

## **Synopsis: Revelation 20:1-6**

This essay looks at the Greek text of Revelation 20:1-6 as the focus of the debate between Amillennialism and Premillennialism. It argues that it can be taken as a discrete pericope with a good textual basis. It attempts to argue that because of the importance of one's interpretive approach, we need to grasp the significance of symbolism as the key to the book. It also argues for an amillennial interpretation via three main points. These are *firstly*, that, 20:1-6 are a recapitulation of the visions of 12:7-12 and 19:11-21, and that therefore 20:1-6 does not follow sequentially on from what precedes. Specifically, this removes the idea that Christ returns to earth to reign for a thousand years. *Secondly*, that Satan has been bound with the first advent of Christ and his church is attacking his hold on the hearts of men and women around the world in all nations. *Finally*, it argues that the first resurrection is spiritual, and probably refers to the gift of new life.

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## INTRODUCTION

This essay compares and contrasts the premillennial and amillennial interpretations of Revelation 20.1-6. Any discussion of millennial views inevitably devolves upon these six verses in John's Apocalypse because they (and verse 7) are the only ones in the Bible to mention 'a thousand years,' commonly called, 'the millennium.'<sup>1</sup>

Of the much ink spilt on Rev.20:1-6, most of it has been to do with the debate about whether the Lord Jesus will return to set up an earthly kingdom over which he will then reign for a thousand-years, or whether this heavenly kingdom reign has commenced on earth already with his death and resurrection. In the latter interpretation, commonly called 'Amillennialism' or more happily, 'inaugurated millennialism', the next major eschatological event is the return of Christ to judge and remake the cosmos.

Amillennialism was first clearly articulated by Augustine of Hippo, who in 425 in his *City of God* wrote, 'In the meantime, while the Devil is bound for a thousand years, the saints reign with Christ, also for a thousand years; which are without doubt to be taken in the same sense, and as denoting the same period, that is, the period beginning with Christ's first coming.'<sup>2</sup> For Augustine and other amillennialists, the binding of Satan by the angel from heaven (vv.2-3) is too much like the binding of the strong man parables of Christ (Mk.3:27), and the thrones of judgment (v.4) like the Lord's promise to Peter and the disciples about their gospel authority on earth (Matt.16:19; 18:18). As Augustine argues, if the Devil is let loose, there will be no church because it is either taken away or if still around, will be annihilated by persecution.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There is some suggestion that 2 Peter 3:8 comes under this category as that chapter is an answer to 'scoffers' who ask, "Where is the promise of his coming (τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ)? For ever since our fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." (3:4). The apostle's answer, 'ὅτι μία ἡμέρα παρὰ κυρίῳ ὡς χίλια ἔτη καὶ χίλια ἔτη ὡς ἡμέρα μία' does mention a thousand years, but far less definitively than Rev.20.

<sup>2</sup> Aurelius Augustinus (Augustine), *The city of God*, translated by Henry Bettenson, (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1972), 914. One does need to be aware that Augustine is claimed by both postmillennialists and amillennialists. See, Loraine Boettner, *The millennium*, (Philadelphia, USA: P&R, 1957) 10, 110.

<sup>3</sup> Augustine, *The city*, 910.

The first view is usually called ‘premillennialism’ and comes in two main shapes: ‘classical’ premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism.<sup>4</sup> This essay, however, will need to confine itself to the question of whether Rev.20:1-6 presents the return of the Lord Jesus before or after the millennium.

## **APPROACHING THE TEXT**

### **Defining a biblical hermeneutic**

Any discussion of the Book of Revelation must first come to a clear hermeneutic. Although traditionally the literary genre has been defined as apocalyptic, recent discussions have argued for a more complex view. A casual reading of the first three verses of the book unearths three distinctive genres: apocalypse (1:1), prophecy (1:3), and epistle (1:4).<sup>5</sup> Each of these literary types is intertwined, such that, epistle (1:4) leads into prophecy (1:9), which in turns leads into apocalyptic vision (1:13ff).

### *The danger of literalism*

The issue for the interpreter of the book, nevertheless, is how to interpret the visionary material in the book. Most dispensational premillennialists are adamant that all material in the book must be taken literally unless specifically told otherwise. In an essay defending dispensational premillennialism, Herman Hoyt uses phrases like ‘normal’ and ‘biblical’ to describe a literal interpretation of Revelation, stating, ‘The literal method of approach to the teaching of the premillennial, dispensational doctrine of the kingdom is absolutely basic.’<sup>6</sup> Robert Thomas, another dispensationalist, following a similar hermeneutic, argues that the lake of fire (19:20)

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<sup>4</sup> Anecdotally, dispensational premillennialism with its ‘pre-tribulation rapture’ and separate plans for the nation of Israel and the church is the ‘default’ millennial view of most evangelicals in New Zealand today.

<sup>5</sup> G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, quoted in D.A. Carson, D. Moo, & L. Morris, *An introduction to the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Apollos, 1992), 478.

<sup>6</sup> Herman Hoyt, in *The meaning of the millennium: four views*, ed. Robert Clouse, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1977), 67.

and abyss (20:1) are actual places, not symbols, and that the chain with which the angel binds Satan (20:2) although not a ‘material’ chain is one such that Satan is ‘literally’ bound.<sup>7</sup>

Such confusion is bound to occur when one takes a highly symbolic book and tries to interpret it literally. There are elements in Revelation and other apocalyptic type books which even the most ardent literalist will find impossible to interpret in a literal way. The problem that classical premillennialist G.E. Ladd identifies, is that anyone who argues against a literal reading is immediately accused of being liberal or denying the inerrancy of Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

It is this commitment to literalism by many that logically leads them to a futurist interpretation of the Apocalypse. Literalists conclude, that, if the visions of John are of ‘literal’ things that happen, then all such events must lie in the future as no such things (6:1-7, coloured horses and riders; 8:7, fire and blood falling on the earth; 9:7, locusts with women’s hair etc.) have ever been seen yet in the history of earth.

