

THE VIABILITY OF PREMILLENNIALISM AND THE TEXT OF REVELATION

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Abstract: *Any text needs to be read in its literary context before it is read in the context of larger hermeneutical and theological frameworks. This is true for Revelation 20:1–10 as well. Before placing the one Scriptural text that mentions a reign of one thousand years in the context of Jewish tradition or Christian tradition, we need to read the text first on its own terms. In the pursuit of this task, we seek answers to four questions: When does the period of a thousand years begin? Where is the location of the thousand-year period? Who is who in the text? What happens in connection with the thousand-year period?*

Key words: *millennium, new creation, reign of Jesus, rebellion, judgment, resurrection*

It seems provocative to say that in discussions about eschatology among evangelicals, systems of theological thought have been more important than the biblical text. This should not be controversial, however, especially if one considers the role that the rapture plays in the eschatological program of some, seen in the light of a single NT passage from which this is derived (1 Thess 4:17) and evaluated in the light of the history of interpretation of 1 Thessalonians. While some authors have become wealthy when they wrote fictional accounts of the rapture and its aftermath,¹ the dearth of consistent historical and philological exegesis becomes quickly evident if one reads publications by popular end-time writers.² At the same time, it is dangerous to deplore, at the beginning of an essay on aspects of NT eschatology, the lack of sustained exegesis leading to suspect presentations of eschatological views, since such a lament may imply that the author arrogantly assumes he is right because he has done the exegetical work, while the views of others are problematic because they have not really read the biblical texts. Such an assumption would be ludicrous, obviously, particularly since some authors who have written about NT eschatology have indeed engaged in serious exegesis. Meanwhile, a call to re-read texts that have given rise, directly or indirectly, to diverging interpretations should always be welcome, as should be a call to re-examine one's exegesis and one's larger interpretive framework. Since Scripture is the *norma normans* of what the

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¹Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind*, 16 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1995–2007).

²E.g., Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970); Hal Lindsey, *There's a New World Coming: A Prophetic Odyssey* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, 1973); Hal Lindsey and C. C. Carlson, *The Terminal Generation* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1976); Hal Lindsey, *The Rapture: Truth or Consequences* (New York: Bantam, 1983); Hal Lindsey, *Planet Earth 2000 A.D.: Will Mankind Survive?* (Palos Verdes, CA: Western Front, 1994); Hal Lindsey, *Apocalypse Code* (Palos Verdes, CA: Western Front, 1997).

church believes and teaches, a commitment to the authority of Scripture necessitates a constant reading and re-reading of Scripture, accompanied by exegetical humility, especially with regard to passages that have received diverging interpretations throughout the history of the church.

The subject of the millennium arises out of Revelation 20:1–10, where the phrase “a thousand years” (χίλια ἔτη, translated in the Vulgate as *annos mille*), is used six times: the angel coming down from heaven “seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years”; he was locked up in the pit “so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended”; the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God “came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years,” while “the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended”; the believers who are part of the first resurrection “will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years”; and “when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison,” deceive the nations, and eventually be thrown into the lake of fire (vv. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).³

A few methodological observations are in order. Most interpreters place Revelation 20:1–10 in a “wider perspective,”⁴ with the result that John’s description is framed and thus augmented by images, predictions, and expectations from OT, Jewish, and other NT passages, none of which mention specifically a messianic thousand-year period. While the history of interpretation has shown that such linkages are often helpful, it has also shown that the vision of 20:1–10 as a whole, or elements within the vision, were sometimes adapted to fit other passages whose interpretation was not based on Revelation 20. The interpretation of 20:1–10 must begin with this text and its immediate context in chapters 19–21.

John wrote for congregations in Asia Minor whose members consisted of Jewish and Gentile believers, very few of which would have been able to detect allusions or echoes of OT passages. The first, and basic, task of the interpretation of Revelation should be to seek understanding on the level of what Luther called the *sensus literalis*, with the assumption that the meaning of the text is not “behind” the text in allusions to and echoes of diverse passages and traditions. The command in 22:10 that John must not seal up the words of the prophecy he is recording in his book should be taken seriously, unless we should assume that John was incompetent in the task given to him. Traditional biblical and Jewish perspectives, as relevant as they may have been for John’s thinking, should not be made normative for how we understand the text. Rather, John’s text should be taken as normative for how he wants his readers to understand the biblical and Jewish traditions, if they were aware of them. In particular, interpreters of 20:1–10 should be aware of the danger of letting one’s “preferred theological approach arrived at mostly by other means”⁵ determine the meaning.

³ Biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV, unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ E.g., Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 987; Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 509.

⁵ Fanning, *Revelation*, 505.

The interpretation of the thousand-year period in Revelation 20:1–10 revolves around four main questions: (1) When does the period of a thousand years begin? (2) Where is the location of the thousand-year period? (3) Who is who in 20:1–10? (4) What happens in connection with the thousand-year period?

Some interpreters have linked the millennium with the past and present: it began with Jesus' coming, in particular with his death and resurrection; that is, the millennium is connected with the age of the church. Other interpreters have linked the millennium with the present and the more or less immediate future: it is a golden age on this earth before Jesus' return; that is, the millennium is connected with the missionary expansion of the church and Christianization of the world. The so-called premillennial view holds that the millennium takes place in the future, after Jesus' second coming. The discussion of these views is well known and does not need to be rehearsed in detail here. What follows intends to demonstrate that 20:1–7, understood in its context, supports the view that the thousand-year period takes place after Jesus' second coming, as the first phase of the new creation, relevant in its impact for Satan and the unrepentant whom he deceives a second time.

I. THE CHRONOLOGICAL SEQUENCE OF EVENTS CONNECTED WITH THE THOUSAND-YEAR PERIOD

There is wide agreement that the vision of John in Revelation 19:11–16 reports the return of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. The recurring phrase “and I saw” (*καὶ εἶδον*) in 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11; 21:1, 2 refers to a sequence of visions that is not automatically identical with a sequence of events, since the same event can be the subject of several visions. Well-known examples involve the defeat of the enemy of God and his people, described as the judgment of Babylon and the Beast in 18:1–24; as the defeat of Babylon at Harmagedon in 16:12–21; and as the defeat of the ungodly forces of the kings of the earth in 19:17–21.

However, it can hardly be doubted that there is a chronological sequence of *some* of the events narrated in chapters 19–21: the return of Jesus in victory, the judgment of the unrepentant, and the new heavens and the new earth cannot take place at the same time. While some interpreters understand John to speak always and only symbolically about theological and spiritual realities, without anticipating any actual event happening, most interpreters do not doubt the chronological sequence of at least two realities that John describes in his visions in these chapters: the return of Jesus (19:11–21) takes place before the new heavens and new earth become a reality (21:1–22:5). The question is where the vision of 20:1–10 (and 20:11–15) belongs. There are five chronological markers in 20:1–10.

First, the reference to the thousand-year period at the beginning of which Satan is bound by the angel who comes down from heaven “holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain” in 20:1 is followed by the statement in 20:2 that the dragon, who is the ancient serpent, the Devil and Satan, is locked up in the *abysos* “for a thousand years,” and by the two statements in 20:3 that he is kept locked up “until the thousand years were ended” and that “after that he must be let out for a little while.” The phrase *μετὰ ταῦτα* in the sentence *μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ*

λυθῆναι αὐτὸν μικρὸν χρόνον must indicate a chronological progression of the fate of Satan: there is a period in which he deceives, followed by a thousand-year period during which he is rendered impotent, since he is locked up in the *abyssos*, followed by release and final activity.

Second, in the statement in 20:5 that “the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended,” the conjunction ἄχρι in the phrase ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη is clearly temporal, with ἄχρι as a “marker of continuous extent of time up to a point,”⁶ not a marker of geographical movement, the only two options for use of the conjunction. This means that there is a temporal sequence between the resurrection of the martyrs and the faithful believers who reign with Jesus during the thousand-year period and the resurrection of the unrepentant who had been removed from earth at Jesus’ victorious return (19:21; cf. 20:5, 13–15).

Third, the vision of the banishment of Satan for a thousand-year period to the *abyssos* by the angel coming down from heaven that results in Satan’s inability to deceive the nations (10:1–3) must be sequentially related to the banishment of Satan to the lake of fire and sulphur in 20:10, which happens “when the thousand years are ended” (ὅταν τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη, 20:7). There is a temporary banishment of Satan to the *abyssos* (20:3) and a permanent banishment of Satan to the lake of fire (20:10), separated by the thousand-year period (20:7).

