

## AMILLENNIALISM RECONSIDERED

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### Introduction

G. K. Beale's latest commentary on Revelation and Kim Riddlebarger's new book *A Case for Amillennialism* have renewed interest in the debate on the nature of the millennium.<sup>1</sup> Amillennialism has an illustrious history of support from Augustine, theologians of the Calvinistic and Lutheran confessions, and a long line of Reformed theologians such as Abraham Kuyper, Arvin Vos, H. Ridderbos, A. A. Hoekema, and M. G. Kline.<sup>2</sup>

Amillennialists recognize that a straightforward reading of the text seems to show "the *chronological progression* of Rev 19–20, the futurity of Satan's imprisonment, the physicality of 'the first resurrection' and the literalness of the one thousand years" (emphasis supplied).<sup>3</sup> However, they do not accept a chronological progression of the events in these chapters, preferring instead to understand the events as recapitulatory. Their rejection of the natural reading of the text is driven by a hermeneutic of strong inaugurated eschatology<sup>4</sup>—the paradox that in the Apocalypse divine victory over the dragon and the reign of Christ and his church over this present evil world consist in participating with Christ in his sufferings and death.<sup>5</sup> Inaugurated eschatology emphasizes Jesus' victory over the powers of evil at the cross. Since that monumental event, described so dramatically in Rev 12, Satan has been bound and the saints have been reigning (Rev 20). From the strong connection between the two chapters (see Table 1 below) they infer that Rev 20 recapitulates Rev 12. This view that, beneath the play and counterplay of

<sup>1</sup>See G. K. Beale's commentary on Rev. 20 in *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); and Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

<sup>2</sup>Summarized in Riddlebarger, 31.

<sup>3</sup>R. Fowler White, "On the Hermeneutics and Interpretation of Rev 20:1-3: A Preconsummationist Perspective," *JETS* 42/1 (March 1999): 53.

<sup>4</sup>According to Anthony A. Hoekema, "Amillennial eschatology . . . gives us an inspiring vision of the lordship of Christ over history and of the ultimate triumph of his kingdom" ("Amillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse [Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 1977], 187).

<sup>5</sup>R. Fowler White, "Agony, Irony, and Victory in Inaugurated Eschatology: Reflections on the Current Amillennial-Postmillennial Debate," *Westminster Theological Journal* 62 (2000): 172-175.

good and evil, God is triumphing, gives amillennialists an optimistic view of history.

Premillennialists also have an optimistic view of history, believing in the ultimate triumph of God over Satan, through Christ's victory at the cross. But they see victory coming progressively in the successive events of salvation history. They deny that there is break between Rev 19 and 20, or that Rev 20 recapitulates Rev 12. This article is an attempt to advance the debate over the millennium by demonstrating that there is *progression* rather than *recapitulation* in the major themes of the book. Further, it will be shown that chapters 19 and 20 are part of an inseparable unit that cannot be divided, and that chapter 20 should be seen as consummated rather than inaugurated eschatology. Finally, a form of premillennialism that eliminates significant problems inherent in other systems of interpretation will be suggested.<sup>6</sup>

### *A Summary of Amillennialism*

Amillennialism may be summarized as follows: the thousand years of Rev 20 represent the entire Christian era, beginning with the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and ending with the second coming. Two resurrections are found in Rev 20:4-5, one at the beginning of the thousand years and one at the end: the first resurrection is the resurrection of Christ (12:5) and a spiritual resurrection of martyred saints (20:4),<sup>7</sup> while the second resurrection is the physical resurrection of the saints and the wicked (20:12-13, 15) at the second coming of Christ.<sup>8</sup> The binding of Satan is his fall from power, with a "restraining order" placed upon him at the enthronement of Christ (Luke 10:18; 2 Thess 2:7; Rev 12:9-10). The loosing of Satan to deceive the nations at the end of the thousand years (20:7-10) is the campaign of the dragon, beast, and false prophet to deceive the world in the final conflict (16:13-14, 16). One event, which also includes the destruction of the enemies of God in 19:20-21 and 20:7-10, is represented by the battle of Armageddon (16:16), the war of the beast's armies against the armies of heaven (19:11-21), and the battle of Gog and Magog against the beloved city (20:7-10). The battle culminates in the second coming of Christ, the judgment of the wicked, and the rewarding of the righteous—events which mark the end of the millennial Christian era. Thus there is no future millennium.

Amillennialists cite parallels between the visions of Revelation as

<sup>6</sup>Unless otherwise noted, the RSV translation of the Bible is used. Limitations of space do not allow extensive treatment of every area touched upon, such as the Battle of Armageddon, the state of the dead, the fate of the wicked.

<sup>7</sup>Riddlebarger, 213-215; Beale, 995-996.

<sup>8</sup>Beale, 1003-1004, 1013-1014.

evidence that the same events are being described in a recapitulatory pattern. A classic example is that Rev 20 appears to be a recapitulation of chapter 12, with the following parallels in Table 1.<sup>9</sup>

<b>TABLE 1 RECAPITULATORY PATTERN OF REVELATION 12 AND 20</b>	
12:7-11	20:1-6
heavenly scene (v. 7)	heavenly scene (v. 1)
angelic battle against Satan and his host (vv. 7-8)	presupposed angelic battle with Satan (v. 2)
Satan cast to earth (v. 9)	Satan cast into the abyss (v. 3)
the angels' evil opponent called "the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the one called the devil and Satan, the one deceiving the whole inhabited earth" (v. 9)	the angels' evil opponent called "the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan" restrained from "deceiving the nations any longer" (vv. 2-3), to be loosed later to deceive the nations throughout the earth (vv. 3, 7-8)
Satan's expression of "great wrath because he knows he has little time" (v. 12b)	Satan to be "released for a short time" after his imprisonment (v. 3)
Satan's fall, resulting in the kingdom of Christ (v. 10) and his saints (v. 11; note the "conquering" theme) (v. 12b)	Satan's fall, resulting in the kingdom of Christ and his saints (v. 4)
the saints' kingship based not only on the fall of Satan and Christ's victory, but also on the saints' faithfulness even to death in holding to "the word of their testimony" (v. 11)	the saints' kingship, based not only on the fall of Satan, but also on their faithfulness even to death in holding to "the testimony of Jesus and the word of God" (v. 4)

This diagram demonstrates a strong relationship between the two passages. In both chapters, Satan is cast down and his power is restricted (12:7-9; 20:1-3). In both, the kingdom of Christ and his saints assumes new power (12:10-11; 20:4). But are these two passages referring to the same events? Or is chapter 20 an advance over and a climax to chapter 12?

<sup>9</sup>Beale, 992; Riddlebarger, 202.

### *Are the Cycles Repetitive or Progressive?*

What the amillennialist view effectively uncovers is the recapitulatory nature of the visions. What it fails to recognize is that each vision represents an escalation in the conflict, detailing new victories in the warfare against Satan. As the book progresses, there is more than recapitulation—there is increasing victory for Christ and increasing defeat for Satan.<sup>10</sup> Each repetition reaches an octave higher for God and an octave lower for Satan, culminating in the climactic consummation. This is especially true in chapters 12 and 20. This principle can be illustrated in the repetitive themes of these chapters, such as the warfare between Christ and Satan, the kingdom of God and the reign of the saints, and the judgment. The following sections will begin with the commonly understood order of events, and then discuss whether there is recapitulation or a sequence of escalating events.

#### The Casting Down of Satan

The Bible identifies four downfalls of Satan, each one more decisive than the previous, resulting in further restrictions upon him and, ultimately, culminating in his final destruction.