#### *Σημαίνειν and levels of meaning*

Greg Beale’s exegesis of 1:1 (...καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ) is highly significant in the light of the current debate. He draws attention to the verb *σημαίνειν*, and linking it to Daniel 2:28-30, and 45, Beale argues that the term in 1:1 should be translated *signify*, or *make known* by ‘symbolic communication in a dream vision’.<sup>9</sup> The symbolic signification of the term in Daniel defines its use in Revelation to convey the idea of communication by symbols.<sup>10</sup> In essence, the language of book is overarchingly symbolic,

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<sup>7</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: an exegetical commentary*, WEC, (Chicago: Moody, 1992, 1995), 406.

<sup>8</sup> George E. Ladd, in *The meaning of the millennium: four views*, 93.

<sup>9</sup> G. K. Beale, *The book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, USA/ Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans / Paternoster, 1999), 50. See also, Gregory K. Beale, ‘The purpose of symbolism in the book of Revelation’, *CTJ* 41 (2006), 53-66.

<sup>10</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 52.

although some parts are plainly literal. How can one tell? The visions of John are symbolic, and the ‘other’ parts are not!

Vern Poythress posits that Revelation’s symbolism must be read at four different levels: *linguistic, visionary, referential, and symbolic*.<sup>11</sup> He goes on to argue convincingly, that, to try and take the visionary language of Revelation literally is to miss the intended theological message that the symbolism is meant to convey.<sup>12</sup> This argument is especially pertinent when considering the nature of the events that John sees in the passage before us. For, as Beale points out, those who tend to interpret the majority of the book literally, while formally acknowledging these levels of interpretation, in passages like 20:1-6 ‘typically neglect the visionary and symbolic levels of communication by collapsing them into the referential, historical level.’<sup>13</sup> In other words, if one acknowledges that 20:1-6 is a description of a vision that has symbolic meaning then it is incorrect to try and interpret it in terms of literal, sequential, and historical events. Long before Beale or Poythress, Henry Swete was complaining of the same exegetical errors. He warned expositors that the same methods of interpretation used on narrative cannot be also used on apocalyptic.<sup>14</sup>

### **Revelation 20:1-6 as a pericope**

It is important to satisfy ourselves that 20:1-6 is able to stand on its own as a basic unit from which we can trace a sufficiently significant theme. This is especially important in the light of the fact that v.7 also speaks of the millennium (τὰ χίλια ἔτη). Furthermore, many who hold a premillennial view of the passage would prefer to take vv.1-10 as the pericope.

### *The structure in the versions*

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<sup>11</sup> Vern S. Poythress, ‘Genre and hermeneutics in Rev.20:1-6’ in *JETS* 36/1 (1993), 41-54.

<sup>12</sup> Poythress, ‘Genre and hermeneutics’, 41-54

<sup>13</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 973.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (London: Macmillan, 1911, reprinted: Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1977), 263.

The Nestle-Aland 27<sup>th</sup> edition (NA27)<sup>15</sup> Greek New Testament separates off 20:1-6 in the text, and indents the text at vv. 4, and 5b (αὐτῆ ἡ ἀνάστασις...). The United Bible Societies fourth edition (USB4) places vv.1-6 under the heading, ‘The Thousand Years’, dividing the section itself into 1-3, and 4-6. Vv.7-10 commences a new section under the heading, ‘The Defeat of Satan.’<sup>16</sup>

The *Society for Biblical Literature Greek New Testament* text,<sup>17</sup> Westcott and Hort text,<sup>18</sup> and *Textus Receptus*<sup>19</sup> all follow the NA27 text, as does the Hodges and Farstad’s *Majority Text*.<sup>20</sup> All major modern English translations (NIV, ESV, CEV, RSV, NEB, NRSV, and NASB) also follow this paragraphing with a subheading like ‘the thousand years’.

#### *Structure in the commentaries*

Amongst commentators there are differences, mostly between those that cut off vv.1-6 and those that make 1-10 the pericope. In terms of recent major works, David Aune and Robert Thomas set vv.1-10 apart as a pericope. Aune in his structural outline entitles vv.1-10 as, ‘The final defeat of Satan’, although he does subtitle 1-3 as a, ‘Vision of Satan’s thousand-year imprisonment’, and 4-6 as a, ‘Vision of Christ’s thousand-year reign’.<sup>21</sup> Thomas sees 1-10 as ‘a two-part vision of the doom of Satan’.<sup>22</sup> He then delineates 1-3 as Satan’s period of ‘enforced

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<sup>15</sup> Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo Martini, and Bruce Metzger, *Novum Testamentum Graece, 27<sup>TH</sup>* (Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993)

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo Martini, and Bruce Metzger, *The Greek New Testament, fourth edition*, (Stuttgart, United Bible Societies, 1993, 1994)

<sup>17</sup> Michael, W. Holmes, *The Greek New Testament, SBL edition*, (www.sblgnt.com, 2010)

<sup>18</sup> Brooke, F. Westcott, and Fenton J.A. Hort, *The New Testament in the original Greek*, (Cambridge: 1881-2)

<sup>19</sup> F. H. A.Scrivener, *The New Testament in the original Greek according to the text followed in the Authorised Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1894, 1902) reprinted as *H KAINH ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ*, (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, n.d.)

<sup>20</sup> Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, *The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985). The late Zane Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad were both dispensational theologians.

<sup>21</sup> David Aune, *Revelation*, WBC, Vol.52C (Waco, Texas: Word, 1997, 1998, 1998), 1078.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas, *Revelation*,403.

restraint,' and 4-10 as his imprisonment in the lake of fire and unsuccessful attempt to escape.<sup>23</sup> Robert Mounce agrees with Thomas, taking 1-10 as a pericope, yet dividing it into three sections (1-3, 4-6, and 7-10).<sup>24</sup> Grant Osborne<sup>25</sup>, Ramsey Michaels<sup>26</sup>, and Craig Keener<sup>27</sup> all agree with Aune and Thomas. As noted above, most of these who take 1-10 as a literary unit are coming from a premillennial perspective.<sup>28</sup>

Beale sees the verses as part of a larger literary segment of 17:1 to 21:8,<sup>29</sup> and 1-6 are given the rather intimidating title, 'The millennium is inaugurated during the church age by God's curtailment of the Satan's ability to deceive the nations and to annihilate the church and the resurrection of believers' souls to heaven to reign there with Christ.'<sup>30</sup> In his excellent commentary Stephen Smalley takes 19.1-20.15 to form a unit comprising the seven visions.<sup>31</sup> Smalley,<sup>32</sup> Alan Johnson<sup>33</sup>, Denis Johnson,<sup>34</sup> Henry Swete,<sup>35</sup> and Philip E. Hughes<sup>36</sup> all agree with taking 1-6 as a pericope.

