

THE DISCERNER



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Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.

Ephesians 5:6-12

**An overview of Revelation 20 and its significant
relation to the Millennium**

In this issue of *The Discerner* I would like to express praise to God for the clarity of His Word. He has not left His people in darkness or to their imaginations but has spoken straightly and plainly (Pr. 8:8-9) that we may know His Word is truly a lamp to our feet and light to our path.

Furthermore, I praise the Lord for my precious wife Stacey, for patiently listening to this issue and others multiple times over, the saints of Liberty Christian Church whose informed comments and insightful questions have been instrumental in leading me to dig deeper into the Word of God and Pastor Rob Radesky for his editing assistance and suggestions. It is indeed an immeasurable blessing to belong to a body of saints whose love for God is expressed through their understanding and obedience to His Word.

THE DISCERNER
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Introduction

Amid discussions between varying eschatological groups within Christian circles, it is inevitable that a statement similar to the following comes up, “We should remember to treat the views of an opposing camp fairly.” This is a true statement and we should be careful so as to not misrepresent any view. Instead, we are to treat all views fairly and accurately. This is a good principle and one that should be upheld by all. At the same time, the preeminent emphasis and practice among believers should be to treat the Word of God fairly and accurately in our interpretation of the Word.

It is the Scripture, and the Scripture alone, that is the standard. For this reason, utmost care should be given to ensure Scripture is treated with the greatest respect (2 Timothy 2:15). Years ago a pointed and prominent question among discussions surrounding biblical doctrine conveyed the respect for the sufficiency and authority that belongs to Scripture alone. The question was, “What does the Word of God say?” Or put in other words, “What saith the Scripture?” This significant question caused us to realize, regardless of the position held, that it is the Word of God that is the final word! Consequently, this question brought the attention of our minds back to the Word of God and encouraged thoughts to be shaped in the light of God’s truth alone. Essentially, the question leads us to search the Scripture as the absolute authoritative truth to determine if what was believed was in line with truth or not.

Under this scenario “fairness” was first applied to the Word of God as the question acknowledged the God-ordained place of the Bible as the preeminent authority. The question, “What does the Word of God say?” led people to be like the Bereans of Acts 17:11, who examined the Scriptures daily to see whether or not the message they heard was true. Furthermore, like the believers of Thessalonica, the question also encouraged people to esteem the Bible as it truly is -- the Word of God and not merely the word of men (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

The ability to easily mass produce books, coupled with effortless access to prolific information via the internet, has in recent years given

rise in evangelical circles to the popularity of religious tradition, church history, creeds, confessions, and various post-apostolic councils. In several respects this has been a good thing because it has placed information, and in many instances, **good information** into the hands of those who previously had little or no access to it. However, such a great privilege as ease of access to volumes of information comes with a great responsibility on the part of God's people. Essentially, and simply put, the responsibility we have as we assimilate the volumes of easily available information into our regular reading is that of remembering and practicing the simple fact that God's Word overrides everything.

Subtly though, in the average conservative Christian's conversations, this influx of information has resulted in the prominence of different questions regarding biblical doctrines. Questions such as "What saith premillennialism?" Or "What saith amillennialism or postmillennialism?", "What position do you hold?" or "Have you read this book or that book?" Questions such as these have replaced the question "What saith the Word of God?" Oftentimes, conversations involving these questions result in discussing a specific author's opinion about a text of Scripture rather than discussion of the text itself.

These questions are not new, neither are they wrong in the proper context. Neither is the acknowledgment of creeds, confessions, church history, and various post-apostolic councils wrong. However, the increased prominence, influence and significance being charged to these extra-biblical resources, along with a multitude of other writings, has indirectly and unintentionally (at least in the beginning anyway) elevated extra biblical material to a competitive status with Scripture and this is wrong. The concern is no longer, "What saith the Scripture?" but whether or not the extra-biblical material is given fair treatment along with Scripture.

I once heard a Christian comment on reading four to six books a week. While this is certainly commendable, the sad part of the story is that this Christian, like many, had a daily Bible reading plan to read through the Bible in a year. Let me emphasize that reading through the Bible in a year is commendable, but there is something seriously awry when the all sufficient Word of God gets a yearly commitment for

completion while completion of multiple lesser works is given a higher priority. No wonder it is not uncommon today when a Christian, or even a non-Christian, has a biblical question he or she is referred to the latest book on the subject, or a particular church council where the subject was addressed, as opposed to chapter and verse in the all-sufficient Word of God.

I am concerned that the new prominence of creeds, confessions, church history, and various post-apostolic councils, along with undue emphasis on the latest books, has led to the minimization and ignorance of the one and only standard—the Word of God. The single greatest reason contributing to the minimization and ignorance of the Word of God is that the general Christian body is unfamiliar with the clear text of the Word of God. The reason for this unfamiliarity is at least twofold. First, the lack of time spent reading and studying the Bible as the first priority as compared to the time spent reading and studying extra biblical material. Secondly, and consequent to the first, is the error of interpreting Scripture in the light of a system of theology as opposed to interpreting a system of theology in the light of Scripture. Many have allowed their zeal to know what the Bible means to court the “I want it now” mentality. This courtship has persisted to the extent that godly zeal to know the Word has divorced painstaking persistence in the self-interpreting pages of Holy Writ for commentaries, systematic theologies, and other extra-biblical material. In short, an effort to know the Word quickly has led to the exchange of the Word for “a word” on the Word.

As a note of explanation, I am **not** advocating the elimination of commentaries and other extra-biblical material from one’s study. To do so would be unbiblical and foolish, not to mention hypocritical on my part because I regularly read multiple commentaries, creeds, and confessions. Furthermore, right now you are reading this instead of your Bible and what follows are my notes on Revelation 20, which I hope you will examine with a discerning eye in the light of Scripture. Instead, I am arguing for true allegiance to Scripture alone as the authority. Such an allegiance is exemplified by the proper prioritization of the Bible in our study habits, and an interpretative process (hermeneutic) that acknowledges God’s divine ability to clearly communicate His written Word to finite sinful men.

The interpretive process is known in a single word as *hermeneutic*, coming from the Greek word *hermeneuo*. In Luke 24:27, we read that while on the road to Emmaus with the two disciples, Jesus “*explained to them the things concerning Himself from all the Scriptures.*” The word translated *explained* is an intensified form of *hermeneuo*, which means to *explain in words, expound or interpret*. Hermeneutics is “the discipline that deals with the principles of interpretation.”¹ The hermeneutic is not the meaning of a biblical passage, but it pertains to how or the method used to find the meaning of a passage of Scripture. Proper hermeneutics is important because while a person may spend time in the Scripture, as advocated in this introduction, employment of an improper hermeneutic will result in an improper understanding of the text.²

Among the many forms of hermeneutics, the most sound is the historical-grammatical method. Its soundness comes from the fact that it acknowledges the importance of both the historical context of Scripture and the grammar of the original languages. Occasionally, the word *literal* implied by the word *historical* is stated in front of the phrase as *literal historical-grammatical*. Either way, this method acknowledges the fact that “words and sentences occur in the context of a conversation, in the context of a language, and in the context of a culture.”³ Furthermore, use of this method adheres to the clarity of Scripture and acknowledges God’s divine ability to clearly communicate through His written Word to finite sinful men.

However, don’t be weighed down by these terms. To put it simply, the Bible is not a collection of dark, mystical sayings secretly hidden from all but the so-called elite of mind. God’s Word is a **light** to our path and a **lamp** to our feet (Psalm 119:105). The wisdom of God’s Word is **plain**, even **straightforward** (Proverbs 8:8-9), making wise the simple (Psalm 19:7). God’s Word is revelation (unveiling or revealing) as

¹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI.), 1994, p. 15.

² An excellent as well as easy to read book on properly interpreting the Bible is “How to Study the Bible” by Richard Mayue. Published by Christian Focus.

³ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970) 99.

opposed to veiling or obscuring. God, Who is all-powerful and all-knowing, successfully used human language to reveal His divine truth in the pages of the Bible. In the Bible, God says what He means and means what He says so that we can clearly know Him and what He expects of His people (Deuteronomy 29:29). Furthermore, such communication applies to the future things, so that God's people can know with certainty what to expect regarding the things that are yet to come (Revelation 1:1-2, 19). Consequently, a plain, straightforward approach to interpreting the pages of Scripture, as opposed to spiritualizing and mystifying the text,⁴ will best prepare the person of God for discerning righteousness and justice and equity and every good course (Proverbs 2).

Therefore, let us as a first priority familiarize ourselves with the Word of truth through reading and studying the Bible, so that we can know with certainty the answer to the all important question, "What saith the Scripture?" We will then be able to properly test the writings and sayings of others and be able to determine whether or not another person's teachings are of God (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 and 1 John 4:1).

This study is not intended to be a verse-by-verse commentary on Revelation 20. Rather, it is an overview of the significance of Revelation 20 to the millennium. Much more could be written describing the character and content of the millennium than what appears in this article. However, it is my desire in this overview of Revelation 20 to show that by simply taking the Word of God in its plain sense, without spiritualizing or allegorizing the text, we remove much confusion and are left with a consistent, sound approach to interpreting the book of Revelation. Thus, it will quickly be apparent to the reader that an argument for a literal hermeneutical approach to understanding this chapter is made. I am convinced that such argumentation for a literal hermeneutic comes directly from the text itself, and that making

⁴ A text is spiritualized when a meaning is assigned to the words of the text that ignores or denies the literal meaning conveyed by the text. For instance, explaining that Rev. 20:1 does not mean Satan will be incarcerated but refers to the time of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection and the communication of the Gospel to the Gentiles is a spiritualization of the text. Mystifying Scripture removes any meaning from the text leaving it a mystery.

mention of it is merely highlighting that which is asserted by the Holy Scripture. Although the nature of the chapter is eschatological, a literal hermeneutical approach is consistent with the hermeneutic used for interpreting the rest of the Bible. For the purpose of contrast, as well as refutation, other positions are listed that do not follow this approach. I have provided sources so as to allow the reader an opportunity to verify fair treatment of the quoted text.

Unavoidably, all eschatological discussions must deal with the facts presented in Revelation 20, particularly those dealing specifically with the millennium. The reason for this is the fact that the 20th chapter is an essential component in defining the millennium as demonstrated by the following quotes from two authors who hold opposing millennial views.

“Revelation 20 is the most important biblical passage dealing with the subject of the millennium and is the only place in the Bible which specifically mentions the “thousand years”.”⁵

“Does it [millennium] refer to a literal 1,000—year period or to a period that is indefinitely long but can’t be calculated? The whole issue of premillennialism versus amillennialism or postmillennialism is dramatically affected by the answer to this question.”⁶

What is the significance of the 20th chapter of Revelation to the millennium? **What saith the Scripture?**

⁵ Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003) p. 195.

⁶ Richard Mayhue, *How To Study The Bible*, (Christian Focus, Great Britain, 2006) p. 137.

