20:1-10 start at our Lord’s first advent, amillennialists create problems such as the following.

- They cut short the story of the Lord’s final triumph that started in chapter 19. They make it tell the fate of two of the wicked leaders but not of the third one (Satan). It does not tell his fate until the thousand years are past.
- They allege that Satan is *presently* bound and in a locked and sealed Abyss “to keep him from deceiving the nations” (20:2-3). That interpretation contradicts much evidence, as in 1 Peter 5:8 (he is a devouring lion) and 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 (he blinds minds). The early church certainly considered “the nations” as deceived, as raging and plotting in vain “against the Lord and against his Anointed One” (Acts 4:23-30).



- They require, to avoid two resurrections, that “came to life” refer to spiritual life in Revelation 20:4 but physical life in 20:5. It is obvious that in verse 5 it will be physical for “the rest of the dead,” the ungodly. But it does not distinguish a different *kind* of life from that in verse 4, but at a different *time*: they “did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.” Using the same language here implies the same kind of resurrection for both groups.
- They allege that the Lord Jesus and the saints who have died (these still unglorified) are presently ruling spiritually in heaven. Instead, the rule promised to both Jesus and the saints is on earth (Ps. 2:8-9; Rev. 5:10). And the context before and after the millennium passage is on earth.
- They require that the “thousand years” affirmed six times in 20:4-6 has already lasted about two thousand years.
- They assume—with no evidence—that the Lord’s Second Coming will take place at *the end* of the “thousand years.” It seems unreasonable that the main event predicted throughout the book (His coming) would happen without notice.

**A pattern of pauses.** Let us return to the signs of structure in Revelation 6-19. Along with the nesting pattern noted above, there are other meaningful patterns for the first and second series of judgments. One is the pauses before and after last items begin, to add supplementary information. These are shown in Chart D. In that chart read the title across row 1 and the four subtitles across row 2 before you look down the columns.

- Now look down columns 1 and 2. These show **pauses before** each last item begins. The cell on row 3 of column 1 shows that chapter 7 is a pause before the last seal is opened (8:1a). The cell on row 4 of column 1 shows that 10:1 to 11:14 is a pause before the last trumpet is sounded (11:15a).
- Now look down columns 3 and 4. These also show **pauses, after** the last item begins. The cell on row 3 of column 3 shows that the beginning of chapter 8 is a pause. It takes place after the last seal is opened but before the trumpet judgments are carried out. In the same way, the cell on row 4 shows that 11:15b to 14:20 is a long pause. It takes place after the last trumpet is sounded but before its judgments (the bowls) are poured out in chapters 15-18.

This all helps us interpret chapters 10-14 as mostly supplementary. Each pause gives added information, sometimes looking backward or forward. This new information includes, in each chapter 11 to 14, key personages whose stories mesh and are resolved before the kingdom begins.

CHART D Pauses for Supplementary Information Before and after Last Seal & Last Trumpet Begin			
Pause/Supplement Before Last Item Begins	Last Item	Pause/Supplement After Last Item Begins	Fulfillment of Last Item
7:1-17 144,000 Israelites Great Multitude	Last Seal 8:1a	8:1b-5 Silence Incense, Prayers	Seven Trumpets
10:1 to 11:14 Little Scroll Two Witnesses	Last Trumpet 11:15a	11:15b to 14:20 Kingdom Foreseen Woman, Child, Dragon Two Beasts Anticipations	Seven Bowls

The pauses isolate and emphasize the last items they surround. The last seal inaugurates all the seven trumpet judgments; the last trumpet embraces all the bowl judgments. There is also a four/three pattern. The first four seals (6:1-8) are the four “horsemen,” who bring political, social, and economic ruin. The last three seals reveal religious aspects. The first four trumpets wreak havoc on nature (8:7-12), but the other three trumpets are even more serious “woes” (8:13 to 9:21 and 11:14 to 14:20).

I will now comment on a few selected passages in all these chapters leading to the kingdom. Remember that many earlier prophecies dealt with the same period of time. As an example, take the four horsemen of chapter 6. What they represent can be found in Matthew 24:4-9, at the beginning of Jesus’ final prophetic address.

### Comments on Passages in Revelation 6:1 to 11:14

#### **6:2. “I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider...was given a crown.”**

This conqueror under the first seal is apparently the antichrist (1 John 2:18), who will claim to be Messiah (Matt. 24:5). Also called “the lawless one” (2 Thess. 2:3, 8, 9), he will be prominent and powerful during the Tribulation. Although followed and worshiped by “the whole world,” he will be like an evil Beast (Rev. 13; see comments there). God will give mankind what they want, to their own ruin. Earlier I quoted from one of the various prophecies about that ruler, from Daniel 7. He will start as a “little horn” on the final world government (Dan. 7:8), “waging war against the saints and defeating them” (Dan. 7:21). He will continue until time for God’s kingdom to begin (Dan. 7:22, 27).

**6:12-17. The sixth seal and God’s wrath.** Under this seal the sun turns black, the moon turns red, the stars fall to earth, the sky recedes and rolls up, and every mountain and island is

**removed.** Sounds like the end of the world, but it is not. The same features (sun, moon, stars, etc.) are still present in succeeding chapters. So the language must be understood as poetic and hyperbolic. Yet, the reality is awesome enough to make men recognize God's hand. "Hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! **For the great day of their wrath has come,** and who can stand?" Will God's wrath start acting at the sixth seal? No, but at the first seal. Because it will be wrath when He withdraws His restraint and "the lawless one will be revealed." In wrath "God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie" (2 Thess. 2:6-12). Will they realize that the final dictator, wars, famine, and death come from God's wrath? Not at first. Even now, men do not recognize that being given over to their own lusts and depravity reveals "the wrath of God." But Romans 1:18-32 says that it does. And by the sixth seal, most of them will realize it.<sup>38</sup>

**7:1-17. Sealed Israelites & the great multitude.** After telling in Revelation 6 about the first six seals, John in this interlude (ch. 7) describes two groups of believers. The first group is of Israelites; the second group, of Gentiles. There could hardly be a more obvious way than John's to describe them as distinct from each other.

- The first group are "144,000 from all the tribes of Israel" (7:1-8; see also 14:1-4). They have all received "a seal on the foreheads" to identify and protect them during even greater judgments.
- The second group, seen in heaven, is "a great multitude...from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne....These are **they who have come out of** the great tribulation" (7:9-17). More accurately, "These are **the ones coming out of** the great tribulation" (English Standard Version). As John sees this group, the Tribulation is still occurring—and they are still coming.<sup>39</sup> "They were wearing white robes" (7:9; cf. 6:11). Apparently they have interim bodies while awaiting their resurrection at the Lord's return to earth (20:4-5).

To repeat, these two groups of believers are clearly contrasted: "144,000 from all the tribes of Israel" (7:4) and the "great multitude...from every nation" (7:9). There is no obvious reason to consider them as basically the same. Nevertheless, some do so. They are obliged by their theology to deny a future role for converted Israel.<sup>40</sup> See more in chapter 12 and my comments there.

**"For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd" (7:17).** Literally, Messiah "will shepherd them," referring to the great multitude (and no doubt to the sealed Israelites also). This is the same verb (*poimanei*) the Greek version of Psalm 23:1 uses for what the LORD God does. It has another, related meaning. In Revelation 2:27; 12:5; and 19:15, all of them quoting from Messianic Psalm 2:9, it means "rule." The ideal Ruler will combine both meanings of the verb. He will rule by shepherding.<sup>41</sup> Both activities are combined in Ezekiel 34:23-24. There God promises to "place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend (*poimanei*) them; he...will be prince among them." In John 10:2-5, 11-18 Jesus claimed that position.

**Revelation 8-9, the first six trumpets.** As already noted (see Chart D), 8:1-5 is the pause providing a supplement before the trumpets begin sounding. The incense rising up “before God” (8:4) from the golden altar symbolizes the prayers of the saints. Like the martyrs in 6:9-11, they want God to take action. Their prayers are augmented with “much incense” (8:3), which may refer to the constant intercession of our High Priest, Jesus (Heb. 7:25). God’s answer consists of the severe judgments brought on earth by the trumpets, which conclude with the bowls (Rev. 16). These judgments remind us of the ten “plagues” in Egypt (Exod. 7:14 to 12:30), so called in Exodus 9:14, 15; 10:14; 11:1; and 12:13.<sup>42</sup> Calling the bowls “the seven last plagues” (Rev. 15:1, 6, 8; 21:9) implies that the other judgments in Revelation are also plagues (cf. 9:18, 20). In neither Exodus nor Revelation is there reason to doubt their generally literal nature. However, at least the last three trumpets, called “woes” (first introduced in Rev. 8:13), have a magnitude that requires symbolic language. The first two woes are described in chapter 9. The third woe consists of the seven bowls.

**10:1-7. An angel announces the last trumpet in advance.** Here begins an interlude between the sixth and last trumpets. John sees a “mighty angel...standing on the sea and on the land” (vv. 1-2, 5).<sup>43</sup> This angel swears by the eternal Creator:

“There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.” (10:6-7)

This announcement helps give great emphasis to the last trumpet, which will bring fulfillment to God’s previous messages through the prophets. In “the mystery of God **will be accomplished**,” the Greek verb (*etelesthe*) is aorist indicative, which normally represents past tense. Here it is clearly futuristic (proleptic), a fairly common use in predictive prophecies.<sup>44</sup> What “the mystery” involves is probably what the voices express when that trumpet sounds (quoted below at 11:15-18): God replacing Satan’s kingdom with His own.

**10:8-11. Eat “the little scroll” and “prophecy again** about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.” It is evident that John’s eating the scroll marks a new development in the book. What is new? Not a new series of judgments going back in time, since John eats it between the sixth and last trumpets (10:7; 11:14). (Going back in time might be reasonable after the last in a series, but not just before it.) Instead, personages are introduced whose stories began previously but climax in the time of the last trumpet, which consists of the bowls.

**11:1-13. “Measure the temple of God...[in]...the great city...where also their Lord was crucified”** (11:1, 8). This “great city” is called “the holy city” in verse 2 and “figuratively called Sodom and Egypt” in verse 8. The two witnesses testify and do wonders there, are killed and later revived there, and ascend to heaven from there. When they ascend, a “severe earthquake” kills seven thousand people and terrifies the rest. It is hard to see how anyone can deny a literal end-times temple in literal Jerusalem, end-times capital of the end-times Jews.

“**My two witnesses...** will prophesy for 1260 days” (11:3). Who will they be? Some say Elijah and Moses, who appeared with the transfigured Jesus on the Mountain of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:3). “I will send you the prophet Elijah,” God had promised, “before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes” (Mal. 4:5). Coming down from the mountain, Jesus repeated that promise. However, He also explained that John the Baptist would have fulfilled it if they had accepted him (Matt. 17:10-12). What about Moses, who did some of the same miracles the witnesses will do? Well, Moses already died once and should not die twice. Walvoord discusses such guesses and concludes the witnesses will not be historic characters but brand new prophets.<sup>45</sup>

When will the two witnesses “prophesy for 1260 days”? Either the first half or the second half of Daniel’s seventieth “seven,” which Revelation 4-19 describes. Each half lasts three and a half years, equivalent to 1260 days. (See “The Tribulation three and a half years long” in “Introduction to Chapters 4-19.”<sup>46</sup>) The first half includes at least the first four seals (Rev. 6:1-8), which are “the beginning of birth pains” (Matt. 24:8). Those lead inexorably to “the great tribulation” (Rev. 7:14) described in following chapters. There is a marker when that second half begins: “the abomination that causes desolation,” set up in the temple (13:14; 2 Thess. 2:4). It signals the “great distress [Tribulation], unequalled from the beginning of the world” (Matt. 24:15-21). A Tribulation of only 1260 days may seem short. But “if those days had not been cut short, no one would survive” (Matt. 24:22).

McClain is probably right that the two witnesses give their testimony and do miracles during the first half of the seventieth seven. When they complete it, “the beast is permitted to overcome and kill them when he reaches the height of his world power (vs. 7).”<sup>47</sup>

**11:14. “The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.”** This is the third mention of the three woes (the last three trumpets; see also 8:13 and 9:12). It emphasizes the importance and finality of the last trumpet, which follows at once.

## Comments on Passages in Revelation 11:15 to 14:20

### 11:15-18. The last trumpet

15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “**The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.**” 16 And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying: “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because **you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.**” 18 The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. **The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints** and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

**The importance of this seventh trumpet** is seen in its being last and in at least three other facts:

- Its special designation. It is referred to on three occasions as one of the “woes” (8:13; 9:12; and 11:14). The woes are the last three trumpet blasts, of which it is the climax.
- Its special announcement in advance. (Under 10:1-7 above, reread the quotation of 10:6-7.) The angel had said in anticipation that under this trumpet the mystery of God would be accomplished.
- Its special attainment. Reread the quotation above from 11:15-18, noting the bolded words. The judgment under this trumpet is the last stage leading to the kingdom. When the kingdom comes, God will raise and judge individual persons—and give the saints their rewards.<sup>48</sup>

**The meaning of this last trumpet.** All heaven knows for certain that after the judgments of this trumpet the kingdom can and will begin. That is why the loud voices use the Greek past tense (aorist indicative): “the kingdom...**has become**...you **have begun to reign**” (11:15, 17). As in 10:7 the past tense here describes what is surely about to happen instead of what has already happened.<sup>49</sup> In fact, the story of the last trumpet is paused at this point, as stated in and along with Chart D. This pause (11:15b to 14:20) serves (a) to present key personages who take part in the end and (b) to preview some related events. When the story of the last trumpet resumes in 15:1, it again uses Greek past tense for future. It says that with the bowls “God’s wrath **is completed**.” The verb states the future result as already done. Pouring out the bowls will finish inflicting God’s wrath so that He can begin to rule. But from 15:1 through chapter 19, there are no signs that His kingdom is inaugurated. Instead, the earth is still ruled by the devil and his Beast. See under “Chapters 15-18, the seven bowls.”

**12:1-17. “She gave birth to a son...who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.** And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne” (12:5). This chapter continues the pause after the last trumpet sounds. It gives highlights of the long history and future of the woman and the dragon. He is identified as “the devil, or Satan”(12:9). She represents the nation of Israel, as the following facts show.

- Her Son is the Messiah. In a lament in the Book of Romans, the apostle Paul clearly states that relationship between ethnic Israel and Messiah. Paul expresses “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” for “those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons....from them is traced the human ancestry of Messiah” (Rom. 9:2, 3, 5).
- The angel Michael, who fights against the dragon on her behalf (Rev. 12:7) is identified in Daniel 10:21 and 12:1 as “the great prince who protects” Israel.
- Even the separate tribes of Israel are given emphasis in Revelation 7:4-8 (the 144,000) and 21:12 (names on the gates).

Notice four things about the dragon’s (the devil’s) being hurled down from heaven:

- This will take place in the last days. Not only did the Messiah ascend to heaven and will therefore not be on earth (12:5), but the devil will know that “his time is short” (v. 12b).

- The dragon (and therefore not Messiah) will still be in control of the earth (v. 12b; see 13:2-8).
- The devil will attempt once more, unsuccessfully, to destroy the chosen nation, Israel (12:13-17). That will be Israel's greatest persecution, her final ordeal. Its occasion is mentioned often, including the next passage in Revelation (13:1-8).<sup>50</sup>
- The devil's being "hurled to the earth" again reminds heaven that the kingdom is about to start. The following words from heaven express anticipation rather than realization: "**Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom** of our God, and the authority of his Messiah" (12:10).

Although the woman (Israel as an entity) will be preserved, many of "the rest of her offspring" (12:17) will get killed. These are identified as believers in Jesus, probably some of the fruit from the ministries of the 144,000 (chs. 7, 14) and the two witnesses (ch. 11).

**Why Israel?** The reason is that God has adopted the nation of Israel (Amos 3:2; Rom. 9:5) and will never rescind such an election. "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29; see 11:1-2, 25-29). Nevertheless, many interpreters believe that the church has replaced ethnic Israel. Accordingly, they cannot accept that the woman in Revelation 12 is that nation, and make various proposals to avoid that identification. Some consider her "child who will rule all the nations" a symbol of all saints who are to rule with Messiah. But if the child represents them all, whom does she represent and why is she not destined to rule? Also, when the "child" is put out of harm's way in heaven, why is she left on earth and specifically persecuted? Many Roman Catholics used to consider her to be Mary, who was the physical mother of the Messiah. Yet, nothing else in the passage supports that view.<sup>51</sup> Still others consider the woman to be the Messianic community. But in that community all will rule. Why say so of only one of her sons and not of her?

**13:2-8. The dragon gave the Beast "authority over every tribe, people, language and nation" (13:7).** The pause continues. This Beast is the Antichrist, the devil's last and greatest representative. His ruling authority continues forty-two months (v. 5), which corresponds to "the time, times, and half a time" (3½ years) the woman is protected from the serpent in 12:14. But apparently during the same period "the saints will be handed over to him [to the 'little horn'] for a time, times, and half a time" (Dan. 7:25). Daniel later identifies that period as the last half of the seventieth *seven* for Israel (9:27).<sup>52</sup> When that last *seven* is complete, the six goals of that prophecy will be reached (9:24), implying the eternal rule of Messiah Himself. See my comments on Daniel 9:24-27 in "The Tribulation three and a half years long" under "Introduction to Chapters 4-19."

**Chapter 14 foresees "final" judgment and two harvests.** Chapter 14 ends the pause that started in 11:15b after the last trumpet sounded. At that time the elders had announced, "The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. **The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants**" (11:18). Now, at the end of the pause and just before the bowls,

that announcement is renewed. An angel who “had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth...said in a loud voice [that] **the hour of his judgment has come**” (14:6-7). This promise to judge the dead and reward God’s servants goes beyond the Tribulation. It cannot be fulfilled until He comes back in glory and raises the servants (John 5:25-30). So chapter 14 again looks to the time of the Lord’s Second Coming (His *parousia*). It reminds us that the last trumpet actually includes the final events (the bowls) leading to that coming. It even sketches the two “harvests” He will reap—but does not actually describe His coming.

An obvious indication of the chapter’s point of view is the announcement in 14:8: “**Fallen! Fallen is Babylon.**” That outcry is proleptic (stated as past though still future), because Babylon will not fall until the last bowl (16:17-19). After that the Lord will come in glory and reap the two harvests foreseen in 14:14-16 and 17-20. In each one He will act through His agents, the angels. The first harvest probably pictures the Rapture, with God’s elect ones (saints) as ripe grain. The second harvest is the slaughter at Armageddon.

- The first harvest reflects two passages in Matthew about the Lord’s Second Coming. (a) In Matthew 13:30, 39-42 the Lord had said that angels will “gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.” (b) In Matthew 24:30-31 angels “will gather his elect [people] from the four winds.”
- In the second harvest the grapes are Messiah’s enemies massed at Armageddon (19:19-21).

So I make two suggestions about these post-trib harvests: (a) They are basically different from each other; and (b) the first one is the Rapture. Those who believe in a Rapture before the Tribulation will, of course, disagree. Take John Walvoord as an example. In his commentary on Revelation he sees them as basically alike. He considers “the first harvest [14:14-16] as **the judgments in general** which characterize the period and the second harvest [14:17-20] as the final climactic one.”<sup>53</sup> He does not even mention the parallels to Matthew 13 and 24. Nor does he refer to the Rapture, though he quotes Henry Alford, who does. Alford lists four reasons to distinguish between the two harvests, then concludes,

[T]hough I would not pronounce decidedly, I must incline to think that the harvest is the ingathering of the saints, God’s harvest, reaped from the earth: described here thus generally, before the vintage of wrath which follows.<sup>54</sup>

So Alford’s conclusion is different from Walvoord’s. He decides that the first harvest is probably the Rapture but the second is the “vintage of wrath.” Walvoord does not attempt to answer Alford’s arguments. If he had, he could have mentioned that the order of harvest seems different from that in Matthew 13. There it is bad-then-good. But in Revelation 14 it is good-then-bad. In Matthew the angels “collect the weeds...to be burned” before they “gather the wheat” (Matt. 13:30). But in Revelation the good grain is reaped before the bad (the grapes) are gathered. However, the apparent contradiction in order may be explained if the two movements are not instantaneous but overlapping.



*For a discussion of the issues in the following paragraph, see Appendix C (p. 62) or my longer study, [“Does the Bible Teach that All Men Are Immortal?”](#)*

**14:11. “And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever.”** This describes inescapable continual torture! It is like 20:10, which says that the devil, the Beast, and the false prophet “will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” But these two passages are quite different from Matthew 3:12 and 13:30, in which the wicked are burned up like chaff. Which picture shows the time aspect better? Part of the background, Isaiah 66:24, is much used in the New Testament but often misunderstood. It does not imply continuing consciousness of “the dead bodies” of the wicked, but their unrelenting destruction (undying worms and unquenchable fire). Also, the Lord’s parable in Luke 16:19-31 gets pushed beyond its intentions. Indeed, the formerly rich man finds himself in continual agony in a fire. But even if that aspect is designed to teach doctrine, it does not say how long the suffering will continue.

Among reasons not to take Revelation 14:11 and 20:10 literally are the following:

- Man is not immortal by nature. From the beginning he could “live forever” only if he would “take from the tree of life and eat” (Gen. 3:22).
- Since God abounds in love and is just, He will not keep the wicked alive forever in order to torment them.
- Parallel passages, such as, Revelation 19:3 and Isaiah 34:9-10, show that the eternal smoke of torment is hyperbole. It will be canceled when the whole world is made new (Rev. 21:1, 5; Isa. 11:9).