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas, *Revelation*, 403.

<sup>24</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The book of Revelation*, NICNT, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1977), 351.

<sup>25</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, ECNT (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2002), 696.

<sup>26</sup> Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, (Downers Grove, USA/ Leicester, IVP, England, 1997), 219.

<sup>27</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The NIV application commentary: Revelation*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 2000), 463.

<sup>28</sup> See, Michaels, Thomas, Keener,

<sup>29</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 972. He actually sees this section as a chiasm.

<sup>30</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 972

<sup>31</sup> Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: a commentary on the Greek text of the Apocalypse*, (Downers Grove, USA, IVP, 2005), 500.

<sup>32</sup> Smalley, *Revelation*, 500

<sup>33</sup> Alan F. Johnson, 'Revelation' in *The expositors Bible commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1981), 580

<sup>34</sup> Denis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: commentary on Revelation*, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey, P&R, 2001), 278

<sup>35</sup> Swete, *Revelation*, 259.

<sup>36</sup> Philip E. Hughes, *The book of Revelation*, (Leicester, England: IVP, 1990), 206.

R. H. Charles in the older *International Critical Commentary* deals with 20:1-3 as the constraining of Satan, but thinks that from that point to the end of the book the text is ‘incoherent and self-contradictory’.<sup>37</sup> His theory for the ‘incoherence’ of the text is that John died – a hypothesis he provides no evidence for - after penning 1:1-20:3.<sup>38</sup> He therefore argues that 21:9 – 22:2, 14-15, 17 should follow on from 20:3, and 20:4-6 after 22:17.<sup>39</sup> Needless to say, most modern commentators like Beale, Aune, Mounce, and Thomas treat the text as a unity. Beale cites six manuscripts of Revelation of ‘first and second degree’ quality that contain the whole text of the book.<sup>40</sup>

There is no doubt that v.1 commences a new vision following the recurring formula *καὶ εἶδον*. This is repeated in vv. 4 and 11, and as Swete notes, from v.7 the text reads more like a prophecy than a vision.<sup>41</sup> Even Osborne accepts this, as following E. Muller; he identifies 1-3 as before the millennium, 4-6 as during the millennium, and 7-10 (Satan’s release and final showdown) as afterwards.<sup>42</sup>

### **Confirming the text**

It is also important that we satisfy ourselves as to the wording of the text. There are three variants of significance in this passage that warrant comment. These are:

**20: 2a**, ὁ ὄφεις ὁ ἀρχαῖος after τὸν δράκοντα, following most witnesses (*Codex Sinaiticus*, uncials 046, 025, most minuscules). However, the *Textus Receptus* has the transposition τὸν ὄφιν τὸν ἀρχαῖον, thus avoiding the inconsistency of the nominative ὁ ὄφεις ὁ ἀρχαῖος. ‘The latter reading

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<sup>37</sup> R. H. Charles, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, ICC, (Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1920), vol.2, 140, 144.

<sup>38</sup> Charles, *Revelation*, 147.

<sup>39</sup> Charles, *Revelation*, 153.

<sup>40</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 70ff.

<sup>41</sup> Swete, *Revelation*, 267.

<sup>42</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 697.

is in accord with the linguistic usage of the book of Revelation, which employs the nominative usage for a title of a proper name that stands in apposition to a noun in an oblique case.', says Metzger.<sup>43</sup>

Most scholars define this as a typical example of a Johannine solecism. As the *lectio difficilior*, Aune notes that it is a nominative case that modifies the preceding accusative (τὸν δράκοντα),<sup>44</sup> and therefore to be preferred. He goes on, however, to label the parenthetical phrase ὁ ὄφεις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὃς ἐστὶν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς a gloss added to 'ensure the reader's proper identification of the dragon' in line with ancient Aramaic magical incantations.<sup>45</sup> Contrary to Aune, Beale argues that the nominative phrase is used to conform the name to the nominative in 12:9 (ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφεις ὁ ἀρχαῖος), and to identify the passage further with 12:7-11 which depicts the expulsion of Satan from heaven by Michael and the angels. He notes that both 12:9 and 20:2 may be allusions to Genesis 3 where ὁ ὄφεις occurs four times (3:1, 4, & 13).<sup>46</sup> This would make 20:1-6 a recapitulation of 12:7-11 (12), which we will look at in more detail latter.<sup>47</sup>

**20: 2b**, Later in verse two, the Byzantine text tradition (uncial 051, minuscules 2030, 2377, *Harklensis Syriac*, and *Byzantine Koine*) has ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὄλην ('the deceiver of the whole world') after ὁ Σατανᾶς.<sup>48</sup> Beale believes that this reading occurs because the solecism

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<sup>43</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *A textual commentary on the Greek New Testament, second edition*, (Stuttgart, Germany: United Bible Societies, 1994, 1998), 687.

<sup>44</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 1072.

<sup>45</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 1072.

<sup>46</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 994.

<sup>47</sup> See his seven parallels between 12:7-11 and 20:1-6 in, Beale, *Revelation*, 992.

