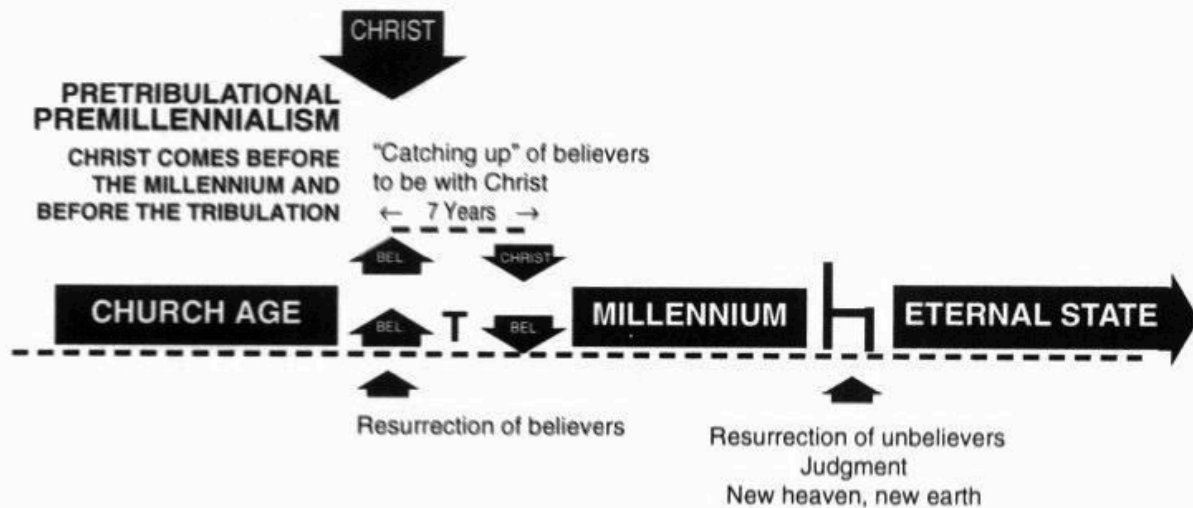


Eschatology - The Doctrine of Last Things
The Millennium
Part 1 - Overview and Revelation 20

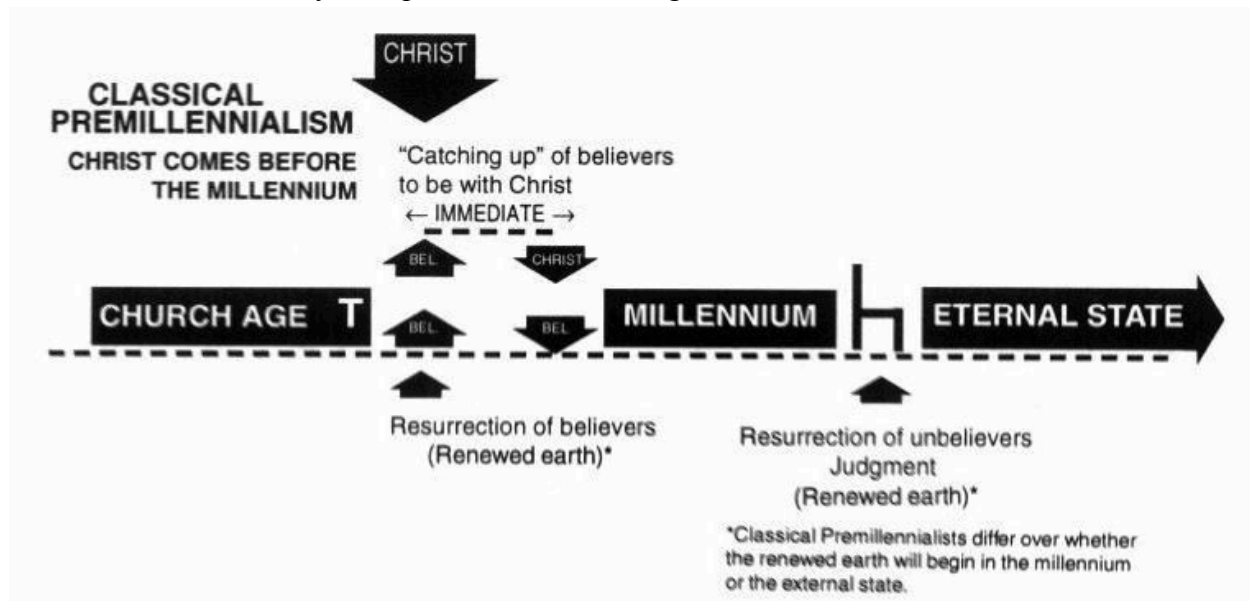
1. Introduction to the Millennium
 - 1.1. The word millennium means “one thousand years” (from Lat. millennium “thousand years”). The term comes from Revelation 20:4–5, where it says that certain people “came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.”
 - 1.2. Although this is the only text in all of Scripture that refers to a 1,000 year period, believers through the ages have used the term and idea of a millennium. However, there are great disagreements over what is intended by this and other texts which are thought by some to refer to a physical reign of Christ upon the earth.
 - 1.3. In the history of the church there have been four major views of the millennium and its relation to our current age and the final consummated state. These four are: dispensational premillennialism, classical premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism. (Dr. Grudem lists three, but there are so many distinctions between Classical Premillennialism and Dispensational Premillennialism that we will treat them as two distinct options.)