### **Comments on Passages in Revelation 15:1 to 20:3**

**Chapters 15-18, the seven bowls.** Chapter 15 introduces “seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God” (15:1, 7; 16:1), also called “the seven last plagues” (15:1). Constituting the last trumpet, these are God’s final judgments on a rebellious earth preparatory to establishing His kingdom (16:5, 7). As such, they lead directly to Messiah’s return. See my comments on the first six trumpets. Behind the scenes and invisible to men, God is in control as “King of the ages” (15:3).<sup>55</sup> However, there is no hint that His mediatorial kingdom is already established on earth during the time of these bowls. On the contrary, Messiah’s enemies are still in charge. The fifth bowl is poured out “on the throne of the beast, and his [the Beast’s] kingdom was plunged into darkness” (16:10). In fact, at this point the whole world is still opposed to Messiah. The sixth bowl prepares His enemies for “the battle on the great day of God Almighty” (16:14). That battle is to be fought against “the kings of the whole world” (16:14; 19:17-21), gathered at Armageddon (16:16). Note also the opposition of Babylon in these chapters.

**16:10. “poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast.”** These “seven last plagues” (15:1) are poured out after the Beast is in full power. Thus they are definitely subsequent to the first seals, opened before the Great Tribulation. They do not recapitulate.

**16:17. “It is done!”** This is another anticipatory exclamation, this one elicited by the seventh bowl. That last bowl triggers a dual judgment: (a) a religious and economic judgment of Babylon the Great and (b) a political and military judgment of earth’s armies.

**17:12. “The ten horns...will receive authority as kings.”** These final godless kings were pictured centuries before in Daniel 2:40-43 and 7:23-24. They will all be ruling in the last stage before God sets up His eternal kingdom on earth (Dan. 2:44).

**17:18; 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21. “the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”** This describes “Babylon” still doing what Messiah is destined to do, that is, ruling over the kings (see 1:5). But Babylon is not legitimate; she is like a prostitute astride the political Beast. She is responsible for the earth’s spiritual adultery (17:1-6; 18:3, 9; 19:2) and for the deaths of prophets, saints, and others (18:24; 17:6; 19:2). Her fall was anticipated in 14:8 but finally occurs under the seventh bowl (16:19). It happens “in one day” (18:8), “in one hour” (18:10, 17, 19). She is destroyed by the Beast and horns she formerly controlled (17:16-17). Her demise triggers great rejoicing in heaven in the first verses of chapter 19.

The great importance of “Babylon” in Revelation 17-19 is evident—her worldwide power, fame, influence, and doom. What city will she be? Historic Babylon on the Euphrates River has had practically no inhabitants or importance for centuries. Will that city quickly regain all the glory described in Revelation? Highly unlikely, though not impossible.<sup>56</sup> More likely, a successor will inherit Babylon’s identity and her account. A strong candidate is Rome, often called the city on “seven hills” (17:9) and possibly called “Babylon” in 1 Peter 5:13.<sup>57</sup>

**19:1-10. “Hallelujah...Hallelujah...Hallelujah...Hallelujah...”** This is a two-part Hebrew word meaning “praise the Lord.” *Hallelu* is the second person plural imperative, meaning “praise.” *Jah* (pronounced *yah*) is a shortened form of the Lord’s name. These four praises from heaven extol God for His sovereign power and the plan He is accomplishing. The first three (vv. 1-5) celebrate His punishment of Babylon, “the great prostitute.” The fourth one celebrates His impending kingdom and wedding of its Ruler:

“For our Lord God Almighty reigns...  
The wedding of the Lamb [Messiah] has come,  
and his bride has made herself ready.” (vv. 6-7)

*The time referred to in the next verse is the same as in 21:1-10. See Appendix F, page 76.*

**“The wedding of the Lamb has come”** (19:7). In this prophecy the long-awaited wedding has still not taken place (the bride has just got ready), but it is time for it.<sup>58</sup> Thus, it will take place after the Tribulation, not before it. The Lamb’s bride is implicitly contrasted to the prostitute city of Babylon. In chapter 21 the bride is specifically identified as “the Holy City, Jerusalem” (21:2, 9-10). As often happens, the bridal city here includes her inhabitants. These wear “fine linen...the righteous acts of the saints” (19:8). This figure of the king inaugurating his rule by

“marrying” his capital city is common in Old Testament prophecies (for example, Isa. 54:5-8; 61:10; 62:5).<sup>59</sup> Here it emphasizes the fact that Jesus’ kingdom people, often called the *ekklesia*,<sup>60</sup> are complete and ready. At this point He actually comes to earth to rule.<sup>61</sup>

**19:11-16 and 20:1-3. The Lord finally comes back.** This is clearly the climactic goal of all the preceding judgments. It features the last of three major pictures of Messiah in the book (see chapters 1 and 5 and Chart E). I will quote some points in His description that show His ability to reign.

He is Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war....Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter....he has this name written: “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.” (Rev. 19:11-16)

CHART E Major Pictures of Messiah in Revelation		
In Chapters 1-3	In Chapters 4-18 (22)	In Chapters 19-22
High Priest	The Lamb who was slain	King of Kings & Lord of Lords
Overseeing the churches who await the kingdom	Opening the seals that bring judgments on earth	Coming to earth to reign

Following the King are “the armies of heaven...riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen” (19:14). Some identify these as the church, returning to earth, as though that proves that they were raptured earlier. Truly, some of them are saved human beings: “with him will be his **called, chosen** and faithful followers” (17:14). But during the Tribulation Revelation has pictured a steady stream of saints going to heaven at death *without being raptured*. Surely they will come back with Him. But the “armies of heaven” coming to do battle are angels, as usual (Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17; Matt. 16:27; 24:31; 25:31; 2 Thess. 1:7).

When the King arrives on earth, He first completes the judgments of the last bowl of God’s wrath. He immediately vanquishes the enemies gathered against Him at Armageddon (19:17-21). That slaughter provides for the birds “the great supper of God...the flesh of kings” and of others (19:17-18). Birds consume all those dead bodies (v. 21). However, there is a different fate for the wicked trio who guide them. Two of them, “the beast...and...the false prophet... were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur” (19:20). What happens to their leader, known as the dragon, the devil, and Satan? The next verses say that he gets bound and thrown into the Abyss (20:1-3). Thus, the beginning of chapter 20 does not return to a previous stage, as amillennialists believe.<sup>62</sup> Rather, it completes the story of Messiah’s victory in the last bowl. Finally, everything is ready for Him and His saints to reign.

## **Part III: The Everlasting Kingdom**

### **Revelation 20:1 to 22:5**

*I saw thrones on which were seated  
those who had been given authority to judge...  
and I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded  
because of their testimony for Jesus....  
They came to life and reigned with Messiah a thousand years...  
They will reign with him a thousand years.*

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth....  
I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem,  
coming down out of heaven from God...  
“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them.”*

*He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new.”*

*The nations will walk by its light,  
and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.*

*The angel showed me the river of the water of life  
flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.*

*The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city...  
and his servants...will reign for ever and ever.*

Finally the Book of Revelation brings us to its goal—the climax of the Bible and of all history! This is what all heaven anticipated at the last trumpet, which consisted of the bowls: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever” (11:15). It is the kingdom we perpetually seek and ceaselessly plead for—and for whose citizens the Lamb shed His blood.

### **Two Main Views of Revelation 20**

I will briefly present the premillennial (“premill”) and amillennial (“amill”) perspectives on Revelation 20. Then I will list some issues and tell how each responds to them. I prefer the premillennial view, partly because it can deal with biblical prophecies more normally. It can agree with what godly people believed in God’s chosen nation of Israel (see Luke 1-2). Even figures of speech and later revelations do not justify replacing that nation with a different group. Thus, the thousand-year reign begins the future and literal fulfillment of many such prophecies. The amillennial view, in contrast, often transforms (some say “spiritualizes”) many prophecies. It considers the “primitive church...mistaken” in its interpretation.<sup>63</sup> And it denies that the thousand-year reign is future, material, or a thousand years long. Instead, it considers it a preliminary form of Jesus’ kingdom that began when He came the first time—and still continues.

**Premillennial view.** In spite of some symbolism, Revelation chapter 20 is clear about the main actors and their roles—and emphatic about time. It continues the story from chapter 19, in which Messiah returns to earth and defeats His enemies (19:11-21). Next, Satan will be bound and cast into the Abyss (20:1-3).<sup>64</sup> Then Messiah will begin to reign in glory, as was often predicted. Other human beings will reign with Him, including saints martyred during the Tribulation. Those martyrs will be raised from the dead as participants in “the first resurrection” (20:4-6). After raising His dead and gathering all the saints, Messiah will judge them and reward them (11:18).<sup>65</sup> His kingdom will begin with only converted people, but not all glorified. In that form it will last a thousand years. At the end of that time, “Satan will be released from his prison and ... will deceive the nations...to gather them for battle.” Fire from heaven will kill the gathered enemies, and Satan will be cast into the lake of sulfur (20:7-10). Then the second resurrection will take place, that of all the unsaved dead. The awesome judge will be King Jesus, seated on the “great white throne.” Most premillennialists teach that no one in that judgment will be found enrolled in the book of life. If so, they will all be “thrown into the lake of fire” (vv. 11-15). After that a “new heaven and new earth” will continue forever.<sup>66</sup>

*For a more detailed statement of the amillennial view and their recapitulation argument, see “Structure of Revelation 6-19” (p. 22) and especially Appendix D (p. 64).*

**The amillennial view** is that Revelation 20 has much symbolism and an important recapitulation or two. It does not continue the story from chapter 19 but returns to the Lord’s first coming. At that first coming He bound Satan and inaugurated a spiritual form of His kingdom. Its duration would last an indefinite time here symbolized as a “thousand years” (millennium). He now rules from heaven, and His saints rule with Him. This will end when Satan is released and leads in a rebellion, which Jesus will quash in His Second Coming. He will then raise and judge the dead, glorify the saints, banish sinners to hell, and rule forever in the “new heaven and new earth.”

**Issues and Answers.** “*Amill*” means amillennial answer; “*Premill*” means my premillennial answer.

**Issue 1.** Can a “thousand years” (millennium) represent Jesus’ promised eternal kingdom?

*Amill.* No. His kingdom will never end or have rebellion.

*Premill.* Yes, because it will only be the first stage. (For this and the next issue, see especially Appendix E, p. 68).<sup>67</sup>

**Issue 2.** Why do resurrection and judgment *follow* the millennium? Several other prophecies picture, instead, the kingdom *beginning* with those events when Jesus returns.

*Amill.* They follow because the kingdom that was promised is not the millennium but the new heaven and earth, which come later.

*Premill.* They both precede and follow, because the millennium is transitional. Not clearly revealed before, it requires two stages of resurrection and judgment instead of just one previously revealed. This is a case in which later biblical prophecy modifies earlier prophecy. What was earlier combined proves to be more complicated. (See also Issue 6.)

**Issue 3.** Since prophecies in Revelation sometimes return to earlier conditions, can 20:1-3 go back to Jesus' first coming?

*Amill.* Yes. Theology requires it.

*Premill.* No, because it is the climax of the story Revelation was telling. In connection with the last bowl of God's wrath, Messiah had just returned in glory—His Second Coming (19:11-16). He had then destroyed His massed enemies and banished to hell their leaders #2 and #3 (19:17-21). Next should follow (as it does in 20:1-3) disposing of their #1 leader, "the dragon...serpent...devil...Satan." Why, instead, would the story jump back to his being bound thousands of years earlier?<sup>68</sup> Why would it leave a gap in the story of Messiah's conquest?

**Issue 4.** Does binding Satan in Revelation 20:3 refer to binding him at Jesus' first coming? In Revelation he is bound and banned "to keep him from deceiving the nations." In the Gospels Jesus said He "ties up the strong man" (Matt. 12:28-29) and that "the prince of this world will be driven out" (John 12:31).

*Amill.* Yes, the binding in Revelation is what took place in the Gospels. Jesus bound Satan in the sense that he is unable to keep the gospel from being preached successfully.

*Premill.* No, they are different. Jesus gave many foretastes of the coming age (Heb. 6:5) but by no means the whole banquet. We must not mistake partial or temporary fulfillments for final ones. Jesus and His apostles cast out demons and did many miracles that now are seldom if ever seen (see Heb. 2:3b-4). And there is no evidence that Satan is still bound—much less, removed from the world and in the Abyss. Instead, as Jesus said at the end of His ministry (John 14:30; cf. 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2), Satan is now in charge.<sup>69</sup> And he is quite able to affect the reception of the gospel. As "the god of this age [he] has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4).

**Issue 5.** Is the millennium a spiritual form of Jesus' kingdom established at His first coming? Many interpreters, if not most, even premillennialists, believe He began to rule.

*Amill.* Yes. He implied so by preaching the kingdom (e.g., Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 10:7, 9). He stated it clearly: "the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28b). He proved it by His victories over Satan (see above). He now rules from heaven (Acts 2:29-36).

*Premill.* No. See my discussion in the "General Introduction." There is no clear Scriptural evidence that His kingdom started.<sup>70</sup> From the time of John the Baptist, it was constantly preached as having *drawn near* (Matt. 3:2), not as begun. It continued *near* during Jesus' ministry (Matt. 4:17; 10:7), even on His final journey toward Jerusalem (Luke 10:9, 11). It was present only in His person (Luke 17:21). But from His final arrival at Jerusalem, the kingdom was no longer

even near. As He clearly taught in Luke 19:11-27, it now has to await His Second Coming. Several times He promised to come and rule.

**Issue 6.** Does Revelation 20:4-6 teach that there will be bodily resurrections on two occasions? (Other prophecies usually picture only one.) Verse 4 speaks of “the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony....They **came to life** and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” But in verse 5a they are contrasted to “the rest of the dead” who “did not **come to life until** the thousand years were ended.” So two groups came to life many years apart. Verse 5 and verse 6 call the earlier event “the first resurrection.” Does that teach two bodily resurrections separated in time?

*Amill.* No, Revelation 20 does not contradict the consistent teaching of one bodily resurrection. Therefore, the language as applied to the first group in Revelation 20 means spiritual conversion.

*Premill.* Yes, Revelation 20 reveals two bodily resurrections separated by a thousand years. That gives the expressions “came to life” and “resurrection” their normal and contextual meaning.<sup>71</sup> Though not impossible, it is unusual to use the same language as spiritual in one verse and physical in the next.<sup>72</sup> So just as the martyrs (along with other believers) will be raised at the beginning of the millennium, the unconverted will be raised at its end.

**Issue 7.** Since Messiah’s Second Coming is not mentioned in Revelation 20 *at the end* of the “thousand years,” must we assume that it will take place then?

*Amill.* Yes, it is implied. When He comes, then He will raise the dead, judge all men, and inaugurate His kingdom.

*Premill.* No, because He will come much earlier. He will come when the divine description at the end of chapter 19 says He will—just before the millennium. (If the millennium were taking place now, it would indeed be essential for Revelation to mention His Second Coming *after* it.)

### More Comments on Passages in Revelation 20

**20:1-3.** “An angel...seized Satan and bound him for a thousand years.” Thus is put away Messiah’s principal wicked opponent. This three-verse account has a dual purpose, which I have suggested by including it in the preceding section as well as here.

- Looking backward, it completes the bowls of God’s wrath. It concludes the story of Messiah’s triumph over His enemies when He finally returns to earth to rule. Two verses (19:19-20) in the previous paragraph have told what happened to enemy leaders #2 and #3. This account tells what happens to leader #1.
- Looking forward, it is the first step in inaugurating His promised kingdom.

**20:4-6.** John “saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge [that is, to rule].” The structure of the book strongly favors the premillennial view. At the end of chapter 19 and first verses of chapter 20, Messiah has come to earth<sup>73</sup> and disposed of His enemies. With Satan sealed in the Abyss, Messiah can install His co-rulers for the kingdom. These include tribulation martyrs who “came to life and reigned with Messiah a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4b, 6b). Several other prophecies also picture saints ruling alongside of Him (e.g., Isa. 32:1-2; Dan. 7:27; Luke 19:15-19; 2 Tim. 2:12; cf. 1 Cor. 6:2-3). Amillennialism affirms that this millennium is already taking place and we are already ruling. But with biting sarcasm the apostle Paul denies it: “You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!” (1 Cor. 4:8).

**“A thousand years...thousand...thousand...thousand...thousand...thousand...” (20:2,3,4, 5,6,7).** Through Latin we get the equivalent for “thousand years”: *millennium*. Amillennialists believe (a) that this represents the period of time starting with Jesus’ first coming, (b) during which He and the saints have been reigning from heaven. Since the time has lengthened to nearly two thousand years, they assure us that the number is symbolic. Premillennialists, in contrast, can take the number as literal. They affirm that the millennium itself is still future and earthly—and will inaugurate the *predicted* form of Messiah’s/God’s kingdom.

Every interpreter must face the question of how to interpret “thousand” and other numbers for time in Revelation. Which ones should be understood literally? Alva McClain, in *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (pp. 491-496), discusses this question at length. He argues (p. 493) that except for common figures of speech, time notices in Revelation have literal meanings. “In chapters 4-20...there are at least twenty-five references to measures of time. Of these, only two *require* what is called a ‘figurative’ treatment: the ‘day of his wrath’ (6:17), and ‘the hour of his judgment’ (15:7).” McClain points out (as I did previously) that the period for the “Great Tribulation” is given repeatedly in equivalent terms: as forty-two months in 11:2 and 13:5, as 1,260 days in 12:6, as 3½ years (“time, times, and half a time”) in 12:14 (see Dan. 7:25 and 12:7; cf. Dan. 12:11, 12). He shows (p. 493) that John’s seeing “seven lamps...blazing” does not prove that all (or even many) numbers in Revelation are symbolic. *John himself* interprets these lamps as “the seven spirits of God” (Rev. 4:5; cf. 1:4; 3:1). So *seven* means *seven*, probably referring to the Spirit’s work or gifts. Therefore, most such numbers can be literal, especially those that (a) are repeated or explained and also (b) have no clear symbolic meaning in other Scriptures. This “thousand years,” used six times, fits both criteria.

Repetition in Revelation 20:2-7 favors a literal meaning. So does John’s *commentary* (v. 6b) on his vision. In the previous verses (2-5) he has described in past tense what he has seen about the thousand years. But in verse 6b he switches to the future tense to comment on what he has seen (“**will be** priests...**will reign** with him for a thousand years”). So both the repetition and the commentary agree on a future reign lasting a thousand years.



This conclusion, however, produces a discrepancy. Revelation 20 is the only passage that seems to limit the kingdom's duration to a thousand years. Many passages say that it will last forever. For example:

“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up **a kingdom that will never be destroyed**, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but **it will itself endure forever.**” (Daniel 2:44, quoting from Daniel's explanation to Nebuchadnezzar)

He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is **an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.** (Daniel 7:14)

He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom...**from that time on and forever.** (Isaiah 9:7)

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and **he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.**” (Luke 1:32-33)

...and you will receive a rich welcome into **the eternal kingdom** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:11)

Therefore, since we are receiving **a kingdom that cannot be shaken**, let us be thankful.... (Heb. 12:28)

In fact, the Book of Revelation agrees: “He will reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15; cf. 22:5). Why then does chapter 20 seem to limit the kingdom's duration and end it with rebellion (20:7-10)? Based on Revelation 20, some premillennialists often speak of a “thousand year kingdom.” But an eternal kingdom can hardly be completed in a thousand years! Furthermore, why would God finally give up on His original plans and promises for this material world, and destroy it? Surely He would not! Instead, the thousand years will only be the first stage of the new world, its grand entrance, its period of transition, its imposing foyer for the majestic building. The apostle Paul so indicated in the “resurrection chapter,” 1 Corinthians 15.

- He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Cor. 15:25–26; cf. Rev. 20:14)
- Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. (1 Cor. 15:24)

**The millennium mediatorial.** McClain comments on the verses just quoted from 1 Corinthians 15. They show that the first thousand years of the kingdom will be mediatorial. During that stage the Father will not rule directly but through “the Lamb” (Messiah) as mediator. The Lamb will have a throne on earth, but the Father's throne will apparently continue in heaven. When the Lamb perfects His kingdom, however, He will merge it with the Father's universal kingdom. After that, Father and Son will rule together. In the glorious capital city there will then be one

supreme throne, “the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:3).<sup>74</sup> However, it seems that the city itself, new Jerusalem, must come to earth at the beginning of the millennium. See my discussion under “General Considerations in Revelation 21:1 to 22:5,” especially “The Relationship between the Old & New Jerusalem” (p. 48), also Appendix F (p. 76).

**Two resurrections and two judgments.** We are still looking at 20:4-6, in which the Lord sets up His kingdom. It says that the martyrs who will help rule “came to life.” This means that the Lord, at His Second Coming just described in 19:11-16, will physically raise them from the dead. Revelation calls this “the first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5), which implies a later second resurrection. Indeed, after a “thousand years” pass, He will raise and judge the rest of the dead (20:12-13). In other words, there will not be one general resurrection and judgment for everybody, but different times for the just and the unjust. Earlier Scriptures had left room for this distinction or clearly implied it. Here are some of the passages that describe or imply two groups of raised ones and two outcomes.