<sup>48</sup> Aland et. al. *Novum Testamentum*, 674. see also, *The New Testament in the original Greek: Byzantine textform 2005*, compiled and arranged by Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont (Southborough, Mass.: Chilton, 2005) [www.byztxt.com](http://www.byztxt.com).

earlier in the verse (see previous note) had the ‘desired effect’ on later scribes in making them want the reading to conform to 12:9 (ὁ Σατανᾶς, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὄλην).<sup>49</sup>

**20: 6,** The external evidence for the presence of the article τὰ before χίλια ἔτη (*Codex Sinaiticus*, 046, and thirty minuscules) is evenly balance with evidence of its absence (*Alexandrinus*, 051, most minuscules). According to Metzger, most of the committee thought it best to include the word in brackets.<sup>50</sup> Aune prefers to omit the article, although he does agree that it is the more difficult reading.<sup>51</sup>

### **A translation**

*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 seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, (3) and threw him into the abyss, and secured him, and sealed it over him, in order that he might not yet deceive the nations until the thousand years are completed. After these things, he must be released for a little while.*

*4. Then I saw thrones (and they that sat on them), and (a) judgment was given to them. And (I saw) the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the witness of Jesus and because of the word of God – such as (those) who had not worshipped the beast, nor his image, and had not received the mark on their foreheads and on their hand. And these lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (5) The rest of the dead did not live until the end of the thousand years. This is the first resurrection. (6) Blessed and holy is the one having a share in the first resurrection. On these ones the second death has no power. But they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a/the thousand years.*

### **DOES 20:1-6 SUPPORT AMILLENNIALISM OR PREMILLENNIALISM?**

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<sup>49</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 994.

<sup>50</sup> Metzger, *A textual commentary*, 687.

<sup>51</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 1072.

We will answer this question by considering three areas critically determinative of which view most accurately represents the teaching of these verses. These are;

- *Does 20:1-6 chronologically follow chapter 19?*
- *Does the binding of Satan depict something yet to happen, or that has already happened?*
- *Is the first resurrection in 20:4-6 physical or spiritual?*

How one answers these will ultimately determine their solution to the larger question.

### **20:1- 6 as a recapitulation of 19:11-21 and 12:7-12**

One of the binding tenets of premillennial doctrine is that the book of Revelation must be interpreted in a more or less literal way. Because of the insistence on literalism, the chapters 4-22 are judged to be still distant future, and will play out in a chronologically sequential manner. Citing Walvoord, Mounce, and Alan Johnson as support, Thomas states, ‘Chronological sequence is the natural understanding of the visions,’ and again, ‘It is a structural necessity of Revelation that this thousand years lies in the future too.’<sup>52</sup>

Under this view, after the destruction of the worldliness of Babylon (17:15-18:24) and the vindication of the church, the Lamb’s bride (19:1-10), there will be a great battle in which Christ and his army defeat the beast and false prophet and their army, and they are thrown into the lake of fire (19:11-21). This return of Christ to earth signals the commencement of an earthly millennial kingdom during which Satan is completely stripped of power (20:1-3) and some or all of the saints are physically resurrected to rule with Christ on earth (20:4-6). After this, Satan will be released from the Abyss and there will be a final battle in which all God’s enemies will be destroyed by fire from heaven (20:7-10), followed by the final judgment (20:11-15) and new heavens and earth (21). As Ramsey Michaels confidently asserts, ‘Within John’s vision there is little doubt that his perspective was premillennial.’<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas, *Revelation*, 405.

<sup>53</sup> Michaels, *Revelation*, 220.

*καὶ εἶδον*

But, is this an accurate assessment of the language of Revelation? Contrary to the attempts by some to take *καὶ εἶδον* of v.1 as indicating some sort of historical chronological sequence,<sup>54</sup> Beale presents a compelling case that more often than not it indicates ‘visionary sequence’ in Revelation.<sup>55</sup> He notes that only three of the thirty-five uses of *καὶ εἶδον* in 19:11-21 give any clear indication of chronological sequence (20, 21a, 21b), while the remainder are visionary linkages.<sup>56</sup> Aune notes that a similar introductory phrase (*καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ*) occurs in 10:1 and 18:1 which indicates a new segment.<sup>57</sup>

In the LXX the phrase *καὶ εἶδον* occurs mostly in Ezekiel (20 times), followed by Daniel and Ecclesiastes. Usage in Ezekiel and Daniel is for visionary purposes, and in Ecclesiastes it fits the Preacher’s ironic nihilism. As noted in the comments on the text above, Aune sees the *καὶ εἶδον* in v.1 as a new vision report, linking it to 10:1 and 18:1 (*καὶ εἶδον ἄλλον ἄγγελον ...*)<sup>58</sup> Beale also points out the similarity of 7:2 which includes the same phrase, noting that almost all commentators, regardless of their interpretive views, see this phrase functioning as either a device to suspend the temporal progress of the vision, or ‘as reverting to a time anterior to the preceding section.’<sup>59</sup> Therefore, as premillennialist commentator Grant Osborne points out, on the basis of *καὶ εἶδον* chronological sequence cannot be proven.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> David J. Macleod, ‘The third “last thing”: the binding of Satan (Rev.20:1-3), in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1999), 469-486, also, Alan Johnson, 581, and, Steve Gregg, *Revelation, four views: a parallel commentary*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 460.

<sup>55</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 975.

<sup>56</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 975.

<sup>57</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 1081.

<sup>58</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 1081.

<sup>59</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 975.

<sup>60</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 699.

### *A recapitulation*

Since Victorinus of Pettau (died c. AD 304) interpreters have noted the recurring cycles of seven in the Apocalypse.<sup>61</sup> There are the seals (6:1-8:5), trumpets (8:6-11:19), and bowls of judgment (15:5-16:21) as clear recapitulations of similar ideas. Developing this literary device, Fowler White takes the angelic ascents and descents of 7:2, 10:1, 18:1, and 20:1 as evidence of visionary recapitulation. For example 7:9-17 is a visionary intermission in the seal cycle of the security of the saints numbered in 7:1-8, and takes the reader back to the fifth seal of 6:9-11.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, 10:1 serves a similar function in the trumpet cycle, and 18:1 takes us back to a point prior to the destruction of Babylon in 16:17-21.<sup>63</sup> In this latter instance, 18:1-24 functions like a prophetic hymn announcing the fall of Babylon.

Understanding the role of recapitulation in Revelation helps us to see, for example, that the ‘final’ battle of Gog and Magog 20:7-10 as a recapitulation of the ‘great’ battle of 19:11-21, and the Armageddon of 16:12-16. This is especially likely when one considers how both 19:11-21 and 20:7-10 allude to the Gog and Magog battle of Ezekiel 38-39.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, if 20:1 is a recapitulation formula, as argued above, then 20:1-6 is conceivably a restatement of the events seen by John in 19:11-21, and also 12:7-12. How is the satanic army defeated? Because Satan has been bound (20:2-3) in his ability to gathered deceived nations under his thralldom (20:8). Even his release to deceive the nations in v.7 is short, as has already been revealed in 12:12.