1. *The primeval fall of Satan.* The primeval downfall of Satan is alluded to in Rev 12:3-4a: “Another portent appeared in heaven; behold a great red dragon. . . His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth.” This action was prior to his attack on the woman in order to devour her child (4b). The initial expulsion of Satan is implied in Isa 14:12-14 and Ezek 28:12-19.<sup>11</sup> The biblical narrative indicates that he subsequently tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3) and appeared in heaven as the *satan* (“accuser”) of men of God, such as Job and Joshua the high priest (Job 1 and 2; Zech 3:1-2). For this reason, the book of Revelation identifies him as “the accuser of the brethren” (Rev 12:10). Satan thus appears to have the role of prosecuting attorney in the heavenly courts.

2. *The fall of Satan at the cross.* Satan was expelled as earth’s representative when the dragon, who deceives the whole earth, and his angels were cast out (Rev 12:9). This event happens at the cross, the place

<sup>10</sup>Each vision brings advance for the cause of God: the Seven Seals climax in the wrath of the Lamb (6:16-17); the Seven Trumpets climax in the beginning of Christ’s active reign (11:17); the Seven Wonders climax in the harvest of the earth (14:15-20); the Seven Plagues climax in the fall of Babylon (16:19); the Downfall of Satan’s Kingdom climaxes in the death of Death (20:14); and the final vision climaxes in the eternal reign of the saints (22:5). See Appendix A for the list of visions.

<sup>11</sup>The name “Lucifer,” from the Latin Vulgate, was first identified with Satan by Tertullian, Jerome, and other early church fathers (J. Ridderbos, *Isaiab*, trans. John Vriend [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985], 142). Though the passages deal with earthly kings, the language has overtones of a rebellion in heaven as described in Rev 12.

where salvation occurs by the Lamb's blood (vv. 10-11). Jesus himself affirms that "now [at the time of the cross] is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out," for when "I am lifted up from the earth, [I] will draw all men to myself" (John 12:31, 32). Therefore, the judgment that takes place at the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Christ replaced Satan, the accuser of the brethren, with Jesus, the true representative of the earth. The "accuser of the brethren" is replaced by the "advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous" (1 John 2:1). Jesus describes this casting out of Satan in Luke 10:18: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

3. *The fall of Satan into the abyss.* At the third stage of Satan's downfall, an angel with the key to the bottomless pit binds him tightly with a great chain, throws him into the pit, and locks him up (20:1-3) so that he can no longer deceive the nations. The symbols used to describe the angel's actions convey the idea that Satan is completely immobilized. He had previously lost access to heaven (12:9); now he has lost access to the nations of earth (20:3). He is in solitary confinement for a thousand years (20:2), bound to a chaotic abyss of his own making.

4. *The fall of Satan into the lake of fire.* At the fourth stage, after Satan is released to resume his work of deception and attack on the beloved city, he is cast into the lake of fire (20:10). There he is to be tormented until Hades itself is cast into the lake of fire and destroyed (20:10, 14). Jesus destroys "him who has the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb 2:14). Thus Satan is reduced to ashes (Mal 4:1, 3); he ceases to exist—"never shalt thou be any more" (Ezek 28:19, KJV).

The question at issue is whether the casting of Satan into the abyss in Rev 20:1-3 is the same as the prior one in 12:9, where he is cast down to the earth. In 20:1-3, the fall of Satan into the abyss, the text clearly indicates that Satan is no longer able to deceive the nations. However, according to Rev 12:9, the fall of Satan at the cross, Satan is still actively deceiving when he is cast out: "And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, *the one who continually deceives* (ὁ πλανῶν) *the whole world*—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him" (emphasis supplied). Revelation 12:9, unlike Rev 20:1-3, does not indicate a cessation of Satan's work of deceiving. Rather, though he is now confined to the world, he is still a menace to the world, indicated by the cry, "Woe to you, O earth . . . for the devil has come down to you in great wrath" (Rev 12:12). If Satan were bound at this juncture, why the woe? Therefore, the downfalls of Satan described in Rev 12:9 and 20:1-3 cannot be describing the same event.

That the Christian era is characterized by satanic deception is indicated throughout the NT. "Take heed that no man *deceive* you. For many shall in my name saying, 'I am Christ,' and shall *deceive* many" (Matt 24:4-5, KJV, emphasis supplied; see also vv. 11, 24); "carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to *deceive*" (Eph 4:14, KJV, emphasis supplied). Satan's deceitful work is also indicated in the following verses: "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of gospel" (2 Cor 4:4); "even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (11:14); "the prince of the power of the air" is "at work in the sons of disobedience" (Eph 2:2); opponents are captured by the snare of the devil (2 Tim 2:26); "your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour" (1 Pet 5:8).

Beale's response to these texts is that God has restricted Satan so he cannot spiritually harm the true church.<sup>12</sup> The text, however, indicates that Satan no longer deceives *the nations* until the thousand years are finished (Rev 20:3). That *the nations* in 20:3 are not the true church, but rather God's enemies, is evident in several ways: at the end they are deceived by Satan, they gather to attack the camp of the saints, and they are consumed by fire (vv. 7-9).<sup>13</sup>

Beale questions the logic of "protecting the nations from deception by Satan in 20:1-3 after they have just been both deceived by Satan (16:13-16) . . . and destroyed by Christ at his return in 19:11-21."<sup>14</sup> However, Satan is not bound in order to protect the nations. Rather, he is bound by the circumstances that bring an end to his powers to deceive, namely, the destruction of his subjects (19:21). Satan always deceives when he has subjects to act upon. He stops only when all his people are dead and the earth is destroyed, making it an abyss (cf. Jer 4:23-28), the primordial condition described in Gen 1:2. As soon as the dead are raised at the end of the thousand years, he again deceives them (20:13, 7-8).<sup>15</sup> During the thousand years, Satan's

<sup>12</sup>Beale, 985-986; see also Riddlebarger, 211.

<sup>13</sup>"The nations" (τὰ ἔθνη) in Revelation applies uniformly to the enemies of God (2:26; 11:2, 18; 12:5; 15:4; 16:19; 19:15; 20:3, 8) until the final chapters after sinners have been destroyed (21:24, 26; 22:2). Rev 15:4—"all nations shall come and worship thee"—is no exception since even the inhabitants of the sea and nether world will acknowledge God's justice (5:13; cf. Phil 2:10-11).

<sup>14</sup>Beale, 981.

<sup>15</sup>Notice the juxtaposition of texts, an example of *hysteron proteron*, the principle of anticipation found throughout the book of Revelation where something is mentioned first and explained later. In 20:12, the dead are judged; only in v. 13 are they raised to life. In 20:8-9, the beloved city is attacked, whereas only in 21:2 does it come down from heaven. The second resurrection is mentioned in 20:5 and described in vv. 11-15. See Ekkehardt Müller, "Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 20," *AUSS* 37 (1999): 243. For another explanation

activity is not partially curtailed—it is totally curtailed. He is tied up, locked up, shut up, and sealed up in the pit (20:1-3).

I conclude that after the fall of Satan at the cross (Rev 12), he is still active in the work of deception; whereas at his third expulsion, when he is cast into the bottomless pit, he is no longer able to deceive the nations (20:1-3).