- “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Daniel 12:2)
- “the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14)
- “those who are considered worthy of taking part in the resurrection from [Greek, from among] the dead” (Luke 20:34-36)
- “those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” (John 5:28-29)
- Christ will “raise up at the last day” anyone who believes in Him. (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54)
- “each in his own turn [=tagma, military term for a group]...when he comes, those who belong to him” (1 Cor. 15:22-24; see below)

Also consider Isaiah 24:21-22. The Lord will herd heavenly powers and earthly kings “in prison,” then punish them “after many days.” This perfectly agrees with a personal judgment *after the thousand years*. What these passages had implied, Revelation 20 makes explicit.

Notice just who “came to life and reigned with Messiah” in verse 4. They were “the souls of them that **had been beheaded** because of their testimony for Jesus...” “Souls” is used in a common meaning of “persons,” as in 18:13 (also Acts 2:27 [for Jesus]; 2:43; 7:14; 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:14). The verb for “came to life” is the same one used for our Lord’s resurrection in Romans 14:9 and Revelation 2:8. These martyrs in 20:4 were first “beheaded,” then “came to life.” Even that order of events shows it means physical life, not spiritual. If it meant spiritual life, the order of events would be wrong, putting faithful witness and martyrdom before conversion!

We should assume that all true believers, not only martyrs, will eventually take part in this first resurrection. And they are all guaranteed exemption from “the second death” (20:5-6). This

means that they will all obtain glorified, eternal bodies. The apostle Paul comments on this in the great resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15. Twice he calls the resurrected Messiah “the firstfruits” (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). This means that He represents a whole harvest of people who will be glorified when He comes again: “Messiah, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him” (15:23). Indeed, bodily resurrection is absolutely essential to Christianity. We must be “clothed...with immortality” in order to “inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 15:50-54; see also 6:9, 10). That does not happen when we die. It will not happen until Messiah returns to set up His kingdom, as anticipated in Revelation 11:15, 17; and 19:6. His return finally takes place in Revelation 19. Then He will raise us in “the first resurrection,”<sup>75</sup> and with Him we will “reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:10; cf. 3:21).

In contrast are those who do not take part in the first resurrection. They will not be raised and judged until the millennium is finished. All of them will be consigned to “the lake of fire...the second death” (20:14-15; cf. vv. 5-6). Like all men, they are not naturally immortal; only God is immortal (1 Tim. 6:16). Neither did they seek it, because “to those who by persistence in doing good seek...immortality,” He will certainly give it (Rom. 2:7). Therefore, those raised in the second resurrection will never eat from the tree of life “and live forever” (Gen. 3:22). See Revelation 22:2 and comments there.

**Is “the first resurrection” of Revelation 20 the Rapture?** Many believers nowadays would consider this question strange. “Of course not!” they would answer; “the first resurrection in Revelation 20 will take place at the wrong time and will leave believers on earth.”<sup>76</sup> For some, their answer is based more on emotional assumptions about their favorite passages than thorough inductive study. Because of those assumptions, they refuse to consider some other passages, such as Matthew 24:30-31 (see below). On the relationship between the resurrection and the Rapture, see Appendix B (p. 58). I have a separate writing with the same title: “[Will the Church Go Through the Great Tribulation?](#)”

Before deciding if Revelation 20:4-6 refers to the Rapture, reconsider Scriptural references to that event. What is the Rapture as pictured in Scriptures (not just in theology)? One part of a much bigger event, namely, the Lord’s coming again (Greek *parousia*). Some predictions of His coming refer to the Rapture as well. They emphasize different aspects of the Rapture, which we can learn as seen below. *No passage gives all aspects.*

- **Rapture aspects 1 and 2: (1) Jesus’ coming in glory and (2) saints gathered.** To distinguish the Rapture, these are the two most important aspects. First Corinthians 1:7 emphasizes the revelation of His glory (“to be revealed”). Matthew 24:30-31 has that plus the gathering of His saints (cf. Psalm 50:3-5). Both aspects are also mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:1: “the **coming** of our Lord Jesus Messiah and our being **gathered** to him.” And in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: “For the Lord himself will **come down** from heaven, with a **loud command**...and the **trumpet call** of God, and the dead in Messiah will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left **will be caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”<sup>77</sup>

- **Rapture aspect 3: dead saints resurrected.** The 1 Thessalonians 4 passage and 1 Corinthians 15:22-23 add this third aspect, that dead saints will also be raised back to life.
- **Rapture aspect 4: all saints glorified.** The two passages just named and Philippians 3:21 all say or imply this fourth aspect. In this process the “snatched-up” saints will be transformed—that is, given glorified bodies like His. That glory for the saints is emphasized in Colossians 3:4 and 1 John 3:2.

So different passages give different aspects of the Rapture. But the two most important aspects are (1) the Lord’s coming and (2) gathering His saints. Other passages affirm that He will resurrect them in glorified bodies. After that, where will He go with them? John 14:1-6 leaves open the possibility, but does not require, that He will return to heaven with them.<sup>78</sup> Some passages, such as, 1 Corinthians 15:22-23 (like Matt. 24), require instead that He will stay on earth and reign. In Revelation only one passage clearly combines the two main factors of the Rapture. That passage is 20:4-6. Only it has both the Lord’s coming and the resurrection/gathering of the saints. So yes, that is the Rapture. It will occur after the Tribulation, when He comes to rule. In fact, if the Rapture must include taking us away, there would be no Rapture at all in Revelation.

**20:7-10. “When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations.”** At the end of the millennium, Satan will be released from the Abyss and will have a temporary success. He will manage to deceive and gather nations—and to attack “the city [God] loves” (v. 9). After a final defeat, he will be thrown into the lake of sulfur. Those who join him in rebellion, where will they come from? That is a problem for premillennialists, because no one will bear children after being raptured. Those raptured just before the millennium will be glorified and confirmed in holiness (1 Cor. 15:50-54) in order to “inherit” the kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50; Matt. 25:34). Also, they will no longer marry or have children (Luke 20:34-36). If the kingdom began only with them, no later rebellion would be possible.<sup>79</sup>

So all premillennialists must make two assumptions about the forefathers of these millennial rebels: (a) that they were not raptured/glorified, which would have rendered them incapable of marriage and rearing rebels, (b) that they were converted *after the Rapture*. Obviously, the amount of time for such people to get converted depends on the time of the Rapture. If it takes place before the tribulation period (the pretribulation Rapture view), there will be seven years. If it takes place after the Tribulation (the post-tribulation Rapture view), there may be only days or weeks. Either way, whether in seven years or less, many will get converted in a brief time. Read what Zechariah promises for after Messiah’s appearing:

On that day [that is, starting then, many Jews] will look on me [Messiah], the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him....On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity. (Zech. 12:10; 13:1)

Having been born anew, such people can enter the kingdom. If they enter unglorified, will they miss their eternal inheritance? No; but to get it, they must be glorified later.

**20:11-15. “Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them,”** Some interpreters wrongly assume that this verse (11b) marks the end of the present world.<sup>80</sup> The description is not literal, however, but poetic and apocalyptic. Like many passages in psalms and prophecies (e.g., Ps. 18:4-15; Isa. 24:17-20; Jer. 4:23-26), it is designed to evoke feelings more than to provoke analysis. It is like an earlier occasion in Revelation—the sixth seal—when the sky and earth seemed to flee: “The stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree . . . .The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place” (Rev. 6:13-14). Yet, the “removed” mountains were still present in the next verses (6:15-16). In fact, “every island . . . and the mountains” were still there in 16:20, when they seemed to disappear yet again. None of these passages was intended to indicate the end of the world—an important consideration in 21:1 to 22:5. (I discuss this much more in Appendix E, p. 68.)

**John saw “a great white throne and him who was seated on it, [by whom] the dead were judged” (20:11a, 12b).** Who will be seated on that throne to judge? Jesus, God’s Son. “The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22). Who are these people being judged after the millennium? “The dead, great and small,” from “the sea . . . and death and Hades” (vv. 12a, 13a). But they are only “the rest of the dead” (see vv. 5-6), who were not raised earlier. Many years after the first resurrection, these are raised to be judged, then condemned, and committed to the fire.<sup>81</sup> As a result, there will be a cleansed world, with no enemies to God’s justice still remaining.

Will saints, then, that is, believers, escape Messiah’s judgment? Some think so, because “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). Yet, Paul warns believers that “**we must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah**” (2 Cor. 5:10). Could that “judgment seat” (Greek *bema*) be the one in Revelation 20? You cannot tell from the Greek term itself. The term could refer to that “great white throne” or to a different occasion. One occasion will be a thousand years earlier, “when the Son of man comes in his glory” (Matt. 25:31) to set up His kingdom. “The King will say to those on his right [that is, the “sheep”], ‘Come . . . Take your inheritance, the kingdom . . .’” (25:34). That reward is probably the same rulership as described in Revelation 20:4-6. It was foreseen in the exclamation at the last trumpet: “The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints” (Rev. 11:18). In other words, the Lord at His Second Coming will immediately judge many of His servants and assign them rulership positions. However, He will wait a thousand years (until the postmillennial “great white throne”) to raise and judge the wicked.<sup>82</sup>

**“Judged according to what they had done” (20:12b).** Several Scriptures say the same as this verse. For example, Romans 2:6: “God will give to each person according to what he has done.” (See discussion in “[A Survey of Romans](#).”) So not all will receive the same punishment, which will not last the same for all. See my discussion of 14:11 and immortality. Here the outcome is that each unconverted person is “thrown into the lake of fire” (20:15). For what purpose? To be tormented (see Luke 16:24, 28) and destroyed (“destroy both body and soul in hell,” Matt. 10:28). In Matthew 13 the Lord compares the ungodly to weeds: “As weeds are

pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age....They will throw them into the fiery furnace....Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom..." (Matt. 13:40, 42, 43).

Weeds thrown into a furnace get consumed. Uniquely, however, Revelation 14:10-11 and 20:10 picture non-ending torment for the wicked world rulers and their followers. Discussing the earlier verses, I argued against a literal interpretation. Keeping mortal man alive to be tormented forever would require the righteous Judge to act against His nature. The picture drawn in Revelation is apocalyptic hyperbole (a form of exaggeration), a common figure of speech.

**“No more death.”** The account in Revelation 20:14 posts this notice: “Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.” Why will death and Hades be thrown there? At least in this case, not to be tormented but to be abolished. This will be the Lord’s final victory over death, predicted by the apostle Paul: “He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:25-26).<sup>83</sup> So the Lord will abolish death, not prolong it eternally. The result, as Revelation 21:4 says, is that “there will be no more death.”<sup>84</sup> At this point “he hands over the kingdom to God the Father” (1 Cor. 15:24). The transitional stage of the kingdom will be over. That does not mean, however, that everything in chapters 21 and 22 is subsequent.

### General Considerations in Revelation 21:1 to 22:5

*In keeping with his promise, we are looking forward  
to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (2 Pet. 3:13)*

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,  
for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,  
and there was no longer any sea. (Rev. 21:1)*

*“He will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,  
for the old order of things has passed away.”  
He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”  
(Rev. 21:4-5)*

*For much more detail, see Appendix E ( p. 68); my separate writing, “[A New Heaven & a New Earth](#)”; and George N.H. Peters, The Theocratic Kingdom..., Propositions 148-151.<sup>85</sup>*

**The common view of this passage.** We have been considering the millennium in Revelation 20. Amillennialists think it is taking place now; premillennialists think it will begin when Jesus returns. Both groups agree that the following picture, the last in the Bible, is even more important. The theme of Revelation 21:1 to 22:5 is the “new heaven and new earth,” which I will also

call “the new world.” Most evangelical believers assume that it will not only be subsequent to the millennial world but far superior in character. Many think it will totally replace that world after “the heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire...” (2 Pet. 3:10). Some believe that the fiery destruction is also on the occasion of Revelation 20:11b: “earth and sky fled from his [the Judge’s] presence, and there was no place for them.”<sup>86</sup>

**The continuity view.** Yet, other considerations oblige me to modify the common view. The “new heaven and new earth” is not separate from nor subsequent to the millennium. Instead, it starts at the millennium and continues it. That seems obvious when we consider 2 Peter 3:13, in the apostle Peter’s final reference to the kingdom as the Christian hope. “In keeping with **his [God’s] promise,**” Peter assured us, “we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” To what “promise” with that title did Peter refer? Most directly, to Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22, the only previous uses of the title. Read those passages in context, and you will see that they refer to millennial conditions, even including death (65:20).<sup>87</sup> So God did not relate our hope just to the perfected phase of the kingdom but to its initial phase, the millennium. It seems certain that “new heaven and new earth” in Revelation 21 includes both.<sup>88</sup> If so, the destruction language in 2 Peter 3 and Revelation is not absolute. Instead, it is hyperbolic like other parts of Revelation and many Old Testament prophecies. It primarily refers to purging the world *before* the kingdom starts, in other words, *before the millennium*.<sup>89</sup> This continuity view best harmonizes with two kinds of related promises.

- Renewal promises. Jesus promised that “**the renewal of all things** [will be] when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne” (Matt. 19:28). When He comes and takes His throne, He will not then wait a thousand years but begin the renewal immediately. The Apostle Peter later preached the same thing. Jesus will return, he said, “when the time comes for God to **restore everything**, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets” (Acts 3:21).
- Wedding promises. The wedding of the Lamb is announced just before the millennium (19:7-8) and also at the beginning of the final description (21:2, 9-10). That means that the beginning point for the two passages is the same. Both refer to the same new world.

**The “new heaven and new earth” (21:1). “I am making everything new” (21:5).** Let us consider what is so labeled and what this newness means. To some extent it refers to continuing the material world. We must not misunderstand God’s intentions. He will never decide that a material world is too “unspiritual” or unworkable. He will not give up on everything He has made and completely discard it. Not even when there is rebellion after a thousand year reign. Instead, He will finally purify and restore it all. That is certainly what Isaiah meant in his many prophecies of the kingdom. And when he called it “new,” he did not mean “distinct.” I will copy from my writing “[A New Heaven and A New Earth](#)” (p. 9):

In the expression “new heaven and new earth,” the Greek word for “new” is not the one for young or recent (*neos*) but for a better quality (*kainos*). God intends to renew rather than replace. The process and result are analogous to the renewal of an individual: “If anyone is in Messiah, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:17). Even though he is new, he remains the same individual. Likewise, Romans 8:19–

21 promises that “the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation...itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” God does not threaten His creation with extinction but—after purging—promises it liberation. Like the resurrection body itself, the New World will be far superior yet the same entity (1 Cor. 15:35–44).

So the New World will begin at the same time that “the sons of God [are] revealed,” as soon as Messiah returns. The “new heaven and new earth” will include the millennium. Why, then, did the apostle John not use the title until 21:1? Simply because Revelation *does not describe* the kingdom earlier. In chapter 20 it sketches some key transitional factors. But it goes back (recapitulation!) and describes some eternal factors in chapters 21-22. Among those eternal factors, giving also Old Testament references, are the following:

- God will reside with men. (Rev. 21:3, 4; Isa. 12:6; Ezek. 48:35; Zech. 8:3, 20-23)
- They will be His people. (Rev. 21:4b, 7; Hos. 2:23)
- Splendor of the city. (Rev. 21:24, 26; Isa. 60:5-7, 10-13)
- God’s light. (Rev. 21:23-25; 22:5; Isa. 24:23)
- Offer of the water of life. (Rev. 21:6; 22:1, 17; Ezek. 47:9)
- Offer of the tree of life. (Rev. 22:14, 19; Ezek. 47:12)<sup>90</sup>

So our hope is the eternal kingdom, the final objective for all the Bible. It will have two stages: when it begins and after it is perfected. At either stage it can be called the “new heaven and new earth.” In it God will finally achieve what He originally intended, a world of blessing with man in charge as His agent. Therefore, the last three chapters of the Bible wonderfully fulfill the first chapters. Study Chart F, which compares eighteen items from those chapters.

In Chart F did you notice such fulfillments as man’s ruling as he was designed (Gen. 1:26, 28), having pleasant work to do (2:15, 19-20) without curse or pain (3:14, 16, 17), having free access (3:24) to the beautiful garden (2:9-10), to water from its river (2:10), to its tree of life (2:9; 3:22-24), and above all, to God’s presence (3:8)? Did you notice that for its entire existence the kingdom will be centered on earth (Rev. 19:15; 20:7-9; 21:2, 10, 24-26; 22:2)? Heaven will come to earth! Far from discarding His original design in making earth and man (Genesis 1-2), God will completely fulfill it.

**The Relationship between the Old & New Jerusalem.** This is a brief summary of Appendix F (p. 76), by the same name.

Jesus the Messiah will come to rule forever as the glorified human being that He is. A material Man ruling a material world requires a material capital city. Establishing His throne in the chosen city is known as “marrying” it. God chose Jerusalem to be His bride because of eternal promises to King David. Jesus ratified that choice and foresaw Jerusalem’s future glory even though it was rejecting Him. In fact, many prophets had described the city’s long history of unfaithfulness and ultimate glory.



<b>CHART F</b>	
<b>From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained</b> (listing items generally in their order in Genesis)	
<b>Genesis 1-3: Paradise Lost</b>	<b>Revelation 20-22: Paradise Regained</b>
1. “God created the heavens and the earth” (1:1; 2:2-4).	He will create “a new heaven and a new earth” (21:1).
2. God said, “Let there be light, and there was light” (1:3-4).	“The glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp” (21:23; cf. 21:24; 22:5).
3. “God...separated the light from the darkness... and the darkness he called night” (1:4-5).	“There will be no night there” (21:25; 22:5).
4. He made the seas (1:9-10).	There will be “no longer any sea” (21:1).
5. He made the sun and the moon (1:14-18).	There will be no need of sun or moon, for God is its light (21:23; 22:5).
6. He made man to rule over His creation (1:26-28).	“They will reign for ever and ever” (22:5).
7. He prepared a lovely walled garden (2:8), with gold and spices available (2:11-12).	He will bring to earth a magnificent city of gold, the new Jerusalem (21:18).
8. He provided a tree of life to “eat and live forever” (2:9; 3:22-23).	The nations will eat the fruit of that tree, which will bear 12 crops a year and have healing leaves (22:2).
9. From the garden flowed a life-giving river (2:10).	From His throne in the city will flow the river of water of life, from which we may drink (22:1, 17).
10. Man was to till the garden and take care of it (2:15, 19-20).	God’s servants will serve Him (22:3).
11. God let Satan into the garden to test us (3:1).	He will cast Satan into the lake of fire and let nothing impure into new Jerusalem (20:10; 21:27).
12. By man’s sin we brought ourselves death (3:2-6; 2:17; 3:19).	By the Lamb’s obedience God will destroy death (21:4).
13. God walked in the garden; but man, after his fall, hid out of fear and shame (3:8-11).	“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them” (21:3). “They will see his face” (22:4).
14. Man’s sin brought pain in childbearing and in labor, with a curse on nature (3:16-19).	“No longer will there be any curse” (22:3).
15. After the fall man was to toil on the cursed ground outside the garden (3:17-19).	God’s servants will serve Him (22:3).
16. God shut man out of the garden (3:23).	God will bring Paradise to us (21:3) but keep out all the impure (21:27).
17. God prevented man’s access to the tree of life (3:23-24).	He will let the nations eat the fruit of that tree and be healed by its leaves (22:2).
18. God put “cherubim and a flaming sword” east of the garden (3:24).	The city will have “a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates” (21:12).

The people of faith, such as, Abraham and his descendants, all look for an eternal city built by God. Jesus went to prepare us place in that city, His Father's house. When He comes back to reign, that city will also "come down out of heaven from God." Described in Revelation 21-22, it will combine perfect beauty and perfect benefit. As the renewed form of the old Jerusalem, it will be situated in the Promised Land from the beginning of the millennium. (Thus, Revelation 21:1 goes back to the same time as announced in 19:7.) This is what the early church believed for over two hundred years.

### Comments on Passages in Revelation 21:1 to 22:5

Now we will look at the glorious kingdom in more detail. It is a magnificent country, 21:1-8, with a majestic capital, 21:9-27, and merry citizens, 22:1-5.

#### The magnificent country, 21:1-8

**Its title. "A new heaven and a new earth" (21:1).** As explained before, this title indicates a renewal, not a substitution. It is the "better country—a heavenly one," which people of faith have looked for across the centuries (Heb. 11:16). It is the "kingdom that cannot be shaken" (Heb. 12:28). It belongs to those whose "citizenship is in heaven," from which they "eagerly await a Savior...the Lord Jesus Messiah" (Phil. 3:20).

**Its capital and location. "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (21:2a).** Most of the bolded words in the quotation were in the prediction in 3:12: "I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, **the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God...**" Thus, the eternal kingdom will *not be in heaven but on earth*. As someone has said, our eternal home will not be heaven in heaven but heaven on earth! The most important change will be that "the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them" (21:3; cf. v. 7). Closeness to Him will cancel the curse and all its effects: "no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (21:4). But full salvation will not be mostly negative, not just a rescue. Instead, it will mean inheriting the new world (21:7) as God's sons and freely drinking the water of life (21:6).