2. Overview of the Four Major Millennial Views
 - 2.1. Dispensational Premillennialism
 - 2.1.1. This system is sometimes referred to as pretribulational premillennialism, due to its belief that believers are raptured out of the earth prior to the tribulation. However, that is simply one part of the larger system of dispensationalism, so I will use the term dispensational premillennialism.
 - 2.1.2. This is the dominant position within evangelicalism today. Most end times teaching heard on radio and TV, and seen in books, teach this system.
 - 2.1.3. This position is the most recent of the positions, first being formulated in Ireland and England in the 1830’s by John Nelson Darby and his followers, and then popularized by many conferences and especially the Scofield Reference Bible.
 - 2.1.4. According to this position, Christ will return not only before the millennium (Christ’s return is premillennial), but also it will occur before the great tribulation (Christ’s return is pretribulational). This position is similar to the classical premillennial position discussed below, but with one important difference: it will add another return of Christ before his return to reign on earth in the millennium. This return is thought to be a secret return of Christ to take believers out of the world. The pretribulational premillennial view may be represented as in the following figure.



- 2.1.5. According to this view, the church age will continue until, suddenly, unexpectedly, and secretly, Christ will return part way to earth, and then will call believers to himself: “The dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:16–17). Christ will then return to heaven with the believers who have been removed from the earth. When that happens, there will be a great tribulation on the earth for a period of seven years.
- 2.1.6. During this seven-year period of tribulation, many of the signs that were predicted to precede Christ’s return will be literally fulfilled. The great ingathering of the fullness of the Jewish people will occur, as they trust Christ as their Messiah. In the midst of great suffering there will also be much effective evangelism, especially carried out by the new Jewish Christians. As such, the millennium will have a distinctively Jewish focus and flavor, as God’s focus returns to the covenants with Israel. At the end of the tribulation, Christ will then come back with his saints to reign on the earth for one thousand years. After this millennial period there will be a rebellion, resulting in the final defeat of Satan and his forces, and then will come the resurrection of unbelievers, the last judgment, and the beginning of the eternal state.
- 2.1.7. This system is clearly the most complex of the four systems, but is also clearly the most familiar to many Christians living in America and the United Kingdom today.
- 2.1.8. This system is also completely tied to the dispensational system of a “literal hermeneutic” and a sharp distinction between the Church and Israel, and God’s covenants with each.
- 2.2. Classical Premillennialism
- 2.2.1. The prefix “pre-” means “before,” and the “premillennial” position says that Christ will come back before the millennium. This viewpoint has a long history from the earliest centuries onward. It is the oldest of the four systems as far as can be traced after the close of the New Testament.

2.2.2. It may be represented as in the figure below:

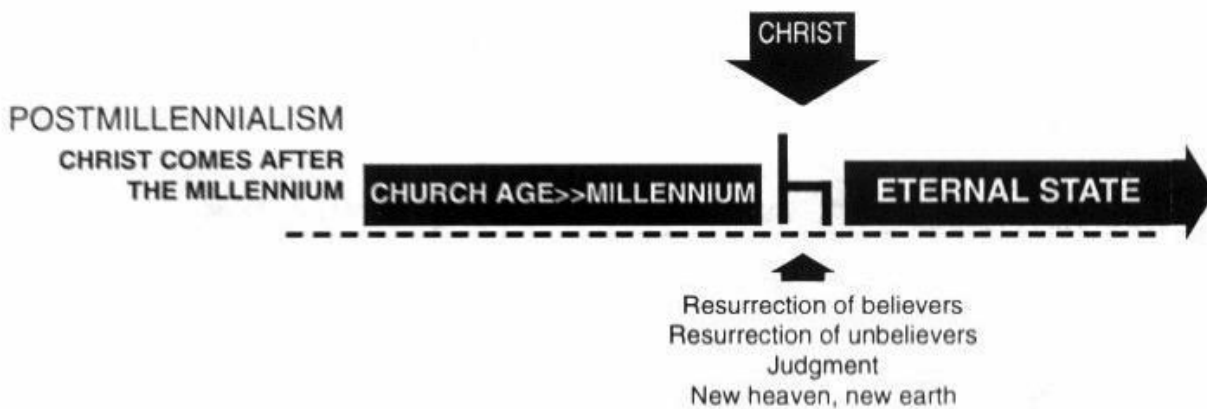


- 2.2.3. According to this viewpoint, the present church age will continue until, as it nears the end, a time of great tribulation and suffering comes on the earth (T in the figure above stands for tribulation). After that time of tribulation at the end of the church age, Christ will return to earth to establish a millennial kingdom. When he comes back, believers who have died will be raised from the dead, their bodies will be reunited with their spirits, and these believers will reign with Christ on earth for one thousand years.
- 2.2.4. During this time, Christ will be physically present on the earth in his resurrected body, and will reign as King over the entire earth. The believers who have been raised from the dead, and those who were on earth when Christ returns, will receive glorified resurrection bodies that will never die, and in these resurrection bodies they will live on the earth and reign with Christ. Of the unbelievers who remain on earth, many (but not all) will turn to Christ and be saved. Jesus will reign in perfect righteousness and there will be peace throughout the earth.
- 2.2.5. Many premillennialists hold that the earth will be renewed and we will in fact see the new heavens and new earth at this time (but it is not essential to premillennialism to hold to this, for one could be a premillennialist and hold that the new heavens and new earth will not occur until after the final judgment). At the beginning of this time Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit so that he will have no influence on the earth during the millennium (Rev. 20:1–3).

- 2.2.6. According to the premillennial viewpoint, at the end of the thousand years Satan will be loosed from the bottomless pit and will join forces with many unbelievers who have submitted outwardly to Christ's reign but have inwardly been seething in rebellion against him. Satan will gather these rebellious people for battle against Christ, but they will be decisively defeated. Christ will then raise from the dead all the unbelievers who have died throughout history, and they will stand before him for final judgment. After the final judgment has occurred, believers will enter into the eternal state.
- 2.2.7. It should be noted that classical premillennialists are not dispensational, and thus do not necessarily demand a literal hermeneutic, or a distinction between the Church and Israel. Consequently, there is no return to the covenants with Israel in this system, nor does the millennium necessarily have a Jewish distinctiveness. Additionally, some people holding this position believe the 1,000 year is symbolic and not literally 1,000 years.