Revelation 20 is Chronological

As opposed to being a recapitulation of prior events (a subject addressed later in this article), Revelation 20 and the events described therein are chronological. This is to say the events are sequential and follow prior events as opposed to being merely repetitious accounts or a retelling of previous events. Two self evident characteristics of the text make the chronology evident:

1. *Grammatically Chronological*

The phrase “and I saw”, which indicates chronological significance is used 9 times from chapter 19 to 21 (19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11; 21:1, 2, 22). The English Standard Version (ESV), excluding Revelation 19:19, 21:2 and 21:22, translates the phrase as “Then I saw”. In doing so, the ESV clearly conveys chronology as indicated by the word “Then.” The three exceptions in the ESV are translated “And I saw...”.

2. *Contextually Chronological*

A casual observation reveals that the events of chapter 20 fit perfectly, and in context, between the Second Coming of Christ in chapter 19 and the Eternal State in chapter 21. An outline of these passages demonstrates the contextual chronology.

Chapter 19

1. Jesus Returns (11-16)
2. Birds of the air are assembled for the consumption of those to be killed (17-18)
3. The antichrist and his followers assemble to war against Christ at His return (19)
4. The antichrist and the false prophet are thrown alive into the lake of fire (20)
5. The rest are killed and the birds are filled with their flesh (21)

Chapter 20

With the antichrist and his followers destroyed by the Second Coming of Christ at the close of chapter nineteen, chapter twenty immediately focuses attention on the one who empowered the antichrist throughout the duration of the tribulation -- Satan.

1. Satan is bound and sealed in the abyss for a thousand years (2)
2. Saints reign with Christ for the duration of the thousand years (4)
3. Martyred saints of the tribulation are resurrected to reign with Christ for the duration of the thousand years (4)
4. At the completion of the thousand years Satan is released from his prison (7)
5. Satan deceives the nations and gathers them together against the saints and the beloved city (9)
6. Fire comes from heaven and destroys them (9)
7. The devil is thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet are (10)
8. The Great White throne judgment takes place (11)
9. All resurrected unbelievers are cast into the lake of fire (12-15)

Chapter 21

1. New heavens and a New Earth are revealed (1)
2. The holy city New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God (2)

Reasons Why Revelation 20 is Futuristic

Of further significance is the fact that the events of Revelation 20 are events that are yet to occur. This is opposed to positions that maintain some or all of the events of chapter 20 have already transpired or are happening at this moment. The events described in Revelation 20 bear self-evident testimony to their future fulfillment for the following reasons:

1. Revelation 20 Follows Christ's Second Coming

Since, as previously demonstrated, the events of Revelation 20 chronologically follow the Second Coming of Christ, then the events of Revelation 20 must be future for Christ has not yet returned.

2. Saint's reign with Christ is yet future

Resurrected saints will reign with Christ for one thousand years (4, 6). Every time the Greek word translated here as *reign* is used in reference to believers, it is used with reference to a future reign (1 Cor. 4:8; Rev. 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5). *Reign* appears twice in 1 Corinthians 4:8, where the

first time it applies to a carnal presumption and the second time to the proper future reign of the saints.

3. Saint's reign follows Christ's Second Coming

This reign is more than a vicarious reign. It is a reign with Him in His presence, not merely reigning in Him or presently being seated with Him in heavenly places (as described in Ephesians 2:6). The fact that believers will reign with Christ is shown in the book of Revelation and elsewhere to be future (2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4, 6; 22:5; Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:29-30; 1 Cor. 6:3; 2 Tim. 2:12). Such a reign necessitates Christ's presence, therefore His return must precede these events. Since Christ has not yet returned, and His saints are not yet reigning with Him, Revelation 20 must still be in the future.

4. The reign includes those martyred during the tribulation

Verse 4 specifically refers to saints martyred during the tribulation being resurrected and reigning with Christ for a thousand years. This necessitates the tribulation precede the resurrection and the thousand year reign. Since the tribulation has not yet occurred, then neither have the events of Revelation 20. Therefore, Revelation 20 is future.

5. The Empowerment of the Antichrist

The fact that Satan empowers the antichrist (2 Thess. 2:9, Rev. 13:4) necessitates that Revelation 20 follow the antichrist's reign. Since, in Revelation 20 Satan is bound and sealed in the abyss (1-3), he would not be able to empower the antichrist whose reign is characterized by what the Bible describes as one of the greatest periods of deception the world will ever know (2 Thess. 2:9-10; Mt. 24:21-24; Rev. 13:14; 17:13, 17).

Satan's release and deception of the nations at the completion of the thousand years (v. 7-8) could not be a reference to the period of antichrist's reign since some of those experiencing the resurrection and a thousand year reign with Christ were those who refused to worship the beast (antichrist) and receive his mark (v. 4). This clearly places the antichrist's reign prior to the thousand years thus prior to Revelation 20, where Satan is bound. Therefore, since the antichrist has not yet been revealed, Revelation 20 is future.

Exposition

The Incarceration of Satan, A Literal Event

Revelation 20:1-2

¹ And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. ² And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years...”

Is this binding of the devil to be understood as being literal? How could it not be? In the previous chapter of Revelation we answer “Yes!” to the question of whether or not the return of Christ is literal, “Yes!” to the antichrist and the false prophet being literal, “Yes!” to their being cast into the Lake of Fire as being a literal event, and “Yes!” to the destruction of their armies as being literal. The birds are literal and literally respond to the call of God to a literal meal He will provide. How can we answer anything but, “Yes, the binding of the devil is literal!”, when it is presented to us by the Word of God in the context of so many other literal things and events? It is a confusing hermeneutic that teaches, the angel and the devil are literal, but the chain and binding, the abyss and the thousand years are not literal.

Some state that because these verses are eschatological (pertaining to the last days), apocalyptic⁷ in nature, and pertain to supernatural events, they cannot be taken literally and, therefore, by necessity must be taken spiritually, symbolically, or allegorically. By what necessity should we not take these events literally? When the angel Gabriel appeared to the virgin Mary, that was literal (Lk. 1:26-30)? He literally said to her that she (a virgin) would conceive and bear a son and name

⁷ For an excellent article on the differences and similarities between Revelation and Jewish apocalypses see Erik Swanson’s, *The Genre of Revelation* at www.theologicalstudies.citymax.com. In the article Swanson clearly states the differences and similarities between Revelation and Jewish apocalypses and explains why the default association of Revelation with Jewish apocalypses leads to the default reading of Revelation in a non-literal or allegorical manner. The overall content of the article shows the differences to be substantial and therefore such default reading unwarranted.

Him Jesus, and she literally did conceive and bear a child, all the while maintaining her virginity (Lk. 1:31; 2:1-7, 21). Gabriel said to Mary, “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end.” Who would argue with the literal fulfillment of these passages in Luke 1:32-33? These too were eschatological prophecies.⁸

Should we not take the binding of the devil literally because it is a supernatural event taking place outside our scientific realm of understanding? Should we conclude the text of Revelation 20 is merely God describing things to us using our words so that we can grasp a point, while knowing that the words do not mean what they say? Should this have been the approach that Isaiah and the rest of the children of Israel used when attempting to understand Isaiah 7:14 which described the virgin birth of Christ? While the supernatural may defy science, that does not make the supernatural any less literal. Just because something is supernatural is no ground for concluding that it cannot be literal.

The Manner of Incarceration

The angel

The angel in verses 1-2 is one like Michael or another angel employed in the service of Christ.

Because the angel is not specifically identified by name, it has been asserted this is Jesus since it is said of Christ in Revelation 1:18 that He has the keys of death and Hades (this position assumes He also possess the key to the abyss). However, from Revelation 5 to this point in 20:1, angels are referenced almost 60 times. God’s extensive use of angels in the events of the last days is evident from chapters 7 to 20. The simple use of a good concordance quickly reveals that the angels of these chapters are:

⁸ A study of the following verses reveals that the “last days” actually began with the first advent of Christ, 1 Pet. 1:19-20 (*eschatos chronos—last times*); Heb. 1:2 (*eschatos hemera—last days*); 2 Tim. 3:1 (*eschatos hemera—last days*); Jude 1:17-18 (*eschatos chronos—last time*); 1John 2:18 (*eschatos hora—last hour*); 2 Pet. 3:3 (*eschatos hemera—last days*).

- Described in the plural form (angels) and could not be Christ because there is only one Christ.
- Referred to with a numerical adjective (first, second, third, etc. — angel) and could not be Christ for the same reason stated above.
- Designated as “another angel” and could not be Christ. Not only does the context reveal these are angels and not Christ, but the Greek word *allos*, translated *another*, clarifies these are angels. *Allos* means **another of the same kind**, as opposed to *heteros* which is **another of a different kind**. In Revelation, it is *another* angel like the previous one. If the text referred to Christ as *another* angel, one would expect to find the Greek word *heteros*, which would distinguish Christ based on the fact that He is distinctively different from all angels.
- The angel (star falling from heaven) of 9:1 is put into action by the sounding of the fifth trumpet. Likewise, the 4 angels of 9:13-14 are put into action by the sounding of the sixth trumpet. Contextually, there exists no reason for saying the angel of 9:1 is anyone other than an angel used of God in the events of the last days, just as those angels before him and after him.
- Likewise, there exists no contextual qualifier designating the angel of Revelation 20:1 as anyone but an angel. Allegorical or spiritualizing hermeneutics that make this angel Christ, or that make the angel an “intermediary exercising Christ’s authority over death and the grave”⁹, are bizarre at best. Christ defeated Satan with nothing more than His life given on the cross (Heb. 9:26) and resurrection from the grave. He needed nothing external to Himself, not a chain nor even an angel to affect the defeat.

The key and abyss

Having the key of the abyss, this angel has authority and ability over the place of the abyss. Regarding a spiritual being using an object, such

⁹ Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI. 2003) p. 209.

as a key and chain, and a fixed place capable of imprisoning a spiritual being, see the notes that follow under *A great Chain*.

The Greek word translated *abyss* (*bottomless pit*- KJV) appears 7 times in Revelation (9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 8). Each time it refers to a place of demonic incarceration. In Luke 8:31, demons entreated Christ not to send them there.