**Its celebration.** The Holy City is "**prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband**" (21:2b). This pictures the time of the Lamb's wedding. His bride is His capital city, whose identity will be emphasized in the next section. The "marriage" of the king to the capital city was a common theme in ancient times and in Scriptures (Isa. 62:1-5). When will this wedding take place? In Revelation it was first announced in chapter 19, at the end of the Tribulation. That was just before the Lord's return and the millennium. At that time John heard "what sounded like a great multitude" shout, "the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready" (19:6-7). Those verses in chapter 19 clearly implied that the wedding was about to take place. It will begin when the thousand years begin. (It would make no sense to postpone it to the end of the millennium.) Since 21:2 refers to the same occasion, then Revelation 21 and its new world must also, to some extent, describe the millennium.

**Its cleanness.** No wicked people will be allowed to enter that capital city and contaminate it (21:8, 27). That includes “all liars.” The apostle Paul likewise listed “the wicked” who will not “inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9, 10). Then he told how the Corinthian believers had obtained the required purity: “you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Messiah and by the Spirit of our God” (6:11).

### **The majestic capital, 21:9-27**

The last scenes in this book were pointed out by one of the angels who had poured out the last plagues (21:9; cf. 17:1). “Come,” he invited John, “I will show you **the bride, the wife of the Lamb**” (v. 9). Whom did he show him as bride? There can be no doubt. “He...showed me **the Holy City, Jerusalem**, coming down out of heaven from God” (21:10). The words are almost identical to those in verse 2a; the setting is the same as there. The King is about to “marry” His capital city. But being a bride does not make the city unreal; its marvelous glory and beauty are here described. Furthermore, as seen in the parallel in 19:7-8 (see my comments and footnotes there), this bride city implies her inhabitants. Will the twelve tribes of Israel be included? Surely they will, since their names are on the gates (21:12-13). What about other “nations,” who “walk by its light” and their “kings...bring their splendor into it” (21:24, cf. v. 26)? Why not? Those same *nations* have full access to the fruit and leaves of the trees of life (22:2). Apparently there will always be distinct nations—no melting of the whole world into one gray sameness.

Instead of commenting on many items individually, I request you to study Chart F. Observe that God will fulfill exactly what He originally designed for this earth. He has prepared an eternal capital worthy of His name. In size and beauty it will accommodate and delight all who live in it and the constant visitors from the nations.<sup>91</sup>

### **The merry citizens, 22:1-5**

The items these citizens will enjoy forever include the water of life (v. 1), the tree of life (v. 2), uncursed nature (v. 3), “the throne of God and of the Lamb” (vv. 1, 3), serving God and seeing Him (vv. 3-4), constant divine light (v. 5), and fulfillment of their regal capabilities (v. 5).

**The tree of life.** We were specifically banned from this tree after Adam’s sin. “The man...must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life,” God said, “and eat, and live forever” (Gen. 3:22-24). In the great capital city that tree will be abundant. “Down the middle of the great street of the city” will flow “the river of the water of life” (Rev. 22:1-2a). “On *each side of the river*” will be “the tree of life...yielding its fruit every month” (v. 2b). So there will be *many trees of life*, with fruit available always for all (cf. 22:14, 19). Eating it will be a sacrament, which grants what it symbolizes.<sup>92</sup>

## Epilogue

### Revelation 22:6-21

*“Behold, I am coming soon!” (22:7)*

*“Behold, I am coming soon!” (22:12)*

*“Yes, I am coming soon.”*

*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. (22:20)*

This repeated promise of Jesus to come soon is the major emphasis of Revelation. The same promise at the beginning of the book showed that the coming will be public, glorious, to rule:

“Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him...and all the peoples of the earth will mourn...” (1:7).

The last repetition of that promise is followed by the Bible’s last prayer, for Him to come rule. When He comes He will inaugurate the new world, the “new heaven and new earth, in which”<sup>93</sup>

- **Individuals** who inherit that new world will enjoy eternal life, in glorified bodies joyfully serving God and ruling forever (Rev. 22:3–5).
- **Nations** will live in peace and righteousness, bringing their glory and honor to the capital (21:24, 26; Isa. 2:2–4).
- **Nature** will be liberated—no more curse—rejoicing with the sons of God (Rom. 8:18–22).
- **Messiah** will receive vindication and glory in the world that once rejected Him. Along with the many He redeemed, He will inherit as God's Firstborn Son and Abraham's Heir (Gal. 3:16, 29).
- **God the Father** will finally accomplish His purpose in creation and His promises to Adam, to Abraham, and to David.
- **The material world** will be forever and perfectly united to the spiritual world in a pleasing and powerful demonstration to the angels and all the universe of God's righteousness, goodness, and love.
- **The devil** and his works will be banished forever.

God will forever dwell with man, and man will forever rule with God.

**Let us live for that world!**

## Appendix A

### We Are the Kingdom in Embryo, Revelation 1:6

*Jesus “has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.” (Rev. 1:6)*

The statement in Revelation 1:6 is unusual. Only that verse and Revelation 5:10 seem to say that God’s people are already Jesus’ kingdom. The terms used, *kingdom* and *priests*, reflect the language of Exodus 19:6: “You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” In Exodus God was explaining to ancient Israel why He had called them out of Egypt and was about to make a covenant with them. He was going to constitute Israel as His kingdom. Using the same language in the New Testament, centuries later, showed that history was being repeated.<sup>94</sup>

Yet, speaking of a present kingdom contradicts most of the evidence. Many passages say or imply that we will enter the kingdom in the future. For example, consider all the times our Lord and others spoke of His kingdom in the last chapters of Luke (Luke 19-24). On every occasion it was clearly future.<sup>95</sup> One such occasion was near the end of Jesus’ prophetic discourse. He told when the kingdom would again be near: “When you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near” (21:31). Since none of the predicted things happened immediately, the kingdom was not near at least until after the Day of Pentecost. Note also two occasions from the Last Supper. “I will not eat it again,” He said, “until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God” (22:16). And again, “I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (22:18).

So in Luke chapters 19 to 24 His kingdom was only future. Yet, that was a distinct change in Jesus’ message. Because in nearly all the protracted final journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51 to 19:27), the kingdom had been near. That was the message He had given His representatives to proclaim in “every town and place where he was about to go” (10:1). He had emphasized that message by repeating it (10:9 and 10:11, Greek).<sup>96</sup> He had told them that at every stop, whether “welcomed” or not, they were to announce that “the kingdom of God has drawn near.” He had also enabled them to give evidence of the kingdom’s nearness by doing its miracles, miracles He had been doing. These were “powers [same word as *miracles*] of the coming age” (Heb. 6:5).

What changed the message from the kingdom as near to the kingdom as only future? Jesus’ Parable of the Minas (also known as the Parable of the Pounds or Parable of the Nobleman) in Luke 19:11-27. Given at the last stop before Bethany and Jerusalem, this parable revealed that the kingdom would no longer be near. Instead, it would start only **after Jesus went to heaven and then returned.**<sup>97</sup> (See Chart G.)

He went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once....A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king [Greek says literally, “receive a kingdom”] and then to return....He was made king [Greek says literally, “after receiving the kingdom”]...and returned home. (Luke 19:11-12, 15a)

Thus, a new stage had begun when Jesus finally arrived at Jerusalem. He wanted His disciples to realize that the kingdom was no longer near. He referred to it as only future (that is, postponed, from the disciples’ point of view) in all His succeeding remarks. Therefore, we know that it had not begun before that time. Nor did it begin when He gave His life to redeem many, nor when He showed Himself alive after He rose, nor when He ascended to the Father’s right hand (in the “distant country” of the parable), nor when He poured out the Holy Spirit to start forming His church. It did not begin at any point in New Testament times—nor since then. The kingdom was clearly future not only in the rest of Luke but often clearly so in Acts and the Epistles.<sup>98</sup> It will begin only when He returns.<sup>99</sup>

<b>CHART G                      The Kingdom That Was Near Is “Postponed”</b> <b>Parable of the Minas, Luke 19:11-27</b>		
<b>Deliberate Journey to Jerusalem</b> <b>by Jesus &amp; Disciples</b> <b>Luke 9:51 to 19:27</b>		<b>Passion &amp; Triumph</b> <b>in Jerusalem</b> <b>Luke 19:28 to 24:53</b>
MESSAGE DURING THE JOURNEY	END OF THE JOURNEY PARABLE OF THE MINAS	SAMPLE STATEMENTS IN LUKE AFTER THAT PARABLE
“The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them...ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go... ‘When you enter a town ...heal the sick...and tell them, The kingdom of God is near you.’” (10:1, 8, 11)	“A man of noble birth went to a distant country to receive a kingdom and then to return...After receiving the kingdom, he returned home.” (19:12, 15)	“I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” (22:16)  “I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” (22:18)
“The people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once....” (19:11)  <b>JESUS’ KINGDOM WAS NEAR.</b>	In all remaining passages in Luke, the kingdom is now referred to as future, after Jesus goes to heaven and returns. Nearly all Acts and Epistles references easily mean this, too.  <b>JESUS’ KINGDOM WILL COME AFTER HE GOES TO HEAVEN AND RETURNS.</b>	

Years passed. Jesus had indeed gone to that “distant country” (heaven) and poured out the Holy Spirit. He was forming His church; yet, the kingdom was still future. For example, Paul and Barnabas kept telling new believers that “we must go through many hardships **to enter the kingdom** of God” (Acts 14:22). The Epistles agreed. For example, the apostle Peter in his last letter encouraged believers to add godly qualities to their faith. Those who do “**will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Messiah” (2 Peter 1:11). Several passages refer to our inheritance in that future kingdom: 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; 15:50; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5; and James 2:5.

In case you want to research this, look up and read in context all the passages in the following list. It is taken from my "[Basileia for the Kingdom of God: Acts and Epistles](#)" in my website. It gives all occasions in those books where the Greek word *basileia* is used for Jesus' kingdom. In their own contexts nearly all these references can easily refer to a future kingdom. Some of them, especially the starred ones, can only be future. Not one pairs a supposed present kingdom with the future one.

Acts 1:3; *1:6; 8:12; *14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23; 28:31	1 Thessalonians *2:12
Romans 14:17	2 Thessalonians *1:5
1 Corinthians 4:20; *6:9; *6:10; 15:24; 15:50	2 Timothy *4:1; *4:18
Galatians *5:21	Hebrews 1:8; 12:28
Ephesians *5:5	James *2:5
Colossians 1:13; 4:11	2 Peter *1:11
	Revelation 1:6; 1:9; 5:10; *11:15; *12:10.

This is abundant evidence that the kingdom has not started yet but is still future. Nevertheless, nowadays some disagree. Some cite only Colossians 1:13, which says that God **“has brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.”** But this does not really refer to the kingdom as present. Start with the Greek for the verb I have bolded (*metestesen*). Here it probably means *has transferred* or *carried away*, as it does in Acts 13:22 (removed Saul) and 1 Corinthians 13:2 (remove mountains). If so, Colossians 1:13 means that God has carried us away to Christ's future kingdom. That would perfectly fit the previous verse (Col. 1:12), that “the Father...has qualified you to share in the **inheritance** of the saints **in the kingdom** of light.” That kingdom and inheritance are future, as you can read in four different Epistles of those cited above (1 Cor. 6:9, 10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; and James 2:5). Thus, the statement in Colossians 1:13 is not absolute; it is true legally but not factually. We live here but belong to the future. The perspective is the same as in Colossians 3:1-4: **“your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ...appears, then you also will appear.”** So neither Colossians 1:13 nor 3:1-4 contradicts the abundant evidence that the kingdom is still future.

Yet, Revelation 1:6 does seem to contradict it. Why? Consider two more factors.

1. First, this title is proleptic—our *future title*, not active yet. Jesus Himself is given a proleptic title in the preceding verse (Rev. 1:5): “the ruler of the kings of the earth.” He deserves that title. All believers agree that He is the Messiah, the One anointed to rule.<sup>100</sup> His authority is described in Ephesians 1:20-23, which says that the Father

raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule...and every title...not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body....

On the Father's throne, "above all rule...in the present age" and the coming age! Given "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). Yet, He doesn't use it all, as the persecuted church recognized early on. In prayer they quoted from Psalm 2: "The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One" (Acts 4:25-29). Likewise, in Revelation "the kings of the earth" are still in rebellion as late as the last bowl (Rev. 16:14; 19:19).

Jesus must wait to rule the kings. "He sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time **he waits** for his enemies to be made his footstool" (Heb. 10:12b-13; cf. Acts 2:34b-35).<sup>101</sup> When His enemies are finally subjected, He will sit on His own throne, "the throne of his father David, and...reign...forever" (Luke 1:32-33). He is not on His promised throne yet.<sup>102</sup> In this delay Jesus is like his forefather David, who was anointed to be king but had to wait for years before he ruled. As a lad David received God's anointing through Samuel (1 Sam. 16:13). But not until years later did all the tribes anoint him "king over Israel" (2 Sam. 5:3)—and he finally began to rule.<sup>103</sup> Likewise, Jesus foresaw the delay in His own case and promised to sit on His throne when He comes again:

- "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on His throne in heavenly glory" (Matt. 25:31).
- "At the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne" (Matt. 19:28).

Does anyone dare to affirm that Jesus has already come "in His glory" and sat "on His glorious throne"? Does anyone really believe that "the renewal of all things" is taking place? Until it does, His title "ruler of the kings" (Rev. 1:5) is still only proleptic—a trustworthy promise. But He will not wait forever. Revelation chapters 6-19 show how His enemies will be subdued; then promise will become reality.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, the "kingdom" label for believers in Revelation 1:6 is proleptic until He comes.

2. Believers also wait to rule. The same language used in 1:6 is used again in 5:10 to describe men "purchased...from every...nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God." At this second use, however, notice the additional promise: "and they will reign on the earth." Believers have essentially the same future-tense promise in 2:26-27 (cf. 3:21).<sup>105</sup> But there is nothing to suggest that they begin to reign until near the end of Revelation. In fact, their non-reign is the main point in 1 Corinthians 4:8: "You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!" In Revelation 20:4, 6, however, that reign for Messiah and the saints does finally begin. (Even the words in 20:6 are like those in 5:10.) And the last chapter says that they "will reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:5).

So Jesus is not reigning over the nations yet, and His people have not begun to reign. What, then, does 1:6 mean by saying that He "has made us to be a kingdom"? Two answers have been suggested.



First, many modern interpreters believe that Messiah's kingdom has begun in an unexpected form. In that case, they claim, the kingdom's fullness is still future but in us it has intruded into the present. However, no passage says that it actually began—and no passage distinguishes a present form from a future form.

Second, some of us believe that we are His kingdom as a legal certainty but not as an historical fact. Such legal language is not unusual in the Bible;<sup>106</sup> it is probably the best explanation for such statements as the following.<sup>107</sup>

- “God...seated us with [Messiah] in the heavenly realms.” (Eph. 2:6)
- “Your life is now hidden with Messiah in God. When Messiah, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” (Col. 3:3-4)
- “All things are yours, whether...the present or the future.” (1 Cor. 3:21-22)

Such statements are not factual but legal. We do not have a double existence—on earth and in heaven, present and future—but a divine standing with Messiah.<sup>108</sup> In the same way, we already belong to His future kingdom. To use another illustration, we are His kingdom in embryo, waiting to be born.

## Appendix B

### Will the Church Go Through the Great Tribulation?

*The apostles Barnabas and Paul...returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships [much tribulation, KJV] to enter the kingdom of God," they said. [And they] appointed elders for them in each church. (Acts 14:14a, 21b-23a)*

*For more detail, see my separate writing also labeled "[Will the Church Go Through the Great Tribulation?](#)"*

Reared as a Dispensationalist, I did not imagine for many years the conclusions I defend below. In the present writing, under "More Comments on Passages in Revelation 20," I discuss the factors of the Rapture (p. 43). The two main factors are the Lord's coming and the resurrection/gathering of the saints. The only passage in Revelation that combines those two is 20:4-6—*after the Tribulation*. So I conclude that that will be the Rapture, when the Lord comes back to rule. In fact, if the Rapture must include taking us away, there would be no Rapture at all in Revelation. Please weigh my argument, beginning with the quotation above.

Acts 14 shows how Paul and Barnabas finished their missionary tour at great risk to themselves. They returned to the new believers in the new churches, appointed leaders (elders), and reminded them of the following: (a) Our glorious goal is God's coming kingdom on earth, and (b) we will certainly have tribulation (distress) on our way to it. The most severe such distress is described in the Lord's "Olivet Discourse" (Matt. 24-25) and especially in the Revelation. That will be in the last days, just before the kingdom begins. Permitted to look ahead to those days, the apostle John saw many godly saints at that time, either on earth or coming from earth. For example, he saw a "great multitude...wearing white robes...come out of the great tribulation" (Rev. 7:9, 14). Will those saints be members of the true church? Dispensationalists say no, that the church will miss that "Great Tribulation." All its members, they say, will previously be raptured (literally, caught up) in eternal bodies and—they add—be removed from the earth. How nice, if true!

Indeed, there will be a Rapture. Believers both living and dead will at some time be caught up into eternal life. Various passages teach aspects of this. Those most quoted are John 14:1-3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, both of which say

- that the Rapture will take place when the Lord Jesus comes from heaven to earth.
- that after His coming and our Rapture, we will be with the Lord.

The occasion for this to happen is "the **coming** [Greek *parousia*] of the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:15). What is that? The Greek term often referred to the public coming of a high official, such as a king. It is used for the Lord's coming six times in the Thessalonian Epistles.<sup>109</sup> But in the first 70% of the New Testament (the Gospels, Acts, Romans, down to 1 Cor. 15:23), it is so used in only one chapter. In Matthew 24 it appears four times, verses 3, 27, 37, 39. There it clearly refers to a promise Jesus reiterated in the same context and elsewhere. That promise was to

come back to earth in order to rule there with His servants (e.g., Matt. 16:27; 19:28; 25:19-23, 31; Luke 19:12, 15). It would be natural for us to assume that other references to His coming also imply that purpose of ruling.

However, John 14 adds a new perspective to His promise. That passage is part of His discourse to His disciples on the night before His crucifixion. He has made a troubling announcement: “I will be with you only a little longer....Where I am going, you cannot come....you cannot follow now, but you will follow later” (John 13:33, 36). He then explains that He is about to go to “my Father’s house....I am going there to prepare a place for you” (14:1-2). But His disciples will not be separated from Him forever: “**I will come back and take you to be with me...**” (14:3). Furthermore, He adds, “You know the way to the place where I am going....I am the way....No one comes to the Father except through me” (14:4, 6; see also 14:28; 16:17, 18, 28; 17:3, 11, 13).

In John 14, then, as in Matthew 24, the Lord promises to “come back” and “gather his elect” (Matt. 24:31).<sup>110</sup> The Matthew passage makes it evident that His purpose is to reign on earth. But the context in John implies another purpose, namely, to lead us “to the Father,” where the Lord has gone, and to the “Father’s house.” He went there to “prepare a place” for us. Though we “cannot follow” Him yet, we “will follow later.” We “know the way” to the Father. Dispensationalists assume that He will remove us from earth and take us away, to the place prepared for us. Their assumption leads them to a surprising conclusion: that there will be not one but two future comings of the Lord. (They assume that each is sometimes called His *parousia*.) They call the first one the Rapture. They say that it will occur before the Tribulation and its purpose will be to take the church away. They call the other one the Second Coming. Occurring after the Tribulation, its purpose will be for the Lord to rule. They love to say that in the Rapture the Lord comes **for** His saints but in the Second Coming He comes **with** them.

Remember that this Dispensationalist distinction of two comings is largely based on their understanding of John 14:3. That passage mentions the Rapture but does not mention the kingdom. Their theory requires the puzzling conclusion that the term *parousia*, often used later, has no fixed meaning. Take, for example, a passage that uses that term—1 Thessalonians 4:15. Here they call it the Rapture because the passage mentions the Rapture but not the kingdom. For the same reason they also call it the Rapture in 2 Thessalonians 2:1. But not in verse 8, in which the Lord comes back to rule. There they call it the Second Coming, its meaning in Matthew 24.<sup>111</sup> Using this sorting process, they cannot acknowledge that 2 Thessalonians 2:1 and 2:8 both refer to the same event. Their theory requires that they sort every passage about His coming, to see if each refers to the Rapture or the Second Coming. And when they decide on the latter, they deny that any event connected with that one is the Rapture.

This Dispensationalist theory has other puzzling aspects. If there will be two *parousias* or two stages of the same *parousia*, why does no passage list them both? (No passage hints at more than one return by Jesus.) Why does no passage clearly put the Rapture before the Tribulation? Why does none even clearly teach a removal of raptured ones to heaven? That is true even in the Book of Revelation, which gives much detail about the Tribulation. Before the Tribulation it has

no coming of the Lord—nor Rapture and removal. Instead, it has several pictures of saints going through that period (e.g., Rev. 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24). And after the Tribulation it does have the resurrection of the saints but not their removal (20:4-6).