Furthermore 19:11-21 doesn’t read like a parousia one would expect from familiarity with the Synoptic Gospels. As Jack McKelvey points out, there is no mention of Christ coming on the

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<sup>61</sup> Smalley, *Revelation*, 19.

<sup>62</sup> R. Fowler White, ‘Re-examining the evidence for recapitulation in Rev.20:1-10’, in *WTJ* 51, (1989), 319-44.

<sup>63</sup> White, Re-examining the evidence. See also, Dave Mathewson, ‘A re-examination of the millennium in Rev.20:16: consummation and recapitulation’, in *JETS* 44/2 (2001), 237-51. Mathewson argues that recapitulation does not preclude premillennialism but neither does it prove it.

<sup>64</sup> Denis Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 276.

clouds (Matt.24:30; 26:64; Mk.13:26; 14:62; Lk.21:27), accompanying angels (Matt.13:41; 49; 16:27; 24:31; 25:31; Mk.8:38; 13:27) or the gathering in of the elect (Matt.24:31, 40-41; Mk.13:27).<sup>65</sup> Christ coming on a white horse doesn't read like a rescue mission, but an act of judgment. On this basis, the descent of the angel is not a future event happening chronologically anterior to the parousia, but a symbolic restatement of the victory of Christ over Satanic powers in his death and resurrection.

### **The binding of Satan in 20:1-3 depicts an inaugurated reality**

The second major point difference between amillennialists and premillennialists is their interpretation of vv.1-3. The latter insist that here we have something yet to happen, while the former argue it has already commenced.

#### *Exegeting 1-3*

John (v.1) next sees an unnamed angel descending from 'heaven'. The angel comes down, presumably to earth, to open the abyss, the place of imprisonment for 'disobedient spirits'.<sup>66</sup> This is supported by the fact that when the abyss was last opened demonic locusts escaped to plague the earth-dwellers (9:1). This also makes it likely that this is the same angel as in chapter 9. He is able to open the abyss because he has the key, keys being ancient symbols of authority and control.<sup>67</sup> It also suggests to the reader the keys of Christ given to Peter in Matthew 16:19. The 'great chain' (ἄλυσιν μεγάλην) is going to be used to 'bind' Satan for 1,000 years (v.2). This makes the Christian reader think of the chains they attempted to bind Legion of Gadara (Mk.5:4) with.

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<sup>65</sup> R. Jack McKelvey, 'The millennium and the second coming' in, *Studies in the book of Revelation*, edited by Steve Moyise, (Edinburgh/New York: T & T Clark, 2001), 86

<sup>66</sup> Joachim Jeremias, 'ἄβυσσος' in *Theological dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*, edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), I, 9.

<sup>67</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 699; Beale, *Revelation*, 984.

Unlike (v.2) Legion's helpers, with no bother at all the angel arrests (aorist active indicative verb to stress the decisive action of the angel in contrast to the present tenses in v.1<sup>68</sup>) Satan and binds him (aorist), presumably with the great chain he is carrying, for 1,000 years. As noted in the textual comments, the title given to Satan stands out as it is in the 'wrong' case, and therefore stands in apposition to τὸν δράκοντα. The thousand years is normally taken as a very long time, unless a literalist hermeneutic is applied.<sup>69</sup>

As (v.3) noted in v.2, Satan is cast (ἔβαλεν) into the abyss, locked in, and the lid is sealed. Aune suggests that John is using a 'protological' formulation of the scene.<sup>70</sup> R. Fowler White links this to ancient cosmological myths describing the defeat of serpents that are mentioned in the Bible (Job 26:13) and extra-biblical records.<sup>71</sup> There is also an unmistakable allusion to Isaiah 24:21-22 which describes the imprisonment of the enemies of Yahweh in a pit.<sup>72</sup> It is true that there are obvious parallels with extra-biblical literature, but it would be more likely that the Christian author of the Apocalypse was influenced by Isaiah rather than obscure pagan cosmologies.

#### *Satan is bound now*

The binding of Satan in 20:2-3 is seen by many premillennialists as the *coup de grace* to put amillennialists out of their misery. How, they ask, can one hold to an inaugurated millennial kingdom in which Satan is bound if the nations of today are still experiencing satanic deception?<sup>73</sup> Not only is Satan thrown into the abyss and secured (presumably with the great chain), but the lid of the abyss is sealed. This sealing can be connected with royalty, authority,

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<sup>68</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 702.

<sup>69</sup> See Walvoord, Thomas

<sup>70</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 1083.

<sup>71</sup> R. Fowler White, 'On the hermeneutics and interpretation of Rev. 20:1-3: a preconsummationist perspective', *JETS* 42/1 (1999) 53-68

<sup>72</sup> 'Pit' is ὀχύρωμα ('stronghold, prison') in the LXX

<sup>73</sup> Keener, *Revelation*, 464.

and legal legitimacy.<sup>74</sup> In 22:10 John is told by the angelic messenger *not* to seal up (μὴ σφραγίσῃς) ‘the words of this prophecy’, presumably to allow others to have access to its contents. If Satan is ‘sealed’ into the abyss, then how can he have access to the nations? As some joke, “If Satan is bound today then his chain is too long!”<sup>75</sup>

What is also at stake here is the extent and intensity of the meaning of δέω in this context.

Amillennialists argue that binding must be read with the ἵνα μὴ clause ‘in order that not’ of v.3 and relates directly to the deception of the nations which has now changed since the coming of Christ. Premillennialists respond that the binding of Satan is absolute because not only is he arrested (ἐκράτησεν - aorist), but in v.3 is also bound and locked (ἐκλείσεν - aorist) into the abyss, and its ‘door’ sealed (ἐσφράγισεν - aorist).<sup>76</sup>

However, the purpose of the binding is ‘so that’ Satan cannot deceive the nations any longer, as he was so doing previously. As James Hughes observes, ‘It should be noted that during the thousand-year period Satan is bound with regard to *one thing only*, his deceiving the nations.’<sup>77</sup> It is also important to make the exegetical connection between 12:9 (...ὁ Σατανᾶς, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὄλην), 20:3 and v.8, where Satan’s release at the end of his millennial incarceration *results* (purpose) in him deceiving (πλανῆσαι) the nations into gathering for battle against Christ. Again, we must look beneath the highly symbolic language to the theological truth being conveyed.