2.3. Postmillennialism

- 2.3.1. The prefix post- means "after." According to this view, Christ will return after the millennium.
- 2.3.2. This view is usually traced back to Augustine (although there is major debate as to whether Augustine was postmillennial or amillennial.)
- 2.3.3. This was the view held by some Puritans, including Jonathan Edwards.
- 2.3.4. The postmillennial view may be represented as in the figure below:



- 2.3.5. This system is clearly far simpler than either for of premillennialism.
- 2.3.6. According to this view, the progress of the gospel and the growth of the church will gradually increase, so that a larger and larger proportion of the world's population will be Christians. As a result, there will be significant Christian influences on society, society will more and more function according to God's standards, and gradually a "millennial age" of peace and righteousness will occur on the earth. This "millennium" will last for a long period of time (not necessarily a literal one thousand years), and finally, at the end of this period, Christ will return to earth believers and unbelievers will be raised, the final judgment will occur, and there will be a new heaven and new earth. We will then enter into the eternal state.

2.3.7. Postmillennialism is very similar to amillennialism, which will be discussed below. However, postmillennialism is more optimistic about the success of the Gospel in this age, believing it will eventually permeate every facet of society, and almost everyone alive at that time will be converted.

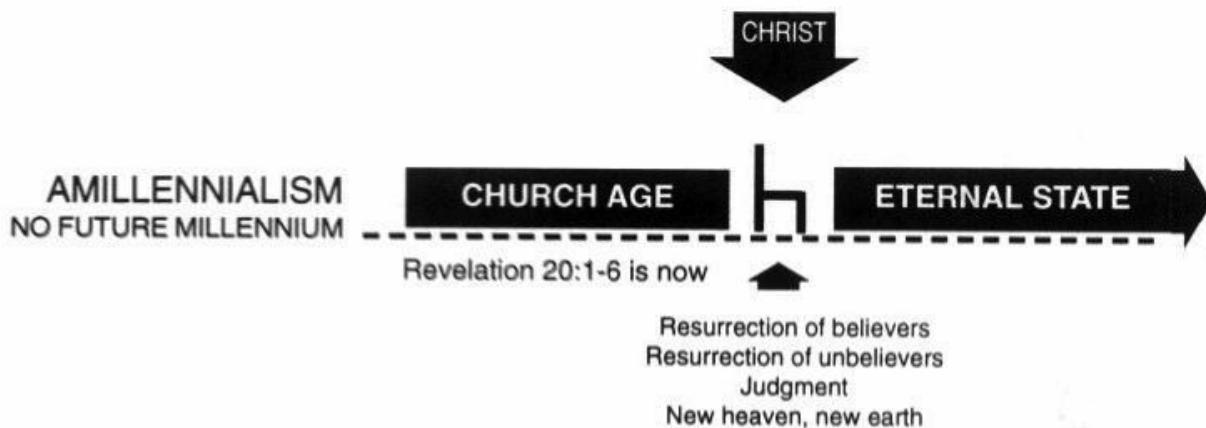
2.4. Amillennialism

2.4.1. The title amillennialism is used to capture the idea that there will be no distinct era known as the millennium in the future.

2.4.2. This view is usually traced back to Augustine (although there is major debate as to whether Augustine was postmillennial or amillennial.)

2.4.3. This was the dominant position of most Christians for much of the history of the church.

2.4.4. This view may be seen as depicted in the figure below:



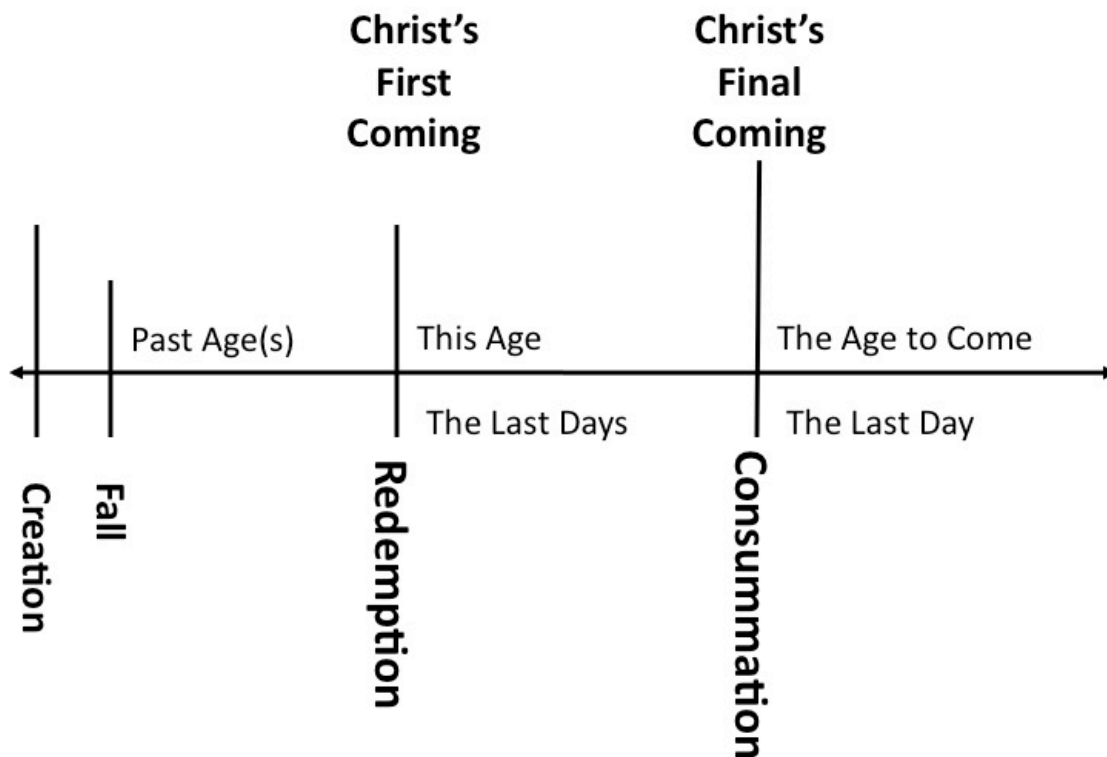
2.4.5. A cursory glance at the graphic shows that this is the simplest and most straightforward of the millennial systems.