There is another factor in opposition to the Dispensationalist theory: Some passages do combine the Rapture with the Second Coming. For example, consider 1 Corinthians 15:22-55. That is a doctrinal discussion of Jesus' *parousia* and our resurrection, as in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. It insists that the Gospel requires our resurrection. We must have glorified bodies in order to inherit the kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50). We will get those bodies suddenly (vv. 51-52) at the Lord's *parousia* (vv. 22-23). But, like Matthew 24, it immediately relates His *parousia* to His coming reign (vv. 24-25). In other words, we will be resurrected at His Second Coming. Since that connection contradicts their view, Dispensationalists tend to say little about 1 Corinthians 15, especially verses 22-25, when discussing the Rapture. For example, Wayne Brindle discusses seven passages that he considers "Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture." But he does not refer to 1 Corinthians 15 at all, though our resurrection is its main theme.<sup>112</sup>

Note, however, how Brindle uses Revelation 22:7, 12, 20. In all three verses the Lord says, "I am coming soon." Since the Lord here warns of no signs, Brindle says that He refers to His pretribulational coming (to rapture and remove believers). But Brindle makes no such claim for the same promise in Revelation 1. Verse 1 says that the book concerns "what must **soon** take place." Verse 3 says that "the time is **near**." Then verse 7 says, "Look, **he is coming** with the clouds." Why does Brindle consider that different from the same promise in chapter 22? Because chapter 1 immediately adds that His coming will be public and seen worldwide: "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him." Brindle's theology cannot let him admit all that for the *parousia* that includes the Rapture.

As stated before, the Dispensationalist distinction of two comings is largely based on their understanding of John 14:3. But one of the foremost apologists for Dispensationalism, John F. Walvoord, admits that the apostles could not have understood that passage as a separate event. In this excerpt from my [Thessalonians](#) course, I am paraphrasing and quoting Walvoord.

...the disciples still did not understand that He would leave them and return. To the extent that they understood the Lord's departure, they believed that the Rapture "was a part of the promise to come to earth a second time....Much later Paul was converted, and God revealed the doctrine of the Rapture to him."

Walvoord is right that the disciples at most could have understood the Rapture to be part of the Second Coming. So why should we be confident that Jesus instead meant something separate?

In my writing with the same name as this appendix, I deal with other Dispensationalist pretribulation arguments such as the following.

- They keep the "blessed hope" and "glorious appearing" separate in Titus 2:13. Instead (as in the NIV), both terms refer to the Second Coming.

- They infer that Revelation 3:10 promises the Rapture and the twenty-four elders of Revelation 4 prove it. The promise instead is to keep us from lasting harm, as the same verb plus preposition indicate in John 17:15. The elders do seem to be human beings from ethnic groups all over the world.<sup>113</sup> But even if they represent the church and only the church, their presence in heaven does not signify that all they represent are there.
- They allege that 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 teaches an imminent *parousia*/Rapture because the Lord could not come like a thief if there were signs first.. But the passage does not discuss—does not even mention—the Rapture or *parousia*. Instead, it discusses only the Day of the Lord. And the “imminence” language it uses comes right out of the Gospels, where it refers to the Second Coming. (Compare 1 Thessalonians 5 to Matthew 24.)
- They propose that the removal of the restrainer in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 must be the Rapture. But the apostle does not link the Rapture to the restrainer. Instead, he links it to the Lord’s *parousia* (v. 1), which he locates within the Day of the Lord (v. 8). That Day, and all it contains (including the *parousia*), cannot begin until the restrainer moves aside so that lawlessness can mature. Apparently the restrainer is God Himself and His purposes. Rather than being taken away, He steps aside, as the Greek implies.
- They argue that years must elapse after the Rapture for many people to get converted and enter the kingdom unglorified. If the kingdom began with only people just glorified in the Rapture, such people cannot marry or have children (Luke 20:34-36). In that case Satan would have no one to deceive at the end of the millennium. Instead, many will be converted immediately after Jesus’ return (Zech. 12:10; 13:1).

The reason Dispensationalists accept doubtful evidences for a pretribulation Rapture has to do with their concept of the church. In short, they consider that the church is destined to rule with Christ but Israel is to be ruled over. They call the church “heavenly” but Israel “earthly.” Instead, the church is Messiah’s entire kingdom assembly, destined to include Israel and other saved nations. Indeed, God will fulfill His special promises to Israel. But otherwise there will be no essential difference between them and other saints. And no reason to snatch all the saints away before the final Tribulation begins.

## Appendix C

### Will God Torment the Wicked Forever?

See my [“Does the Bible Teach that All Men Are Immortal?”](#)

*“And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image...” (Rev. 14:11)*

*The devil, the Beast, and the false prophet “will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” (Rev. 20:10)*

This picture of the wicked’s doom is quite different from the one in Matthew 3:12 and 13:30. There John the Baptist, then Jesus, used the Greek verb for “**burning up** the chaff.” When chaff or people are “burned up,” they do not survive. But these Beast-worshipers and their leaders pictured in Revelation never seem to burn up. They are tormented in fire for ever. An unthinkable description of inescapable and continual torture! Must its time element be interpreted literally? Many Christian statements of faith assume that it must. Reportedly, this doctrine is the main reason many people (such as, Charles Darwin) have rejected Christianity.

There are many New Testament pictures of ultimate punishment, but only these two texts make it unending. An unquenchable fire does not. Several texts (such as Mark 9:48) quote or allude to the picture in Isaiah 66:24: “And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched....” That verse does not imply continuing consciousness of “the dead bodies” but their unrelenting destruction. Not unceasing torture but God “burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:12).

To reiterate, no passage before Revelation clearly pictures the wicked living forever in torment. That includes the Lord’s parable about the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The formerly rich man finds himself in continual agony in the fire in Hades (16:23-24, Greek). But continual is not necessarily unending. Furthermore, the parable is not designed to teach standard doctrine. It pictures the man and Lazarus each with a body right after death—not waiting for the resurrection. He is being tormented—not waiting for the judgment. He sees Lazarus and Father Abraham, and converses with the latter, across the “great chasm.” He is not “outside, [in] the darkness” (Matt. 8:12; 22:13). The timing in Revelation 20:11-15 is quite different. It affirms that God will raise the dead (giving them bodies) and judge them before casting them into the fire.

Nevertheless, Revelation 14:11 and 20:10 do picture unending torment. But there are several reasons not to take them literally. Following are three of them. For much more discussion of the issues and the relevant Scriptures, see my writing [“Does the Bible Teach that All Men Are Immortal?”](#)

- Man is not naturally immortal. Therefore, he will come to an end unless God intervenes. Equating “immortality” with “eternal life,” Romans 2 says that God will grant it only to those who seek it rightly (v. 7). No passage says He will keep some alive forever in order to punish them. At most, that could only be an inference.

- God is just and fair and will not punish all alike or forever. He is “compassionate and gracious...slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness...” (Exod. 34:5-7 and several parallels). “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). Isaiah 28:23-29 gives examples of how His judgment is measured:

<sup>28</sup> Grain must be ground to make bread;  
 so one does not go on threshing it forever.  
 The wheels of a threshing cart may be rolled over it,  
 but one does not use horses to grind grain.

<sup>29</sup> All this also comes from the LORD Almighty,  
 whose plan is wonderful,  
 whose wisdom is magnificent.

Since He “will give to each person according to what he has done” (Rom. 2:6), punishment will vary. Some “will be beaten with many blows” but others with “few blows” (Luke 12:47-48). Neither the few blows nor the many blows will rain down forever.

- Parallel passages show that the Revelation descriptions are hyperbolic (an exaggeration for effect). Consider “the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever.” The same fate is described for the city/prostitute Babylon in 19:3: “The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.” Not only is Babylon pictured as burning forever—she will never again be inhabited (Rev. 18:2, 21-23; echoing predictions in Jer. 50:39-40 and 51:26, 29, 37, 43, 62). These same pictures had been combined in the prophecy about Edom in Isaiah 34:9-10:

9 Edom’s streams will be turned into pitch,  
 her dust into burning sulfur;  
 her land will become blazing pitch!

10 It will not be quenched night and day;  
 its smoke will rise forever.

From generation to generation it will lie desolate;  
 no one will ever pass through it again.

However, these prophecies picture as permanent a reality that will change. How do we know that? By comparing them to more comprehensive or less figurative prophecies. In this case, when the first earth “passes away” (Rev. 21:1), God will make “everything new” (21:5). “[T]he earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9b). That majestic holy flood will cover even Edom and Babylon. It will even “swallow up death forever” (Isa. 25:8; Rev. 21:4). No suffering sinners or burning bodies will remain, only “the kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:27-28).

## Appendix D

### The Amillennial/Recapitulation View of Revelation 20

**The structure of Revelation 6-19.** As I have shown, those chapters have a solid structure leading to the Lord's return and rule in chapters 19-20.<sup>114</sup> Their backbone is three series of consecutive judgments inseparably linked together: seven seals, then seven trumpets, then seven bowls. The seals keep God's scroll (probably a title deed) closed to all but His worthy heir: Jesus, the Lion and the Lamb. After the Lamb breaks the seals and opens the scroll, all seven trumpets get sounded in order. The last trumpet, which is the last of three "woes," consists of the final series, the seven bowls. Those bowls are quickly poured out to complete God's wrath. The last bowl elicits "a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'It is done!'" (16:17). Babylon falls (chs. 17-18), which triggers *hallelujahs* because the Lord can come to rule (19:1-10).

That is the goal of all the judgments: the King's coming back to earth in glory (1:7). He comes with heavenly armies to "rule...with an iron scepter." He defeats His enemies and disposes of the wicked leaders: the Beast, the false prophet, and Satan (19:11 to 20:3). Faithful martyrs and others are raised, "who have part in the first resurrection," and rule with the King "a thousand years" (20:4-6). After that, "Satan will be released from his prison" and will lead in a final rebellion. When that is quashed, there is another resurrection and final judgment (20:7-15). The millennial stage of the kingdom is superseded by the perfected "new heaven and new earth" (chs. 21-22).

Thus, Revelation 6-19 show a constant goal and relentless progress toward it: the Lord's coming and kingdom. There is an occasional shout of anticipation as the kingdom draws nearer, but rarely a flashback or a flash forward.

**A different structure?** Amillennialists require a different view of the structure in Revelation, one which justifies their changing the apparent time and character of the millennium. They want to show that 20:1-4 takes place *before* the judgments in the previous chapters and pictures a spiritual kingdom the Lord began at His first advent. Accordingly, Riddlebarger argues for a structure of recapitulations.

Revelation contains a series of visions, each of which functions like a different camera angle looking at the same event. Therefore, the order in which the various visions contained in Revelation are recounted by John does not necessarily reflect the order of historical occurrence of the reality which those visions symbolize. This is what is known as "recapitulation," in which the same basic pattern is repeated in a variety of formulations.... Revelation 20 may, in fact, not be describing events which come chronologically after those recorded in Revelation 19 but events which are contemporaneous with them.... Revelation is a series of consecutive visions, each depicting the course of the present age from a different perspective (recapitulation).... (Riddlebarger, pp. 200-206)

So Riddlebarger thinks that by recapitulation each vision or series in Revelation depicts "*the course of the present age* from a different perspective." If it describes "the *present age*" rather



than “what must take place *after this*” (4:1; 1:19), his structure affects the whole book. How does he try to prove it? Only by alleging an “obvious parallelism between chapters 12 and 20 of Revelation....Although they are not identical”—and here he quotes Beale—“they depict the same events and mutually interpret one another.”<sup>115</sup> Consider the two examples he gives.

**First example: Does 20:1-6 recapitulate 12:7-11?** He lists seven supposedly “same events” to prove that these are the same scene. The “events” in 12:7-11 are the final part of the “Woman and the Dragon” story, which I understand to feature Israel and Satan. To show his argument succinctly, I will bold some *verbal* and *conceptual* parallels.

In 12:7-9 **Satan the dragon** (“who **leads the whole world astray**”) and his angels are defeated in **heavenly** warfare and “**hurled** to the earth.” This is heralded as a sign that salvation and **the kingdom** “have come” (12:10). The saints, **faithful to God**, have overcome their accuser (12:10-11), who is “filled with fury because he knows that **his time is short**” (12:12). The dragon redoubles his pursuit of the woman and her offspring (12:13-17).

What are some similarities in Revelation 20? I will bold them. An angel comes **from heaven** to lay hold of **the dragon, Satan**, bind him, and **throw him** into the Abyss (20:1-3a). There he must stay a thousand years (while Christ and the **faithful** saints **rule**) until he is “set free **for a short time**” (20:3b) and allowed to “**deceive the nations**” (20:3, 7).

But such similarities do not prove identity. Instead, the passages are like separate scenes in a great drama. The same participants (such as, the dragon, angels, saints) act in the same settings (heaven and earth), looking to the same ultimate outcome. But the acts keep changing. In spite of likenesses between chapters 12 and 20, the differences are greater (Riddlebarger discusses none of these differences). Consider just two of the items that are alike but different. Why equate them?

- In 12:9 Satan is cast down from heaven to earth, where he persecutes the woman. In contrast, in 20:3 he is cast from earth into the Abyss, where he stays a thousand years, persecuting no one.
- In 12:10 “a loud voice” predicts the kingdom after Satan is cast down, but does not affirm its presence nor the Lord’s return. In contrast, 20:1-6 immediately follows His return and affirms a thousand year kingdom six times! Riddlebarger tries to make this a kingdom *in heaven* until Christ comes in glory.<sup>116</sup> That view quite detaches the passage from its earthly context before and after. It also disregards repeated promises that the saints “will reign *on the earth*” (5:10; cf. 2:26). Most important, the only coming of Christ to rule in this context is at the end of chapter 19. There is not even a suggestion that He will come, as amillennialists assume, at the end of the thousand years.

**Second example: Does 20:7-10 recapitulate 19:11-21?** This is Riddlebarger’s second example to prove recapitulation. He asserts that “the two battles depicted in Revelation 19:11-21 and Revelation 20:7-10 are one and the same event, each depicted from different redemptive-histori-

cal ‘camera angles.’” Here are some arguments by which he tries to equate them. Since the battle in 20:7-10 comes at the end of the millennium, he first tries to disconnect it from the Lord’s Second Coming in 19:11-21.

- He claims that the beginning of Revelation 20 does not logically follow the end of chapter 19 in time. For one thing, he considers the action too mild; when Jesus comes in glory, He will not just bind the devil but destroy him. Furthermore, here Satan gets “bound for the express purpose of being prevented from deceiving the nations.” That would make no sense, he says, if Jesus had just judged the nations. “What remains of the nations to be protected from Satanic deception?”<sup>117</sup> In other words, he thinks the Lord would leave no nations capable of being corrupted. For these reasons he argues that the binding of Satan must have happened at Jesus’ first advent and will continue throughout this “millennium” that started then. The millennium will close with the rebellion of 20:7-10 and its battle, which Riddlebarger thinks recaps the one in chapter 19. Surely he feels uneasy that the main event according to his timetable, the Lord’s coming in glory, is quite missing from this account!
- He claims that both battle accounts fulfill Ezekiel 38-39. Ezekiel 39:17-20 invites birds and animals “to feast upon the remains of God’s defeated enemy...” Riddlebarger declares that issuing the same invitation in Revelation 19:17-18, 21 shows it to be the fulfillment. So does calling the rebels “Gog and Magog” in 20:8, as in Ezekiel. And the accounts in Revelation both have fire.
- Since the last bowl fulfills God’s wrath, Riddlebarger decides there can be no rebellion a thousand years later to ignite His wrath again. That simply implies that the end of pre-kingdom wrath guarantees a perfected kingdom from the start. But God has revealed otherwise.

In his “Exposition of Revelation 20:1-10” (pp. 206-226), Riddlebarger begins by discussing problems the dispensational view creates. Their millennium has unglorified saints after Jesus returns and judges, final conflict and revolt rather than absolute peace, “a return to the Old Testament redemptive economy,” and requires two resurrections instead of one. Discussion of these issues would fill many more pages.

## The Amillennial View of Revelation 20

Facts as most amillennialists see them.

**Jesus promised to return and set up a glorious kingdom, not the millennium.** That glorious kingdom will start with the general resurrection (of all the dead) and judgment, and will be eternal. In contrast, those events will take place *after* the millennium, which itself will end in rebellion. The kingdom Jesus promised will be the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21-22.

**So what is the millennium?** A symbol for the spiritual form of kingdom Jesus established at His first coming. In it He has now been ruling (from heaven) nearly two thousand years, until time comes for His glorious rule. Look at some Scriptural evidence that Revelation 20:1-6 refers to His first coming.

**“An angel...seized...Satan, and bound him” (Rev. 20:1-3).** This reflects what Jesus said about Satan on certain occasions.

- How can anyone “enter the strong man’s house and carry off his possessions,” as Jesus was doing, “unless he first ties up the strong man?” (Matt. 12:28-29).
- When His heralds reported their power over demons, He said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18).
- Speaking of His coming death and resurrection, Jesus claimed, “Now is the time for judgment on this world. Now the prince of this world will be driven out” (John 12:31).

**“The saints came to life and reigned with Christ” (Rev. 20:4-6).**

- Jesus began to reign. He implied so by preaching the kingdom (e.g., Matt. 4:16; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 10:7, 9). He stated it clearly: “the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28b). He proved it by His victories over Satan (see above). He now rules from heaven (Acts 2:29-36).
- Saints are ruling with Him. “They came to life” in “the first resurrection” (Rev. 20:4-6), which refers to their conversion and spiritual renewal. It cannot mean their bodily resurrection, predicted in 20:5b and implied in 20:12-13; because that will take place in connection with the one judgment (see Matt. 13:40-43; 25:31-46; Rom. 2:1-16; 2 Thess. 1:5-10).

In other words, Revelation 20:1-6 is already being fulfilled. Therefore, it does not follow *in time* the passage just before it (19:11-21), which describes Jesus’ Second Coming.

**New heaven and new earth.** At the end of this age, Satan will be released (20:7). He will deceive the nations and lead them to rebel, thus bringing to an end the present form of the kingdom (20:8-9a). At that time the Lord will come back—as implied though not mentioned (20:9b). He will first defeat the rebellion (20:9b-10). Then He will raise all the dead bodily and make the final judgment of all men (20:11-15). After that, He will establish the glorious and eternal “new heaven and new earth,” in which He will rule forever.

## Appendix E

### The New Heaven & New Earth Begin at the Millennium

(See my separate writing, "[A New Heaven & a New Earth.](#)")

*“Behold, I will create  
new heavens and a new earth.  
The former things will not be remembered,  
nor will they come to mind...  
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight  
and its people a joy...  
he who dies at a hundred  
will be thought a mere youth...  
The wolf and the lamb will feed together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,  
but dust will be the serpent's food.  
They will neither harm nor destroy  
on all my holy mountain,”  
says the LORD.  
(Isaiah 65:17, 18, 20, 25)*

*“As the new heavens and the new earth that I make  
will endure before me,” declares the LORD,  
“so will your name and descendants endure.”  
(Isaiah 66:22)*

*But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward  
to a new heaven and a new earth,  
the home of righteousness.  
(2 Peter 3:13)*

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,  
for the first heaven and the first earth  
had passed away,  
and there was no longer any sea.  
(Rev. 21:1)*

### The Continuity & Discontinuity Views

**Summary of the continuity view.**<sup>118</sup> Do not neglect to read the four passages quoted above. Only in them does the Bible use the title “new heaven(s) and new earth,” which I will also call the “new world.” As the first Isaiah passage (in Isa. 65) clearly shows, that new world begins at the millennium, when there will still be death. We can call this the continuity view, because it implies that the eternal state is a continuation of the millennium. Both are stages of the eternal kingdom Jesus promised to establish when He returns in glory (inaugurating the age to come).

The Book of Revelation previews the fulfillment of His promise. It sketches the transitional stage, the millennium, in chapter 20. Then it paints both stages (transitional and perfected) with more detail in chapters 21-22. The title “new heaven and new earth” (Rev. 21:1) applies to both stages, although the Isaiah passages describe only the transitional stage. That millennium will be like the majestic entrance hall to an even grander building. Some things will already be eternal in the millennium, but others will not be eternal until the thousand years have passed. By then everything will be “new” (21:5). Study this continuity view in chart H.

CHART H The New Heaven & New Earth, Continuity View		
The Present Age The Present Heavens & Earth	The Age to Come, Messiah’s Kingdom The New Heaven & New Earth →	
“He waits for his enemies to be made his footstool.” (Heb. 10:13)  We “wait for [God’s] Son from heaven.” (1 Thess. 1:10)	Millennium	Eternal State →
	Transitional stage Sketched in Revelation 20	Perfected stage → Both stages mixed in Revelation 21-22

Messiah’s schedule for renewing all things can be seen in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, which lists three steps in the process of defeating death. The first step was Messiah’s own resurrection as “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (15:20). The second and third steps will take place at the beginning and end of the millennium. They are both mentioned in succession in verse 23. Greek *epeita* and *eita* each introduces an event later in a series, not simultaneous events.<sup>119</sup>

**Then** [Gr. *epeita*], **when he comes**, those who belong to him. **Then** [Gr. *eita*, later] **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...When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him. (1 Cor. 15:23b-26, 28)

This passage shows that the Son will come and reign as mediator until all enemies, even death, have been completely subdued. Even death will finally be “thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14). Then He can turn the perfected kingdom over to the Father.<sup>120</sup> Please study chart I, which depicts those three steps in defeating death, and the stage after each step.

<b>CHART I Three Steps in Defeating Death to Perfect a New World</b> (These steps are from 1 Cor. 15:20-28.)					
The Present Heavens & Earth (2 Peter 3:7)  in “the Present Age” (Eph. 1:21)		The New Heaven & New Earth (2 Peter 3:13)  in “the Age to Come” (that is, the kingdom, Eph. 1:21)			
		Millennium (transitional phase)			Eternal State→ (perfected phase)
Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
Messiah was raised as firstfruits.	He waits and we wait.	“Then [ <i>epeita</i> ], when he comes, those who belong to him” will be raised.	“ <b>He must reign</b> until he has put all his enemies under his feet.”	“Then [ <i>eita</i> ] the end will come,” when He destroys death, the last enemy. Then He “hands over the kingdom to... the Father.”	The Son will be subject to the Father and reign with Him.