A great chain

A literal understanding of this passage has been objected to on the basis that angels and devils are spiritual beings, and, therefore, do not engage one another in battle using objects such as chains. However, a study of Scripture reveals that, although angels and devils are indeed spirit beings, they are nonetheless literal created beings who engage each other and a physical universe as seen in the following examples:

- Each other:

¹² Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. ¹³ "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia." (Dan 10:12-13 NASB)

"But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."" (Jude 9 NASB)

- Mankind:

²⁴ So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life. (Gen 3:24 NASB)

²³ Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, ²⁴ in order that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers. (Judges 9:23-24 NASB)

¹⁴ Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized him. (1 Sam 16:14 NASB; Compare vs. 16, 23; 18:10; 19:9)

²² "And the Lord said to him, 'How?' And he said, 'I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then He said, 'You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and do so.'²³ "Now therefore, behold, the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the Lord has proclaimed disaster against you." (1 Kings 22:22-23 NASB)

- Holding certain positions of power in world affairs:

¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Eph 6:11-12 NASB; Compare Dn. 10:12, Judges 9:23, and 1 Kings 22:22-23)

- Even controlling atmospheric conditions in the world:
See Job 1:12, 16-19

Furthermore, since demons themselves are created beings, it stands to reason that through the use of other created things suited to their realm they are capable of being subdued and bound; as we see,

- Places contain them
"and they were entreating Him not to command them to depart into the abyss." (Luke 8:31 NASB)

“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment...” (2 Pet 2:4 NASB)

- Bonds restrain them
“And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.” (Jude 6 NASB)

Because the Bible gives us these instances documenting the engagement of angels and demons with a physical universe and with each other, there is no reason to conclude that Revelation 20:1 must mean something other than what it literally says. There is nothing in the text to indicate anything other than a literal encounter between an angel and the devil, wherein a chain made to bind the devil is put to use. The material of which the chain is constructed is not given, but it is said to be *great*, obviously capable of holding the devil.

Seizing of the Devil

The angel laid hold of Satan. In the Greek it is *seized*, implying strength on the angel’s behalf as well as submission on the part of the devil. There is no doubt left as to whom this angel seizes for four names depicting various aspects of his nature are given.

1. **The dragon** - The word is used 13 times in Revelation and depicts Satan’s ruthless character.
2. **The serpent of old** - Here is depicted his cunning and crafty character and his long time presence among man ever since his introduction in Genesis 3.
3. **The devil** - The word means *slanderer*. In Revelation 12:10, he is called the accuser of the brethren— likely with false accusations. In John 8:44, Jesus identified Satan’s most noted character trait in connection with this word devil. In that passage, Satan is called the father of lies. Five times in this single verse Christ referred to his lying nature as:
 - a. does not stand in the truth
 - b. there is no truth in him
 - c. whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature

- d. he is a liar
 - e. father of lies
4. **Satan** - The word means *adversary*. He is the enemy of God and the saints, and he is the enemy of all that is good and God honoring.

By these names we are able to see the biblical depiction of Satan as a ruthless, crafty, slandering, lying enemy.

We are informed that the angel does the following five things with the devil:

1. Seizes him
2. Binds him
3. Throws him into the abyss (descriptive of a violent act)
4. Shuts the abyss over him
5. Seals him (or the abyss)

Such action is summed up in verse 7, “And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison...”. The angel will incarcerate Satan. By no uncertain terms we are informed that a stop is put to the devil. He is not weakened, neither is he merely staked to a chain like a mad dog free to operate within the chain’s reach. He is not under house arrest free to operate under a watchful eye. No, John saw the ruthless devil, seized, bound, and thrown into the abyss which is shut and sealed over him— *So that he should not deceive the nations any longer...*

The text is clear — the abyss becomes Satan’s prison. Because of his imprisonment, he cannot deceive the nations (20:3). His nature is not changed, but his exercise of it in the world is halted during this time. Thus, his most noted character trait is arrested for a thousand years. [Since it will be the devil who empowers the antichrist (Rv. 13:12; 2 Thess. 2:9) to deceive people and nations during the tribulation (2 Thess. 2:11; Rv. 13:14; 17:13, 17), the reign of the antichrist must be contemporaneous with Satan’s liberty. Therefore the imprisonment of Satan must follow the reign of the antichrist.]

As already stated, the short time Satan is released **following** the thousand years (20:3, 7) cannot refer to the period of time in which the antichrist reigns because some of those reigning with Christ throughout the imprisonment of Satan will be those who refused to worship the

beast (antichrist) and receive his mark. This clearly places the reign of the antichrist prior to the thousand years.

Some interpret this event between the angel and the devil as merely being symbolic. They do so to support the idea that Satan is **presently** free but unable to deceive the nations. This, they say, allows believers to take the Gospel to the world as commissioned in Mt. 28:18-20. However, such an interpretation denies the meaning of the words used by the Holy Spirit. Neither the words, nor the context of Scripture will allow this.

The Holy Spirit uses strong words (i.e., **seized, bound, thrown into the abyss**, which is **shut** and **sealed** (vs. 2-3) over its **prisoner** (v.7)) to convey the point that Satan will be halted for a thousand years. Furthermore, spiritualizing such words possessing clear meanings, and the meaning expressed by the combined use of these words, so as not to mean total confinement renders the passage unknowable. If such clear words do not mean what they say, how can we be certain of any meaning, and, for that matter, the meaning of any of the words in this entire context? Spiritualizing away the obvious meaning of terms of such clear and emphasized statements to a point where the words do not mean what they say is more in line with a postmodern¹⁰ approach of interpreting Scripture than a biblical pursuit for truth.

The Place of Incarceration *and threw him into the abyss*

The word translated *abyss*, or *bottomless pit*, appears 7 times in Revelation (9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 8). Each time it refers to a place of demonic incarceration.¹¹

In Luke 8:31, demons entreated Christ not to send them into the abyss. From this incident, we see that the abyss is most definitely a place. However, it is certainly not a place they desire to be.

¹⁰ In postmodernism words do not mean what they say.

¹¹ That the beast is said to be from the abyss (11:7; 17:8) implies demonic empowerment as this ruler and/or kingdom will likely be influenced by demons which are currently being held until a time during the tribulation when they will be released as mentioned in 9:1-3.

In the abyss, Satan will not be merely hindered by a long chain. He will not only be prevented from deceiving Christians, but also from deceiving nations. In fact, the abyss will be his prison according to verse 7, “And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from **his prison...**” (Rev 20:7 NASB)

Every instance in the New Testament where the Greek word translated in Rev. 20:7 as *prison* is used with reference to a place, it always refers to a specific place of incarceration. There is no Scriptural warrant for assuming the abyss is any place but a special temporal place suited to house the devil and demons. The abyss cannot be the earth as proposed by some who maintain that Revelation 20:1-6 is a recapitulation of 12:7-11. According to recapitulation theory, although there are some differences between chapters 12 and 20, the two sections of Scripture “depict the same events and mutually interpret one another.”¹² However, this is not so, for the differences are substantial and clearly indicate a different event. Although there are some similarities, similarity does not constitute equality! We can easily notice the significant difference with a brief comparison between the two chapters in the following table.

Revelation 12	Revelation 20
The devil cast to the earth	The devil cast into the abyss
The devil at large (v. 12, 13, 17)	The devil incarcerated (v. 3, 7)
The devil who deceives the whole world (v. 9)	The devil unable to deceive the nations (v. 3)
The world under a woe because of Satan’s wrath (v. 12)	The world blessed as implied by Christ’s reign and Satan’s incarceration (v. 4, 7)

While Satan is on the earth, he is not imprisoned but free to roam (Job 1:7; 2:2; 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:12-13, 17; 20:7-8). In the abyss, he is imprisoned (20:7). Additionally, those demons who entreated

¹² Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, (Baker Books , Grand Rapids, MI. 2003) p. 201.

Christ not to send them into the abyss (Luke 8:31) were already in the world. If the world is the abyss, the passage in Luke is meaningless.

The abyss could not be the lives of unbelievers as proposed by Augustine in the *City of God*¹³, because in spite of Augustine's position, Satan already has full control of the lost (2 Timothy 2:26; 1 John 5:19) and has maintained such control as will be shown in the section *Satan's Present Activities*. Furthermore, the heart of the unbeliever could hardly be Satan's prison since it is said of Satan that he now works in the sons of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2), where he freely expresses himself through the employment of his attributes. His most notable attribute is deception, and according to Revelation 20:3, he will be unable to employ it against the nations. No, according to Scripture, it is not Satan who is the prisoner of the lost but the lost who are prisoners of Satan (2 Tim. 2:26; 1 Jn. 5:19).

That the abyss is a place is denied by some who maintain that the "term should rather be thought of as a figurative description of the way in which Satan's activities will be curbed during the thousand-year period."¹⁴ This position ignores the plain use of the language in the text. Not only is the abyss described as a place into which the devil is cast but as already pointed out, the abyss is also described as a prison (Rv. 20:7). It is a place into which Satan will be *cast* and it is a place from which he must *come out* (20:8). Every time *abyss* appears in the New Testament it is a place. The plea of the devils in Luke 8:31-32 to be cast into pigs as opposed to the abyss is a plea for one place over against another.

The clearest and most consistent interpretation of the abyss is that of a prison in which Satan will be incarcerated for one-thousand years. During which time he will be completely unable to deceive the nations.

¹³ In his work *The City of God*, Augustine writes, "And he cast him into the abyss,' — *i.e.*, cast the devil into the abyss. By the *abyss* is meant; the countless multitude of the wicked whose hearts are unfathomably deep in malignity against the Church of God; not that the devil was not there before, but he is said to be cast in thither, because, when prevented from harming believers, he takes more complete possession of the ungodly."

¹⁴ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, (Grand Rapids, MI. Wm. B. Eerdmans) p. 228.

A Biblically Unfounded Interpretation of the Binding of Satan

It has been stated that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 is merely a way of saying that since Christ's first advent, "... he [Satan] cannot deceive the nations in such a way as to keep them from learning about the truth of God"¹⁵ as he did during the Old Testament period. But such a teaching is not founded on the clear testimony of the Word of God. The lost have always been under Satan's power and binding Satan has not been necessary to get God's truth to them. This was true in the Old Testament and it remains true today (1 Cor. 10:20; Eph. 2:2-3; Col. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:26). God certainly let the nations go their own way (Acts 14:16). However, He gave some revelation (Enoch, Noah, Job, Abraham, Joseph and others), and He gave Israel a special written revelation (the written Word) and as the Scripture clearly shows, these proclaimed the Word of God to others and to nations long before the first advent of Christ. Thus, God, from the beginning, has had compassion on whom He will, enabling men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation to believe His Word. This, as the various texts below indicate, was more than an occasional event.

1. Enoch

Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam preached, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." (Jude 14-15 NASB)

2. Noah

Noah, as he built the ark preached to a lost world and was called a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). He preached for approximately 120 years.

3. Job

Job, who was a Gentile most likely living after the flood but prior to Abraham, proclaimed the reality of the redeemer and that in the end the redeemer would take His stand on the earth (Job 19:25).

¹⁵ Ibid., 228.

4. Melchizedek

Melchizedek was a priest of the Most High God (Gn. 14:18; Hb. 7:1) before God established His covenant with Abraham (Gn. 15:1-19). Furthermore, he was king of righteousness, peace (Heb. 7:2) and was a representation of the Son of God (Heb. 7:3). As a priest of God as well as a great man of God (Heb. 7:4), Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham (Gn. 14:20; Heb. 7:4) and seminally from Levi (Heb. 7:9-10). These facts testify to the reality of much knowledge and belief in God and His truth that was present in the world prior to Abraham.

5. Abraham

Abraham was a witness to Canaan (Genesis 14:17-24).

6. Joseph

Joseph was a witness to Egypt (Genesis 39-50).