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<sup>74</sup> G. Fitzer, ‘σφραγίς’, in *TDNT*, VII, 939-951.

<sup>75</sup> Gregg, *Revelation four views*, 464.

<sup>76</sup> Contrary to the argument from the purpose clause, in a paper ‘Progression versus recapitulation in Revelation 20:1-6; some overlooked arguments’ delivered to the *Evangelical Theological Society*, Charles Powell, argues that the purpose clause does *not* determine the degree of restriction, but rather the language use to describe the nature of restriction. [www.bible.org/article/progression-versus-recapitulation](http://www.bible.org/article/progression-versus-recapitulation)

<sup>77</sup> James Hughes, ‘Revelation 20:4-6 and the question of the millennium’, in *WTJ* 39 (1973), 281-302. *Italics* mine.

What does 20:2-3 then depict? Patristic commentator Andrew of Caesarea (AD 567-637) wrote, 'This passage expresses the destruction of the devil that occurred through the passion of our Lord. For through his passion, the one who is stronger than the devil, namely, Christ our God, bound him who seemed to be strong and freed us, who were his spoils.'<sup>78</sup> Andrew of Caesarea is alluding to the explanation by Christ of his ability to cast out evil spirits. Through his ministry, death, and resurrection Jesus bound the demons inhabiting Legion (Matt.8:29), and with the 'finger of God' came as the 'one stronger than the strong man' (Lk.11:20-22) to force Satan from the earth. As the fulfilment of the curse on the Serpent in the Garden (Gen.3:15), Christ crushes the head of Satan (see Matt.21:44; Rom.16:20), and through the ministry of his servants saw Satan fall from heaven (Lk.10:18) as the 'ruler of this world' was judged (Jn.16:11). As those sitting on the thrones of judgment (v.4) they by his authority bind on both earth and heaven (Matt.16:19; 18:18) because 'all authority' has been given to him (Matt.28:18-19) to commission his disciples to go to all nations and make disciples. Therefore Paul says of him that he has 'disarmed the rulers and authorities...triumphing over them' (Col.2:15; see also, 1 Cor.15:25), and the author of Hebrews that through death the Lord 'destroyed the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil (Heb.2:14).'<sup>79</sup>

How, then, does a believer in an inaugurated millennial reign account for the satanic activity still occurring on the earth? *Firstly*, one's millennial view does tend to colour how one sees world events. Those who believe that Satan is roaming unrestrained throughout the world will point to numerous wars, false religions, and grievous injustices against the poor and defenceless as evidence of their view. For many premillennialists, the world is sick and evil and Satan a mighty and unstoppable enemy. In their cosmic viewfinder, the church is small and persecuted,

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<sup>78</sup> William Weinrich, *Greek commentaries on Revelation/ Oecumenius, Andrew of Caesarea*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 188.

<sup>79</sup> Speaking from the perspective of his studies into ancient near eastern cosmological mythologies, Fowler White, in 'On the hermeneutics and interpretation of Rev. 20:1-3: a preconsummationist perspective', *JETS* 42/1 (1999) 53-68, writes: '*Applying our observations about the relationship between historical events and their symbolic depiction, I believe we are bound to conclude that the fate of the dragon in Rev 20:1-3 is analogous but not identical to the fate of Satan in history. Stated differently, while the dragon is captured and confined in the epic imagery and plot of John's vision, Satan is not captured and imprisoned in history. Rather, like the serpentine dragons of Babylon and of the darkness and deep, Satan is deposed from his role as deceiver of the world nations.*'

and the saints cry out for the return of Christ (22:20) to rescue his people and establish his rule on the earth.

On the other hand, amillennialists (and also postmillennialists to a lesser degree) will point to restraining effects of God's grace on the inhabitants of the earth, that, even though totally depraved, no one is completely evil. Though Satan's power has not been completely banished, the gospel has gone into all the world and most people are pretty decent. The church is free to preach the gospel, and most believers are free to worship.

*Secondly*, one needs to remember the exegesis of the passage, that the binding Satan is in order to prevent his deception of the nations (τὰ ἔθνη), which we have already seen (12:12; 20:8) he deceives for the purpose of bringing them to war against Christ and his people. Since his binding, however, Satan is unable prevent anyone being drawn to him (Jn.12:31-32) and to attack the church (12:7-12) at will. The nations since the coming of Christ are no longer held under Satan's power (Is.9:1-2; Lk.2:30-32; 4:27).<sup>80</sup> As Jesus proclaimed to his followers, "And I, if I am lifted up, will draw all men to myself" (Jn.12:31).<sup>81</sup>

It must be with regard to the deception of the nations for a full-scale attack on Christ and his people that the binding of Satan is understood. To insist that the binding be complete, absolute, and universal is to fly in the face of other Scriptural passages that speak of spiritual realities in an absolutist way. The Psalms, for example, constantly speak of God's unchallenged rule and victorious reign (Psalms 45:5; 47:8; 93:1; 96:10; see also, Is.24:23; 52:7), and that is before the final Day of the Lord or return of Christ. Are such passages false representations of reality? Absolutely not; instead, they are speaking of the eschatological reality of God's sovereign rule and assured conquest of his enemies, while at the same time allowing for the activity of Satan

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<sup>80</sup> Smalley, *Revelation*, 505.

<sup>81</sup> Hughes, *Revelation*, 211.

and evil forces (see, Job 1 & 2). In the same way Satan's binding is a present reality, but also a future hope.

### **The 'first resurrection' in 20:4-6 is not physical**

The final area of debate between premillennialists and inaugurationists is over the meaning of the vision John sees of the faithful saints who live and reign with Christ in the 'first resurrection.' These ones have nothing to fear of a 'second death.' Premillennialists take this to mean that this is a prophecy of a future physical resurrection of certain saints who will rule with Christ over a millennial kingdom.