There is a progression in the four stages of Satan's downfall: he is cast out primevally (Rev 12:3-4), he is cast out as "accuser of the brethren" at the cross (Rev 12:10), he is bound so he can no longer deceive the nations (20:2-3), and he is vanquished and annihilated as head of the armies of earth when he is cast into the lake of fire (vv. 8-10). Each time he falls, he is cast into a worse place: out of heaven, into the earth, into the abyss, and, finally, into the lake of fire. His powers are progressively diminished: he can no longer live with God, represent the earth, deceive the nations, or, finally, exist. Thus each successive fall represents further defeat for Satan rather than a recapitulation of a previous defeat.

### The Warfare Theme

In the warfare between Christ and Satan, victory alternates between the two sides, but ends triumphantly for Christ. A possible sequential arrangement might look like the following:

1. At the ascension of the Man Child to heaven, there is war between Michael and his angels and the dragon and his angels. The dragon, called "Devil" and "Satan," is cast out of heaven, bringing joy to those in heaven but woe to the earth (12:7-12). The "brethren" have power to overcome the dragon "by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony" as they lay down their lives in martyrdom (v. 11).

2. The dragon persecutes the woman for 1,260 days (12:13), but she is nourished during this time (v. 14). The beast from the sea makes war on the saints for 42 months (or 1,260 days) and overcomes them (13:5-7), but he is doomed to be killed with the sword (v. 10).

3. At the time of the fifth trumpet, a star that is fallen from heaven is given the key to the bottomless pit (9:1).<sup>16</sup> This fallen star, named Apollyon ("the destroyer," v. 11), can be identified as Satan (cf. Luke 10:18; Rev 12:9; Isa 27:1; and Amos 9:3, where "the deep" is the dwelling place of the

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of juxtapositions in Rev 20, see Ed Christian, "A Chiasm of Seven Chiasms: The Structure of the Millennial Vision, Rev 19:1-21:8," *AUSS* 37 (1999): 221.

<sup>16</sup>Some argue that the fallen star of the fifth trumpet is the same as the angel with the key to the bottomless pit in 20:1. But note that though the fallen star is given the key—the divine passive—he has only temporary custody of it in contrast to the angel of Rev 20:1, who owns the key.

dragon).<sup>17</sup> Satan opens it up, unleashing smoke from which emerge locusts, like horses arrayed for battle and which attack and torture men for a period of five months. They have no power to hurt the people of God (v. 4).

4. At the end of the “time, two times, and half a time” (i.e., 42 months or 1,260 days), the dragon is angry with the woman and makes war with the remnant of her seed (12:17). At the same time, the beast that ascends from the abyss makes war on the two witnesses and kills them (11:3, 7-8), but after three and a half days they are resurrected and ascend to heaven (vv. 11-12).

5. On the great day of God, demonic spirits gather the kings of the earth to battle at Armageddon (16:14, 16). These kings, represented by ten horns, receive power for one hour with the beast. “They will make war with the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings” (17:12-14).

6. At the end of this period, a Rider on a white horse, followed by the armies of heaven, makes war with the beast, the kings, and the armies of the earth. The beast and the false prophet are cast into the lake of fire, while the Rider slays the rest with the sword that issues from his mouth (19:11-21).

7. Satan is cast into the abyss where he is bound for a thousand years (20:1-3).

8. At the end of the thousand years, Satan is loosed from his prison and gathers the resurrected nations from the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog, who are as numerous as the sand of the sea—to attack the camp of the saints. Fire comes down from heaven and devours them (20:7-9).

Beale makes stage 1 (Rev 12:7-12) the same as stage 7 (Rev 20:1-3). But Satan is cast from heaven to the earth in stage 1, whereas he is cast into the abyss in stage 7—a much lower place.

The state of the abyss in the fifth trumpet (9:1ff.) contrasts vividly with its condition at the beginning of the thousand years (20:1-3). During the Christian era, Satan is not confined to the abyss because he has the key to unlock it. He exercises the power of the keys to unleash myriads of evil forces to torture humanity. He rules as king of that domain (v.11). By contrast, in chapter 20, an angel from heaven has resumed control of the key (v.1) and entrapped the devil.

Amillennialists would also make stage 5 (Rev 16:14, 16; 17:12-14) the same as stage 8 (Rev 20:7-9). There are differences, however, between the battle of Armageddon in 16:12-16 and the battle in 20:7-9. First, the

<sup>17</sup>Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 114; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 160; Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2002), 302.



characters are different. In the former, the instigators are demonic spirits from the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. In the latter, the beast and false prophet have been eliminated (19:19-20); the dragon (i.e., Satan) is the instigator. Second, the locations may be different—a place called Armageddon, alluding to Mt. Carmel in northern Israel,<sup>18</sup> versus “the beloved city,” Jerusalem, to the south. Read sequentially, there are three stages of the Battle of Armageddon: the drying up of the river Euphrates—hence the fall of spiritual Babylon—(16:12-16), the battle of the armies of heaven versus the armies of the beast (19:11-21), and the attack of Gog and Magog on the camp of the saints after the 1,000 years (20:7-10). Read as recapitulation, there is only one stage to the battle—the climax in 19:11-21 being the same as the climax in 20:9-10.

It should be noted that there are significant differences between the battles in chapters 19 and 20. The participants in the former are the armies of heaven under the leadership of the Rider on the white horse versus “the kings of the earth with their armies” under the leadership of the beast (19:19). This battle reflects the last-day issue of the worship of the beast in chapters 13ff. and involves only the end-time enemies of God at the time of the *parousia*. The conflict in 20:7-10 encompasses the enemies of God from all ages under the leadership of Satan, the only remaining member of the satanic trinity of dragon, beast, and false prophet, who have been raised from the dead (20:13) to face the last judgment (v. 12). The fate of these enemies is different in each battle. In the former, the beast and the false prophet are cast into the lake of fire (19:20), while their armies are slain by the sword and the birds devour their flesh (v. 21). Chapter 20 describes the ultimate consummation: the devil and all his hosts are consumed by fire (vv. 9-10, 14).

Stages 6 (Rev 19:11-21) and 7 (Rev 20:1-3) must be consecutive. First, the beast and the false prophet are defeated and cast into the lake of fire. At the end of the thousand years, the dragon is cast into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet were already thrown (20:10).<sup>19</sup> Thus chapters 19 and 20 must be sequential.

In this warfare, there is constant progress toward victory for the Lamb

<sup>18</sup>To interpret 'Αρμαγεδών, commentators often cite historic battles fought around Megiddo or Mount Carmel (e.g., Swete, 209; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 301). Others suggest that 'Αρμαγεδών is a corruption of *Har Moed* (בְּהַר מוֹעֵד, Mount of Assembly), connecting it with the mountain of God in Isa 14:13, and Mount Zion, which would identify it with “the beloved city” of Rev 20:9 (Meredith G. Kline, “*Har Magedon*: The End of the Millennium,” *JETS* 39/2 [1996]: 207-222; Beasley-Murray, 245). In this case, the location of the final battle would be the same.

<sup>19</sup>Though 20:10 has no verb (lit., “where the beast and the false prophet”), it is evident that they are absent in the final battle of the nations against “the beloved city.” Only Satan is left to gather them to battle because the beast and the false prophet have already met their doom.

and his people. Though in the heat of the conflict they often are killed, yet their death is seen as victory—by their faithful testimony, even unto death, they overcome (12:11). Finally, God intervenes to defeat the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. The Lamb is victorious at the end.

### The Progressive Disintegration of Satan's Empire

Revelation 17–20 comprises a vision<sup>20</sup> that depicts the downfall of every aspect of Satan's kingdom—the great harlot, the city of Babylon, the beast and the false prophet, the armies of earth, the dragon, the wicked dead, and Death and Hades. Each is destroyed by fire.