7. Joshua and Israel

Joshua and Israel were witnesses of God to Jericho and the nations of the land. When Rahab hid the spies she told them, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you." (Joshua 2:9). She believed (Heb. 11:31). She, as well as her father and mother, brothers, and all her relatives, were spared God's judgment on Jericho (Joshua 6:22-23). Rahab eventually was named in the lineage of Christ (Mt. 1:5).

While Israel was to destroy all of certain tribes upon entering the Promised Land (Deut. 7:1-2; 20:16-18), they were to offer terms of peace to those that were far away. If the terms were accepted, the people of the city would become the servants of Israel (Deut. 20:10-11). Otherwise, the men were to be killed, and the rest taken as spoil (Deut. 20:12-15). Thus they were to be God's witnesses as He stated in Isaiah (Is. 43:8-13). It was not Satan that held the other nations in bondage that prevented Israel from being a faithful witness, but Israel's own sin (Ezk. 16).

8. Jonah

Jonah witnessed to the Ninevites. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria. As such, it was the capital of one of the great empires of the world. According to Jonah 1:2, 3:2 and 4:11, Nineveh was "the great city." In 3:3, it is called an "exceeding great city." In Jonah 4:11, we read there were 120,000 young children (*persons who do not know the*

difference between their right hand and their left hand) living in Nineveh. When adults are included in this figure, some estimate the population to be as high as one million people (Fausset's Dictionary). Their wickedness was so great that Jonah 1:2 says it had come up before God. He sent Jonah to cry against it (1:2) and proclaim the city's ruin if the people did not repent and believe God (3:4). They believed in God (3:5) as their king issued a decree calling on the people to fast and to "call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way..." (3:8). Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah (Lk. 11:32).

9. Jeremiah

Jeremiah preached to nations (Jer. 1:10)

10. Daniel

Daniel took God's word to Babylon and Persia. Like Jonah, Daniel was God's witness inside the walls of world empires. His impact, and the impact of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego), resulted in the kings of these empires issuing decrees for their nations and others to acknowledge God (Dan. 3:28-30; 6:25-27). Even the great king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, appears to have been converted under the ministry of Daniel (Dan. 4:19-37).

Summary of Satan being bound:

Thus far we have seen that the binding of Satan will result in a complete cessation of his activities in the inhabited world as opposed to his activities merely being hindered or limited.

1. Satan's incarceration is clearly expressed by a six-fold description:

1. Satan is seized (20:2)
2. Satan is bound (20:2)
3. Satan is thrown into the abyss (20:3)
4. The abyss is shut (20:3)
5. The abyss is sealed (20:3)
6. Satan is a prisoner for one thousand years (20:7)

2. Satan's incarceration is not merely the freeing of the nations since the death and resurrection of Christ, allowing them to learn the truth of God, because the Old Testament's record of God's truth being proclaimed to Gentiles is demonstrated by:

- Enoch

- Noah
- Job
- Melchizedek
- Abraham
- Joseph
- Joshua and Israel
- Jonah
- Jeremiah
- Daniel

The New Testament Depicts Satan as not Presently Incarcerated

Satan's Present Activities/The World's Present Character

The New Testament presents Satan as presently being at liberty and having power in the world. His presence and power radically influence the character of this present world. Therefore, the event of Satan's binding expressed in Revelation 20:1-3 is not in place now. He is not presently incarcerated. The New Testament makes this explicitly clear three ways as it depicts:

1. Satan's Present Influence in the Lives of Believers

Indeed, Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). Through the cross He disarmed the devil and demons that they might have no authority over the converted (Colossians 2:14-15; Hebrews 2:14-15). However, these verses cannot be claimed as either a fulfillment or explanation of Rev. 20:1-3. A study of the context of these references reveals that Christ's death on behalf of believers disarmed the devil so that He cannot justifiably charge believers (Col. 2:14-5) and hold death over their heads as an instrument of fear (Heb. 2:14-15). In Christ's death what was directly accomplished for believers **indirectly** impacted the devil. Revelation 20 addresses that which is to be done **directly** to the devil.

Although Christ's death delivered believers from Satan's power, it did not deliver them from his influence and God still uses Satan to accomplish His will in the lives of the saints. Satan therefore continues

as a very real and active foe against believers. Satan continues to exercise authority in the world as opposed to being shut in the abyss. Consider the following:

- In Luke 22:31-34, Jesus told Peter that Satan desired to sift him, but Christ prayed that his faith not fail and that afterwards he was to strengthen his brothers. The sifting of Peter continued until after the resurrection of Christ and possibly through John 21:15-17. In Acts and through his epistles Peter strengthened the brethren.
- In Acts 5:3, Peter said Satan filled the heart of Ananias to lie to God.
- Romans 16:20 implies that Satan **is yet** to be crushed under the feet of the Saints.
- Paul instructed the church at Corinth (1 Cor 5:5) to deliver a sinning brother over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the soul might be saved.
- In 1 Corinthians 7:5, Paul instructs married Christians not to deprive each other of physical union lest Satan tempt them.
- 2 Corinthians 2:11 speaks of the possibility of Satan taking advantage of believers who do not forgive.
- 2 Corinthians 11:14 states that the devil presently disguises himself as an angel of light. Thus, he continues to be active in the world in his role as the deceiver, which is contrary to Revelation 20:1-3.¹⁶
- Ephesians 4:27 warns against giving the devil an opportunity. This would be of no concern if he is presently bound as described in Revelation 20.
- Ephesians 6:11 exhorts believers to put on the spiritual armor of God so that they can stand against the devil's schemes.
- Ephesians 6:16 exhorts believers to take up the shield of faith with which they are able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the evil one. These verses in Ephesians do not indicate that Satan is bound or even loosely restrained. perplex

¹⁶ In 2 Corin. 11:3 and 14 Paul is concerned about believers being deceived by the devil. In the light of this concern, spiritualizing Rev. 20 to mean that Satan is bound so that he cannot deceive the nations (Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, Pg. 210) creates a perplexing condition for it is a strange doctrine that presents Satan unable to deceive the nations but able to deceive the Saints.

- In 1 Thessalonians 2:18, Paul speaks of Satan thwarting his attempt to visit the believers at Thessalonica.
- In 1 Timothy 1:20, Paul delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan so that they might be taught not to blaspheme.
- 1 Timothy 3:7 warns of the snare of the devil. Not only does the devil have schemes (Eph. 6:11), but he executes them (Eph. 4:27 and 6:16) and they are affective (1 Tim. 3:7).
- James 4:7 instructs believers to resist the devil.
- In 1 Peter 5:8, Peter warns Believers to be sober and vigilant for their adversary the devil is walking about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. A definite contrast to the description in Revelation 20:1-3 and 7, but essentially equivalent to Job 1:7 and 2:2 where Satan is shown to be roaming about on the earth and walking around on it. The point being that Peter does not present Satan's liberty less restrained than that which is depicted in Job.

2. Satan's Present Rule over Unbelievers

In light of such presence and influence in the lives of Christians, one must ask what power Satan presently has over unbelievers. We must consider that:

- Paul calls Satan the god of this world in 2 Corinthians 4:4 and says that he blinded the minds of the unbelieving.
- In 2 Corinthians 11:13, Paul says that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Thus, he is now deceiving the nations of the world; consider in contrast to Revelation 20:3 which says that while he is bound he will not be able to deceive the nations.
- Ephesians 2:2 calls Satan the "prince of the power of the air" and shows that he is presently at work in the lives of unbelievers — "the spirit that is **now** working in the sons of disobedience".
- Ephesians 6:11-12 clearly depicts Satan's present realm and his influence in current world affairs. ¹¹ *Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.* ¹² *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.* Compare this to Gen. 3:1-5, Daniel 10:12, Judges 9:23, and 1 Kings 22:22-23, and we see that this has been Satan's influence for quite

some time. According to this passage in Ephesians 6, his influence still remains.

- Paul says Satan holds those in opposition (unbelievers) captive to do his will (2 Timothy 2:25-26).
- John says all unbelievers are in his arms (1 John 5:19). This is to say that all unbelievers are still under Satan's control.

3. Satan's Present Activity as described in Revelation

The book of Revelation can be separated into three divisions. According to Rev. 1:19, John was told by Christ to record "... *the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things.*" The *things which you have seen* pertain to John's vision of Christ in chapter one. This speaks of John's immediate past. The *things which are* relate to the seven churches in chapters two and three. This is the present. The *things which shall take place after these things* refers to the future and follows *the things which are* and covers chapters four through twenty-two verse five.

The *things which are* speak to the seven literal, historical churches (1:11) and relates to churches of all time. These seven churches are representative of all of the churches of John's day to the present.¹⁷ Though the individual applications may vary, they provide a sort of panoramic perspective of the church to the present. Thus, the *present* as represented by the phrase *the things which are* encompasses our

¹⁷Christ is seen by John in the midst of the seven churches of Asia Minor (Compare Rev. 1:12-13 with 1:20) this does not mean that Christ is not also in the midst of the other churches such as the church at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Colossae, Philippi, Thessalonica and others. The number seven is used by Scripture as representative of a universal completeness, thus what is said to these seven churches is essentially said to all of Christ's churches. John is to write to these specific churches. The book of Revelation as a whole however is to all of the bond servants of Christ (1:1). Therefore, all are represented by these seven. Further demonstrating that these seven churches are representative of all of Christ's churches is the same exhortation given at the end of each of the individual addresses, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

time as well as John's. Now notice what is said of Satan as Christ addresses four of these churches:

- In 2:9, Jesus said to the church of Smyrna that He knows the blasphemy of those who are of the synagogue of Satan.
- In 2:10, Jesus tells Smyrna that the devil who is Satan, (see 12:9 and 20:2) is about to cast some of them into prison.
- In 2:13, Jesus' words "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is..." may have indicated that the city of Pergamum was a Satanic stronghold.
- When addressing the church of Thyatira in 2:24, Jesus alludes to some being involved in the deep things of Satan.
- To the church of Philadelphia, Christ again references those of the synagogue of Satan (3:9).

These verses clearly depict Satan as having organized followers, being active in specific places and in specific cities, and being present to assault believers. This is not the case in Revelation 20:1-3 and 7.

Further demonstrating that Satan is not merely hindered or tethered with a long chain is the fact that 20:7 calls the abyss into which he will be thrown a **prison**. Every place in the New Testament the Greek word translated here as *prison* is used with reference to a place it refers to a place of incarceration.

So, according to the New Testament, Satan is presently active and at liberty to go back and forth throughout the earth. Yet there is a day reserved when he will be bound and locked away for a predetermined time. To claim Satan is **presently** in the condition described in Revelation 20:1-3 and 7 is to:

1. Reduce the meaning conveyed by the words in that chapter.
2. Ignore most of the other passages of the New Testament that demonstrate a present condition contrary to that clearly described in Revelation 20.
3. Ignore those verses referencing him in chapters two and three of Revelation.