2.4.6. According to this position the passage in Revelation 20:1–10 describes the present church age. This is an age in which Satan’s influence over the nations has been greatly reduced so that the gospel can be preached to the whole world. Those who are said to be reigning with Christ for the thousand years are Christians who have died and are already reigning with Christ in heaven. Christ’s reign in the millennium, according to this view, is not a bodily reign here on earth but rather the heavenly reign he spoke of when he said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18).

2.4.7. Thus this view is called “amillennial” because it maintains that there is no future millennium yet to come. Since amillennialists believe that Revelation 20 is now being fulfilled in the church age, they hold that the “millennium” described there is currently happening. The exact duration of the church age cannot be known, and the expression “thousand years” is symbolic for a long period of time in which the Gospel will be proclaimed and God’s perfect purposes will be accomplished.

- 2.4.8. According to this position, the present church age will continue until the time of Christ's return (see figure above). When Christ returns, there will be a resurrection of both believers and unbelievers. The bodies of believers will rise to be reunited with their spirits and enter into full enjoyment of heaven forever. Unbelievers will be raised to face the final judgment and eternal condemnation. Believers will also stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), but this judgment will only determine degrees of reward in heaven, for only unbelievers will be condemned eternally. At this time also the new heavens and new earth will begin. Immediately after the final judgment, the eternal state will commence and continue forever.
- 2.4.9. This scheme is very simple, seeing only two ages - the present one and the one to come, which is ushered in at the return of Christ. There are no intervening or intermediate stages such as a two stage return, a tribulation, or literal millennium.
3. Key issues in determining our understanding of the millennium
- 3.1. As always, we must let more clear passages and teachings of Scripture inform our understanding of less clear passages. This means that we let the more straightforward didactic portions control our understanding of prophetic and apocalyptic passages, and also that we let things which are taught many times control our understanding of those which seem to be unique. This approach is dictated by Scripture itself:
- 3.1.1. Numbers 12:6–8 he said, “Listen to my words: **“When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams.** ⁷ But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. ⁸ **With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles;** he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”
- 3.1.2. This means that passages like Revelation 20 - which is apocalyptic and prophetic - must be interpreted in light of what we see regarding the end times in clearer portions of Scripture, especially in the New Testament. Furthermore, if we find something which seems to be unique to Revelation 20, it must be interpreted in light of things which are taught in multiple places in Scripture, especially if these occur in NT passages dealing with eschatology.
- 3.2. It is important to remember the central teaching of the NT on eschatology - the two ages, the now but not yet. This is the CENTRAL teaching of the NT regarding eschatology. It is taught in numerous passages (see 1 John 3:2; Romans 8:23-25; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5; Ephesians 1:13-14), and in very clear, unambiguous terms. Furthermore, this age is referred to as the “last days” while the age to come is associated with “the last day” (see Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:1-2; John 6:39-40; John 12:48). Consequently, whatever is taught regarding the millennium must line up with the understanding that there are two ages - this age and the age to come.

- 3.3. It is also critical to remember that the event that started the last days was the life, death, resurrection, and ascension. No other “events” will usher in the “last days” - they were ushered in when Christ came the first time (see Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 John 2:18,22; Acts 2:17, 32-33).
- 3.4. This entire age - the last days - are characterized by unbelief, sin, and many antichrists (see 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Peter 3:3-7; Matthew 24:36-42; 1 John 2:18; 1 John 4:1-3).
- 3.5. Furthermore, the door from this age to the age to come is the return of Christ. When Christ returns this age is ended and the age to come is ushered in; the last days give way to the last day. These things do not happen gradually; rather than happen suddenly at the return of Christ.
- 3.6. This may be represented as in the following graphic:



- 3.7. All of the information above was covered in much greater detail in our introductory discussion on eschatology (the first part of our discussion on Chapter 54).
- 3.8. Finally, at the return of Christ, as we are ushered from this age into the age to come, death is swallowed up by life, and believers are resurrected. The NT teaching is not that there are multiple resurrections for believers, separated by great lengths of time, but rather at the return of Christ, the dead in Christ rise first, and then all believers who are alive are joined with Christ. This happens all at one time.

- 3.8.1. 1 Thessalonians 4:15–18 According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage each other with these words.
- 3.8.1.1. Notice that at the return of Christ, believers who have physically died are raised and then believers who are still alive are taken up to meet Christ. There is no hint of a separation in time between these two events - both happen at the return of Christ.
- 3.8.1.2. Furthermore, all believers who have died are raised at the same time. There are not two different resurrections for believers. All of them are raised when Christ returns.
- 3.8.2. 1 Corinthians 15:21–26 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.
- 3.8.2.1. Notice that believers will be raised like Christ **when He comes**. The resurrection of the body will occur **at** the return of Christ - not before nor after.
- 3.8.2.2. After the resurrection, the end comes, which is when all enemies have been subdued and Christ hands the kingdom over to the Father. When Christ returns, all enemies have been subdued, the resurrection occurs, the kingdom is handed over to the Father. This is the age to come, and it is ushered in when Christ returns.
- 3.8.2.3. Finally, notice that when Christ returns, having vanquished all enemies, death has been vanquished as well. It is the last enemy to be destroyed. When the resurrection happens, death has been defeated, and this happens at the return of Christ.
- 3.8.2.4. Note that like the passage in 1 Thessalonians 4, this is all very simple. The enemies of God continue to rail against Him until Christ vanquishes them all; He returns and death has been vanquished. This is all one single event.