#### *Exegeting 4-6*

John (v.4) sees thrones, occupants of the thrones, who are most likely the martyred saints. The thrones remind the reader of the twenty-four elders (4:4, 11:16; 19:4), representatives of the twelve tribes and twelve apostles. One is also made to think of the heavenly thrones that Daniel saw in the presence of the Ancient of Days (Dan.7:9). However, because John uses *ἐκάθισαν* 'they sat', the subject of the sentence is not immediately resolved. Instead the reader must discover that the thrones are for the souls of the martyrs who were beheaded for their loyalty and then 'lived' (*ἐζήσαν*) and ruled with Christ for a thousand years. Some read *ἐζήσαν* as an ingressive aorist indicating that they 'began to live/ lived again' in the future and reigned with Christ.<sup>82</sup> However, some also think it may be constative, indicating 'increased spiritual life' or 'action viewed as a whole.'<sup>83</sup> Even if it is taken as being ingressive it simply means 'the beginning of an ongoing process', and cannot be used to argue for an exclusively future state.

This implies that those who exercise judgment from the throne are deceased martyrs in heaven.

Thomas' objection that the thrones cannot be for the martyrs because they are not resurrected

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<sup>82</sup> Thomas, *Revelation*, 416.

<sup>83</sup> Archibald T. Robertson, *Robertson's word pictures in the New Testament*, in 'TheWord Bible Software', 2003-2010, by Coostas Stergiou. See also, Beale, *Revelation*, 1000.

‘until later in v.4’ is only valid if one follows his rigid literalism.<sup>84</sup> What we are told is that they have been faithful to Christ and have resisted pressure to compromise with the anti-Christ system, as in 13:16-17.

Premillennialists mostly agree that the thrones are located on earth because the angel ‘comes down from heaven’ to them. Amillennialists make the connection to Daniel 7:9 and by implication to a celestial reign. In Daniel the thrones are clearly heavenly as this is where the Ancient of Days takes his seat too. As Beale notes, forty-two of the forty-six occurrences of throne in Revelation refer to thrones in heaven.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, as observed above, it seems best to take the occupants of the thrones as the deceased (‘souls of those beheaded’) martyrs (see 3:21). As Philip Hughes puts it, ‘We are informed that it is *souls* that are thus enthroned, that is to say, persons in the disembodied state which prevails between death and resurrection.’<sup>86</sup>

The (v.5) ‘rest of the dead’ are taken to be the opposite of the faithful martyrs, those who did worship the beast, receive his mark, and chose rebellious life over the witness of Christ and the word of God (v.4). They do not ‘live’ until the end of the millennium, which event is named ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη.

A blessing (v.6) is pronounced on those ‘who have a share’ in the first resurrection. They are immune to the ‘power’ (ἐξουσία) of the ‘second death’ (ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος). It seems a reasonable interpretation to include all believers with the martyrs as living and reigning with Christ for the millennium (1:6; 5:10).<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Thomas, *Revelation*, 413.

<sup>85</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 999.

<sup>86</sup> Hughes, *Revelation*, 211.

<sup>87</sup> Mark Wilson, *Revelation: Zondervan illustrated Bible backgrounds commentary*, vol.4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 361.

*A spiritual resurrection precedes the general resurrection, just as physical death precedes eternal death*

There are three main interpretations of the meaning of ‘resurrection’ in these verses. Some (Meredith Kline, Beale, James Hughes) see it as a reference to death and the intermediate state. Others like Philip Hughes link it to the resurrection of Christ as the basis for the general or ‘second’ resurrection. Finally, premillennialists see in it the physical resurrection of all believers (Thomas, Alan Johnson), or even a physical resurrection of just the martyrs (Walvoord, Charles, Mounce). Even though it seems out of sync with the rest of Scripture, many take this latter view (physical resurrection) because they claim it is the natural reading of the passage.

To support this view, an oft cited maxim of Henry Alford’s is usually rolled out. He argues, that, if one changes the meaning of the two resurrections (‘*ψυχὰι ἔζησαν* and *νεκροὶ ἔζησαν*’) in a single passage to make one spiritual and the other physical, ‘then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything.’<sup>88</sup> Henry Swete, on the other hand, contends, that, ‘To infer from this statement, (v.5) as many expositors have done, that the *ἔζησαν* of v.4 must be understood of bodily resuscitation, is to interpret apocalyptic prophecy by methods of exegesis which are proper to ordinary narrative.’<sup>89</sup>

To summarise these verses, then, in this passage we are told:

- (a) souls *lived* and reigned with Christ a thousand years, which is the *first* resurrection  
(*αὕτη ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη*),
- (b) the rest of the dead *did not live* until the end of the millennium, thereby implying *another* (second) resurrection,

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<sup>88</sup> Henry Alford, *Alford’s Greek New Testament*, in TheWord Bible Software, [www.theword.net](http://www.theword.net)

<sup>89</sup> Swete, *Revelation*, 263.

(c) and, those participants in the *first* resurrection are immune to the *second* death, which thereby implies a *first* death).<sup>90</sup>

All those who participate in this first resurrection are ‘blessed and holy’, and/because the ‘second death’ has no power over them. To put it another way, the ‘first’ (spiritual) resurrection is the minimal requirement to avoid suffering the second death (v.6). And, as Beale notes, physical resurrection by itself cannot provide protection from the second death.<sup>91</sup> The second death can only refer to a final and terrible *spiritual* judgment on those who worship the Beast. The faithful martyrs, along with all believers, instead fulfil a priestly and regal role with Christ for *the* (τὰ) thousand years. Premillennialists see this as referring to the rule that raptured saints who return with Christ will enjoy over an earthly kingdom centred in literal Jerusalem.

Although most commentators infer a ‘second resurrection’ and a ‘first death’ from these verses, some have pointed out this does not necessarily have to be the case. As Swete argues, ‘By labelling it the ‘first resurrection’ the ‘seer merely guards against the impression that he had referred to the General Resurrection which will follow and not precede the thousand years of the martyrs reign.’<sup>92</sup> In other words, ‘first resurrection’ simply indicates that it belongs to the present order of things, not future.<sup>93</sup>

While amongst interpreters who hold that the first resurrection is spiritual there is disagreement as to whether it refers to regeneration or the intermediate state, the plausibility of such a view still stands. Needless to say, premillennialists disagree, choosing rather to highlight the verb *ἔζησαν* as the pivot on which the interpretation of the verse stands.<sup>94</sup> For, as they argue, the subject of the verb is the souls of those who have been executed for their faith. They already believe, so it can’t refer to an analogy of faith or some type of spiritual resurrection. They

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<sup>90</sup> See Beale’s helpful diagram on p. 1005.