Summary of Satan's present activities:

That Satan's incarceration is *future* as opposed to *present* is demonstrated by the New Testament's description of:

1. Satan's present influence in the lives of believers
2. Satan's present rule over unbelievers
3. Satan's activity in the *things which are* described in Revelation 2-3

The Duration of Satan's Incarceration

And bound him for a thousand years

The word *millennium* comes from the Latin words *mille*, meaning *thousand*, and *annus*, meaning *year*. *Millennium* relates to the Greek word *chilioi* translated *thousand* in Revelation 20:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, & 7.

A Thousand Years, Obscurity or Perspicuity?

The ***thousand year*** or *millennium* during which time Satan will be bound from the earth and Christ will reign on the earth has been denied as being a literal thousand years on the premise that the book of Revelation, and in particular the specific passages referring to the thousand years, are obscure.¹⁸ Therefore, it is concluded that the thousand years are not to be understood as a literal thousand years but symbolic depicting an undisclosed lengthy period of time extending well beyond a thousand years.

It should be recognized that if the passage is truly obscure, then it would be incorrect to dogmatically conclude that the period should be interpreted as symbolic. As a matter of fact, if the book is truly obscure then any dogmatic interpretation would be questionable. The passages are either obscure or they are not. If obscure, then they must be regarded as obscure and left as such without assigning a dogmatic meaning. On the other hand, if the passage yields its meaning in the light of its immediate context, and the context of the rest of Scripture, then it is not obscure.

¹⁸ Referring to Rev. 20:1-6 Louis Berkhof says, "The passage occurs in a highly symbolical book and is admittedly very obscure, as may be inferred from the different interpretations of it." Systematic Theology, p. 715.

Perhaps a brief look at what may be considered a truly obscure subject in Scripture compared to that of Revelation 20 will assist in seeing the difference between obscurity and perspicuity (clarity).

1 Corinthians 15:29¹⁹ twice mentions the subject of baptism for the dead. It is the only verse in all of Scripture where this subject is mentioned. Thus, the subject is mentioned only two times in the same verse, in only two sentences in all the Word of God. Furthermore, in the immediate context there is no explanation as to the cause or result of the act. Paul simply mentions it in passing while arguing for the doctrine of the resurrection.

“Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?”

1 Corinthians 15:29 NASB

Noted author and respected New Testament commentator John MacArthur accurately comments on this passage of Scripture and reveals a sound interpretive approach to the text when he writes,

“This verse is one of the most difficult in all of Scripture, and has many legitimate possible interpretations; it has also, however, been used to support many strange and heretical ideas. The careful and honest interpreter may survey the several dozen interpretations offered and still not be dogmatic about what it means. But we can be dogmatic, from the clear teaching of other parts of Scripture, about some of the things it does not mean. As to what this verse does mean, we can only guess, since history has locked it into obscurity.”²⁰

The argument claiming Revelation 20, in particular the thousand years, to be obscure would better serve its position by simply claiming ignorance as to the meaning of the thousand years rather than assigning a dogmatic meaning to it and thereby removing the basis of its claim of obscurity. There is little room for dogmatism in obscurity.

¹⁹ Specifically, it is the subject of baptism for the dead that is obscure not the Scripture of 1 Corinthians 15:29.

²⁰ (from The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Copyright © Moody Press and John MacArthur, Jr., 1983-2007.)

The Perspicuity of the Text, Isolated but not Infrequent

Revelation 20 is the only chapter of Scripture that specifically states a set duration of time for the earthly reign of Christ and Satan’s incarceration. However, while the specified duration is isolated to chapter 20, its appearance here is not infrequent. And its frequent use furthers the point that the thousand years is not obscure. Instead, its frequent use actually highlights the perspicuity of the Scripture. The phrase *thousand years* appears:

- Six times
- In six different verses
- In five sentences
- And in three paragraphs

The following tables show a comparison between what might be considered an isolated obscure subject (1 Cor. 15:29) and the thousand years passage in Revelation 20.

Obscure	Not Obscure
Baptism for the Dead	Thousand Years
1 Corinthians 15:29	Revelation 20:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7
Mentioned only twice in all of Scripture	Mentioned six times in Revelation 20
Same Paragraph	Three Paragraphs
Same Verse	Six Different Verses
Two Sentences	Five Sentences
No Additional Scriptural Allusions to Subject	Multiple Allusions to Thousand Year Period Throughout Scripture ²¹
No Explanation associated to Subject	Multiple Explanations Associated to Subject

²¹ While Revelation 20 is the only chapter of Scripture that specifically describes a set duration of time related to the earthly reign of Christ, it is not the only section of Scripture that addresses the content and character of His reign. The character and content of the millennial kingdom of Christ is mentioned throughout Scripture. For example see Deut. 30:1-5; Ps. 2:6-12; Is. 11:6-9; 65:17-25; Jer. 30-33; Ez. 37; Joel 3:18-21; Mic. 4:1-8; Zech. 14:9-21; Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:29-30; Acts 1:3, 6; 3:21; 1 Cor. 6:3; 2 Tim. 2:12, etc....

Explanations Associated with the Thousand Years of Revelation 20

Verse 2	Satan bound for a thousand years
Verse 3	Satan is unable to deceive the nations for a thousand years
Verse 4	A thousand year reign of Saints with Christ
Verse 5	The resurrection of the rest of the dead following the thousand years
Verse 6	Thousand year reign with Christ repeated
Verse 7	Satan released at the end of the thousand years

Perspicuity (clarity) as opposed to obscurity is further conveyed in the context by the following three characteristics:

1. Beginning, Content, and Completion

Adding further clarity to this passage is the fact the thousand year period of Revelation 20 has a specific beginning, specific content, and a specific completion. Merely noting these facts, as well as pointing out that the thousand year period is not obscure, does not define the duration as being a literal thousand years. However, clarity, content and completion notably add significant weight to a literal interpretation of the thousand years. What these elements certainly do argue for is that the thousand year period should not be understood as or be described as obscure.

Notice that with the beginning, content, and end of the thousand years there are associated very specific events.

- The beginning
 - Satan is bound (v.2)
 - Saints are resurrected (v.4)
- Content
 - Satan is unable to deceive the nations (v.3)
 - Saints reign with Christ (v.4)
- The end
 - Satan is released (v. 3,7)
 - Satan deceives the nations (v. 7, 10)

- Satan is cast into the lake of fire (v. 10)
- The rest of the dead are raised (v. 5, 11-13)

2. Interrelation and Interdependence

Furthermore, in many ways the events of the thousand years are both interrelated and interdependent to one another as well as to the surrounding context. Such interrelation and interdependence demonstrates order and structure in the text promoting clarity as opposed to obscurity. For instance:

- Nations not being deceived is dependent upon the fact, according to the text, that Satan is incarcerated. This is dependent upon the nature of the abyss, the authority and action of the angel casting him into the abyss.
- Saints reigning with Christ is demonstrated to be dependent upon a resurrection which is obviously dependent on a previous death which, in some cases, as explained in verse four will result from martyrdom.
- Reigning with Christ **for the duration** of a thousand years is dependent upon the resurrection occurring at the beginning of the thousand years.
- Those saints who did not worship the beast or receive his mark and reign with Christ for a thousand years must live during the tribulation, during the antichrist's reign. For the tribulation is the only time worshipping the beast or receiving his mark will be possible.
- The antichrist's reign and ability to deceive the nations is dependent upon Satan's ability to empower him which will be impossible during the thousand years seeing that during Satan's incarceration it is said he will not be able to deceive the nations.
- Satan's release from prison after the thousand years are completed (v. 7) is dependent upon a previous incarceration which, as the text previously indicated in verse three, will last until the thousand years are completed.

3. Grammatical Use of terms

Adding significant weight to the argument that the thousand years are to be understood as a literal thousand years is not only the clarity of the text but its grammar. For instance, there is no other place in more than forty occurrences in the New Testament where the word *year* or *years*, when used with a numerical adjective means anything but a literal period of time lasting for the duration designated by the number. This also stands true in the over eight hundred instances in the Old Testament, where the word *year* is used with a numerical adjective. To interpret the thousand years of Revelation 20 as referring to a period of time other than a literal thousand year period, essentially ignores the common meaning of the numerical adjective when used to describe years. This actually results in obscuring what is otherwise a clear text.

It is maintained by some that the phrase *a thousand years* is merely a way of expressing a long duration of time which exceeds a literal thousand years. Such a position not only ignores the common meaning of the numerical adjective as described above but it also ignores the fact that the book of Revelation conveys long or short periods, large or small quantities without a numerical adjective and when it does so it does so quite plainly. For example,

When the book of Revelation expresses unspecified short periods of time it does so explicitly:

Revelation 20:3 "...and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a **short time**." The phrase *short time* in the Greek is the word is *micron*. It means a *little* and is used here to address a *micron* of *chronos* (*chronos* is Gk. for duration of time). While the actual length of time is not explicit, the fact that it will be a short time is.

When the book of Revelation specifies specific short periods of time it does so explicitly:

"For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a **short time**." In the Gk. the word is *oligos*. The **specific** time would be that time during which

the antichrist is empowered by Satan (Rev 12:12; see also 12:6, 14; 13:1-18).

When the book of Revelation expresses unspecified large quantities it does so explicitly:

“and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the **number of them is like the sand of the seashore.**”
(Rev 20:8 NASB)

“And I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was **myriads of myriads**, and thousands of thousands...”
(Rev 5:11 NASB)

When the book of Revelation expresses specific large quantities it does so explicitly:

“And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel...” (Rev 7:4 NASB)

More than ten times Revelation uses the Greek word *polus* translated *many*, *much*, and *great* to express large numbers (Rev 1:15; 5:4, 11; 7:9; 8:3, 11; 9:9; 10:11; 14:2; 17:1; 19:1, 6, 12). The book easily could have used the same word to express an undisclosed period of time exceeding a literal thousand years in the 20th chapter, but it did not. Instead, it used *chilioi*—*thousand (a single group of one thousand years)*. Furthermore, every time the book of Revelation refers to multiple *thousands* it uses the word *chilias*. This Greek word *chilias* (multiple groups of one thousand) is used 19 times (Rev 5:11; 7:4, 5, 6, 7, 8; 11:13; 14:1, 3; 21:16) but not once in chapter 20. The use of these two words is similar to that of our English word *dozen*. If we speak of a dozen eggs we are referring to a plurality of eggs (12) in a single group of one dozen. If we speak of dozenss, we are still talking about a plurality of eggs but in multiple groups with each group consisting of 12 eggs. If the thousand years of Revelation 20 was meant to refer to a time period consisting of multiple thousands, it seems that the book would have used *chilias* (multiple groups of a thousand) as opposed to

chilioi (a single group of one thousand), especially given the fact that all other times in Revelation multiple thousands are meant it uses *chilias*.

Therefore, it can be safely concluded that if the thousand years of Revelation 20 during which Satan will be imprisoned was intended to be anything but a literal thousand year period, such as an undisclosed period of time exceeding a literal thousand year timeframe, the book could have easily and explicitly expressed this.