Fourth, the banishment of Satan to the *abyssos* for a thousand-year period means that during this period he can no longer deceive the nations (ἵνα μὴ πλανήσῃ ἔτι τὰ ἔθνη, 20:3), ending, for the time being, his activity as “the deceiver of the whole world” (ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην, 12:9; cf. 13:14; 18:23), who had used the Beast and the False Prophet to deceive the inhabitants of the earth, those who did not follow the Lamb (19:20). When the thousand-year period is ended and Satan is released from the *abyssos*, he will again deceive (πλανήσῃ) the nations (20:8, 10). The thousand-year period of 20:1–7 is framed by the unrelenting deception activity of Satan, with the obvious implication that during the thousand-year period Satan is prevented from deceiving.

Fifth, the statement “this is the first resurrection” (αὕτη ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη) in 20:5 suggests a chronological sequence between a first resurrection and a second resurrection, separated by the thousand-year period. The first resurrection describes the beginning of the thousand-year period, which is connected with the martyrs and with the beatitude in 20:6, “Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years.” The believers in Jesus Messiah, both the martyrs and all the faithful followers of the Lamb, will participate in the first resurrection, which takes place at the victorious return of Jesus described in 19:11–21. The implied second resurrection must be the event described in 20:11–15, when the unbelievers, all people whose name was not written in the book of life, face God’s judgment before the great white throne, resulting in Death and Hades being thrown into the lake of fire, which is identified with “the

⁶ BDAG 160.

second death,” a fate shared by “anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life” (20:15).

II. THE LOCATION OF THE THOUSAND-YEAR PERIOD

The symbolism of John’s visions should not detract from the fact that they relate to specific realities located at specific places by four geographical markers in the text.

a. *The earth.* Four events are linked with the earth (ἡ γῆ): the return of Jesus, the death of the followers of the Beast, the thrones on which the martyrs and other faithful believers sit, and the goal of final rebellion of Satan and the unrepentant.

1. The return of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords (19:11–16) occurs as a movement from heaven (19:11, 14) to the earth (19:19). This seems obvious from the fact that the armies of the kings of the earth (οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς), which consist of both slave and free, both small and great (19:18–19), that is, who represent all people who follow the Beast (19:20), suffer defeat.⁷ The defeat clearly takes place on earth (19:15, 20–21).

2. The unrepentant who had followed the Beast, the “rest” (οἱ λοιποί), were “killed by the sword of the rider on the horse” (19:21), that is, they suffer physical death on earth when Jesus returns, since they were loyal to the kings of the earth who opposed the Lamb.

3. The thrones occupied by the martyrs and the faithful followers of Jesus (20:4) are not explicitly described in terms of location. They could be located in heaven, from where the angel in 20:1 came, where the throne of God is (1:4; 3:21; 4:2–11; 5:1, 6, 11; 7:9, 11, 15–17; 8:3–5; 14:3; 16:17; 19:4). More likely the thrones and the believers sitting on them are located on earth: they reign together with the Messiah (μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ), who has been described in 19:11–21 as establishing his supremacy on earth by vanquishing the Beast and the “armies” of the kings of the earth who were loyal to the Beast.

4. When the thousand-year period is ended, Satan is released from the *abyssos*; he “will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle. They marched up over the breadth of the earth” (20:8–9). In the phrase “across the breadth of the earth” (ἐπὶ τὸ πλάτος τῆς γῆς; 20:9),⁸ the verb ἀναβαίνω means “to be in motion upward” with the translation “to go up” or “to ascend” (BDAG). The translation “march up” (NRSV, RSV, ESV) assumes a military metaphor for ἀναβαίνω, which is plausible in the context of the term πόλεμος in 20:8; at the same time, ἀναβαίνω often means “go up, ascend” without an implied reference to military action. The explanation that ἀναβαίνω takes up the idiom of people “going up” to Jerusalem is plausible in the

⁷Note that in antiquity only free people fought in armies, not slaves; cf. Hendrik Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 71–72; see generally Karl Wilhelm Welwei, *Unfreie im antiken Kriegsdienst. Dritter Teil: Rom*, Forschungen zur antiken Sklaverei 21 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1988).