- 3.8.3. 1 Corinthians 15:50–55 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.
⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” ⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”
- 3.8.3.1. Here, as in 1 Thessalonians 4, we see both the resurrection of believers who have died and the transformation of the bodies of living believers. Both of these things must happen for our fallen flesh and blood can not inherit the consummated kingdom. We must be changed, either by having our bodies transformed (those who have never died), or by having our bodies raised (those who have died).
- 3.8.3.2. Once again, notice that these two events - the transformation of the bodies of living believers, and the resurrection of all believers who have died, happen at the same time - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye. And this all happens at the last trumpet - the return of Christ. When He returns, death is swallowed up - there is no more death.
- 3.8.4. Philippians 3:20–21 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.
- 3.8.4.1. This text speaks of the eschatological realities of Christ subduing all enemies (bringing everything under His control) and Christ transforming our bodies.
- 3.8.4.2. It is likely that the transformation of the body spoken of here includes both the resurrection of those who have died and the bodily transformation of those still alive.
- 3.8.4.3. Once again, all of this happens apparently happens at the return of Christ. We are eagerly awaiting him to come from heaven, and this would be at His return.
- 3.8.5. 1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.
- 3.8.5.1. Once again, we learn that believers will have to be transformed. We need to have our bodies changed to be like Jesus’. And this will happen when He appears. This is the event that changes everything. The old age stops and the new one begins.

4. A look at Revelation 20:1-10

4.1. Revelation 20:1–10 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. ² He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. ³ He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. ⁴ I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵ (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. ⁷ When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth — Gog and Magog — to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. ⁹ They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰ And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

4.2. Key issues in interpreting Revelation 20:1-10

4.2.1. As always, it is imperative that we let the genre of literature determine our hermeneutic method. In this case, the genre is apocalyptic, a well known genre from the ancient world which was full of symbolism and figurative speech. This must be kept at the front of our minds as we interpret the passage.

4.2.2. Because apocalyptic literature is part of prophetic literature, we must remember that by nature it is given in visions and riddles, and must therefore be interpreted in light of clearer, more straightforward portions of Scripture. This principle is noted by God Himself:

4.2.2.1. Numbers 12:6–8 he said, “Listen to my words: “**When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams.** ⁷ But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. ⁸ **With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles;** he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”

- 4.2.3. We should specifically remember that Revelation often uses numbers in a figurative rather than a literal manner. This is true of the seven churches of Asia (there were far more than seven - these were chosen because seven is a number of fulness), of the 144,000 sealed from the 12 tribes (it is 12x12x1,000 - to indicate fulness), the fact that Jerusalem is 12,000 stadia cubed (Revelation 21:16), and the walls were 144 cubits thick (both of which are built on multiples of 12, and one with 1,000 built into the number). Furthermore there are seven angels, the seven spirits (or sevenfold Spirit) of God, seven trumpets, seven seals, and seven bowls. Suffice it to say numbers are EXTREMELY symbolic in the whole book of Revelation.
- 4.2.4. Finally, when looking at the resurrections in Revelation 20:4-6, we should also consider if John has any similar passages that might shed light on this more obscure passage.
- 4.3. Specific comments on Revelation 20:1-10
- 4.3.1. Revelation 20:1-3 - note how the passage begins with a lot of symbolism.
- 4.3.1.1. Revelation 20:1-3 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having **the key to the Abyss** and holding in his hand **a great chain**.²He seized **the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan**, and **bound him** for a thousand years. ³ He threw him into the Abyss, and **locked and sealed it over him**, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.
- 4.3.1.1.1. Is there a LITERAL lock and key for the Abyss?
- 4.3.1.1.2. Is there a literal chain? How would a literal physical chain be used on a spirit being that does not have a physical body to be chained?
- 4.3.1.1.3. Notice the symbolic names for Satan. He is not literally a serpent or a dragon. These are symbols.
- 4.3.1.1.4. Is Satan literally bound with a chain and literally locked and sealed in a chamber (the Abyss)? Is the Abyss literally sealed? Or is it more likely that these are symbolic statements?
- 4.3.1.1.5. Even if one believes Satan is literally bound and his movement restricted, the passage still uses symbols to express this in terms we could understand, rather than literal terms, since the use of a physical chain and dungeon makes no sense for spirit beings who have no bodies. The same thing is true of the angels mentioned in Jude 1:6, another bit of apocalyptic literature.

- 4.3.1.2. The binding of Satan finds a parallel in Mark 3:27 and Luke 10:17-20:
- 4.3.1.2.1. Mark 3:27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up (δέω) the strong man. Then he can rob his house.
- 4.3.1.2.1.1. Here Jesus is talking about how it is that he has the power to drive out demons. This can only be done if the master of the house - Satan - has been bound first. Since Jesus is driving out the demons, the master of the house, Satan, has already been bound.
- 4.3.1.2.1.2. The same verb, δέω, is used for binding here as in Revelation 20:2.
- 4.3.1.2.1.3. Mark 2:27 (and its parallel in Matthew 12:29) and Revelation 20:2 are the only places Satan is spoken of as being bound in the NT. In the Gospels Satan is already bound during the time of Jesus, and this binding did NOT refer to a physical binding, but rather to a restriction of his power and authority as people were set free from his control.
- 4.3.1.2.2. Luke 10:17-20 The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." ¹⁸ He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. ²⁰ However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."
- 4.3.1.2.2.1. Notice that as the disciples minister in Jesus' name and under His authority, Satan falls from heaven. This is likely symbolic language to refer to the fact that through Christ the believers now have removed Satan from his place of authority. This is why Jesus speaks of the demons submitting to the disciples in v19.