Satan's Future Inactivity/The World's Future Character *So that he should not deceive the nations any longer (20:3c)*

We have seen that this phrase speaks to the most noted character trait of Satan—that of deception, and in particular, that character trait being arrested for a thousand years. The consequence to Satan being bound is that he is not able to deceive the nations. This fact, coupled with the fact that the world will know the immediate presence of Jesus as He reigns in the world with His glorified saints will drastically alter the character of the future world for a thousand years (See the table *Character of the Millennial Kingdom* on page 58).

However, this is not to say that during the thousand years Satan is bound, evil and deception will cease to exist in the world of men.

Although mortal believers will possess the flesh during the millennium and will consequently sin and therefore die, they will not experience the deceit of Satan by which he presently sifts believers, fills their hearts to lie, tempts them, takes advantage of them, hurls his flaming arrows at them, seeks to thwart and devour them (See previous comments under *Satan's Present Influence in the Lives of Believers*).

The existence of evil and deception in the hearts of the lost will be as real during the one thousand years as it ever was. Unless a person is given a new nature, his or her life will always be dominated by the presence of evil (Rm. 3:9-18) and deception (Jer. 17:9). Actually, saying that a person's life is dominated by evil and deception does not go far enough according to the references just cited. According to these

verses, a person's very nature prior to conversion is evil and deceitful.²² Nothing but a divine work of God in the inner man can ever change this. Even binding the devil will not change the condition of the natural man.

However, during the thousand years Satan is bound, unbelievers will be ruled by a rod of iron under Christ and His resurrected saints (Rev. 20:4-6; 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). During this time, unbelievers in and of themselves will lack the supernatural empowerment and opportunity to rally. They will exist but "in the closet". With their king incarcerated and Christ's presence ruling the world they will lack the key individual who is able to establish their evil solidarity. Consequently, they will acclimate themselves to the new world around them. Like Judas, who falsely followed Christ (Jn. 6:64) prior to Satan putting betrayal in his heart (Jn. 13:2) and then later entering his heart to betray Christ (Jn. 13:27), these individuals will offer feigned worship to Christ (see Psalm 18:43-45; 66:3; 81:15).²³ In that world, they will be as wolves dwelling with lambs and leopards lying with goats²⁴ until they emerge from their closets under the unifying rule of Satan when he is released from his prison at the end of the millennium.

Nevertheless, as stated previously, the Bible indicates that during the millennium the character of the world will be drastically altered while Satan is in his prison and Christ rules on the earth (Deut. 30:1-6; Ps. 2:6-12; Is. 11:6-9; 65:17-25; Jer. 30-33; Ez. 37; Joel 3:18-21; Mic. 4:1-8; Zech. 14:9-21; Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:29-30; Acts 1:3, 6; 3:21; 1 Cor. 6:3; 2 Tim. 2:12).

Further understanding of the impact of Satan being bound during the millennium will be gleaned when we examine verses 7-8.

²² A study on the Biblical doctrine of the total depravity of man will yield much understanding on this condition and such a study is strongly recommended as it will serve to enhance one's knowledge of the sovereign grace of God.

²³ In John 6 we see that there were several people who on the surface appeared to be disciples of Christ. These were guilty of falsely following Christ and eventually left Him. This was no surprise to Christ but He allowed them to follow even though He knew from the start who they were (John 6:52-71).

²⁴ My comment here is not an interpretation of Is. 11:6 or 65:25. Instead it is merely a use of poetry.

Resurrection, Raised to Reign

As we move into the fourth verse of Revelation 20 it is necessary that we consider some preliminary and basic facts related to resurrection.

A. There are two types of physical resurrections:

1. **Mortal**— Resurrection of the mortal body to mortality. This is to say the resurrection of a body that will once again experience physical death (1 Kings 17:17-22—Widow’s son; 2 Kings 4:32-37— Shunammite’s son; 2 Kings 13:20-21— Dead man out of Elisha’s grave; Luke 7:12 -15— Widow’s son; Mark 5:21-42; Luke 8:40-55— Jairus’ daughter; John 11:43-44— Lazarus; Acts 9:37-40— Tabitha “Dorcas”; Acts 20:9-12— Eutychus). All of these eventually died again.
2. **Immortal**— Resurrection of the body to immortality. This is to say the resurrection of a body that will never again experience physical death.

Of this immortal resurrection, Jesus was the first as He is referred to as the first fruits of those who are asleep (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). Of Jesus’ resurrection, the following is said to be true in Scripture:

- a. His resurrection was to immortality (Acts 13:34; Romans 6:9)
- b. This is a physical body as opposed to merely being a spirit:
 - i. Jesus said He would raise His body (Jn. 2:19-22)
 - ii. Jesus’ resurrected body was touched (Mt. 28:9; Jn. 20:16-17)
 - iii. Jesus said His resurrected body was physical (Lk. 24:38-39)
 - iv. Jesus ate and drank in His resurrected body (Lk. 24:41-43; Jn. 21:9-13 with Acts 10:40-41)
 - v. Christ presented Himself alive (Acts 1:3; 10:39-41; 1 Cor. 1:8)
- c. This is the same physical body only immortal:
 - i. When Jesus said He would raise His body He referred to the very body that was destroyed (Jn. 2:19-22)

- ii. Disciples recognized Jesus after His resurrection based on familiarity of preexisting conditions with His mortal body (Jn. 20:24-29).

Subsequent to and as a result of the resurrection of Christ, believers will be resurrected (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). After Christ's resurrection some believers who had previously died were resurrected, likely as attestation to Christ's resurrection and the future resurrection of all believers (Mt. 27:51-53).

Resurrected saints will have a body like that of Christ (Phil. 3:20-21). Therefore our resurrection:

- a. Will be to immortality (Lk. 20:34-36; 1 Cor. 15:42, 52-54)
- b. Will be physical as it is **the body** that shall be raised (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Thess. 4:16). In 1 Corinthians 15:44, it is called a *spiritual body* strictly in the sense that it is fitted for immortality. Notice it is still a body as opposed to being just a spirit.
- c. Will be the same body only immortal as it is **this** body that shall be raised (1 Cor. 15:53, 54)

- B. The resurrection has an order (1 Cor. 15:23a).
 1. Christ (1 Cor. 15:23b)
 2. Believers (1 Cor. 15:23c)
 3. Unbelievers (1 Cor. 15:24)

John 5:28-29 describes the content of the resurrection (believers and unbelievers), while 1 Corinthians 15:23-24 describes the order.

Saint's Raised to Reign with Christ

Revelation 20:4a

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them.

This verse is interpreted by verse 6 as saints reigning with Christ for a thousand years. As mentioned before, this reign is more than a vicarious reign. It is a reign **with** Christ in His presence not merely reigning in Him or presently being seated with Him in heavenly places as described in Ephesians 2:6. This concept of believers reigning with Christ is described in the book of Revelation and elsewhere (2:26-27; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4, 6; Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:29-30; 1 Corin. 6:3; 2 Tim. 2:12).

The antecedent of the pronoun *they* in Rev. 20:4 is therefore best understood to be those to whom Christ and the Word of God promised this future rule. While Revelation 19:14 introduces us to those armies of heaven coming to rule, Revelation 20:4-6 reveals the long awaited fulfillment of the grand and glorious promise of ruling **with** Christ.

“And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.” (Rev 19:14 NASB)

As promised in the following verses:

“And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matthew 19:28 NASB)

“and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Luke 22:29-30 NASB)

“Do you not know that we shall **judge** (kree'-no) angels? How much more, matters of this life? If then you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church?” (1 Corinthians 6:3-4 NASB)

“If we endure, we shall also **reign** (bas-il-yoo-o) with Him... “
(2 Timothy 2:12 NASB)

“And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall **rule** (poy-mah-ee-no) them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father...”
(Revelation 2:26-27 NASB)

“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”
(Revelation 3:21 NASB)

“And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will **reign** (bas-il-yoo-o) upon the earth.” (Revelation 5:10 NASB)

“And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will **rule** (poy-mah-ee-no) them with a rod of iron;

and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.”
(Revelation 19:15 NASB)

“And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”
(Revelation 20:4:b-c NASB)

The reign of the saints includes those martyred during the tribulation. Verse 4c specifically refers to saints martyred during the tribulation being resurrected and reigning with Christ for a thousand years.

Informative Questions

1. How do we know this resurrection and reign is not merely a description of a resurrection to new life (regeneration)?

We know that this is not a description of a resurrection to new life, specifically in the sense of regeneration, because these individuals were already regenerated as indicated by the fact that they had been martyred because of the testimony of Jesus and the word of God (v. 4b) and had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand (v. 4c).

2. How do we know that this resurrection and reign is not merely a description of martyred saints ascending to heaven?

We know that this is not a description of the souls of saints martyred during the tribulation ascending to heaven because John’s description in Revelation 20 encompasses all those martyred as coming to life and reigning with Christ for a thousand years, thus he includes the souls of martyred saints **already in heaven** which he previously described in Revelation 6:9-11.

If, as purported by some,²⁵ the phrase “they came to life” was intended to convey the idea of the spirits of saints martyred ascending

²⁵ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, (Grand Rapids, MI. Wm. B. Eerdmans) p. 235.

to heaven as a way of comforting the remaining Christians on earth during John's day it seems that the better place to have done that would have been back in the 6th chapter where those martyred were first mentioned.

Moreover, if all the phrase *they came to life* means is that these martyred saints are alive in heaven it is hardly needed. It was evident from the context of Revelation 6:9-11 that martyred saints are alive in heaven. Likewise, interpreting the phrase "they came to life" as a description of merely being in heaven as opposed to being on earth is also without warrant. For it is evident that if they reign with Christ Who is in heaven (according to this view) , they too are in heaven.

An overall examination of the order and context of the events reveals that the resurrection of revelation 20:4 is not merely a description of martyred saints ascending to heaven. Twice stated is the fact that the martyred saints will come to life and reign the duration of the thousand year period.

"... they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."
20:4d

Again in verse 6, as participants in the first resurrection they, *"... reign with Him for a thousand years."* 20:6c

As previously explained, the thousand years is a specific duration of time to be understood as a literal period of one thousand years. The saints are said to reign for the entire length of that period. Thus, their reign will not begin until the thousand years begins. The thousand years does not begin until the tribulation ends. The saints beneath the altar mentioned in Revelation 6 were not reigning but are depicted as:

- 1) Martyred (6:9, 11).
- 2) Resting as opposed to reigning (6:11).
- 3) Being in heaven during the tribulation as they are waiting for the rest of their fellow servants and their brethren to be martyred (6:9, 11).

In Revelation 20, the martyred saints of Revelation 6, and all the rest martyred during the tribulation, will come to life and reign for one thousand years. As shown above, those saints of Revelation 6 were alive but not reigning for the thousand year period because the period

had not yet begun. They were specifically told to “rest for a little while longer” (6:11).

By the phrase “they came to life” John is describing an all new and extraordinary development for these martyred saints consequent to the Second Coming of Christ, the ending of the great tribulation, the judgment of the antichrist and the false prophet, and the binding of the devil. He is describing a resurrection to reign with Christ on the earth throughout His millennial reign.