**The discontinuity view.** All premillennialists agree that Messiah’s “thousand-year” rule is still future and literal. But not all agree with the continuity view, that it is only the first stage of an eternal kingdom. Some of them usually speak of it as unrelated to the new heaven and new earth, which they limit to Revelation 21-22. They believe it is, in effect, the last of the dispensations, both beginning and ending in Revelation 20. The new world will completely replace it. To them, most biblical passages about the kingdom refer to the millennium but not to the new world. They are confident that John himself makes this distinction. He does not even mention the new world until Revelation 21, after the millennium has been sketched.

One who usually so teaches is John F. Walvoord, in his commentary on Revelation. He finds evidence for his discontinuity view in Revelation 20:11, which says, “Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.” Taking that description as literal and absolute, Walvoord comments:

The most natural interpretation of the fact that earth and heaven flee away is that the present earth and heaven are destroyed and will be replaced by the new heaven and new earth. This is also confirmed by the additional statement in 21:1 where John sees a new heaven and a new earth replacing the first heaven and the first earth which have passed away. Frequent references in the Bible seem to anticipate this future time when the pres-

ent world will be destroyed (Matt. 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17; 21:33; II Peter 3:10). According to this last reference, II Peter 3:10, “The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” Peter goes on to say, “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?” (II Peter 3:11)...Further, it would be most natural that the present earth and heaven, the scene of the struggle with Satan and sin, should be displaced by an entirely new order suited for eternity.<sup>121</sup>

Note the other five Scriptural references Walvoord here gives as evidence that “the present world will be destroyed” absolutely.<sup>122</sup> They all speak about heaven and earth. One of them (Luke 16:17) does not affirm that this world can disappear but instead seems to deny it. The other four, however, do seem to affirm some such thing. Three of them all quote the same words from Jesus’ prophetic discourse: “Heaven and earth will pass away.” The last of the five passages is 2 Peter 3:10. This one paints a picture of the mighty melt-down that will disintegrate and destroy the earth and its works. As Walvoord interprets it, they will simply vanish, leaving nothing; then the new heaven and new earth will start over. Discontinuity!

Walvoord considers his general interpretation of 2 Peter 3 incontrovertible. Therefore, he scorns J.B. Smith’s “rather astonishing conclusion.” Smith avers, says Walvoord, “that the language employed does not signify ‘the vanishing of the former heaven and earth into nothing.’” Instead, Smith believes that enough will remain that the new heaven and new earth will be the old ones renewed. Rather than scorning Smith, let us consider some Scriptural reasons favoring his view. I will begin with reasons in Peter’s last chapter.

### Arguments for the Continuity View

**1. The new heaven and new earth is the Christian hope and is identified as the millennium.** Read the following excerpts from 2 Peter 3, noticing the bolded items. Since Peter calls the new world our hope, it must be relatively near, not an additional thousand years after Jesus’ coming.

Where is this coming he promised?...But **the day of the Lord will come like a thief.** The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you **look forward to the day of God.**...That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire....But in keeping with his promise **we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth,** the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since **you are looking forward** to this, make every effort to be found spotless.... (2 Peter 3:4, 10-14)

Like other passages (cf. 1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5; Luke 17:24, 30), this one says we are looking for “the day of the Lord [or, of God].”<sup>123</sup> This time the label Peter uses for our hope is “**a new heaven**

**and a new earth.”** He gets it from Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22, in which it clearly described “millennial” conditions, including death.<sup>124</sup> By quoting Isaiah’s term, Peter and the Revelation both identify our hope with Isaiah’s. Since Isaiah’s hope began with the millennium, so does ours. Peter was urging us to look for Jesus to return and establish His kingdom, not for something different a thousand years later.<sup>125</sup> Since Revelation does not use the title until 21:1, we must conclude that it belongs to both stages of the kingdom. (Later we will consider Peter’s claim that “everything will be destroyed” before the new world.)

**2. The Lord’s kingdom, once started, will continue forever.** Is any Bible teacher unaware that God promised Messiah, His royal Son, an eternal kingdom on earth (Ps. 2:8; cf. Rev. 5)? Following are some samples showing the duration of His kingdom:

- Daniel 2:44, “a kingdom that will never be destroyed...it will itself endure forever.”
- Daniel 7:14, “an everlasting dominion that will not pass away...will never be destroyed.”
- Daniel 7:24, “Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.”
- Isaiah 9:7, “Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom...from that time on and forever.”
- Isaiah 66:22, “‘The new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,’ declares the LORD.”
- Luke 1:32-33, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”
- Hebrews 12:28, “a kingdom that cannot be shaken.”
- 2 Peter 1:11, “the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Messiah.”
- Revelation 22:5, “they will reign for ever and ever.”

Such prophecies all agree that Messiah and/or His people will reign forever. The kingdom will be His inheritance (see Psa. 2:8, Rev. 5). When He finally comes to claim it, it will not last just a thousand years but forever.<sup>126</sup> Most of these prophecies referred to what we now call millennial conditions. That was what Isaiah finally called the new world and said that it “will endure.” It would not endure if it lasted only a thousand years—but only if there is continuity between its initial/transitional phase and its perfected phase.

**3. Peter’s description of the present world’s “destruction” is hyperbolic.** That destruction will not be completely literal or absolute. We know that because of similar elements when the original world was destroyed. There was continuity between that world (stage 1) and the present world (stage 2). There will be similar continuity between the present world and the new heaven and earth (stage 3).



- Stage 1 was the original “heavens...and...earth” (2 Pet. 3:5), described in Genesis 1. That stage ended in the flood, when “the world of that time was deluged and **destroyed**” (3:6; see Gen. 6-7). Though that stage “was **destroyed,**” the world did not vanish. Instead, it was renewed, resulting in
- Stage 2, “the present heavens and earth...reserved for fire” (3:7). This present stage will also be “destroyed.” “The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements **will be destroyed by fire**” (3:10). But instead of their disappearing, God, “in keeping with his promise,” will bring
- Stage 3, “a new heaven and a new earth” (3:13). If this change is analogous to the change from stage 1, the world will be renewed but not replaced. If so, Peter’s language of destruction is hyperbolic, not fully literal. Relative, not absolute.

You have just seen Scriptural arguments that the new heaven and new earth will begin with the millennium. Now we are considering Peter’s claim that “everything will be destroyed” before that. We should not press that destruction language too strongly or in isolation from other Scriptures. We must allow for apocalyptic hyperbole there, as well as in Revelation and similar prophecies.<sup>127</sup>

We who believe in “literal” interpretation must not deny poetic figures. Many passages in psalms and prophecies are designed to evoke feelings more than to provoke analysis. For examples, read Psalm 18:4-15 and Jeremiah 4:23-26. Revelation has passages comparable to 2 Peter 3. One is under the sixth seal when the sky and earth seemed to flee: “The stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree....The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place” (Rev. 6:13-14). Yet, the “removed” mountains were still present in the next verses (6:15-16). In fact, “every island...and the mountains” were still there in 16:20, when they seemed to disappear again. Yet again, “earth and sky fled” at 20:11; but the “sea” was still present two verses later (20:13).<sup>128</sup>

**More Old Testament examples.** George Peters points out that the Bible often expresses “universality when limitations were intended.” One example he cites is in Genesis 6:7, 13, 17. In the flood God was “going to put an end to all people...destroy both them and the earth.” Yet, Noah’s family and the (renewed) earth survived. Some Scriptures use “equally as strong language” as the apostle Peter’s for non-absolute destruction.<sup>129</sup> For example, Nahum 1:5-6 describes in powerful poetry the destruction of Nineveh (1:8): “the mountains quake...the hills melt away...His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered.” Isaiah 24:1-3 and 17-20 also describe the results of God’s wrath in absolute and poetic—not literal—language. This Great Tribulation scene leads to a unique Old Testament outline of the millennial stage of His reign (24:21-23).

- See, the LORD is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it...The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered. (Isa. 24:1-3)
- The floodgates of the heavens are opened, the foundations of the earth shake. The earth is broken up, the earth is split asunder, the earth is thoroughly shaken. The earth reels like a drunkard...it falls—never to rise again. (24:17-20)

- In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above....They will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days....The LORD Almighty will reign....” (24:21-23)

**4. The Bible teaches that this creation will be renewed, not completely destroyed.** God’s revealed plan is to reverse the curse, not to destroy His created world and make a new one that was never cursed. This plan is obvious in many biblical promises and should be assumed in others, such as 2 Peter 3. Take Romans 8:19-23 as an example.

19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Renewal is just what Messiah and the apostles promised for His Second Coming. In Matthew 19:28 the Lord spoke of “**the renewal of all things**, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne....” In Acts 3:21 the apostle preached that “He [Messiah] must remain in heaven until the time comes for **God to restore everything, as he promised** long ago through his holy prophets.”<sup>130</sup>

**5. The fire Peter predicts will help prepare for the kingdom.** That fire will cleanse before the kingdom starts, not afterward. The discontinuity view, as stated by Walvoord, has to reach an opposite conclusion. He first admits what I said about the first three references to the new world.

The fact that millennial truths are mentioned in the same context in all three of these major references has often confused expositors. However, it is a common principle in prophecy to bring together events that are distantly related chronologically....Second Peter 3:10-13 refers to the day of the Lord beginning before the millennium, as well as to the destruction of the heavens and the earth with fire at the end of the millennium.<sup>131</sup>

There seems to be only one reason for Walvoord to put the “fire at the end of the millennium.” That is because he takes Peter’s destruction language absolutely. Instead, as we have already discussed, Peter’s language is typically poetic. So there is nothing to prevent seeing the fire as pre-kingdom. Among many examples of this factor, consider Deuteronomy 32:22. God’s fire “will devour the earth”; yet, the land, the Jews, and the nations will survive. Isaiah 66:15-16 also describes the pre-kingdom fire. “See, the Lord is coming with fire...he will bring down his anger with fury and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword the Lord will execute judgment....”<sup>132</sup> There are similar New Testament passages, such as, 2 Thessaloni-

ans 1:7 (“when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire”) and Hebrews 10:27 (“raging fire that will consume the enemies of God”).

George Peters says that the fire is **both** literal and figurative. Like the flood, it will destroy governments as well as matter. He says the apostles were cautious in expressing this. “To avoid bitter animosity and persecution,” they used “prophetic” (his term for figurative) language.<sup>133</sup>

**6. The eternal state will be like the millennium in many ways.** It will not be as different from it as many think. George Peters points out that Revelation 21-22 has the same factors as in many millennial prophecies. (Emphasis is his.)

By comparing Rev[elation] chs. 21 and 22 with the Millennial prophecies, as e.g. Isa[iah] chs. 60 and 54, keeping in view the connection of the latter with the Advent and the marriage, we are at no loss to see why, under the teaching of inspired men, the Early Church so universally held that all these prophecies portrayed *a New Jerusalem state here on the earth in the Millennial age*. It seems almost strange that any other opinion can be entertained, when the Spirit employs *precisely the same language*, presents *the same ideas*, etc., in all these prophecies. If the passages alluded to are compared, such is *the similarity* of blessing, of events, of deliverance, etc., that they necessarily must—if there is propriety in language—be applied to *the same period of time*.... To perfect this identity, *the same blessings* enjoyed in the New Jerusalem state *are also attributed* to the Millennial era; such as the tabernacle of God with men, wiping away all tears, no more death, no sorrow, crying, and pain, making all things new, the glory of God, the open gates, the brightness that needs no sun, the river and the tree of life, no more curse, the throne of God and the Lamb, the beholding of His face, the name in the forehead, no night, the reigning, etc.<sup>134</sup>

Walvoord often refers to what he considers a major difference between the millennium and the eternal state: “There was no longer any sea” (Rev. 21:1). Several Old Testament prophecies picture seas in the future kingdom (e.g., Pss. 8:8; 72:8; 89:35; Isa. 60:5; Ezek. 47:15-20; 48:28; Zech. 9:10; 14:8). Others picture rivers that need seas to empty into. Even the “living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter” (Zech. 14:8). Is this not the same as “the river of the water of life” in Revelation 22:1-2, which Walvoord acknowledges as the eternal state? Yet, he considers “no sea” literal and a proof of discontinuity. However, it is more likely that “sea” in 21:1, as commonly in the Bible, is used metaphorically rather than literally. It often symbolizes agitation and dangerous, unsettled conditions of the nations (Dan. 7:2; Psa. 65:7; 93:3, 4; Isa. 57:20-21; Hab. 3:8; Rev. 13:1). The result of no more “sea” would be that wars and unrest will cease. That will characterize both the transitional and perfected state of the kingdom.

## Appendix F

### The Relationship between the Old & New Jerusalem

**1. Jesus Messiah will require a capital city (which He will “marry”).** That is because His kingdom, as revealed in the Bible, will be in a material world filled with material human beings. God confirmed this plan by raising Jesus from the dead. Jesus continues to be a human being with a material body. Glorified but real. “Touch me and see,” He told the witnesses; “A ghost [Greek *spirit*] does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have” (Luke 24:39). His body, like all bodies, is limited in the space it occupies. That will not change when He comes back to rule. When He “comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will **sit on his throne** in heavenly glory” (Matt. 25:31). Since He is truly human, He will not be everywhere at once. He will rule from that throne in a central location, in His capital city. In that city will be concentrated supreme authority, special worship, and specified celebrations. A great many prophecies picture that worldwide kingdom based at one such city (e.g., Isa. 2:1-4; 60:1-14). Some of them adopt a common figure of speech for the king’s establishing his throne in a certain place: He “marries” that city (Isa. 54:5-8, 11; 62:4-5).

**2. Messiah’s capital must be Jerusalem.** According to the references just cited from Isaiah, the throne city will be Jerusalem (which Isaiah also called Zion). Why so? Because that is what God specified in His immutable and eternal covenants. Jesus must rule from “the throne of His father David” (Luke 1:32; 2 Sam. 7:13, 16). As Bible history and prophecy both agree, David’s throne belongs upon earth and in Jerusalem. See Psalm 89, which contrasts God’s throne in heaven (v. 14) to David’s throne on earth, “cast to the ground” (vv. 34-45). Centuries after God’s glory departed, Jesus still called “Jerusalem...the city of the Great King” (Matt. 5:35). Nearing His last days there, He lamented, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together...but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate” (Matt. 23:37-38). Indeed, God’s city rejected and killed its King; and the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. Nevertheless, He had foreseen a better day coming: “you will **not see me again until you say**, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (23:39).

**3. Messiah’s capital will be the same Jerusalem that was previously unfaithful.** God had ruled from there over Israel for centuries. He had suspended His kingdom because of Jerusalem’s unfaithfulness, lamented in numerous prophecies. It was *those same prophecies* that also predicted Jerusalem’s restoration. Consider an example, Ezekiel 16. It rehearsed the whole story: “Confront Jerusalem with her detestable practices” (v. 2). In her continual “prostitution,” she was “more depraved” than Samaria and even than Sodom (vv. 46-48). Therefore, God warned, “I will deal with you as you deserve” (v. 59). “Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you” (v. 60). “You will know that I am the LORD” (v. 62). I will “make atonement for you for all you have done” (v. 63). Many such prophecies identify the coming capital with the same Mt. Zion and Jerusalem as before (e.g., Isa. 24:23; 60:14; Jer. 3:17; Zech. 2:10-13). The same city God withdrew from and overthrew (Isa. 1:25-26; 60:10-20; 62:1-4; Zech. 8:13-15, 22).

- 4. And yet His capital will be the “new Jerusalem.”** Many passages say so. For example:
- Hebrews 11 and 13 call it the eternal hope of all the saints. Abraham “was looking forward to **the city with foundations**, whose architect and builder is God” (11:10). He and his “descendants...did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance...they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he **has prepared a city for them**” (11:12-15). We all have that same hope. “For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are **looking for the city that is to come**” (13:14). Future, yet our relationship is already intimate: “The Jerusalem that is above...is our mother” (Gal. 4:26).
  - That city is “the Father’s house,” where our Lord went “to prepare a place for [us]” (John 14:2). Many think (by their tradition) that in the Rapture we will go up there. Instead, the Father’s house and our abode will come down here, where we and the Lord will reign.
  - Revelation 21:1 to 22:5 celebrates that city. John sees it coming down to its “wedding” with Messiah, then describes it. He sees the new “Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride” (21:2 and 10, echoing 3:12). Because it comes to earth, “the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them” (21:3). In 21:11 to 22:5 it is described as the throne city.
- 5. It is a city, not just a symbol.**
- It does not represent heaven. Instead, John sees it “coming down **out of heaven from God.**”
  - It does not normally represent its inhabitants (God’s saints). Occasionally it does (Rev. 19:8), as in the case of any city. (For example, “all New York City rejoiced...”) But normally, new Jerusalem and its inhabitants are considered as separate (even listed separately in Hebrews 12:22-23). For example, the nations and pure individuals will enter that city (Rev. 21:24-27). They will enjoy its water, its tree of life, and its light (Rev. 22:2-5). They *are not the city* but its citizens (Phil. 3:20).
- 6. How is it related to earthly Jerusalem?**
- It will be the same Jerusalem in its new form. When God promised to “**create** new heavens and a new earth” (Isa. 65:17), He also promised to “**create** Jerusalem to be a delight” (65:18). It will be new in the way we will be new—the same persons but new. “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:3-4). That’s when the real children of God will show up—and the real Jerusalem.
  - It will occupy the same place on earth. It really will be “Jerusalem,” not merely like it. As it comes down, it will not pause and remain suspended in the sky. Since it will be Messiah’s capital city containing David’s throne, it must rest on earth.
  - It will come down at the beginning of the millennium. Come down when it is time for the kingdom to begin, not a thousand years later. Come down “prepared as a bride” (Rev. 21:2), that is, *ready to be married*. The same time as announced in 19:7: “For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.” In both passages the wedding (king-

dom inauguration) is ready. So Revelation 21:1 is not subsequent in time to chapter 20 but recapitulates its time. See my "[A New Heaven & a New Earth](#)" or Appendix E (p. 68).

**7. These views were universal in the early church for over two hundred years.** I will cite examples from the following three Church Fathers, quoted by George N.H. Peters in *The Theocratic Kingdom*.<sup>135</sup> (a) Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, disciple of Polycarp, pupil of the apostle John. He says that the Christian inheritance, to be received at the resurrection, will be the Lord's kingdom on earth. (b) Justin Martyr, Apologist who asserts that all "orthodox" Christians have the same hope to be fulfilled after the resurrection. It will be the millennium centered in glorified (that is, new) Jerusalem and fulfilling God's promise of "new heavens and a new earth." Justin thus identifies the new world and the new Jerusalem (described in Revelation 21:1 to 22:5) as beginning at the millennium. (c) Tertullian, to the same effect as Justin.

a. Peters III:38 quotes Irenaeus (*Comp. Prop.* 142), martyred about A.D. 203:

"Thus, therefore, as God promised to Abraham *the inheritance of the earth*, and he received it not during the whole time he lived, it is necessary that he should receive it, together with his seed, that is, with such of them as fear God and believe in Him, *in the resurrection of the just*.... They will, *undoubtedly*, receive it at the res[urrection] of the just: for true and unchangeable is God; wherefore He also said, 'Blessed are the meek, *for they shall inherit the earth*.'"

b. Peters I:480 quotes Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho*, section 2<sup>136</sup>), martyred about A.D. 165:

"But I and whatsoever Christians are orthodox in all things do know that there will be a resurrection of the flesh, and a thousand years in the city of Jerusalem, built, adorned and enlarged, according as Ezekiel, Isaiah, and other prophets have promised. For Isaiah saith of this thousand years (ch. 65:17) 'Behold I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind; but be ye glad and rejoice in those which I create: for behold, I create Jerusalem to triumph, and my people to rejoice,' etc.... Whereof also our Lord spake when He said, that therein they shall neither marry, nor be given in marriage, but shall be equal with the angels, being made the sons of the resurrection of God."

c. Peters III:39 includes a quotation from Tertullian (source not given), who died about A.D. 230.<sup>137</sup>

...we are again forced to receive the Primitive Church view on the subject. It is scarcely necessary to repeat that the early Fathers all believed that those who had part in the first resurrection would enjoy the New Jerusalem in Messiah's Kingdom, as e.g. Tertullian has it, "in a city of divine workmanship, viz., Jerusalem brought down from heaven," which he tells us "John saw," etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Judgments related to the Second Coming seem previewed in 14:14-16, 17-20 (after other previews).

<sup>2</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God as Set Forth in the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), republished by BMH 1974.

John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966).

Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003).

Samuel E. Waldron, *The End Times Made Simple: How Could Everyone Be So Wrong about Biblical Prophecy?* (Santa Barbara: Calvary Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Making the millennium of Revelation 20 a present kingdom creates other problems. For example, it would require that the Lord's Second Coming must take place *after* the millennium. But Revelation only has it *before*.

<sup>4</sup> I thought Hebrews was mostly for Hebrews, and so was probably James. Though unaware of doing so, I even discounted the church-building sermons recorded in Acts. I supposed that my own understanding of John and Romans got the good news better.

<sup>5</sup> See the Foreword about Alva J. McClain and his book *The Greatness of the Kingdom*.