4.3.1.2.2.2. In any event, it is clear that the authority given to believers in Christ has the effect of altering Satan's place and activity now - not in some future age.

4.3.1.3. It appears that Satan's activity has been severely restricted throughout this age - from the time of Christ's first coming until the time of His second coming.

4.3.1.3.1. This binding of Satan was directly taught by Jesus in His ministry.

4.3.1.3.2. Revelation 20 does not indicate that there will be no more evil. Rather, it states that Satan will no longer have the same freedom to deceive the nations.

4.3.1.3.3. The time that Satan is bound is the same time that the saints reign - 1,000 years. As we will see below, this is a reference to the church age when regenerated believers are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms, and the Gospel is going forth to all nations.

4.3.1.3.4. Being "bound" does NOT indicate a total restriction of Satan's activity. He was bound during Jesus' ministry, yet was obviously still active. Furthermore, in Hebrews 2:14-15 we are told that Jesus' death destroyed the devil. Obviously, it did not totally destroy him; rather, it destroyed his power of holding us in the fear of death (see v15.) The same thing is true here - Satan is not bound from all activities - merely from deceiving the nations in the way he had done previous to the coming of Christ.

4.3.1.3.5. Also note the advance of the faith since Satan was bound from Christ's advent until now. In the 2,000 years from Abraham to Christ, the Gospel made barely any impact on the nations. Since Satan was bound during Christ's ministry, however, the Gospel has advanced all over the world, and people from every nation are embracing the Gospel. This could not happen if Satan were not bound from deceiving the nations as he had prior to the work of Christ.

4.3.2. Revelation 20:4-6 - finds its parallel in John 5:24-29:

4.3.2.1. Revelation 20:4–6 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵ (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

4.3.2.2. John 5:24–29 I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. ²⁵ I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

4.3.2.2.1. Notice that in John 5:24 a person who has heard the word of Christ and believes has crossed over from death (θάνατος) to life (ζωή). This is not something that will happen in the future - it is something that happens now. They were dead, and they have now come to life. This is clearly speaking of regeneration.

4.3.2.2.2. Note that in John 5:25, the time has already come when the dead (νεκρός) will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear it will live (ζήω) - the same verb used in Revelation 20:4 - they came to life. Once again, this is happening from Jesus' time forward - the church age. The (spiritually) dead hear Jesus, and they come to life (spiritually). This is clearly speaking of regeneration.

- 4.3.2.2.3. Also note that in John 5:28-29, Jesus looks to a future resurrection. This one is not happening yet, for Jesus says “a time is coming” - but does not say “and now is” as in verse 25. This event is entirely future. However, note the similarity with the event described in vv24-25 - the dead hear the voice of the Son of God, and they come out - either rising (ἀνάστασις) to life (ζωή) or rising (ἀνάστασις) to judgement. This is clearly speaking of the future resurrection of both believers and unbelievers.
- 4.3.2.2.4. Thus, note that in both John and Revelation we hear of two different times where the dead come to life. In Revelation 20 many argue that the first resurrection (vv4,6) must be a bodily resurrection, since the second resurrection (v5 - the rest did not come to life until after the 1,000 years were ended). However, this ignores that in John’s Gospel (written by the same author), the first coming to life is spiritual, but the second is physical - a point on which virtually everyone agrees.
- 4.3.2.2.5. Thus, in John’s Gospel we have a spiritual resurrection of only believers (regeneration) in the present age, and at a far distant date we have the bodily resurrection of both believers and unbelievers. Furthermore, the future bodily resurrection is associated with the judgement of unbelievers. And we see this same exact pattern in Revelation 20. First there is a spiritual resurrection (note it only speaks of their ‘souls’ in verse 4, not their bodies), and then after a great period of time (spoken of symbolically as 1,000 years), the rest of the dead come to life (v5), and at that time there is the judgement (vv11-15).

4.3.2.2.6. Consequently, if we let the clear passage - John 5 - guide us in our interpretation of the more symbolic passage - Revelation 20 - we see that the first resurrection in Revelation 20 is really regeneration - the dead hear the voice of the Son of God and are raised to life. Further, these believers are delivered from the power of the second death. They will die the first death (physical), many of them at the hands of Satan's minions. But they have already crossed over from death to life, and when they experience the first death, they simply await the second resurrection - when their bodies are raised to life. But those who do not hear the voice of the Son of God (the rest of the dead in v5) will not only go through the first death, but will have to face the second death - when they their bodies are raised only to face judgement.

4.3.2.3. This same language of spiritual raising is used many other places in the NT

4.3.2.3.1. John 11:24–26 Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection (*αναστασις*) at the last day.”²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection (*αναστασις*) and the life (*ζωή*). He who believes in me will live (*ζάω*), even though he dies;²⁶ and whoever lives (*ζάω*) and believes in me will never die (*ἀποθνήσκω*). Do you believe this?”

4.3.2.3.1.1. In v24, Martha is clearly looking to the future bodily resurrection, which will occur at the last day (and not 1,000 years prior to the last day!) This is the second resurrection - the bodily resurrection.