In chapter 17, the harlot meets her doom, executed by the ten horns and the beast, who make her desolate, devour her flesh, and burn her with fire (v. 16). The great city Babylon falls, is burned with fire, and goes up in smoke (18:8-9, 18; 19:3).

The fall of the demonic trinity is described in chapters 19 and 20 in terms of a great battle. In the victory for the forces of heaven, the beast and the false prophet are captured and thrown into the lake of fire (19:20).

Chapter 20 continues the narration with the doom of the dragon, who receives a thousand years in solitary confinement. At the end of the thousand years, his hosts of evil humanity are raised from the dead so he can mobilize them for a resumption of the battle of 19:11-21. As they surround the beloved city, fire comes down from heaven and consumes them. At this point, as noted above, the devil joins the beast and the false prophet in the lake of fire (cf. 19:20; 20:10).

Next is depicted the end of the wicked dead. The sea and Death and Hades give up the dead to face the judgment of the great white throne. Since they are not found in the book of life, they are thrown into the lake of fire (20:11-15). Then Death and Hades are also thrown into the lake of fire, which is the second death (v. 14), where death itself is destroyed (1 Cor 15:26; Isa 25:8). Even the sea, which contained the wicked dead (20:13), no longer exists (21:1). Thus all parts of Satan's kingdom are destroyed, including Satan himself. There is not even a place for the lake of fire in the new heaven and earth since pain, crying, and death no longer exist (21:1, 4).

If the theme of chapters 17–20 is indeed the downfall of Satan's kingdom, the successive elimination of all its elements (i.e., Babylon, the beast and the false prophet, the armies of the beast, the dragon, the wicked

<sup>20</sup>The Sevenfold Structure of Revelation: Prologue: Rev 1:1-8; Seven Churches (1:9 to 3:22); Seven Seals (4:1 to 8:1); Seven Trumpets (8:2 to 11:18); Seven Wonders (11:19 to 14:20); Seven Plagues (15:1 to 16:21); Downfall of Satan's Kingdom (17:1 to 20:15); New Heavens and New Earth (21:1 to 22:5); Epilogue: (22:6-21) (This sevenfold structure of the visions is commonly recognized, with minor variations. For a similar analysis, see J. W. Bowman, "Revelation, Book of," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*.

dead, Death and Hades), then there is no room for a recapitulation of the whole Christian era in chapter 20.

### The Kingdom and Reign of Christ and the Saints

The kingdom of Christ and the reign of the saints come in stages. Arranged sequentially, with significant words italicized, the stages might look like this:

1. Jesus Christ, by virtue of his resurrection (“first-born of the dead”), is “the ruler of kings on earth” (1:5). John, imprisoned on the isle of Patmos, saw himself *sharing a kingdom* (1:9). When Christ ascended to heaven, he established a kingdom of priests, who “*shall reign on earth*” (5:10). As a result of Christ’s death, “*salvation and power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come*” (12:10). Thus the spiritual kingdom of God has new authority and power on earth as a result of Jesus’ mighty act of salvation, and the saints have new power to overcome the enemy through the blood of the Lamb and their own martyrdom.

2. The reign of the saints is muted during the period of persecution (i.e., the 42 months or 1,260 days). The martyrs, crying out for vengeance for all they suffer, are clothed with white robes and told to wait until more fellow servants are killed as they have been (6:11). The saints, while enduring the trampling by the nations, worship in the temple of God (11:1-2). The woman, fleeing from the dragon, is nourished in the wilderness for 1,260 days (12:6). During this period, a rival kingdom is in power, which is ruled by the beast (16:10-11).

3. During “the great tribulation,” the saints are spiritually with Christ (7:14): the great multitude stand before the throne, praising God for his salvation (vv. 9-10). The 144,000 stand on Mount Zion, singing praises and following the Lamb wherever he goes (14:1-5). As the plagues are poured out, they stand on the sea of glass (15:1-4), singing the song of Moses and the Lamb.<sup>21</sup> During this time, there is trouble for the *kingdom of the beast*—there is darkness and men gnaw their tongues in pain (16:10-11). The beast unites with the ten kings to make war on the Lamb, but in the end the Lamb will conquer them (17:12-17).

4. At the final battle, Jesus rides forth on a white horse to smite the nations and *rule them with a rod of iron*. On his robe, he has a name inscribed: “*King of kings and Lord of lords*” (19:11-16). He rules by smiting the nations and slaying them with the sword coming out of his mouth (vv. 15, 21).

<sup>21</sup>See Beatrice Neall, “Sealed Saints,” in *Symposium on Revelation, Daniel and Revelation* Committee Series 6, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992): 1:270-272; also idem, “Inaugurated Eschatology in the Apocalypse,” <[www.jesusinstituteforum.org](http://www.jesusinstituteforum.org)>, under *Jesus and the Revelation*.

5. At the seventh trumpet, when God judges the dead, rewards the saints, and destroys the destroyers of the earth (11:18), "*the kingdom of the world [becomes] the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever*" (v. 15). At that time, God *takes His great power and begins to reign* (v. 17). Here "reigning" seems to be equated with "judging," "executing sentence," and "taking possession of the world."

6. During the thousand years, the souls who have been beheaded come to life *and reign with Christ* a thousand years. They *sit on thrones* and participate in the judgment process (20:4).

7. At the end of the thousand years, God creates "a new heaven and a new earth" (21:1). God and the Lamb are enthroned in the New Jerusalem (22:3) and the saints "*reign for ever and ever*" (v. 5).

The kingdom of God during the Christian era is a contested reign because there is a rival kingdom in power (16:10). God's kingdom might be compared to the Allied governments that were in exile during the Nazi conquest of Europe during World War II. God reigns, but the existence of a powerful rival kingdom limits his exercise of power. But when the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of God and Christ, God takes power and begins to reign (11:15-17) by judging his enemies and rewarding his saints (v. 18). Chapter 20 has moved into that time when God and his saints enter the work of judgment.

Is the spiritual reign of the saints during the 1,260-day period the same as their reign in Rev 20:4? Do they come to life and reign with Christ a thousand years? There are two amillennial explanations for 20:4: a spiritual reign of the saints during this life, and the reign of souls in heaven after their death (i.e., the "intermediate state").

The first view, held by Augustine, is that the first resurrection symbolizes the change in people as they die to sin and rise to new life.<sup>22</sup> Riddlebarger notes:

Once Jesus burst from the tomb, the age to come dawned, and the new creation commenced. . . . If the first resurrection of which John spoke [Rev 20:4] is a spiritual resurrection, then in Revelation 20:6 John is not speaking of a future earthly reign of Christ but a present reign of Christ. This is further reinforced by Paul's argument that Christians are already raised with Christ, and while their outer bodies are dying, their inner beings are being renewed.<sup>23</sup>

This interpretation of the first resurrection is easily refuted. Revelation 20:4 speaks about "the souls of those who had been beheaded

<sup>22</sup>M. Rist, "Millennium," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 382. Riddlebarger, 217; Beale, 1011-1012.

<sup>23</sup>Riddlebarger, 117.

for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God.” This group initially appears in 6:9-11, where they are called “the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne,” who cry out for God to judge and avenge their blood on those who dwell on the earth. These are martyrs who have been killed (from σφάζω, “slaughter, murder”). Described again in 20:4, they were beheaded (πελεκίζω). It is not possible to interpret these souls as live saints, who are physically on earth while spiritually they are “seated with Christ in heavenly places” (Eph 2:6), since they are dead—they have been martyred. Rather, they have passed from this present earthly life to be resurrected to a heavenly life.