The clear teaching of the text is that the phrase *they came to life* is not first explained as a change of location but first as a change of condition after which a change of location ensues. After they are resurrected they begin to reign with Christ on the earth for a thousand years. It is true that at the moment of martyrdom during the time of the tribulation they will ascend to heaven, but not that they begin at that moment to reign with Christ for the thousand year period. The thousand years does not begin until after the tribulation.

3. How do we know this resurrection and reign is literal?

The Greek word translated *they came to life* (*ezesan*) is also used to refer to the *rest of the dead* in verse 5, in which case it is clear according to the texts associated with their coming to life (verses 11-15) that a physical resurrection is in view. In the immediate text where these two words are used together, there is no warrant for applying different meanings to the same word as there is nothing in the text that distinctively indicates a need to do so. Both groups are said to come to life. The first group comes to life at the beginning of the thousand years while the second group does not come to life until the thousand years are completed. Concerning the interpretation of the resurrections of Revelation 20, Henry Alford in his work, *The Greek Testament* states,

“It will have been long ago anticipated by the readers of this Commentary, that I cannot consent to distort words from their plain sense and chronological place in the prophecy, on account of any considerations of difficulty, or any risk of abuses which the doctrine of the millennium may bring with it. Those who lived next to the Apostles, and the whole Church

for 300 years, understood them in the plain literal sense: and it is a strange sight in these days to see expositors who are among the first in reverence of antiquity, complacently casting aside the most cogent instance of consensus which primitive antiquity presents.” (*Alford's Greek Testament*, Volume IV, Part II, p. 732)

“As regards the text itself, no legitimate treatment of it will extort what is known as the spiritual interpretation now in fashion. If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned, where certain "souls lived" at the first, and the rest of the "dead lived" only at the end of a specified period after that first,—if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean *spiritual* rising with Christ, while the second means *literal* rising from the grave; --then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to any thing. If the first resurrection is spiritual, then so is the second, which I suppose none will be hardly enough to maintain: but if the second is literal, then so is the first, which in common with the whole primitive Church and many of the best modern expositors, I do maintain, and receive as an article of faith and hope.” (*Alford's Greek Testament*, the Prolegomena, Volume IV, Part 1, p. 252)

Next, is the fact that the phrase *they came to life* is also described as “the first resurrection.” Therefore, in that the text says *they came to life*, it is communicating a resurrection as opposed to ascension. The Greek word translated here as *resurrection* appears 42 times in the New Testament. With only one possible exception, every time it is used it is in connection with a physical resurrection. The one possible exception is Luke 2:34 where it is written,

“And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, ‘Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed...’” NASB

The resurrection of Revelation 20:5-6 to immortality to reign on the earth with Christ over mortals has been negatively referred to as a *mongrel state*.²⁶ This is to imply that the mixture of immortal

²⁶ Louis Berkhof, (*Systematic Theology*) p. 715, cited David Brown, *The Second Advent* (1846, revised 1849) p. 384.

resurrected people with mortal people will be an unacceptable condition. Sadly, this view fails to recognize as the following references illustrate, that such a mixture of the mortal with the immortal has already been demonstrated many times in Scripture without compromising either immortality or glory.

- In the Old Testament Christ appeared in a preincarnate state and actually ate a meal before Abraham who was mortal (Genesis 18:1-8).
- Angels were present at this meeting and they also ate (Genesis 18:8).
- The text implies that they washed their feet (Gen. 18:4).
- The two angels who were obviously immortal and sinless actually entered Sodom and were among the wicked mortal people of that most wicked place (Genesis 19:1-16).
- Multiple passages in the Bible depict mortal human beings in contact and communication with angels (Ezekiel, Daniel, Peter in Acts 12:6-7, Apostles in Acts 5:18-19, and John in Revelation).
- Once Jesus was resurrected He possessed an immortal glorified body. In His immortal glorified body, immediately after His resurrection and for forty days Jesus interfaced with mortal sinners and even ate food with them (Luke 24:36-43; John 21:13-15; Acts 10:41). Those saints that will be resurrected to reign with Christ throughout the thousand years will possess an immortal glorified body like Christ's capable of interacting with mortals.
- At the resurrection of Christ others were resurrected. These were believers who had previously died (Mt. 27:51-53). After Christ's resurrection these went into the holy city and appeared to many (v. 53). If these were raised with glorified bodies they mixed with those who were mortal.
- When Christ was transfigured on the mount Peter, James, and John, while in mortal bodies, were able to behold Christ in His glory and they did not perish (Mt. 17:1-8).

Furthermore, viewing the mingling of the glorified with the mortal as a mongrel condition resulting in a compromise of glorification overlooks the fact that those glorified will be completely intrinsically separate from sin. Consequently:

- They will no longer possess carnal desires so as to be tempted as before.
- They will be able to view sin from God’s perspective without being in the least bit negatively influenced by sin.
- They will be able to fully comprehend sin’s purpose in fulfilling the plan of God.
- They will, in their final state share in the very real and long awaited rule promised by their Lord!

Thus, in God’s economy, the mixture of immortal resurrected people with mortal people will not be an unacceptable condition.

Separate Resurrections

A comparison between the phrases “came to life” of verse 4 and “come to life” of verse 5 shows that the text is speaking of the same type of event— a physical resurrection. However, while the resurrections may be of the same type-physical, it is clear that they do not occur at the same time. A period of one thousand years separates the resurrection of those martyred for Christ’s cause and those who are described as “*the rest of the dead.*”

Verse 5 is explicit in saying that,

- “The rest of the dead” in contrast to those who were already raised in verse 4, “did not come to life until the thousand years were completed” that is, their resurrection was set apart from those of verse 4 **not by type but by time** and as we will examine later by quality.
- The time period which separates the two resurrections is specifically stated as being “*the thousand years.*”

The context of the chapter shows:

- The resurrection of saints occurring at the beginning of the thousand years.
 - Those reigning do so for a thousand years therefore they must be raised at the beginning of the period (4d and 6c).

- The resurrection of the *rest of the dead* occurring when the thousand years are completed.
 - Verse 5 introduces the subject of the rest of the dead coming to life, while verse 12 picks up with the actual event one thousand years later. The word *nekros* translated *dead* is first used in this chapter in verse 5 and then does not appear again until after the thousand year period ends where it appears twice in verse 12 and twice in verse 13.

Revelation 20:5

“The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.” (Revelation 20:5 NASB)

This first phrase of verse 5 is a parenthetical reference to the resurrection (coming to life) that follows the thousand years. Those described as the *rest of the dead* are those who will be physically resurrected once the thousand years are completed. As previously indicated, verse 5 introduces the subject of the *rest of the dead* coming to life, while verse 12 picks up with the actual event of the resurrection of the *rest of the dead* following the one thousand years. The word *nekros* translated *dead* is first used in this chapter in verse 5 and then does not appear again until after the thousand year period ends where it appears twice in verse 12 and twice in verse 13. Thus, those designated as *the rest of the dead* are clearly distinguished from those resurrected at the beginning of the thousand years. The text could not be clearer in indicating that there are two groups described as being resurrected and that there is a one thousand year period separating the two resurrections.

The phrase “This is the first resurrection” clearly refers to those resurrected in verse 4 who John saw as “... *those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand...*”. These are obviously saints who lived and died because of the testimony of Jesus.

By the previous acknowledgement of the saints beneath the altar in Revelation chapter six, we see that saints being in heaven was a preexisting condition after which time it is said in Chapter twenty that they came to life. Therefore, this resurrection is referred to as the *first resurrection*, not because these individuals come to heaven for the first time but because their bodies are being resurrected incorruptible.

Furthermore, this resurrection is referred to as the *first* resurrection because it:

- 1) Precedes the resurrection of the rest of the dead who are said to come to life and are then judged and cast into the lake of fire.
- 2) Is superior to the second, in the sense that over those who have a part in this first resurrection the second death (being cast into the lake of fire) has no power (v. 6, 14).

Therefore, in these senses we can say that the first resurrection is first in timing and in **quality**.

“Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.”

(Revelation 20:6 NASB)

According to verse 6 those resurrected in verse 4 are blessed and holy as opposed to the *rest of the dead* who will, in their resurrection be *cursed* and *condemned*. This blessing is the fifth of seven blessings associated with the book of Revelation (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14).

Those of the *first resurrection* are blessed and holy because over them the second death (being cast into the Lake of Fire) has no power. By implication the first resurrection is inclusive of all those over whom the second death has no power regardless of the times of their resurrections. In this sense the first resurrection is the resurrection of the righteous (Lk. 14:14; Acts 24:15).

“...and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (Luke 14:14 NASB)

“...having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.” (Acts 24:15 NASB)

Robert Thomas in his commentary on Revelation expresses the inclusive nature of the first resurrection to encompass preceding resurrections of other believers when he writes, “‘The first resurrection’ applies most directly to the resurrection of the martyrs at the end of v. 4, but it does not exclude earlier phases of resurrection from its scope.” (Robert Thomas p. 419)

We know that the resurrection of Revelation 20, although called the first resurrection is not the first sequential resurrection to immortality to occur.

There are multiple resurrections associated with the *first resurrection*:

- 1) The resurrection of Jesus (He is the first fruits from the grave 1 Cor. 15:20)
- 2) The resurrection immediately following the resurrection of Jesus which served as a proof of the effect of Christ’s resurrection (Mt. 27:52-53). Assuming this was a resurrection to immortality.
- 3) The resurrection that takes place when Jesus raptures His Church and takes them into heaven (1 Cor. 15:52-53; 1 Thess. 4:13-17).
- 4) The resurrection of the saints in Rev. 20:4.
- 5) The resurrection or transformation of the saints who die during the millennium.

The unifying factor of those partakers of the *first resurrection* is not so much the timing of the specific instances of their resurrection but the fact that “over these the second death has no power” (Rev. 20:6). The blessed and holy condition (Rev. 20:6) of those not raised in the specific event of Rev. 20:4 (#4 above) cannot be denied those already raised (2 & 3 above) or that will be raised (transformed) following Rev. 20:4 (#5 above).

Satan's Release

⁷ And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore.”

Revelation 20:7-8

As previously demonstrated Satan is **presently not bound** but as the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4) he reigns with power as the organizer of evil world affairs as stated in Ephesians 6:10-12,

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”NASB

In Satan's realm conspiracy is not a theory, it is a reality, as he presently corrals those pursuing the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life to do his will (1 Jn. 2:15; 2 Tim. 2:26). Hot spots of evil presently exist throughout the world, in nations, in states, in governments, in communities, and even in religions. The continuity of such evil spanning time and geographic locations serves as an indicator of the unifying activity of the devil. 2 Thessalonians 2:7 informs us that the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Such will continue until it finds its fruition in the work of the antichrist (1 Jn. 2:18), who through the empowerment of Satan, will be responsible for deceiving and leading the nations against Christ at the battle of Armageddon (Rv. 16:13-16; 19:19-20).