4.3.2.3.1.2. In v25, Jesus assures Martha that everyone who believes in Him (those who hear His voice in the language of John 5), will live even if they die. That is, even if their body dies, they will be raise. This is likely looking at the future bodily resurrection as well.

- 4.3.2.3.1.3. In v26, Jesus goes further and says that if someone believes in Him they will live and never die. This is not a statement that their body will never die, for it will. Rather, it is a statement that if one lives spiritually, they will never spiritually die. They are already raised, having crossed over from death to life. This is the first resurrection - the spiritual resurrection of regeneration.
- 4.3.2.3.1.4. Thus, this passage is very similar to John 5:24-28 and Revelation 20.
- 4.3.2.3.2. John 6:53–58 Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life (ζωή) in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life (ζωή), and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live (ζάω) because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died (ἀποθνήσκω), but he who feeds on this bread will live (ζάω) forever.”
- 4.3.2.3.2.1. Note that once again we have a play on the ideas of both physical and spiritual life and death. This is clearly a major theme for John.
- 4.3.2.3.2.2. Note that if we partake of Jesus - here by feeding on Him rather than hearing Him - we live now and will live forever. This living forever is clearly spiritual, since Christians do die physically. However, it is a play on words as well, since the people in the wilderness died physically, but we will live spiritually forever if we feed upon Christ. Furthermore, we will live physically, for Christ will raise us up - on the last day (once again, not 1,000 years before the last day).

4.3.2.3.3. Romans 6:1–11 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — ⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

4.3.2.3.3.1. Once again note the play on both physical and spiritual life and death. Clearly the death of Christ in view in v3,4,5,6,8,9,10 is clearly a physical death. However, the death of the believer in view in v 2,4,6,8,11 is clearly not physical death but the spiritual death to sin that occurs when the believer is regenerated. When the believer becomes alive to God he dies to sin.

4.3.2.3.3.2. Also note that our present new life in v4 is directly related to Christ's resurrection. Our new life is spiritual - it is not a bodily resurrection. But it is a new life nonetheless, and it is given because of Christ's resurrection.

4.3.2.3.3.3. Furthermore, note that in v8 those who have died with Christ - by coming to life through Him - will also live with Him. This seems to be pointing to the future resurrection of th body.

4.3.2.3.3.4. Thus, in Romans 6, we who were dead have been made alive in Christ - raised to life - at the time we were united to Him in faith and died to sin. And we will be raised to life (bodily) in the future because of His resurrection as well.

4.3.2.3.4. Ephesians 2:4–7 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

4.3.2.3.4.1. Note that we were dead - spiritually. Then we were made alive with Christ. This is resurrection. The dead come to life. But it is spiritual, rather than physical.

4.3.2.3.4.2. Furthermore, note that we who have been raised spiritually are now seated with Christ in heaven - the same thing we see in Revelation 20:4-6. Those who have taken part in the first resurrection - regeneration - are seated in heaven with Christ now, and need not fear death - either the first death (temporal/physical) nor the second death (eternal/spiritual).

4.3.2.3.4.3. Finally, it should be noted that the word used for “raised us together” with Christ is a compound form of the same word used for the resurrection of Christ in Ephesians 1:20. This is important because it shows that the same word used for bodily resurrection may also be used for spiritual resurrection.

4.3.2.3.5. Colossians 2:12–15 having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

4.3.2.3.5.1. Note that once again we see terms like death, burial, life, and raised use not only of literal, physical death/burial/life/raising, but also for spiritual death/burial/life/raising.

4.3.2.3.5.2. Note that once again our spiritual death and raising are linked with Christ's physical death and resurrection.

4.3.2.3.5.3. Further, note that once again the term for our spiritual raising to life is a compound form of the same one used for Christ's physical resurrection (ἐγείρω). Again, this shows that the same term can be used for a spiritual and a physical resurrection in the same passage. The same word is clearly being used in two different senses in the same passage. Thus, to argue that the first and second resurrections in Revelation 20 must both be physical is false, for the two resurrections in all of these passages are of different types - one spiritual and one physical.

4.3.2.3.5.4. Finally, note that in v15 Christ's death is spoken of as having disarmed the Satanic powers arrayed against us, triumphing over them in a public spectacle. This was what happened when the Romans conquered a people - they put them in chains and brought them as captives. This is very similar to what we see in Revelation 20:1-3 where Satan is now bound like a prisoner as a result of the work of Christ.

4.3.2.4. Thus, the clear, consistent teaching of the NT is that we who were spiritually dead, upon hearing the voice of Christ, are raised from the dead and seated with Christ. These people have experienced the resurrection life of Christ and will never taste the second death - spiritual death. And should they die before Christ returns, they will experience the second raising - the resurrection of the body.

4.3.2.5. Consequently, it seems clear that the resurrection pictured in Revelation 20:4-6 is not a resurrection of a select group of believers (those who have died in the tribulation for example) but rather refers to the spiritual resurrection experienced by all believers - regeneration and being seated with Christ in heaven.

4.3.2.6. The reason not worshipping the best or receiving the mark, and being martyred are specifically mentioned is that these are representative of the trials and tribulations the believers John was writing to encourage experienced, and they are also representative of what believers will experience throughout this age, and especially as the final day approaches (see vv7-10 below).