⁸BDAG 823: “the broad plain of the earth”; EDNT 3:101: “the broad surface of the earth.”

context of the reference to the beloved city in 20:9, but the prepositional phrase linked with ἀνέβησαν mentions the earth, not the new Jerusalem.

b. *Hades* (ὁ ἄδης), the pit (ἄβυσσος). The personification of Death and Hades (ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ἄδης) in 20:14 denotes a single reality (cf. 1:18; 6:8). Hades is the same place as the *abyssos*, the place associated with the dead (17:8), the hostile powers (9:1–2, 11), and the Beast (11:7; 17:8). This is the place of temporary punishment, the place of the first death, whose “residents” will be transferred to the lake of fire, the place of the second death (20:14).

1. When Jesus returns, Satan is banished from earth by the angel coming down from heaven and is confined to the *abyssos* (20:1, 3) for a thousand-year period, that is, for the time being. When Satan is granted permission to leave his “prison” (ἡ φυλακή, 20:7) at the end of the thousand-year period, he “comes out” (ἐξελεύσεται) of the *abyssos* (20:8).

2. The unrepentant are evidently also consigned to the *abyssos* upon the victorious return of Jesus. The nations that Satan deceives at the end of the thousand-year period are localized “at the four corners of the earth” (ἐν ταῖς τέσσαρσι γωνίαις τῆς γῆς, 20:8). Interpreters who understand the phrase as a reference to “the world”⁹ in terms of “totality”¹⁰ ignore the more specific meaning of the phrase. The interpretation of the “four corners of the earth” as reference to the outer edges of the earth, understood as entrances to the underworld,¹¹ that is, to Hades and the *abyssos*, is convincing. First, in 7:1, the four angels who stand at the “four corners of the earth” have the power to damage the earth and the sea (7:2–3), that is, to inflict God’s judgment; the “four corners of the earth” mark the boundary between the earth and the transcendent world. Second, in 1 Enoch 18:10–15, the place “beyond the great earth, where the heavens come together” is a deep pit, identified as “the (ultimate) end of heaven and earth: it is the prison house for the stars and the powers of heaven,” the prison of the fallen angelic stars, “which have transgressed the commandments of God.” Third, in Revelation 9:1, the “star that had fallen from heaven to earth” unlocks the shaft of the bottomless *abyssos*, a place of fire and smoke (9:2), as in 1 Enoch 18, from which demonic locusts come up onto the earth to attack the unrepentant (Rev 9:3–6). Fourth, the localization of the nations in 20:8–9 in the underworld beyond the four corners of the earth provides an obvious explanation for the meaning of the verb ἐξελεύσεται, which describes the movement of Satan—he comes out of the *abyssos*—and of the verb ἀναβαίνω, which describes the movement of the nations—they come up from the *abyssos* onto the earth. In 20:13, the unrepentant emerge from “death and Hades.”

⁹David E. Aune, *Revelation*, 3 vols., WBC 52 (Dallas: Word, 1997–1998), 3:1095; Beale, *Revelation*, 1022, who rejects the position of Mealy (who follows Rissi and Kraft) without engaging the relevant arguments.

¹⁰Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, AYB 38A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 776.

¹¹Mathias Rissi, *The Future of the World: An Exegetical Study of Rev. 19:11–22:15*, SBT 2/23 (London: SCM, 1972), 35–36; Heinrich Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, HNT 16a (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1974), 259; J. Webb Mealy, *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20*, JSNTSup 70 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 127–30. The following arguments are adapted from these discussions.