<sup>91</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 1005.

<sup>92</sup> Swete, *Revelation*, 263.

<sup>93</sup> See, Meredith Kline, ‘The first resurrection’, *WTJ* 37, (1975) 366-375.

<sup>94</sup> For example, Ladd, *Revelation*, 265.

contend that the explanation of this as the ‘first resurrection’ should make it plain that a physical resurrection of those who will reign with Christ in his terrestrial millennial kingdom is in view.<sup>95</sup>

It is easier, in some ways, to start with the death imagery. John tells us later (20:14; 21:8) that the ‘second death’ refers to eternal judgment, such as the devil experiences in 20:10. Almost all commentators, whether pre or amillennial agree that if the ‘second death’ is eternal and spiritual, then the ‘first death’ would have to be an actual physical death of the body and entrance into the intermediate state.<sup>96</sup> Both believers and unbelievers will experience such a death. Unfortunately Dean Alford is silent on the possibility of a first death and whether that would be physical or spiritual.

The second death has no power over all believers whether spiritually present with Christ in the intermediate state, or still living upon the earth, because of the first resurrection. If it refers to all believers and not just the martyrs, then James Hughes observations are pertinent; ‘The “living” dead (v.4) are those who have part in the first resurrection and on whom the second death has no power, whereas the “dead” dead are those who have no part in the first resurrection and on whom the second death has power.’<sup>97</sup> As Christ proclaimed to the two sisters, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” (Jn.11:25-26)

Indeed, as Hughes goes on to argue, it is this resurrection that could be considered the ‘first’ resurrection, according to Paul’s definition in 1 Cor.15:20 of the first-fruits of the harvest. In other words, they are blessed because they share in the actual resurrection life of Christ who rose physically from the grave, and through union with him (Rom.6:1-6) they are ‘raised with

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<sup>95</sup> Walvoord, *Revelation*, 298.

<sup>96</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 709.

<sup>97</sup> James A. Hughes, ‘Revelation 20:4-6 and the question of the millennium’, *WTJ* 35, (1973), 281-302.

him in newness of life.’ Their blessings include the first resurrection which gives immunity from the ‘second death’, while at the same time conferring on them priesthood and kingship in Christ.<sup>98</sup> According to Christ, these are ‘the dead’ who have heard his voice and ‘will live’ (Jn.5:25-26). Those dead who hear and live will come out of their graves to a ‘resurrection of life’, but those who have ‘done evil’ to a resurrection of judgment (Jn.5:29).

*Other objections to a bodily resurrection in 20:4*

A couple of other objections to the notion of bodily resurrected saints (or martyrs, or apostles) ruling physically in an earthly millennial kingdom should be considered. If, as premillennialists hold, those who had received the mark of Satan and worshipped the Beast are destroyed in the great battle of chapter 19:11-21, then over what or whom on earth would these resurrected saints reign?<sup>99</sup> According to the vision, they have been utterly defeated and destroyed along with all evil.

Beale asks how could it be possible for glorified saints to rule in a world still populated by people with corruptible bodies?<sup>100</sup> Paul makes it clear that the resurrection body is ‘incorruptible’ (1 Cor.15:42) and is ultimately a ‘spiritual’ body (v.44). Furthermore, as Paul argues in this great chapter on the resurrection, the resurrection involves the defeat of the ‘last enemy death’ (1 Cor.15:25, 54-55). Accordingly to a premillennial reading of Revelation 20, death isn’t destroyed until after the thousand year reign, final rebellion, and final judgment (20:14). This would necessarily make the millennial resurrection somehow less effective and victorious than a second resurrection.

Finally, the notion of two physical resurrections is contrary to the plain teaching of the rest of Scripture. If one was to accept that vv.4-6 are describing a temporary or preliminary bodily resurrection, then this would place this passage outside the clear teaching of the rest of the

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<sup>98</sup> Smalley, *Revelation*, 510.

<sup>99</sup> Mealey, *After the thousand years*, 116.

<sup>100</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 1017.

Scripture. The New Testament speaks of resurrection in three ways: the resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:22), the general resurrection (Matt.22:28; Acts 24:15), and the temporary miraculous restoration of life of men like Lazarus (Heb.11:35). The only exceptions are when Jesus referred to himself, as he did with many other eschatological ideas, as ‘the resurrection and life’ (Jn.11:24-25; see also 5:25-29).

## **CONCLUSION**

No interpretive view of these verses is completely watertight, and no discussion of them can hope to cover every area in a few words. Nevertheless, in this paper we have seen that Revelation 20:1-6 can be taken as a discrete pericope that has healthy textual support. We have also seen that because one’s interpretative approach to the visionary literature of the book as a whole is clearly determinative, we need to grasp the significance of symbolism as the key to the book. Beale’s discussion of *σημαίνειν* and Poythress’ explanation of the different levels in symbolic literature were particularly helpful in this connection. The book is symbolic, and the way we interpret it needs to reflect that.

As we looked at the exegesis and interpretation of 20:1-6 we came to three conclusions. We saw that the verses are a recapitulation of the cosmic victory visions of (at least) 12:7-12 and 19:11-21, and that therefore 20:1-6 does not follow sequentially on from what precedes. Specifically, this precludes the idea that Christ returns to earth prior the millennium. Secondly, we saw that Satan has already been figuratively bound as Christ through his death, resurrection, and body (the church) attacks his hold on the hearts of men and women around the world in all nations. Finally, we argued that the first resurrection is spiritual, and most likely refers to the gift of new life to believers now. These ones either live and reign, or are as the ‘cloud of witnesses’ (Heb.12:1) and reign over Christ’s present millennial kingdom.

Based on these conclusions I would have to say that I 'prefer' the amillennial view of Revelation 20:1-6 over the premillennial one.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> *'Compare and contrast the premillennial and amillennial views of Rev. 20:1-6. Which do you prefer and why?'*

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