4.3.3. Revelation 20:7-11 - finds it parallel in Ezekiel 38-39

4.3.3.1. Revelation 20:7-10 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth — Gog and Magog — to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. ⁹ They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰ And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

4.3.3.2. Due to length, I will not copy all of Ezekiel 38-39, but notice the similarities:

4.3.3.2.1. Both passages specifically mention Gog and Magog - the only places in Scripture to do so.

- 4.3.3.2.2. Both Scriptures mention the vast numbers of people that are part of God and Magog.
- 4.3.3.2.3. Both texts mention Gog and Magog advancing against the people of God.
- 4.3.3.2.4. In both texts, God and Magog are destroyed by divine intervention.
- 4.3.3.2.5. In both texts, the next chapter after the defeat of God and Magog display the Temple of God. In Ezekiel this runs from Chapters 40-48 with the vision focused on the Temple. In Revelation Chapters 21-22 focus on the New Jerusalem, the eternal Temple.
- 4.3.3.3. Revelation 20:7-10 is also a recapitulation of Revelation 19:17-21. Note that the book of Revelation is NOT chronological. Rather, it shows events from many different angles, so that the same event may be covered multiple times.)
 - 4.3.3.3.1. Revelation 19:17–21 And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God,¹⁸ so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.”¹⁹ Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army.²⁰ But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.²¹ The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.
 - 4.3.3.3.2. Once again, notice that massive numbers of people gather to fight against Christ (the rider on the horse) and His army (His people). But behind these masses are the spiritual forces of evil. In Revelation 20 the ultimate deceiver - Satan - is identified, but here it is his henchmen, the beast and the false prophet.
 - 4.3.3.3.3. Although the phrase Gog and Magog is not used, the words of the angel to the birds concerning coming and eating are very similar to Ezekiel 39:17-20:

4.3.3.3.1. Ezekiel 39:17–20 “Son of man, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: Call out to every kind of bird and all the wild animals: ‘Assemble and come together from all around to the sacrifice I am preparing for you, the great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. There you will eat flesh and drink blood.¹⁸ You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth as if they were rams and lambs, goats and bulls — all of them fattened animals from Bashan.¹⁹ At the sacrifice I am preparing for you, you will eat fat till you are gluttoned and drink blood till you are drunk.²⁰ At my table you will eat your fill of horses and riders, mighty men and soldiers of every kind,’ declares the Sovereign Lord.

4.3.3.3.4. In Ezekiel 38-39, Revelation 19:17-21, and Revelation 20:7-10, the end is the same - God crushes His enemies.

4.3.3.3.5. Given all of these similarities, it is highly unlikely that they are referring to three separate events. Rather, they all refer to the same event, looking at it from different angles. John is completing the vision given to Ezekiel concerning the coming final rebellion of humanity against God. And this rebellion is drawn to a close by the return of Christ, which ushers in the final defeat of God’s enemies, and the final judgement.

4.3.4. While much more could be said on Revelation 20, I think it is clear that if we read it in light of the clear teaching on eschatology in the rest of the NT, it is not teaching multiple resurrections, nor a future age that is a hybrid of this age and the age to come, but rather the same things we see elsewhere:

4.3.4.1. The age between the first and second coming of Christ will be characterized by good and evil throughout.

4.3.4.2. During this time, Satan is bound from deceiving the nations so that the Gospel can go forth.

4.3.4.3. As people hear and respond to the Gospel, they are raised from death to life and are spiritually seated and reigning with Christ in heaven.

4.3.4.4. As the time of the end draws near, Satan will be released to give his full power to deceiving the nations so that they will unite against the people of God.

- 4.3.4.5. At that time, Christ will return and His followers who have died will be bodily raised, and those who are alive will be transformed. Christ will defeat Satan, finally crushing the enemies of God permanently.
- 4.3.4.6. The return of Christ will be the time of the final judgement, when believers will enter into unending joy, and unbelievers will be raised only to go into unending misery.
- 4.3.5. Problems with a premillennial reading of Revelation 20
 - 4.3.5.1. In a premillennial reading of Revelation 20, there are both glorified, resurrected saints and mortal saints and unbelievers living side by side during the millennium. Where do we see this in the rest of the NT? Where do we read of an age that is a mingling of this age and the age to come? The NT is quite clear - there is this age, characterized by sin, death, persecution, marriage, childbearing, etc. and the age to come, ushered in at the return of Christ, and characterized by no more death, sorrow, pain, marriage, childbearing, etc. Where do we see any evidence of an in-between age?
 - 4.3.5.2. In a premillennial reading of Revelation 20, after 1,000 of blessing - almost no crime, problems, long life, the presence of undying glorified saints and the personal, direct presence of the glorified Jesus beheld in all of His glory, the majority of humanity still rebels against God and His rule. While that is certainly the trait of this age, there are none of the things which describe the millennium at present, and in the age to come there will be no rebellion against God. So once again, where do we see such a “mixed age” - neither this age nor the age to come - in the rest of the NT?
 - 4.3.5.3. In a premillennial reading of Revelation 20, there are multiple resurrections separated by 1,000 years. Where do we see even a hint of this in the rest of the NT? As seen above, the rest of the NT is clear - at the return of Christ the resurrection and judgement occur. It is all one event. So how do we explain the 1,000 year gap in the premillennial understanding of this passage?
- 4.3.6. Problems with a postmillennial reading of Revelation 20
 - 4.3.6.1. The main problem with a postmillennial reading of Revelation 20 is explaining how the world will become so Christianized, with the Gospel dominating every sector of every nation, that the majority of these people will then rebel against God. Either the Gospel was not really penetrating society as the postmillennialists claim, or there could not be a rebellion involving so much of humanity. It is hard to see how both can be true.

4.3.6.2. Postmillennialism falls into the opposite error of premillennialism. While premillennialism tries to remove the now but not yet tension of this age by so stressing the rebellion and minimizing the present rule and reign of Christ and the effect of the Gospel that the positive effects of God's work all but disappear, postmillennialists remove this tension by so stressing the rule of Christ and the growing influence of the Gospel that the continued worldwide rebellion against God and the persecution of his people throughout this age all but disappear - only to massively reappear in an inexplicable manner at the end of the millennium.