c. *The encampment of the saints* (παρεμβολή τῶν ἁγίων) and the beloved city (ἡ πόλις ἡ ἡγαπημένη, 20:9). The two expressions refer to the same place or reality. The term παρεμβολή can describe “army barracks, a fortified camp” as a technical military term; “camp, encampment” in terms of a temporary population center; and “army, armed forces.”¹² The term is frequently used in the LXX for the camp of Israel (Exod 17:1; Num 4:5), which was holy on account of God’s presence (Lev 14:8; Num 5:2–3; Deut 23:14). The Qumran community understood itself to be “the camps of the saints” (וַיִּשְׁבּוּ יְנִיב, 1QM III, 5). Since Satan seeks to take over the earth by surrounding the camp of the saints with his supporters, a military connotation of παρεμβολή is plausible, either in the sense of “camp” or in the sense of “armed forces,” or both, considering the fact that the people of Israel were considered a fighting force (Deut 2:14; John 1:11).¹³ The encampment of the saints is synonymous with “the beloved city,” a description used for Jerusalem, or Zion, the city God loved (Pss 78:68; 87:2; Jer 11:15; 12:7; Sir 24:11; for the correlation of παρεμβολή and πόλις, see Heb 13:11–14). Since the encampment of the saints is on the broad plain of the earth (20:9), the beloved city must refer to the place where the followers of the Lamb live, that is, “the holy city, the new Jerusalem” (ἡ πόλις ἡ ἁγία Ἰερουσαλήμ καινή), which comes down to earth out of heaven (21:2). Note that the release of Satan from the *abyssos* after the thousand-year period follows the victory of the returning Jesus over all enemies, including the Beast, the False Prophet, Satan, and their followers (19:11–21), a victory that leads to an initial judgment of Satan and the unrepentant (20:1–4) and effects the resurrection of the followers of the Lamb (20:4). Satan attempts to defeat and eliminate the place where the followers of the Lamb reign with Jesus Messiah, the place where the thrones of 20:4 are located.

d. *The lake of fire* (ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός). The λίμνη τοῦ πυρός appears twice in connection with the thousand-year period.

1. The return of Jesus results in the permanent judgment of the Beast and the False Prophet in the lake of fire (19:20). It is the place of eternal punishment (20:10), the place of the second death (20:14, 15; 21:8).

2. After the thousand-year period and Satan’s final deception and rebellion, both Satan and all the unrepentant are relegated to the lake of fire (20:10, 14–15).

III. WHO IS WHO IN REVELATION 20:1–10?

In the vision of 20:1–10, John mentions five transcendent and earthly beings and groups of beings.

a. *God and Jesus Messiah*. As in the earlier visions, John relates events that come from the throne of God (1:4; 4:2; 5:1, 6, 7; 16:17), which is also the throne of the Lamb (3:21; 7:9, 17; 12:5, 10). The action of the angel with the key to the *abyssos* (20:1) executes the will of God and of the victorious Jesus Messiah. The redemption of the martyrs and of all believers is predicated on their faithfulness to the

¹² Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1097–98.

¹³ Koester, *Revelation*, 779.

testimony of Jesus and to the word of God (20:4). Jesus Messiah is described as reigning during the thousand-year period (20:4, 6). Believers are described as “priests of God and of the Messiah” (20:6).

b. *The angel (ἄγγελος) who comes from heaven with the key to the abyssos (20:1).* In 9:1, an angel opened the *abyssos* with a key, which released the demonic locusts (9:1). In 1:18, it is Jesus Messiah who has the keys of Death and of Hades, where the dead reside until the resurrection, that is, he has the power to confine or release people from the realm of the dead.

c. *The dragon (ὁ δράκων), the ancient serpent (ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος), who is the Devil (Διάβολος) and Satan (ὁ Σατανᾶς, 20:2).* He is the deceiver of the world (ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ἔλην, 12:9) since his appearance in the garden of Eden (Gen 3:1) as the serpent “who initiated humanity’s estrangement from God with the bait of becoming like gods.”¹⁴ He is the principal angelic opponent of God and has been defeated on account of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and exaltation (5:5–10; 12:5, 9–11).¹⁵ The angel from heaven seizes Satan, binds him, and throws him into the *abyssos*, which is locked up for a thousand years, evidently with the key the angel holds in his hand, and sealed, preventing unauthorized entities from opening the *abyssos* (20:3). Satan is temporarily released from the *abyssos* when the thousand years are ended (20:7), presumably by the angel with the key. Satan will come out of the *abyssos* and deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, that is, his unrepentant loyalists in Hades (20:8). The result of this rebellion is the eternal, unending banishment of Satan in the lake of fire (20:10).

d. *The people who sit on the thrones (20:4).* John seems to have in mind two groups of people: the martyrs, and all faithful believers. The martyrs are the believers who “did not cling to life even in the face of death” (12:11). At the same time, the martyrs seem to be mentioned as exemplary believers: also on the thrones are the people who have not followed the Beast (20:4). In the message to the church in Laodicea, the crucified and risen Lord promises the believers who persevere by remaining faithful that they will sit with him on the throne (3:21). In 5:10, John conveyed to his readers that all believers who faithfully follow the Lamb are members of God’s kingdom and priests who will reign on earth (5:10). This promise is presented as having become a reality in the time described in the vision of 20:1–10. John makes the following statements about the people on the thrones.