The more common amillennial explanation of the first resurrection is that it applies to the intermediate state—the souls of the righteous, who at death went to heaven where they reign and judge with Christ. But even here there is a difference between chapters 12 and 20—there has been an escalation in the victorious reign of the saints. When Satan is cast out at the cross, the saints “conquer him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.” They conquer Satan through their martyrdom. In 20:4, the martyrs are raised to life—death has no further power over them (v. 6).

More contrasts can be seen by comparing the status of the martyrs in chapter 6 with their status in chapter 20. The souls in chapter 6 are dead, having been slain for the witness they had borne (v. 9). In 20:4, they have come to life. In 6:9, they are “under the altar,” their blood crying out for vengeance as the blood of Abel cried out from the ground (Gen. 4:10). In 20:4, they are no longer under the altar, but are sitting on thrones. In 6:10, they call for God to judge and avenge their blood, but are told to wait—the time of judgment has not yet come. In 20:4, they do the work of judgment. Their cry for vengeance has been answered. Beale does not see 20:4-6 as the “complete fulfillment” of the cry for judgment in 6:10—only a partial answer.<sup>24</sup> But this dilutes the thrust of the text—the souls who were “under the altar” crying for judgment on their enemies now sit on thrones judging their enemies.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Beale, 997-998.

<sup>25</sup>There is a second group mentioned in 20:4: those “who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands.” Beale, *ibid.*, agrees with my conclusion that the syntax of the verse differentiates this group from the martyrs. This group that has not worshiped the beast or its image has come through the “great tribulation” of the end time (7:14). They have been under the death decree of the image to the beast (13:15). During this time they spiritually stand with the Lamb on Mt. Zion and the sea of glass (14:1; 15:2-3). In 20:4, they sit on thrones and judge their enemies. There is progress from their initial spiritual reign with Christ to their taking part in the final judgment. They “live and reign with Christ a thousand years.”

The kingdom of God and reign of the saints must be seen as a suffering kingdom and reign during the Christian era, but a triumphant kingdom and reign after the second coming, which is described in 19:11-21. Chapter 20:1-6 is best understood as succeeding chapter 19 since it describes victory over the dragon, the resurrection of the martyrs, and their work of judging their enemies.

#### Further Consideration of the Two Resurrections

Another problem of the amillennial view has to do with the first and second resurrections. A simple reading of Rev 20:4-6 suggests a thousand-year period with a resurrection at its beginning and a resurrection at its close. It seems clear that the righteous are raised at the first resurrection and, by inference, the wicked at the second resurrection. The first resurrection consists of the "blessed and holy" (v. 6)—i.e., the saints—whereas "the rest of the dead," raised at the end of the thousand years, must be the wicked. The latter are called forth from the sea and Death and Hades (20:13)—enemy territory. John sees humanity in terms of inhabitants of heaven, earth, and sea (Rev 5:13; 12:12). The sea, synonymous with the abyss, was considered the realm of the demonic, the home of the dragon, beasts, and vast hordes of people under satanic rule (Ps 74:13-14; Isa 27:1; Dan 7:2-3; Rev 12:17; 13:1; 17:15).<sup>26</sup> The dead who come forth from the sea, then, could not have saints among them. Those coming out of the sea suffer the "second death" (v. 14), a fate which those raised in the first resurrection do not suffer (v. 6).

Beale's system is more complicated. The "first resurrection" at the beginning of the thousand years (i.e., Christian era) consists of the souls of martyred saints who are translated to heaven at death. Beale acknowledges that nowhere in Scripture is this intermediate state called resurrection.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the first resurrection must be spiritual in nature, just as the second death (meaning eternal life in the lake of fire) is spiritual. Those who believe in annihilation would see the death of the wicked as literal. The lake of fire is *the second death* (20:14).

A minor problem with the spiritual view of the first resurrection is that the martyrs are said to reign with Christ a thousand years, indicating a simultaneous resurrection. What about those who were martyred hundreds of years after the cross event, some just prior to the second advent of Christ? They might have only a few years for their thousand-year reign.

<sup>26</sup>O. Bocher, "Thalassa," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979). For a more detailed explanation of John's tripartite universe, see Neall, "Inaugurated Eschatology," 3-4.

<sup>27</sup>Beale, 1007-1008.

A more serious problem is locating the physical resurrection of the saints. If their souls have already been resurrected at the beginning of the thousand years—the Christian era—when is the resurrection of their bodies? Beale states that the second resurrection at the end of the thousand years (v. 5) includes both the righteous and the wicked.<sup>28</sup> This contradicts Jesus' sharp delineation of the two resurrections as "the resurrection of life" and "the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:29).<sup>29</sup> Verse 6 says the *first* resurrection is for the "blessed and holy." It is clear from the description of the second resurrection in vv. 11-15 that it is for the purpose of judging and destroying the wicked dead.<sup>30</sup> They stand before the throne and are judged by what is written in the books; then they are thrown into the lake of fire (20:12-15). If the souls of the righteous have already been awarded white robes (6:11), that is, judged innocent, and if they have already been seated on thrones, judging and reigning with Christ (20:4), why would they be summoned to appear before the throne to be again subject to judgment?

### *Problems for Premillennialists*

Though the most natural reading of the text favors the premillennial position, there are still problems for premillennialists.

Revelation 15:1, which indicates that the seven last plagues complete the wrath of God, is problematic for premillennialists.<sup>31</sup> If God's wrath ends at the seventh plague, which occurs at the *parousia*, how could God pour out more wrath at the last judgment a thousand years later (20:15)? A careful examination of the text reveals that the seventh plague includes the destruction of the wicked in the lake of fire: "God remembered great Babylon, to make her drain the cup of the fury of his wrath" (16:19). What is "the cup of the fury of his wrath"? The third angel explains that to "drink the wine of God's wrath" is to be "tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb" (14:10). Notice that the beast and the false prophet (synonyms for Babylon) are "cast into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur" at the *parousia* when the Rider on the white horse makes war with his enemies. The lake of fire

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 1013.

<sup>29</sup>The two resurrections in Rev 20 might even be seen as an expansion of John 5:29, especially if the Johannine authorship of both passages is assumed.

<sup>30</sup>The word "dead" (νεκροί) in Rev 20 is a negative term applying only to the wicked. In v. 4, the "blessed and holy" ones came to life but are not called "the dead." See Müller, 243.

<sup>31</sup>G. K. Beale, "John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* 166 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 370.

also appears at the end of the thousand years: "the devil . . . was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (20:10). The devil is cast into the lake of fire a thousand years after the beast and the false prophet were thrown there. Since the lake of fire appears at both the beginning and the end of the millennium, the seventh plague must encompass them both. In this respect, it is like the last great battle which occurs at the beginning and the end of the millennium.