Nevertheless, Christ will return with the armies of heaven and cast the antichrist and the false prophet into the lake of fire and kill the rest (Rv. 19:11-21). Satan, who ultimately empowered and organized them (2 Thess. 2:7-10; Rv. 13; 16:13, 16) will be incarcerated in the abyss for one thousand years.

Verse 7 informs us that after the thousand years are completed Satan will be released from his prison. In that he will be released he will obviously once again be at liberty to exercise his most notable character trait of deception (Jn. 8:44). And according to verse 8 that is exactly what he will do. He will come out to deceive the nations in order to gather them for war. The words *gather* and *together* translate the Greek word *sunago* which comes from two Greek words *sun* denoting *union* and *ago* meaning *to lead, bring, or drive*. It is the same Greek word that was used to describe Satan's activity of rallying the nations against God for the battle of Armageddon prior to the millennium (Rv. 16:13-16; 19:19). Thus, for a short time following his release Satan's activity will be similar to his present activity, only much swifter.

Through the use of deception Satan will unify for a final time the nations of unbelievers (Gog and Magog) who covertly existed throughout the earth during the thousand years. As the unifying leader of the remaining evil in the world, Satan will lead them against the beloved city and fire will come down from heaven and devour them (v. 9). The devil will then be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and false prophet are also. There, they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever (v. 10).

Separate Battles

While it has been stated that the battle of Revelation 20:7-9 is the same battle (recapitulation) as Revelation 19:19-21,²⁷ a simple reading of the text and allowing the words of the passage to mean what they say reveals this could not possibly be the case. The battle of Revelation 20 clearly follows the battle of Revelation 19 by one thousand years.

How Do We Know the Battle of 20:7-9 is not the Same Battle as 19:19-21?

Notice the point of reference provided in verse seven— *“And when the thousand years are completed...”*

From this phrase we see that the event of verse 7 (Satan's release) and those events which follow (deception of nations, gathering of

²⁷ Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003) p. 223.

nations for war, destruction of those nations, and Satan thrown into lake of fire) take place after the completion of the events of the thousand years, events which were themselves preceded by those of chapter 19 which included the battle of Armageddon..

Two key events will occur at the beginning of the thousand years and last throughout its duration revealing that the antichrist's reign must precede the thousand years, thus demonstrating that the battle of chapter 20, which according to verse 7 clearly occurs after the thousand years, could not possibly be the same battle as that of chapter 19 where the antichrist and the false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire. The two key events are:

- 1) The incarceration of Satan so that he is unable to deceive (vs. 1-3).
- 2) The resurrection and reign with Christ of the saints who were martyred during the tribulation (v. 4).

Facts related to these two events:

- 1) The incarceration of Satan so that he is unable to deceive (vs. 1-3).
 - Because it will be Satan who empowers the antichrist and the false prophet to deceive the nations (2 Thess. 2:8-10; Rev. 13:1-8, 11-14; 19:20), it will be necessary for the reign of the antichrist to be contemporaneous with that of Satan's liberty. According to verse 3 of chapter 20 deceiving the nations is something Satan clearly will not be able to do while he is bound. Therefore the antichrist cannot reign during the time Satan is bound. The battle of chapter 19 in which the antichrist and the false prophet are cast into the lake of fire demonstrates the end of their reign and the next event taken up in 20 is Satan's incarceration.
 - The battle of Chapter 20:7-9 clearly follows the thousand years because it is contingent upon the release of Satan from his prison at the completion of the thousand years, thus allowing him once again, for a final time, to deceive the nations (v. 7-8). After which he will be thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet will have already been for one thousand years (v. 10).
 - Three times the twentieth chapter informs us of Satan's release from his prison. Twice in verse three and once in verse seven. Each

time obvious phrases are used to express the fact that his release occurs after the thousand years. After his release he will once again be able to deceive as he did prior to his one thousand year incarceration when he enabled the antichrist and the false prophet.

“... and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.”
(Revelation 20:3 NASB)

“And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison...” (Revelation 20:7 NASB)

- 2) The resurrection and reign with Christ of the saints who were martyred during the tribulation (v. 4).
 - It is evident that some of those who will reign with Christ for one thousand years will be those who were martyred during the tribulation because it is said of them that they did not worship the beast or his image or receive his mark (20:4)—events that could transpire only during the tribulation period, during the reign of the antichrist. Therefore, since those saints who are to be martyred under the antichrist’s reign during the tribulation are said to be resurrected to reign with Christ throughout the thousand years, it is evident that the antichrist’s reign will precede the thousand years.
 - The battle in chapter 19 involves both the antichrist and the false prophet (19:19). In this battle they are both seized and thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone (19:21). This event constitutes the end of their reign. As proven in the above point their demise will transpire prior to the thousand year reign of the resurrected saints and the binding of Satan.

Putting the two events together, Satan will empower the antichrist and the false prophet during the tribulation, at which time God’s saints will not receive the mark of the beast and consequently, some of God’s saints will be martyred. At the end of the tribulation Christ will return to battle against the antichrist and false prophet and cast them into the lake of fire, while destroying the others with the sword of His mouth. Satan will then be bound for a thousand years after which he will be released to once again deceive the nations who will be destroyed in a

separate battle by fire from heaven as opposed to Christ's return. Satan, who deceived them, will be thrown into the lake of fire with the antichrist and false prophet. The interrelation of the events demonstrates the necessity of two separate battles as clearly indicated by the context.

The Great White Throne Judgment

Revelation 20:11-15 takes up with *the rest of the dead* who were initially mentioned in verse five. The scene opens with God seated on a great white throne (v. 11). This is the final judgment often referred to as The Great White Throne Judgment.

There is nothing in the description of this judgment in verses 11-15 which indicates those brought before the throne constitute a mixed crowd consisting of both the righteous and the unrighteous. The verses concern themselves with only those raised at the end of the thousand years who will be judged according to their deeds and cast into the lake of fire. The presence of others is not mentioned or even implied. The presence of the book of life (a subject we will examine momentarily) is used to show that those cast into the lake of fire were not recorded in its pages (v. 15). This judgment will be the climax of the justice of God, something that the righteous will not receive. Instead of His justice they receive His grace, thus they are not a part of this group. Furthermore, it would be a very strange thing for the immediate text to remain silent regarding the condition and finality of the righteous who had been redeemed in Christ if they were present as a part of this judgment. They are not mentioned because they are not a part of this resurrection to judgment.

John saw "the dead ... standing" (v. 12). That they are described as *standing* alludes to their physical resurrection mentioned in verse 5, "The rest of the dead did not come to life until..." Like the first resurrection of verse 4 this resurrection is also physical (see the answer to the prior question, *How do we know this resurrection is a literal resurrection?*). Verses 13-14 also allude to the physical nature of this resurrection.

These will be raised physically but will continue to be the unrighteous dead they were prior to physical death. Note in verse 12 that these resurrected ones are twice referred to as *the dead*. First they are said to

be the dead (from every class of people) standing, then the dead judged. These are the resurrected spiritually dead who died in their sins and will be raised in the same.

They will be judged from the things that are written in the books, according to their deeds. They are standing before God's holy bar of justice as opposed to man's sinful bar of compromise. For this reason all of their deeds are evil before God (See Romans 3:9-20, 23). Because they were not reconciled to God, they stand before Him as hostility against God, still unable to please him (Rm. 8:7-8). That their names will not be found written in the book of life (v. 15) indicates that the books from which they will be judged are the first set of opened books (v. 12b). This would likely not include the book of life which was distinguished from the other books (v. 12c) for their names are not written in it (v. 15). They will receive God's justice (Rm. 6:23a)—death, for they will all be cast into the lake of fire which is called the *second death* (Rv. 20:6, 14). The lake of fire will be the final abode of all the enemies of God and His people (See Romans 8:7-8; 1 Corinthians 15:26, 54-55; 1 Peter 5:7).

The presence of the book of life conveys the truth of divine sovereignty regarding salvation for there are no names in it but those He placed there from the foundation of the world (Rv. 17:8). The presence of the books containing the things written from which the unrighteous dead are judged (Rv. 20:12) conveys the truth of human responsibility. The presence of these two kinds of books conveying two truths, divine sovereignty and human responsibility, pose neither a conflict nor a tension. Rather, in the end God is shown to have mercy on whom He will have mercy and man is judged according to his sinful deeds.

Conclusion

In conclusion and in response to the initial question "What is the significance of Revelation 20 to the millennium?" the answer is, "Much in every way!" For in this chapter, Scripture informs us of the chronological timing, character, and consummation of the millennial kingdom. In its chronology, we see when the millennium starts, how long it lasts, and when it ends. The character of the millennium is displayed in the chapter's description of persons and places and their parts during the millennium. And lastly, the chapter brings us to the

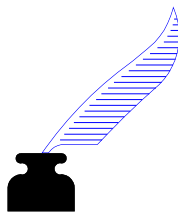
consummation of the millennium as it shows us its climactic end. In short, this chapter addresses the: who, what, when, where, why, and how of the millennial reign of Jesus Christ—and that is significant!

Chronology of the Millennial Kingdom		
Beginning →	At the Second Coming of Christ	Revelation 19-20
Duration →	1000 Years	Revelation 20:2-7
Ending →	End of the 1000 years	Revelation 20:7-10

Character of the Millennial Kingdom		
The Persons	Their Places	Their Parts
Christ	On the earth	Reigning
Angel	On the earth	Seals Satan in the abyss
Satan	In the abyss not inhabited earth	Bound in the abyss for 1000 years.
Resurrected Saints	On the earth following the first resurrection	Resurrected and Return to earth to reign with Christ for 1000 years.
Believers	On the earth	Living/worshiping/serving Christ in their mortal bodies.
The living unbelievers	On the earth	Ruled with a rod of iron.
The rest of the dead	Bodies dead in the earth. Souls in Hades.	Resurrected and judged at the Great White throne

With Christ and His Saints reigning on the earth with a rod of iron and Satan bound, the earth will experience an unprecedented time of peace since the time when sin first entered the earth (Genesis 3). The character and content of the millennial kingdom of Christ is mentioned throughout Scripture (Deut. 30:1-6; Ps. 2:6-12; Is. 11:6-9; 65:17-25; Jer. 30-33; Ez. 37; Joel 3:18-21; Mic. 4:1-8; Zech. 14:9-21; Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:29-30; Acts 1:3, 6; 3:21; 1 Cor. 6:3; 2 Tim. 2:12). Revelation 20 supplies key factors related to this time of peace, namely Christ with His resurrected Saints reigning on the earth with a rod of iron and Satan bound in the abyss.

Consummation of the Millennial Kingdom
Satan is released from the abyss.
Satan gathers the living unbelievers against the saints.
These unbelievers are devoured by fire from heaven.
Satan is cast into the Lake of Fire.
The rest of the dead are judged at the Great White Throne Judgment and cast into the lake of fire.
The new heaven and the new earth begin! (Revelation 21)



The Discerner reflects the heart desire of this pastor for God's people to know and understand God as He has revealed Himself through the Scripture. Jeremiah 9:23-24

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