1. They are the martyrs, that is, “the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God” (20:4).

2. They are the faithful believers “who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands” (20:4).

3. They have come to life (ἔζησαν), that is, they have been raised from the dead in the “first resurrection” (ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη), over whom “the second death has no power” (ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν, 20:5–6).

¹⁴ Richard J. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 198.

¹⁵ Bauckham, *Climax*, 185–86.

4. They reign with Jesus Messiah (βασιλεύσουσιν μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ/μετ' αὐτοῦ) for a thousand years (20:4, 6), participating in the reign of God the Almighty (19:6), in contrast to the kings (βασιλεῖς) who had opposed Jesus and were vanquished when Jesus returned (19:19). Sitting on thrones points to their vindication: they are not judged by God, but rather share in the power of God and the Messiah. John does not need to state over whom the redeemed reign. They do not reign over the followers of the Beast, since they all suffered death when Jesus returned at the beginning of the thousand-year period (19:21; 20:5), banished into the *abyssos* beyond the four corners of the earth (20:8). And they do not reign over the nations at the four corners of the earth, since these are in the *abyssos* during the thousand-year period, at the end of which they are consumed by the fire of God's judgment (20:9), judged in the great assize and thrown into the lake of fire (20:11–15). The reign of the martyrs and the faithful consists in sharing the blessings of the reign of Jesus Messiah, as they rule over God's new creation as a nation of kings.¹⁶ The reign of the redeemed does not end when the thousand years end; they continue to reign forever and ever (βασιλεύσουσιν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, 22:5) in the New Jerusalem, the home of God among his people (21:3).

5. They are priests of God and of Jesus Messiah (ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 20:6; cf. 1:6; 5:10). The redeemed serve and worship the true God, and they serve and worship Jesus.

6. They will not be affected by God's final judgment of the unrepentant (20:11–15) because their names are written in the book of life (20:12, 14).

e. *The nations (τὰ ἔθνη) at the four corners of the earth (20:8) who come up across the plain of the earth (20:9).*

1. These ἔθνη are the unrepentant who suffered death when Jesus returned in victory over all forces of evil (19:21); they “come up” across the breadth of the earth, apparently from the *abyssos* where they shared Satan's temporary fate (20:1–3).

2. When the thousand-year period ends, the unrepentant ἔθνη come up onto the plain of the earth, prompted by the deception of Satan, to march against God and his people (20:7–9). This seems to be the “second resurrection,” which is different from the “first resurrection” (20:5, 6), in which the redeemed come to life at the beginning of the thousand-year period.

3. The nations of human beings who are deceived by Satan a second time, after the thousand-year period, and who again attempt to vanquish God and his people, are described as “Gog and Magog” (Γὼγ καὶ Μαγῶγ, 20:8), an allusion to Ezekiel 28:2–3, 8, where Gog is a prince from the land of Magog, evidently an expression for nations hostile to God and his people.¹⁷ In view is, again, unrepentant

¹⁶ Heinz Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, RNT (Regensburg: Pustet, 1997), 433; Robert H. Gundry, “The New Jerusalem: People as Place, Not Place for People,” *NovT* 29 (1987): 264; cf. Mealy, *Thousand Years*, 116–18.

¹⁷ Koester, *Revelation*, 778. Compare the discussion in Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1095; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 713; Mealy, *Thousand Years*, 126–42. See also William Horbury, “Antichrist among Jews and Gentiles,” in *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World*, ed. M. Goodman (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 113–33.

humanity,¹⁸ described “as numerous as the sands of the sea” (ὡς ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτῶν ὡς ἡ ἄμμος τῆς θαλάσσης, 20:8), thrown into the lake of fire (ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός) when God judges all people, great and small (20:11–15).