With the seven last plagues, the wrath of God is *finished* (15:1). After the lake of fire consumes the earth (20:9; cf. 2 Pet 3:10, 13), God creates a new heaven and earth where there is no longer any pain, sin, curse (21:1-4; 22:3), or wrath of God.<sup>32</sup>

Another problem raised by Beale is that the three battles described in Rev 16:12-16; 19:11-21; and 20:7-10 all allude to parts of Ezek 38-39, which describe a single battle. He concludes that the three Revelation passages must also describe one event: 20:7-10 recapitulating 19:11-21.<sup>33</sup>

Ezekiel's final battle is described as follows: Israel returns from Babylonian exile and God dwells in his tabernacle in their midst, while David rules over them (Ezek 37:24-28); Israel dwells secure in unwallled villages (38:10-12). In the latter days, God stirs up the hordes of Gog from the north to fight against Israel (38:3-6) so that he can destroy Gog with earthquake, hail, and fire (39:20-22). He calls on the birds to devour Gog (39:4, 17) and the Israelites go out and burn their weapons, using them as fuel for seven years (9-10). In restoring Israel to their land following their exile, God has vindicated his name (39:27-28).

Since Israel failed to keep the covenant after the return from exile, even rejecting the Messiah (John 1:11), the OT prophecies of final events cannot be fulfilled exactly.<sup>34</sup> So John universalizes Ezekiel's vision from a local battle of the northern nations against Israel in unwallled villages to a global battle of satanic forces against the saints in the "beloved city." John also expands the one final battle in Ezekiel to include two phases:

<sup>32</sup>The words *forever*, *eternal*, and *everlasting* can denote a period of limited duration. See, e.g., Exod 40:15, Deut 15:17, and Jonah 2:6. Perhaps infinity can be compressed into a short period of time—quality of time rather than quantity. Christ suffered infinite pain for the sins of the whole world in the few hours he was on the cross; believers in Jesus, though subject to death, enjoy eternal life now in this lifetime (John 5:24).

<sup>33</sup>Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, 361-371; idem, *The Book of Revelation*, 976-981.

<sup>34</sup>Just as the covenant lays out two possible futures—one resulting from obedience and one from disobedience (Lev 26; Deut 28)—so prophecy is conditional. For a detailed treatment of this subject, see "The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy," *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1977), 4:25-38.



one at the beginning and the other at the end of the thousand years. The sixth bowl (Rev 16:12-16) introduces the first stage of the battle with the drying up of the River Euphrates (a metaphor for the fall of Babylon), which prepares the way for the “kings of the east” (Christ and his armies, as seen in 19:11-16) to enter the fray.<sup>35</sup> The beast and his armies are slain with the sword. Thus all the enemies of God are temporarily disposed of. Following the interval of a thousand years, the second phase of the battle erupts (20:7-10). The enemies of God from all ages attack the “beloved city,” but are judged and destroyed by fire (vv. 7-15).

The most serious problem for premillennialists is that Rev 20 is the only place in Scripture where a thousand years intervene between the resurrection of the righteous and the resurrection of the wicked.<sup>36</sup> It is clear from Scripture that the events at the end of the world—the *parousia*, the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, the judgment, and hell fire—all occur on “the Day of the Lord.”<sup>37</sup> As the Apostle Peter says:

The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up . . . [on] the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:10-13).

Peter here lists the *parousia* and hell fire as occurring on the Day of the Lord. However, according to v. 8, “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” There are precedents in salvation history for extensions of time that exceed human expectations. Eve expected her firstborn to be the promised Seed,<sup>38</sup> but he did not come for thousands of years. The two advents of Christ—the birth of Messiah, his righteous rule, his destruction of his enemies, and his everlasting kingdom—were seen as one event in the OT.<sup>39</sup> It wasn’t until NT times that Christ’s second coming in glory was separated from his first coming. Already two thousand years have

<sup>35</sup>For a historical background on the drying up of the Euphrates, “the kings of the east,” and “the armies of heaven,” see Stefanovic, 485-487.

<sup>36</sup>Notice, however, that the thousand years is not mentioned in one obscure verse. The expression is mentioned fully six times in Rev 20.

<sup>37</sup>For events associated with the second coming, see Matt 13:49-50; 16:27; 25:31-46; John 5:25-29; Acts 17:31; Rom 2:3, 5-10, 16; 1 Cor 4:5; 15:23-26; 2 Cor 5:10; Phil 3:20-21; 1 Thess 4:13-17; 2 Thess 1:7-10; 2:7-8; 2 Tim 4:1, 8; 2 Pet 3:10-13; Jude 14-15.

<sup>38</sup>A literal reading of the Hebrew in Gen 4:1 is “I have gotten a man, the Lord.”

<sup>39</sup>E.g., Isa 9:6-7; 11:1-10; Dan 2:44; Mal 3:1-2.

intervened to separate the two advents. The NT writers saw themselves as living in “the last days” (e.g., Acts 2:17, 33; Heb 1:2; 1 John 2:18). They expected Christ to come “soon.” Yet “the last days” have stretched out into two millennia. Therefore, it should not surprise us if the events of “the Day of the Lord” are stretched out over a period of a thousand years, giving God opportunity to deal with his various constituencies, as will be explained later—the righteous living, the righteous dead, the wicked living, the wicked dead, and Satan and his cohorts.

In eschatological prophecy, there is a principle of “repeat and enlarge” that flows through Scripture. In the prophecies of Dan 2, 7, 8–9, and 11–12, each prophecy enlarges upon the preceding one, especially the final events. The book of Revelation itself is an enlargement of Jesus’ eschatological prophecies in Matt 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. The same pattern persists in Rev 12–22.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it should not be surprising that John’s final vision enlarges the Day of the Lord prophecies to include a thousand additional years.

Some have charged that chapter 20 is an obscure, symbolic passage that ought to be negated by the preponderance of texts preceding it.<sup>41</sup> To the contrary, the final visions of Revelation are the climax of all Scripture, the grand finale of the warfare between Christ and Satan, the denouement of history. While the first three chapters of the Bible tell of creation, the Edenic state, and the entrance of Satan, sin, and death, the last three chapters of the Bible give us the most detailed account of the exodus of Satan, sin and death, the restoration of the Edenic state, and the new creation.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the final chapters of Revelation can properly be used to inform the preceding Day of the Lord texts.

<sup>40</sup>Chapter 13 is an enlargement of the warfare introduced in 12:17. The seven last plagues (chaps. 15–16) are an enlargement of the pouring out of God’s wrath in 14:10. Chaps. 17 and 18 are an enlargement of the doom of Babylon in 14:8. The Battle of Armageddon (16:12–16) is enlarged in chap. 19:11–21 and 20:7–10. This identification is especially true if Kline’s analysis, 207–222, of Ἀρμαγεδών as *har moed* (הַר מוֹעֵד, Mount of Assembly) is correct. Thus the focus of the final battle of 16:12–16 would be the same as 20:7–10—the holy city.

<sup>41</sup>L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 715.

<sup>42</sup>In a plea for a less literal interpretation of Rev 20:1–3, White argues its dependence on the epic myths of the Divine Warrior’s combat with the dragon in ancient mythology and Scripture. In spite of the dragon’s attacks, the Divine Warrior succeeds in overcoming him and building his kingdom-city. White states that the dragon, figuratively slain in accounts of creation and the exodus, is not slain in history (“On the Hermeneutics and Interpretation of Rev 20:1–3,” 53–66). I would disagree. The waters of chaos were overcome in the creation of land, the waters of the Red Sea were dried up in the exodus, and the Babylonian Empire was dismembered by the attacks of Cyrus the Persian (not Babylonian). Furthermore, Rev 20 is the complement of Gen 3, which depicts the entrance of the serpent. Rev 20 depicts the serpent’s final capture and exodus.