<sup>6</sup> God's title "King of the ages" (Rev. 15:3) alludes to His universal kingdom. He has His rights and sovereignty because He "created all things, and by [His] will they were created and have their being" (Rev. 4:11).

<sup>7</sup> Jewish definition of the kingdom. Many interpreters nowadays conclude that sacred history proved the Jews—even the apostles—wrong. They think the kingdom actually started, albeit in a form unforeseen in the prophecies. Using a few New Testament proof texts, they define it according to their own theology.

<sup>8</sup> Kingdom present? Many interpreters misunderstand the introduction to some of the parables: "The kingdom of heaven is like..." (Matt. 13:24, 31, 33, et al.). This phrase was often used by Jewish rabbis to introduce an aspect of their subject. The subject did not have to be the next thing mentioned. For example, in Matthew 13:24 the next thing after "is like" is the "man"; in 25:1 it is the "ten virgins." No one tries to make either the man or the virgins represent the kingdom. Neither is it necessary that the *present* aspect of each parable describe the kingdom. From the apostles' perspective, they would assume (rightly) in each case that the kingdom is the great consummation.

<sup>9</sup> "then enter his glory" (Luke 24:26). Messiah has already been "crowned with glory and honor" (Heb. 2:9). The world, of course, has not yet seen it, but will. "When the Son of Man comes **in his glory**, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne **in heavenly glory**" (Matt. 25:31).

<sup>10</sup> In Matthew chapters 14 to 28, the kingdom is consistently future. Here are two possible exceptions, in which NIV makes it seem present:

"I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes **are entering** the kingdom of God **ahead of you**" (Matt. 21:31b). This translation pictures a present kingdom being entered. But it misrepresents the Greek verb for what I have bolded [Greek *proagousin*]. The verb does not mean to enter but simply to go ahead, to move toward something. That meaning is clear in Matthew 28:7: "Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and **is going ahead of you** into Galilee.'" Going ahead does not indicate when (or even if) one will arrive.

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You **shut the kingdom** of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves **do not enter**, nor will you let those **enter** who are trying to" (Matt. 23:13). Indeed, this verse pictures the kingdom as available during the time when it was being offered. But due in great part to the religious leaders, no one entered at that time. McClain points out that they could not have prevented anyone's entering a purely spiritual kingdom. But from a human perspective they effectively closed the offer of the covenanted kingdom (got it "postponed").

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<sup>11</sup> Even late in Jesus' ministry, the kingdom was still near. As I said previously, some think that its nearness guaranteed that it would be inaugurated. But not so if it was near only in His Person! By rejecting Him, the Jews rejected the kingdom.

<sup>12</sup> The majority of serious commentaries (perhaps nearly all) now concur that Revelation was written in or about A.D. 95.

<sup>13</sup> Messiah. It is often helpful to change *Christ* to the equivalent Aramaic title, written *Messiah* in English. This is because *Christ* in our usage has lost its royal meaning, which *Messiah* retains. *Messiah* means the same as Hebrew *Mashiach*. They are a common title for kings in God's Old Testament kingdom. This title and its Greek equivalent *Cristos* literally mean "Anointed One." In Messianic Psalm 2, for example, *Mashiach* in Hebrew is used in verse 2. It is translated, as usual, to *Cristos* in the Greek Septuagint and to *Anointed One* in English versions. In the New Testament, however, most English versions do not translate *Cristos* but simply write *Christ*. For an example of this, look at the NIV translation of John 1:41b, Andrew's first witness to his brother Simon: "'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ)." The original of this verse has two forms of the same title: Aramaic *Messias* (written *Messiah*) and, in parentheses, Greek *Cristos*. Each form literally means Anointed One. But like most English versions, NIV translates neither one; it simply says them in English.

<sup>14</sup> "Coming soon." As pointed out in Revelation 1:1 and 1:3, the book **as a whole** "must soon take place." That includes His very public and glorious coming to rule (1:7 and chapter 22).

<sup>15</sup> It was not only the apostle Paul who showed this great interest in the Lord's coming and kingdom. In his last epistle Peter expressed exactly the same interest. See 2 Peter 1:11, 16; 3:3-13.

<sup>16</sup> "spiritual" kingdom. Waldron (in *The End Times...*, p. 74) says, "the kingdom has come...in a form unexpected by the Jews (and even John the Baptist)." As stated in my Foreword, I will often use Waldron to represent amillennial teaching.

<sup>17</sup> The verb for "**made it known**" (1:1) probably implies *clearness*, as in Acts 25:27 ("specifying") and 11:28. However, it sometimes connotes puzzling, symbolic language, such as in the ambiguous oracles of Delphi (cf. John 12:33). And that is what we sometimes get in Revelation.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 550.

<sup>19</sup> "The Old Testament Background of Revelation." That is chapter XI (pp. 101-116) of Merrill C. Tenney's book *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957). In it he explains

the difference between a citation, a quotation, and an allusion....A citation is a fairly exact reproduction of the words of the original text, accompanied by a statement of the fact that they are being quoted and by an identification of the source. A quotation is a general reproduction of the original text, sufficiently close to give the meaning of its thought and to establish unquestionably the passage from which it is taken....An allusion consists of one or more words which, by their peculiar character and general content are traceable to a known body of text, but which do not constitute a complete reproduction of any part of it. (p. 102)

These definitions help appreciate what Tenney says about the unusual procedure in Revelation:

Oddly enough, there is **not one direct citation** in Revelation from the Old Testament with a statement that it is quoted from a given passage; but a count of the **significant allusions** which are traceable both by verbal resemblance and by contextual connection to the Hebrew canon number **three hundred and forty-eight**. (p. 101, bolding added)

<sup>20</sup> Here is a sample of an enigmatic interpretation furnished by the book itself. The prostitute Babylon rides the Beast with "seven heads and ten horns....The seven heads are seven hills....They are also seven kings....The beast is an eighth king..." (17:3, 9, 10).

<sup>21</sup> Revelation 1:14 says of the Person who appeared to John, "His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow." (1:14). The "Ancient of Days" who appeared to Daniel also had white hair (Dan. 7:9). But though



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they both have the character thus symbolized, they are not the same Person. Only the One in Revelation, the Son, could say, “I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!” (Rev. 1:18).

<sup>22</sup> Kingdom future. Appendix A (p. 51) lists all passages mentioning the *basileia* (kingdom) in Acts and the Epistles. Nearly all of them, even Colossians 1:13, clearly must or easily can refer to the future.

<sup>23</sup> Luke 19:11-27. The crucial importance of this parable is considered in more detail, including a chart, in Appendix A (p. 51).

<sup>24</sup> Revelation 1:9. If the kingdom mentioned in this verse had already begun, it would be quite the opposite of the one described in prophecies. Those prophecies predict divine power, justice, and peace, not suffering.

<sup>25</sup> “in the Spirit.” Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 42-43.

<sup>26</sup> One popular interpretation of the churches in Revelation 2-3 is that they represent successive periods of church history. Proponents of this historical view say that Ephesus represents the earliest period and Laodicea (some say with Philadelphia), the latest. There is no consensus about any of the supposed time periods. In spite of interesting analogies, the view lacks Scriptural justification and seems contrived mostly to bolster certain theologies.

<sup>27</sup> For example, of all four Gospels, only Matthew mentions the universal church or local churches by that name. Mark, Luke, and John do not. The term is also absent from 2 Timothy, Titus, 2 Peter, 1 John, and 2 John.

<sup>28</sup> Alva J. McClain compares Daniel 7 to Revelation 4-5 in *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (see my Foreword), 451.

<sup>29</sup> The fact that the elders sing favors their being humans, because nowhere else are angels said to sing.

<sup>30</sup> There are no surviving original New Testament Greek manuscripts, but thousands of handwritten copies. Most of them date from the fifth century or later. Though there is substantial agreement, there are also various readings. How do we know which readings are most like the originals? By the science of textual criticism. For example, it groups manuscripts with similar readings into “families” and tries to determine their “family tree” and its history. It also weighs the external and internal evidence for competing readings—and decides which are heaviest. This process generally seems trustworthy. When a passage has alternate readings, textual specialists usually agree which reading was most likely the original. They choose the reading that seems to have the strongest external and/or internal support.

Biblical textual criticism began in earnest in 1881, after recent manuscript discoveries shook confidence in what was called the “Textus Receptus” (received text). The main “revised text” available is currently *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (United Bible Society, 1983).

<sup>31</sup> What reason do the UBS experts give for choosing in Revelation 5:9 a reading with virtually no textual support? They think it accounts for the origin of all the other readings. Bruce M. Metzger states their reasoning in *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition (NYC: American Bible Society, 1994), 666. The reading *to theo* is “to God” without *hemas* (‘us’). *Autous* means “them.”

Although the evidence for *to theo* is slight (A eth), this reading best accounts for the origin of the others... some scribes introduced *hemas* ... while others replaced *to theo* with *hemas*. Those who made the emendations, however, overlooked the unsuitability of *hemas* with *autous* in the following verse (where, indeed, the Textus Receptus reads *hemas*, but with quite inadequate authority).

<sup>32</sup> W.A. Criswell wrongfully asserts, “it is certainly foreign to the revelation of God that spirits should be clothed, should be crowned and should be seated.” *Expository Sermons on Revelation*, Five Volumes Complete and Unabridged in One (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), vol. 3 p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> Walvoord, *Revelation*, 106.

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<sup>34</sup> “These twenty-four elders are the redeemed saints of God. They number twenty-four, twice twelve, representing the twelve patriarchs of Israel and the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Together, they make up God’s redeemed society.” Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Revelation...*, 3:31.

<sup>35</sup> The promise of rulership for the tribe of Judah was first given in Genesis 49:8-12. That for the house of David, in 2 Samuel 7:11-16 (cf. Luke 1:26-33).

<sup>36</sup> See my early note explaining *Christ* and *Messiah* (Anointed One). God also called each anointed king from David’s line His “son,” even if he did wrong (see both thoughts in 2 Sam. 7:14).

<sup>37</sup> Riddlebarger, p. 201. Adherents of the frequent recapitulation theory, seeming to forget that Revelation was also a letter, exaggerate the importance of the apocalyptic style. They make symbols out of things that are not symbols (such as, most numbers). This enables them to claim that some of the incidents in Revelation are the same as others. As in Roman Catholicism, this approach makes non-experts forfeit to supposed experts.

<sup>38</sup> God’s wrath has various aspects. The Book of Revelation mostly deals with His cleansing the world in the future in order to establish His kingdom. Romans 1 shows a present aspect, namely, that He is already letting man ruin himself. Romans 2:8 promises a third and final aspect, “wrath and anger” for those “who reject the truth and follow evil.” The promise in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9 probably refers especially to that third aspect: “God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation.”

<sup>39</sup> In 7:14 the Greek for “the ones coming out of” is *hoi erchomenoi ek*. This articular participle with the “present” tense stem does not visualize a result but a process.

<sup>40</sup> In fact, some—though not all—amillennial writers even deny the obvious meaning of Romans 11:26, that “all Israel will be saved.” See my [“Will God Eternally Bless Ethnic Israel?: A Critique of ‘Replacement Theology.’”](#)

<sup>41</sup> By calling Jesus “that great Shepherd of the sheep,” Hebrews 13:20 suggests His style of leadership. The title *pastors* is the same word. Though church elders are called by that title only once (Eph. 4:11), they are exhorted to the same kind of work. Paul tells the elders at Ephesus to “be shepherds of the church of God” (Acts 20:28). As “chief shepherd,” says Peter, Jesus is an example to church elders who shepherd their flocks (1 Peter 5:4).

<sup>42</sup> God’s ten judgments on the Egyptians were also called “wonders” (e.g., Exod. 3:20; 11:9, 10) and “signs” (e.g., 7:3; 10:1, 2).

<sup>43</sup> Of the “mighty angel” in 10:1, John Phillips affirms that “this is no ordinary angel.” Instead, he says, such features as His being “clothed in swirling banks of cloud,” wearing “the rainbow on His brow,” and having “His face...as the sun” identify Him as Christ. His setting one foot in the sea and the other foot on the earth “is the formal assertion by Him of His right to reign. This claim has already been acknowledged in heaven (Rev 5); now it is asserted on earth. He claims dominion over all the world...” (*Exploring Revelation* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1974], 146-149.) So Phillips thinks the “angel” is Messiah, making a brief and unique trip to earth to stake His claim. If so, one would think He should appear publicly, creating a great stir. Of that there is no evidence. So more likely the vision is primarily for John to see and report—and the angel is not Messiah but His representative.

<sup>44</sup> For examples of proleptic verbs, see my comments and footnote about the meaning of the last trumpet.

<sup>45</sup> Walvoord, *Revelation*, 179.

<sup>46</sup> Various passages with equivalent measures indicate the actual “Great Tribulation” period. The woman is “taken care of for 1,260 days” (12:6). The “Gentiles will trample on the holy city for 42 months” (11:2). The Beast is given “authority for forty-two months” (13:5). With thirty-day months, these are all equivalent to the “time, times, and half a time” (that is, 3½ years) in Daniel 7:25 and 12:7 (cf. Dan. 12:11, 12). Such repetition strongly favors a literal interpretation of the numbers, as pointed out by McClain in *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 459:

That the figures here are intended to be understood literally seems clear from the fact that evidently the *same* period of persecution in Revelation has been designated in terms of days (12:6), months (13:5), and

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years (12:14). This one fact completely nullifies the year-day theory of prophetic interpretation. For the 1260 days here equals 42 months or 3½ years, and therefore certainly not 1260 years.

<sup>47</sup> McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 458.

<sup>48</sup> Revelation 11:18 reflects the normal New Testament teaching that personal judgment takes place at Jesus' Second Coming, not at our death. That judgment includes, among other things, awarding punishment to the wicked and positions of honor in the kingdom to the godly. (The parable in Luke 16:19-31 is anomalous in seeming to imply that personal judgment takes place at death. But like nearly all parables, it includes items that, if pressed, would contradict non-figurative teaching.) Another question is whether all the wicked will be judged on the same occasion. Premillennialists agree that there will be personal judgment both before and after the millennium.

<sup>49</sup> Revelation 11:15, 17. It is important to recognize the use of Greek "past" tenses for future events ("proleptic" use). Here are some examples in Revelation where the Greek aorist indicative (translation bolded) is so used.

10:7 "the mystery of God **will be accomplished**"

11:15 "The kingdom of the world **has become** the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah"

11:17 "You **have...begun** to reign"

12:10 "Now **have come** the salvation and...the kingdom"

14:8 "**Fallen is** Babylon the Great"

15:1 "with them God's wrath **is completed**"

19:6 "Our Lord God Almighty **reigns**"

Proleptic usage is common in Old Testament predictions, such as Isaiah 9:2-4 and 41:1-7. The verb "glorify" is used proleptically in John 13:31 and Romans 8:30.

<sup>50</sup> Many prophecies predict that terrible time for Israel. Jeremiah 30:7 says, "How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it."

<sup>51</sup> Here are other reasons we know that the woman in Revelation 12 is not Mary. (a) No Scripture suggests that the "pain as she was about to give birth" (12:2) might refer to Mary. (b) How could it be said of Mary that "she fled into the desert" (Rev. 12:6, 14)? (c) If she were Mary, who would the others be who are called "the rest of her offspring" and against whom the dragon makes war?

<sup>52</sup> See at 20:4-6 my comment about duration-of-time notices in Revelation.

<sup>53</sup> This and the next quotation are from John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 221-222. By "final judgment" he means the last in the series during the Tribulation, not at the end of the millennium.

<sup>54</sup> Walvoord's citation of Henry Alford is from *The Greek New Testament*, IV, 690-691. Walvoord hardly tries to defend his own view. His only argument for understanding the harvest as judgment is the word for *ripe* in Revelation 14:15. That word, he says, "has a bad connotation" as in Mark 3:1, 3; 11:20. But he does not mention John 4:35, where an equivalent word (in "ripe [literally *white*] for harvest") is used in a good sense.

<sup>55</sup> "King of the ages" (Rev. 15:3) is the same title as in 1 Timothy 1:17. NIV 2011 switches to the critical text, "King of the nations." Either one alludes to God's universal kingdom, as noted in my opening remarks.

<sup>56</sup> Saddam Hussein was rebuilding parts of Babylon for his own glory but came to an inglorious end.

<sup>57</sup> Calling a city by the name of a similar city is not unique. Jerusalem is "figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified" (Rev. 11:8).

<sup>58</sup> The use of "has come" (Greek *elthen*, past tense) in 19:7 is proleptic as in 11:15 and 12:10. As soon as the Lord comes (19:11 to 20:3), He will "marry" His capital (inaugurate His kingdom centered in Jerusalem).

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<sup>59</sup> It is a mistake to force the same pattern on all passages that speak of a bride for Messiah Jesus. For example, Ephesians 5 pictures the church not as awaiting marriage but already married to Him, already “one flesh” (Eph. 5:28-30). In 2 Corinthians 11:2 only one local church is in view. Only to the church at Corinth does the apostle say, “I promised you to one husband, to Messiah, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.”

<sup>60</sup> *Ekklesia* is usually rendered “church” in the New Testament. There it is first used in Matthew 16:18-19, where Jesus promised to build it and related it to His coming kingdom. The disciples would have understood it to mean the kingdom assembly, as in Psalm 22:22, quoted by Hebrews 2:12. The same term often designated Israel in the Old Testament *Septuagint*.

<sup>61</sup> 19:15, “he will rule them...” See 7:17 for comments on the verb here translated “rule.” This verb and cognate noun combine ruling and shepherding.

<sup>62</sup> Remember that Bible chapters and verses were not original but devised centuries later. In other words, we must combine or separate sentences or sections because of literary evidence, not because of their number tags. Revelation 20:1-3 could have been included at the end of chapter 19 just as well as the beginning of chapter 20.

<sup>63</sup> Amills believe the early church did not understand as well as amills do. Let me give evidence from my “Will God Eternally Bless Ethnic Israel? [A Critique of Replacement Theology](#).” There I quote from Bruce K. Waltke’s huge and erudite study, *An Old Testament Theology*. Several times he says things like the following (pp. 584-5, emphasis mine):

Second, **the primitive church**, lacking the teachings of Jesus and the illumination of the Spirit, **mistakenly thought along with all of Jewry** that the glories of Messiah Jesus would also be fulfilled literally in the land of Canaan.

<sup>64</sup> 20:1, 2, “the Abyss.” Used seven times in Revelation, here it is the prison where Satan will be held during the millennium. The NIV Study Bible comments at 9:1 that it is “conceived of as the subterranean abode of demonic hordes....The Greek word means ‘very deep’ or ‘bottomless,’ and is used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) to translate the Hebrew word for the primeval deep....”

<sup>65</sup> It seems by comparing Revelation 11:18 to John 5:28-29 that dead saints will be judged not at death but after the Lord returns and raises them.

<sup>66</sup> Later I will discuss the fact that Isaiah 65-66 and 2 Peter 3 call even millennial conditions the new heaven and new earth.

<sup>67</sup> Many premillennialists have a problematic view of the millennium. They recognize that Jesus will begin to reign *in the predicted form* when He returns, but not that *that reign* must be eternal. They simply consider the millennium the literal fulfillment of Israel’s “earthly” promises. If pressed, they would acknowledge that the “thousand years” was not clearly anticipated in the Old Testament as a distinct period. They should realize that it will be preliminary and transitional to the eternal state. Amillennialists, in contrast, believe that the “millennium” already started at Jesus’ first coming. Thus, it fulfills many Old Testament promises in a spiritual form, not in their plain meaning.

<sup>68</sup> Daniel 7:25-27 pictures the same sequence of events as Revelation 19 and 20. First, the Beast is killed; then the kingdom begins.

<sup>69</sup> Amillennialists often assume that a partial or analogical fulfillment takes the place of further or greater fulfillment. “Final”-type things were indeed being accomplished during Jesus’ first coming (John 12:31a). But that present fulfillment by no means outweighs the future aspects of those things. John 5:25 gives a sample of both aspects: “a time is coming [in the future] and has now come [present] when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.” Jesus proved that His voice could indeed give both spiritual life and physical life. But in no way did that displace the even greater resurrection that “is coming.” Similarly, Jesus at His first coming “tie[d] up the strong man” (Matt. 12:29). He “disarmed the powers and authorities” (Col. 2:15). Yet, we must continue to struggle against those powers (Eph. 6:11-12) until He returns. Satan is still “the ruler of the king-

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dom of the air” (Eph. 2:2). The victory at the Second Coming will be much more complete, as described in Revelation 20:2-3: “He **seized** the dragon...and **bound** him...**threw** him into the Abyss, and **locked and sealed** it over him.”

<sup>70</sup> Some who believe that Jesus inaugurated His kingdom feel justified in denying the material and political aspects predicted for it. Many such prophecies also promise that the nation Israel will be restored and honored, which amillennialists have usually reinterpreted to mean the church.

<sup>71</sup> We should not interpret words or phrases by what we want them to mean—but by their usage.

<sup>72</sup> 20:4, 5; “came to life.” There should be some clear indication if this expression is spiritual in one verse and physical in the next. It is even less likely that it means conversion both times. In that case, it would mean that everybody will end up converted!

<sup>73</sup> As noted earlier, the amillennial view requires that Jesus come in glory *after* the millennium. However, the Scripture text has only this premillennial coming.