TABLE 2: OVERALL CHIASTIC SCHEME OF REVELATION\*

C(e)	C(b)	C(e')	C(b')	A	B	A	B	E
Trumpet Warnings to the Weyward: 7 Trumpets	Evil Powers Oppose God and His People	Vial Plagues on the Wicked: 7 Last Plagues	Evil Powers Judged by God	Church in Present Earth: Church Militant 1:12-3:22	Ongoing Activity of God Throne, 4 Living Creatures, 24 Elders, Lamb "How long ... do you not judge and avenge?" 4:1-8:1	Church in New Earth: Promises Fulfilled to Overcomers 21:5-22:5	"You have judged ... and avenged" 19:1-21:4	Judgmental Finale by God Throne, 4 Living Creatures, 24 Elders, Lamb "You have judged ... and avenged" 19:1-21:4
8:2-11:18	11:19-14:20	15:1-16:21	17:1-18:24	1:1-11	1:1-11	21:5-22:5	19:1-21:4	22:5-21
Part I						Part II		
(Note: The exact divisions of the text are somewhat tentative.)								

\*Taken from Kenneth Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Naples, FL: Ann Arbor, 1979), 52.

*Structural Evidence for the Unity  
of Chapters 19 and 20*

A strong plank in the amillennial position is the recapitulatory structure of Revelation. Thus the visions of the seals, trumpets, and wonders all portray the Christian era.<sup>43</sup> In harmony with this pattern, amillennialists assert that chapter 20 is not sequential to chapter 19, but is also a recapitulation of the Christian era.

A structural study of Revelation (see Table 2 on previous page) that is relevant to this problem is Kenneth Strand's pioneering analysis of the chiasmic nature of Revelation.<sup>44</sup> In outlining the chiasm, he demonstrates that the visions in the first half embrace the whole Christian era, whereas the visions in the second half deal with end-time judgments, such as the seven last plagues (Rev 15-16), the judgment of the whore, Babylon (17-18), the final judgment (19-20), and the reward of the righteous (21-22).

Strand's analysis could be outlined differently as follows in Table 3.<sup>45</sup>

**TABLE 3**  
**ROUGH CHRONOLOGY OF THE VISIONS OF REVELATION**

<i>Time Line</i>	John's Day	1260 Da/42 Mo.	Wrath/Parousia	1000 Yr.	New Earth
7 Churches (1-3)	=====				
7 Seals (6-7)	=====				
7 Trumpets (8-11)	=====				
7 Wonders (12-14)	=====				
-----					
7 Plagues (15-16)			=====		
Judgment on Babylon (17-18)			=====		
Rider on White Horse (19:11-21)			=====		
Thousand Years (20)				=====	
(Amillennial view [20])	.....				
New Earth (21-22:4)					----->

<sup>43</sup>See n. 20, above.

<sup>44</sup>Kenneth Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Naples, FL: Ann Arbor, 1979), 52.

<sup>45</sup>The table begins with John's day and extends to the new earth. The seven churches may be understood as applying to John's day with relevance for the future. The seals extend from John's day to the time of wrath (6:16). The trumpets extend to the *parousia* (11:15), as well as the wonders (14:14-16). The wavy line represents the center of the chiasm. Note how the visions of the second half focus on final judgments and rewards. To see chapter 20 as a recapitulation of the Christian era (Center of Chiasm) does not seem appropriate for the structure of the visions.

Beale sees the bowls as paralleling the trumpets in time, covering the whole Christian

In the overall chiasmic scheme of Revelation (Table 2), the millennial vision of 19–21:8 is a unit corresponding to the Seven Seals presented earlier in the book.<sup>46</sup> Each section of the millennial vision, marked by the formula  $\kappa\lambda\ \epsilon\lambda\delta\omicron\nu$ , corresponds to a section in the seals. Table 4 shows the parallels.

TABLE 4 COMPARISON OF TWO RELATED VISIONS			
The Seven Seals		The Millennial Vision	
4-5	Sanctuary Scene	19:1-10	Sanctuary Scene
6:1-2	Rider on white horse	19:11-17	Rider on white horse
6:3-4	Rider on red horse takes peace from earth	19:17-18	Birds to eat flesh of <i>horses and riders</i>
6:5-6	Rider on black horse	19:19-21	Beast and false prophet
6:7-8	Death on pale horse, followed by Hades	20:1-3	Dragon
6:9-11	Souls slain for their testimony cry for justice	20:4-6	Souls slain for their testimony raised to life and judge
6:12-17	Sky vanishes as scroll; enemies hide from one seated on throne	20:11	Earth and sky flee from the presence of one seated on throne
8:1	Silence in heaven one half hour	20:12-15	Dead stand before throne; books opened; dead judged
7:15-17	Saints praise God before throne. No more thirst; God leads to living waters; wipes away tears	21:1-8	God dwells with his people. No more death, crying, pain. Water of life for thirsty. God wipes away tears

era (*John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, 196ff.). But the bowls are an elaboration of the third angel's message of 14:10 (drinking of the wine of the wrath of God poured out into the cup of his indignation, just preceding the appearance of the Son of man in the clouds [v. 14]). The next vision (chaps. 17–19, depicting the end of the harlot Babylon) is an elaboration of the sixth and seventh plagues on the fall of Babylon (the drying up of the Euphrates and the collapse of the city, 16:12, 18–19— it is "the judgment of the great harlot," 17:1). Thus the focus is increasingly on final events, supporting Strand's analysis that the second half of the chiasm of Revelation deals with events just preceding the *parousia*.

<sup>46</sup>This is abbreviated from an unpublished paper by William H. Shea, "Literary Structure and the Interpretation of Revelation" (unpublished manuscript, 1988), adapted by Neall in "Sealed Saints," 249-252.

From Table 4, it is evident that the repeated expression καὶ εἶδον that introduces each section in the right-hand column above is significant. Each section introduces a literary parallel to the vision of the seals. Therefore, chapters 19 and 20 seem to be an indivisible literary unit of sequential developments. To divide this section between chapters 19 and 20, as Beale attempts to do, making chapter 20 to parallel and recapitulate chapter 19, does not seem possible within the structure of the text.<sup>47</sup>

In the intricate structure of Revelation, not only do the visions in opposite halves correspond to each other in a chiasmic pattern, but each vision itself is a chiasm. In a detailed study of the millennial vision, Ed Christian has demonstrated that Rev 19:1–21:8 is a unit in the form of a chiasm.<sup>48</sup> His analysis can be summarized as follows:

- A Premillennial announcement of the inauguration of the marriage supper (19:1-10)
- B Premillennial appearance of Christ in sky to judge and fight the wicked (11-16)
- C Premillennial defeat of those who war against God on earth (17-21)
  - D Binding of Satan in the abyss for 1,000 years (20:1-3)
  - E Millennial reign of Christ and saints in heaven (4-6)
  - D' Release of Satan from abyss after 1,000 years (7)
- C' Postmillennial defeat on earth of those who war against God (8-10)
- B' Postmillennial appearance of God in sky to judge the wicked (11-15)
- A' Postmillennial re-creation of earth and consummation of marriage (21:1-8)

Though Christian's premillennial and postmillennial labels may be contested, he has shown convincingly that Rev 19:1–21:8 is an inseparable unit. The chiasm also explains the peculiar sequence of the last battle in C', followed by the last judgment in B'. "On both sides of the chiasm, war against God leads to judgment, which leads in turn to execution, but the scenes of judgment have been separated from the scenes of warfare to emphasize their difference."<sup>49</sup>

### A Premillennial View

Opposing amillennialism are several forms of premillennialism, including the historical and dispensational views, and postmillennialism, which

<sup>47</sup>Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, 359-360.

<sup>48</sup>Christian, 209-225.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 212.