<sup>74</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:24-26 says that Messiah will reign (separately from the Father) until He “hands over the kingdom to God the Father.” McClain (*The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 513) says that this passage succinctly describes the transition between Revelation 20 and 21,

the junction point between two worlds and between two kingdoms. It is the end of the “first” or “natural” order of things, and the beginning of the final order of things. Here also the Mediatorial Kingdom of our Lord ends, not by abolition, but by its mergence into the Universal Kingdom of God. Thus it is perpetuated forever, no longer as a separate entity, but in indissoluble union with the original Kingdom of God from which it sprang.

<sup>75</sup> Some think that both the Lord’s coming and the first resurrection will have yet another stage before the Tribulation. In that stage He will come only to get, glorify, and take away His saints. I discussed that belief in connection with chapter 4 and am about to discuss it again.

<sup>76</sup> As long as I thought that the Rapture must precede the Tribulation, I would not even consider seeing the Rapture in Revelation 20.

<sup>77</sup> From the Latin term for *caught up* or *snatched up* in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, we get the term *Rapture*.

<sup>78</sup> Some assume that “to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17) implies that we will go on to heaven with Him. Instead, it implies the contrary. The same Greek expression translated “to meet” (*eis apantesin*, “to a meeting”) is used only two other times in the New Testament: Matthew 25:6 and Acts 28:15. The latter is most similar to 1 Thessalonians 4. Roman believers went out to meet the apostle Paul and escort him into Rome. If it means the same thing in 1 Thessalonians, those who go out to meet the Lord will accompany Him back to earth.

<sup>79</sup> Rebellion after the kingdom starts? How could there be rebellion when “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD” (Isa. 11:9; cf. Jer. 31:34)? Because such knowledge will not be universal nor absolute at the kingdom’s early stage.

<sup>80</sup> 20:11. Walvoord strongly denies that the present world will survive. Here are some excerpts from his commentary on *The Revelation*, as quoted in my Appendix E, p. 63. He insists that Revelation 20:11, confirmed by 21:1, must mean

that the present earth and heaven are destroyed and will be replaced by the new heaven and earth.... Frequent references in the Bible seem to anticipate this future when the present world will be destroyed.... J. B. Smith offers the “rather astonishing conclusion that the language employed does not signify ‘the vanishing of the former heaven and earth into nothing.’”...It would be difficult to find a more explicit statement [of destruction] than that contained here in Revelation 20:11 and in II Peter 3:10-11.

<sup>81</sup> 20:12-13. “The dead, great and small,” who are here raised and judged, are apparently all unbelievers. They are the second group to be raised in this chapter. The first group is in verses 5-6: “those who have part in the

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first resurrection. The second death has no power over them.” That description implied that this later group is the second resurrection and that all who participate in it will be condemned to the second death.

<sup>82</sup> According to this premillennial understanding, the Lord will judge on at least two occasions: at His Second Coming and a thousand years later. At some stage(s), the saints will even help judge (1 Cor. 6:2-3). Revelation 11:18 looks forward to the first occasion. In His first New Testament reference to it, Jesus called it “that day” (Matt. 7:21-23; cf. 1 Cor. 3:12-15). As in the case of “the day of the Lord,” this refers to more than a period of twenty-four hours. In fact, it will cover several occasions. (And each individual will have his or her own “day” in that court.)

<sup>83</sup> “He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:25-26). Samuel Waldron (*The End Times*, pp. 80-82) uses this victory of Jesus over death as an argument for amillennialism. That is, he tries to prove that the “thousand years” refers to the present rather than the future. He notes that verses 54-57 of 1 Corinthians 15 relate Jesus’ conquest of death to His raising believers at His coming. That victory at His coming, Waldron concludes, is the **final** victory referred to in verse 25. If so, he says, Jesus must be reigning now, because “he must reign until” that victory. This, Waldron continues, must be the “thousand year” reign, a “reign of conquest.” It began at Jesus’ first coming and will end when He comes again and raises the dead. But this amillennial view is contrary to Jesus’ predictions that He will reign **after** He returns (e.g., Matt. 13:40-43; 19:28; 25:31-46). Also, Jesus’ **final** conquest of death will take place not when believers rise but when death is destroyed in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14).

<sup>84</sup> There will be “no more death” for believers *or unbelievers*. For believers, death will be “swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54-55). But only they will receive immortality, God’s gift for those who seek it (Rom. 2:7). Unbelievers, in contrast, will experience the “second death,” which will put an end to death. There, after “many blows” or “few blows” (Luke 12:47, 48), God will “destroy both soul and body” (Matt. 10:28). They will “return to dust” (Gen. 3:19), be “burned up,” (Matt. 3:12). They will not live forever separated from God, as some wrongly define death, but will cease to exist.

<sup>85</sup> George N.H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of our Lord Jesus, the Christ, as covenanted in the Old Testament and presented in the New Testament*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1957). In this reprint each volume has more or less 700 pages. Peters’s masterful discussions, evaluating many views, cover nearly every issue related to the coming kingdom. On the issues in this section, read especially Propositions 148-151 (II:499-534). Proposition 148 affirms that “**This kingdom embraces the new heavens and new earth.**” These terms, Peters argues, include the renewal of more than material things—above all, of “Gentile kingdoms and their upholders.”

<sup>86</sup> 20:11b: “Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.” This half verse “is parenthetical,” says Peters (*Theocratic Kingdom*, III:502-503), “alluding to what was done before, *thus identifying the Judge* and ascribing power to Him.” It reflects Daniel 2:35 (“no place was found for” the Kingdoms and their power). It does not mean that the material world will be destroyed, which would annul God’s plans and covenants. In fact, in the same paragraph the sea is still there, giving up the dead (Rev. 20:13).

<sup>87</sup> God strongly asserts that the millennial new world (as promised in Isaiah) will be eternal. “‘The new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,’ declares the Lord” (Isa. 66:22). We must not take that promise lightly and assume that it will expire after a thousand years. See Appendix E.

<sup>88</sup> The common view, which I modify, is that the new heaven and new earth will be subsequent to the millennial world and far superior to it. John Phillips retains the common view but rightly sees “millennial” conditions in much of the last two chapters. He decides that 21:1-8 introduces the new world but that 21:9 to 22:5 is millennial. “We are taken back to the millennium in this, the last great parenthesis of the book,” he says. “The purpose of this parenthesis is to show the relationship between the two Jerusalems—between the earthly Jerusalem ... and the heavenly Jerusalem....” (John Phillips, *Exploring Revelation*, 267)

<sup>89</sup> Haggai 2:6-9 refers to the same pre-kingdom purging process. “I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land....shake all nations....fill this house with glory....And in this place I will grant peace.” Hebrews 12:26-27 quotes from that passage as still unfulfilled. It then concludes that the passage implies

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“the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.” What will remain? The unshakable kingdom (v. 28).

<sup>90</sup> The biggest change in the perfected kingdom will be no more death (Rev. 21:4; Isa. 25:8; Hos. 13:14).

<sup>91</sup> For the dimensions and shape of the new Jerusalem, I recommend reading Peters, III:47-48.

<sup>92</sup> Concerning the tree of life as a sacrament, see my writing on [Conditional Immortality](#).

<sup>93</sup> I close by copying from the conclusion to my writing “[A New Heaven and A New Earth](#).”

<sup>94</sup> First Peter 2:5, 9 also applies concepts from Exodus 19:4-6 to the church—“holy priesthood, royal priesthood, holy nation.” The similarities to Israel are not just verbal. Even the history of Israel is recapitulated, as the Gospel of Matthew shows. This includes a divinely appointed leader, God’s miracles, the announcement that God’s kingdom was near, ritual washing of the people (baptism), giving laws from a mountain, and making sacrifice to inaugurate a covenant. How evident in Matthew that God was again preparing a people to become His kingdom! But there is powerful evidence that the process was not yet completed. It is still in the works.

<sup>95</sup> In Luke chapters 19 to 24 the Lord’s kingdom is mentioned by that name ten times: 19:11, 12 (Greek), 15 (Greek); 21:31; 22:16, 18, 29, 30; 23:42, 51. In addition, it is referred to there by other names (20:33-36; 21:28; 24:21, 26). All of these present the kingdom as future, none as present or even near.

<sup>96</sup> This great emphasis on the kingdom’s nearness is intended to color all the chapters from Luke 10 to 19. That includes 17:21, which many interpreters use wrongfully. Some treat that verse as though it were the only thing Luke said about the kingdom—and in a way that contradicts its larger context. (Read it all.) Having heard repeatedly that the kingdom was near, the Pharisees, not surprisingly, asked *when* it would come (Luke 17:20a). Jesus answered the Pharisees (vv. 20b-21), then instructed His disciples (vv. 22-37). His answer to the Pharisees had two parts and was no doubt enigmatic to them. The kingdom, He said, (a) will not come gradually and measurably—like the advance of an army or a disease—but (b) was already “in your midst” (NASB). This meant that the kingdom depends on Jesus’ physical presence and power (cf. Matt. 12:28). It says nothing about a present “spiritual” kingdom, as many now assume. Rather, it was still the **predicted kingdom**, near and in their midst only because He was there. Accordingly, His instructions to His disciples warned them that He would soon be absent and pointed them to His Second Coming.

<sup>97</sup> It is highly recommended that you read and study the whole parable, Luke 19:11-27. The “distant country” where the nobleman goes and gets authority to rule has to be heaven. Those he leaves behind until he returns, he leaves on earth. These include two groups: (a) servants to whom he gives money to “put to work” (v. 13) in view of his return, and (b) subjects-to-be who voice their rejection of him as king (v. 14). After being made king, he returns to earth to inaugurate his rule (v. 15a). In verses 15b-26 He deals with his servants, giving rulership (in his kingdom on earth) to those who are trustworthy. But in verse 27 he destroys the subjects who reject him.

<sup>98</sup> This “postponement” of the kingdom in Luke should obviously influence our interpretation of Luke’s next book, Acts. Unless there is clear indication otherwise, we should understand the kingdom to be future in Acts just as it was at the end of Luke. The apostles saw it that way after the risen Lord had instructed them. To instruct them, “He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). After that they still considered the kingdom future: “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Many consider the apostles’ question misguided and think they know better than the apostles. Others ratify the apostles’ belief but think the kingdom has also started with a present spiritual form. If it had a present form as well as future, we would expect some passage to mention both forms. None does.

<sup>99</sup> Luke 19 and Revelation 4-5 indicate the same relationship of the coming Ruler to God. The nobleman in Luke 19 went to a “distant country.” The Lamb in Revelation approached God on His throne in heaven. The nobleman “was made king” (literally, received the kingdom), then “returned home” to rule. The Lamb received the scroll to open, then came to earth (in chapter 19) to rule.

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<sup>100</sup> Because He is Messiah, Jesus is our Lord, our Master (Rom. 14:9). His Messiahship/Lordship is the essence of the gospel as presented in the Gospels and Acts (e.g., Matthew 16:16-18; John 20:31; Acts 2:36). Enemies of the gospel got its message right in Thessalonica. They accused believers of saying “that there is another king, one called Jesus” (Acts 17:7).

<sup>101</sup> Some interpreters discount what Hebrews 10:13 says, that Jesus “**waits**” to rule. They conclude instead—partly from a past tense verb so quoted from the psalm—that He rules already. Ephesians 1:23, quoting Psalm 8:6, says that “God **placed** all things under his feet.” But that quotation does not disclaim His waiting. Its past tense simply reflects the prophetic perfect in the Hebrew original of Psalm 8, which looked to the future as accomplished. Hebrews 2:8 makes that fact abundantly clear. It quotes the same words from the same psalm, then explains that “at present we do not see everything subject to him.” When then will it happen? In “the world to come,” as Hebrews 2:6 has already said at the beginning of the same paragraph.

<sup>102</sup> Jesus must rule from the “throne of his father David” (Luke 1:33). Since God was the real King over Israel (Judges 8:23; 1 Sam. 8:7), David’s throne on earth was sometimes called the LORD’s throne (1 Chron. 29:23; 2 Chron. 9:8). But it was always distinguished from God’s throne in heaven. In Messianic Psalm 89, for example, compare verse 14 with verses 4, 29, 36, and 44. See also Revelation 3:21. David’s throne ceased to exist on earth when the Old Testament kingdom ceased—and will not be reestablished until the kingdom is restored. Those who believe it has now been transferred to heaven are driven by their theology more than by Scriptures.

<sup>103</sup> Likewise, Jesus was first anointed in His unglorified state, at His baptism (Matt. 3:16-17). That constituted Him as the Anointed One (Messiah), the Son of God. He was anointed yet again, in His glorified state, after His resurrection (Acts 2:33a). That enables Him to “baptize in the Spirit” (see Acts 1:4-5; 2:33; 13:32-34). But the Father has not yet *in reality* made “the nations [His] inheritance” nor “the ends of the earth [His] possession” (Ps. 2:8).

<sup>104</sup> See comments on Revelation 11:15. The beginning of His reign is foreseen and announced after the last of the seven trumpets is blown. The first clear starting point for that reign is in 20:4, after He descends from heaven to destroy His enemies (19:11 to 20:3).

<sup>105</sup> The same future tense, “will reign,” is used in Revelation 5:10 and 20:6. In addition, other New Testament passages promise that believers will reign with Messiah and/or share His glory. For examples, see Matthew 13:43; Romans 8:17; 1 Corinthians 6:2; 2 Timothy 2:12; 1 Peter 1:7.

<sup>106</sup> *Legal* statements can express certainty about a future that may not be obvious to others. They can be like the following crude examples that can be true but not obvious: “Your goose is cooked!” or “I own you now!”

<sup>107</sup> The examples offered all relate to our future in Messiah. So does Psalm 8:6, which is quoted as accomplished in Ephesians 1:21-22 but strongly asserted to be unfulfilled in Hebrews 2:8-9.

<sup>108</sup> As pointed out earlier, the passage most used to prove that the kingdom is present is Colossians 1:12-13. The statement there can also be explained as legal but not yet factual: “The Father...has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and **brought us into the kingdom** of the Son he loves.”

<sup>109</sup> In those two epistles *parousia* is used for the Lord’s coming in 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 5:15; 5:23; and 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8.

<sup>110</sup> The Greek phrase in John 14:3 is *parempsomai humas pros emauton*. This does not mean “take you away” but, literally, “take-you-alongside unto myself.”

<sup>111</sup> The Second Coming had already been described in 2 Thessalonians 1:7: “when the Lord Jesus is [meaning, will be] revealed from heaven in blazing fire.”

<sup>112</sup> Wayne A. Brindle, “Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (April-June 2001): 138-51. He lists and discusses John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 5:4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:7; Titus



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2:13; 1 John 3:2-3; and Revelation 22:7, 12, 20. Most of these speak of the Lord's coming. Some of them allude to our resurrection (the main theme of 1 Corinthians 15), but none mentions it specifically.

<sup>113</sup> Under "Revelation 4-5" see my discussion "Who are the elders?" There is powerful Greek textual support for "us" instead of "men" in 5:9. In that case, the elders speak of themselves in verse 9 but of those they represent in verse 10.

<sup>9</sup> ...with your blood you purchased **us** for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation.

<sup>10</sup> You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,  
and they will reign on the earth."

<sup>114</sup> See "Structure of Revelation 6-19" in my main writing.

<sup>115</sup> Riddlebarger (p. 201).

<sup>116</sup> Riddlebarger (p. 215) says it is "important to notice that the thousand-year reign is said to take place where the disembodied souls of the martyrs are (in heaven)...." But "souls" (Gr. *psuchai*) refers to persons with bodies here, as it often does (e.g., Acts 2:41; 7:14; 27:37). Here they have been raised from the dead.

<sup>117</sup> Riddlebarger (p. 203). He also claims, but gives no evidence, that Revelation chapters "13, 16, and 19 depict the same event...judgment day...when Jesus Christ returns in wrath to judge the nations, raise the dead, and make all things new." Read those chapters for yourself to see if they repeat "the same basic pattern," as he alleges. In 13:10 you will see a warning about captivity and being killed. But the whole chapter is about the Tribulation. In 16:15 you will see a promise about the Lord's coming like a thief. But the whole chapter depicts the bowls of God's wrath down to the fall of Babyon and preparations for Armageddon. Not a word about the Lord's actual coming, conquering His enemies, raising the dead, and making things new. Not until 19:11 and following.

<sup>118</sup> See my writing "[A New Heaven and A New Earth](#)," from which much of this discussion is adapted. I will show that earlier Scriptures referring to that new world meant the millennium, not just the final state. For much more in-depth discussion, consult George N.H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom...*, especially Volume II, starting at Proposition 148.

<sup>119</sup> The events in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, introduced by Greek *epeita* and *eita*, are successive, not simultaneous. Here are some examples showing that use of the Greek. First Timothy 2:13 says that "Adam was formed first, then [*eita*] Eve." 1 Corinthians 15:5-7 lists successive appearances of the risen Messiah: "to Peter, and then [*eita*] to the Twelve. After that [*epeita*], he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time.... Then [*epeita*] he appeared to James, then [*eita*] to all the apostles...."

<sup>120</sup> Here is a comment based on 1 Corinthians 15:23-28 from my New Heaven document:

This shows that the Millennium, the first stage of the kingdom, will be mediatorial. During that stage the Father apparently will not rule directly but through "the Lamb" (Messiah) as mediator. The Lamb will have a throne on earth, but the Father's throne will continue in heaven. When the Lamb perfects His kingdom, however, He will merge it with the Father's universal kingdom. Apparently after the millennial stage heaven will finish its descent to the perfected earth. Then Father and Son will rule together. In the glorious capital city there will then be one supreme throne, "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. 22:3).

Since writing that document, I have reassessed one point. The capital city will not pause in its descent. It must come all the way to earth at the beginning of the millennial stage. However, the Father will apparently not relocate to earth until the transitional stage is over.

<sup>121</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 305-306.

<sup>122</sup> Additional Scriptures he could have given include the following. 1 Peter 4:7 speaks of "the end of all things." Hebrews 1:10-12 quotes Psalm 102:25-27 to show that the earth and heavens "will perish...will wear out like a garment [and] will be changed." Hebrews 12:26-28 comments on the LORD God's promise in Haggai 2:6:

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“Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” These words, it continues, “indicate the removing of what can be shaken...so that what cannot be shaken may remain.” “What cannot be shaken” is the eternal kingdom.

<sup>123</sup> Look at the Christian hope from another angle. Its fulfillment is symbolized in the marriage of the Lamb and His bride. That marriage will be ready when the millennium starts (Rev. 19:7-9). It will not be postponed another thousand years after He comes. Since 21:1-2, 9-10 point to the same readiness, the time is probably the same.

<sup>124</sup> Isaiah, like other prophets, had often described such conditions in the future kingdom. But this was the first time anyone had called them “a new heaven and a new earth.”

<sup>125</sup> George Peters, *op. cit.*, II:508, points out another evidence that the Christian hope was relatively near in 2 Peter 3. The apostle sees the wicked people existing continuously and boldly down to the judgment he describes, at which time believers will be delivered.

<sup>126</sup> George Peters, *op. cit.*, II:509, 515.

<sup>127</sup> The Bible often speaks absolutely (that is, in extreme or complete terms) where we would speak relatively. For example, “I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated” (Mal. 1:2b-3a). This could be understood as though God had no love for Esau—but He did (see Obadiah 21). Similarly absolute is Jesus’ requirement “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). Yet, in other passages we are required to love such people.

<sup>128</sup> Similarly, in Isaiah. 51:6 the sky vanishes and the earth wears out before God establishes the heaven and founds the earth, v. 16.

<sup>129</sup> George Peters, *op. cit.*, II:519. He also cites Micah 1:4; Isaiah 13:9-14; Amos 9:5; and other passages.

<sup>130</sup> George Peters, *op. cit.*, II:521, argues from Genesis 9 for the preservation of this earth. When God promised Noah not to destroy the earth again, He had no mental reservation (such as, intending to use fire rather than water).

<sup>131</sup> Walvoord, *op. cit.*, pp. 311-312.

<sup>132</sup> There are many other Old Testament passages predicting God’s fire before the eternal kingdom. See Daniel 7:10-11, Psalm 97:3-5, Micah 1:4, and Malachi 4:1.

<sup>133</sup> George Peters, *op. cit.*, II:518.

<sup>134</sup> George Peters, *op. cit.*, II:527-528.

<sup>135</sup> Peters (I:454-456) discusses some well-known conclusions about early church doctrine by the famous historian, Edward Gibbon. Peters says that in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (chap. 15, p. 535, emphasis by Peters),

Gibbon...describing the Chiliastic view, and correctly noticing that “the ancient and popular doctrine of the Millennium was intimately connected with the Sec[ond] Coming of Christ,” finally remarks: “The assurance of such a Millennium was carefully inculcated by a *succession of fathers* from Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, who conversed with the immediate disciples of the apostles, down to Lactantius, who was preceptor to the son of Constantine....Though it might not be universally received, it appears to have been *the reigning sentiment of orthodox believers*.”

<sup>136</sup> The quotation from Justin Martyr is excerpted from Peters’s lengthy “Proposition 75: *The doctrine of the Kingdom, as held by the churches established by the Apostles, was perpetuated*” (I:480-498).

<sup>137</sup> This is the first of various quotations in Peters’s “Proposition 169: *This Theocratic Kingdom embraces the marriage of Christ to the New Jerusalem*” (III:39-52). Here he does not indicate the source.