Riddlebarger ably critiques in his book. Following is one form of premillennialism that appears to eliminate significant problems inherent in the alternate views:

1. Prior to the coming of Christ, demonic spirits gather the forces of evil to fight the battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:12-16). Jesus appears with the armies of heaven to vanquish his enemies (19:11-21—a depiction of the second coming of Christ).

2. At the second coming of Christ, the righteous dead are resurrected from their “sleep” in the grave and are “caught up to meet the Lord in the air,” along with the righteous living (1 Thess 4:13-18). All are given immortal bodies (1 Cor 15:51-54) and ascend to be with Christ in heaven (John 14:2-3), where they reign with Christ (Rev 20:4). This is the “first resurrection,” a bodily resurrection of all the righteous dead. The “priests of God” (v. 6) consist of the righteous of all ages. The millennial reign of the saints is in heaven.

3. At the same time, the wicked living are “slain by the brightness of His coming” and by his word, “the sword coming out of His mouth.” Their dead bodies lie on earth, to be consumed by vultures (2 Thess 2:8; Rev 19:21).

4. The thousand-year reign of the saints in heaven consists of a work of judgment (Rev 20:4, alluding to Dan 7:22; cf. 1 Cor 6:2-3), perhaps examining the books to determine the justice of God’s judgments in admitting and excluding people from heaven. The saints may even have a part in sentencing the wicked.

5. The earth is in an “abysmal” state. The “great earthquake,” hail, and wrath accompanying the second advent have broken down the cities, devastated the earth, and slain all its inhabitants (Rev 16:18-21; cf. Isa 24:19-22; Jer 4:23-27<sup>50</sup>). Satan is figuratively “bound” on this planet (Rev 20:1-3), which has been reduced to its original state of primeval chaos (ἄβυσσος in Rev 20:1, 3, corresponding to הַיָּם in Gen 1:2). He can no longer deceive the nations because the wicked are all dead and the righteous are all in heaven. He is receiving the first part of his sentence: a thousand years of solitary confinement to think about his rebellion and anticipate future judgment.

6. At the end of the thousand years, the New Jerusalem, with God and the saints in it, descends to earth (Rev 21:2; 20:9).<sup>51</sup> The wicked dead of all periods of history are raised to receive their final judgment (20:13,

<sup>50</sup>Jeremiah, while predicting an immediate fulfillment at the time of the Babylonian captivity, looks back to the original primeval chaos and forward to the final Day of the Lord. For a parallel passage, see Zeph 1:2-3, 14-18. The day of the Lord has historical and eschatological fulfillment (David W. Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* [Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 1988], 94).

<sup>51</sup>An illustration of *hysteron-proteron*. See n. 15 above.

12). Satan, now loosed from solitary confinement by the resurrection of the wicked, and finding his hopes of conquest revived by the vast hosts on his side, deceives them into attempting to conquer the saints in the “beloved city,” the New Jerusalem. Then God, on his great white throne, appears before them and judges them according to their life records written in the books (vv. 11-13). Fire, which purifies the earth, comes down from heaven and devours them all (vv. 9, 14-15). Hell no longer exists, nor do sin and sinners, death, pain, and crying (21:4).

7. God re-creates “a new heaven and a new earth” and dwells with his people forever (21:1-3). The universe is clean.<sup>52</sup>

This view is elegant in its simplicity. The “souls” who reign with Christ a thousand years (20:4) are the saints who were resurrected or translated at the *parousia*. This view avoids the problem amillennialists encounter when explaining how Satan has been bound for the last 2,000 years when he appears to be very active. It also avoids the problem premillennialists have in explaining how unregenerate people can live together on earth with resurrected saints during the millennial reign of Christ, and how war can erupt again at its close.<sup>53</sup>

### The Purpose of the Millennium

The millennium fulfills an essential purpose in salvation history—the punishment of Satan, who has caused havoc in the universe for thousands of years, anguish in heaven as God sacrificed his Son, and torture to the billions who have lived on earth. His greatest delight is in causing misery. He deserves the special punishment Rev 20 portrays—a thousand years of solitary confinement in the midst of the devastation he has caused in order to reflect upon his once exalted status in heaven, his ignominious defeat, and the prospect of future torment in the lake of fire.

Also the redeemed need to have opportunity to satisfy their deepest questions regarding the justice of God. Why are some judged worthy of eternal life and others, perhaps loved ones, excluded? Judgment is committed to them at this time (Rev 20:4). “The books” are available for the saints and even the universe to audit. Paul alludes to this time when he writes: “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we are to judge angels?” (1 Cor 6:2-3).<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup>This view is most dramatically presented in Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), chaps. 40-42.

<sup>53</sup>For a recent description of that scenario, see David J. MacLeod, “The Fifth ‘Last Thing’: The Release of Satan and Man’s Final Rebellion,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (2000): 202-207.

<sup>54</sup>Joel Badina, “The Millennium,” in *Symposium on Revelation*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 6, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Hagerstown, MD: Biblical Research Institute,



It is possible that wrongs will have to be righted and confessions made during this unusual time. David, Bathsheba, and the deeply-wronged Uriah will meet. David will have to demonstrate to Uriah the depth of his repentance. Nazi war criminals, responsible for the extermination of millions, but who surrendered to Christ before being hanged at Nuremburg,<sup>55</sup> will have the opportunity to meet their victims, beg their forgiveness, and fall down at the feet of Jesus in adoration for his power to save even mass murderers.

The millennium may even serve a function suggested by the Catholic doctrine of purgatory. How can sinners enter eternity when there is much dross in them that still needs to be consumed? While the millennium is not a time for purging—Jesus suffered the full penalty for sin at the cross—it may be a time for growth in sanctification. The thief on the cross, experiencing only an hour with Jesus after a lifetime of violence, will have the opportunity to demonstrate the sincerity of his repentance by living a transformed life. Much growth and healing needs to take place before God himself wipes the tears from every eye and admits his people into “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:4, 1). Transitioning straight from this sinful world to the new earth state eliminates the possibility for this time of healing.

### *Conclusion*

The driving force behind amillennialism, its strong affirmation of the victory of right over wrong in world history, is commendable. It creates a positive view of history that focuses on the victories of the Lamb. I agree with the “triumphant irony” of “victory through tribulation” that permeates the book of Revelation. But it is difficult to apply chapter 20—the binding of Satan—to the Christian era.

To conform Rev 20 to a recapitulation pattern requires high-powered reasoning, extensive explaining, and often a dilution of the direct meaning of the text. One of Beale’s strategies when faced with a problem is to dilute the apparent meaning by introducing alternate possibilities.<sup>56</sup> In all of this he is open and fair, evaluating all the options, clearly presenting objections to amillennialism, then giving his answers. The problem with his answers is that they are too tenuous and intricate to be convincing. They violate the principle of simplicity.

On the other hand, the plain reading of the text, the escalating nature

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General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 1:241-242.

<sup>55</sup>F. T. Grossmith tells how Lutheran pastor Henry Gerecke led some of the Nazi war criminals to Christ before their execution in 1946 (*The Cross and the Swastika* [Boise, Pacific Press, 1989]).

<sup>56</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1005.

of the warfare between Christ and Satan, the successive annihilations of the enemies of God in chapters 17–20, the progressive nature of the triumphs of Christ and his saints, as well as the strong structural evidences for the unity of the millennial vision—all seem to favor the sequential reading of Rev 19–21. Therefore, I propose that Rev 20 be seen as consummated rather than inaugurated eschatology.