4. The reappearance of the unrepentant on the earth (20:9) in an attempt to vanquish God and his people, accepting Satan’s deception once again (20:8), leads to destruction of unrepentant humanity by the fire of God’s judgment (20:9), that is, condemnation in God’s final judgment and banishment to the lake of fire (20:11–15), sharing the fate of the Beast (19:20) and of Satan (20:10) in the second death, which never ends (20:14; 21:8). John does not envision “more than destruction” for the nations who are Gog and Magog, hostile to God and his people.¹⁹ They will follow Satan, their deceiver, into the lake of fire, where they will stay forever.

IV. THE EVENTS OF THE THOUSAND-YEAR PERIOD

First, the crucified and risen Jesus, the Lamb at the center of the throne of God (7:17), returns as King of kings and Lord of lords (19:11–14, 16).²⁰

Second, the followers of the Lamb accompany the returning Jesus (19:14). This implies that they have been raised from the dead, participating in the first resurrection (20:5, 6), since they have remained faithful to Jesus unto death and did not worship the Beast (20:4).

Third, simultaneously, as a result of Jesus’ return, the Beast and the False Prophet are thrown into the lake of fire (19:20). The lake of fire is the second death (20:14), which is permanent.

Fourth, simultaneously, as a result of Jesus’ return, Satan is thrown into the *abysos* (20:1–3), which is the first death (cf. 20:14), which is temporary, lasting for the thousand-year period.

Fifth, simultaneously, as a result of Jesus’ return, the followers of the Beast suffer the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty (19:15) as they are completely vanquished (19:17–21). Since their banishment in the lake of fire, which is the second death (20:14–15), happens later, after the thousand-year period, their fate resulting from the victorious return of Jesus Messiah evidently consists in sharing the temporary fate of Satan in the *abysos*, which could be described as the first death, physical death.

Sixth, as a result of Jesus’ return, the faithful believers share the reign of God and Jesus Messiah, as priests of God and Jesus Messiah, vindicated by God as they

¹⁸ Mealy, *Thousand Years*, 122–26, 140–42.

¹⁹ Contra John Morales, *Christ, Shepherd of the Nations: The Nations as Narrative Character and Audience in John’s Apocalypse*, LNTS 577 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 126.

²⁰ The following description is adapted from Eckhard J. Schnabel, *40 Questions on the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 274–78; cf. Mealy, *Thousand Years*, 100; J. Webb Mealy, *New Creation Millennialism* (self-published, 2019), 33–37, 143–150, for the common pattern of events in Isa 24:1–27:1 and in Rev 19:19–20:10. He argues that this view of the millennium was shared by several of the earliest interpreters of Revelation, namely, Papias of Hierapolis (fl. ca. 105–130), Pseudo-Barnabas (ca. 70–130), Melito of Sardis (fl. 150–200), the author of the Apocalypse of Elijah (ca. 150–250), and Victorinus of Pettau (d. ca. 304); cf. *New Creation Millennialism*, 151–60.

sit on thrones (20:4, 6), sharing the blessings of Jesus' royal authority—for a thousand years (20:4, 6), untouched by God's judgment of the unrepentant at the end of the thousand-year period that results in the second death (20:6, 14), which is relegation to the lake of fire (20:11–15), and are thus indeed forever and ever (22:5) in the reality of the New Jerusalem, the home of God among his people (21:3; 22:5).

Seventh, Satan is released after the thousand-year period, deceiving again the unrepentant who emerge from the *abyssos* beyond the four corners of the earth (20:7–8), which seems to be the second resurrection, that is, the reappearance of the unrepentant who have been in the *abyssos* for a thousand-year period. When Satan renews his attempt to vanquish God and his people, God throws him into the lake of fire (20:10), which is the second death (20:14) and is permanent.

Eighth, Satan is joined by Death, Hades, and all the unrepentant, who are judged by God, since their names were not found written in the book of life (20:11–15).

V. CONCLUSION

In this reading, the thousand-year period does not affect the redeemed who reign with Jesus Messiah since his return. The thousand-year period affects Satan and the unrepentant, who persist in their rebellion against God and his people and who are thus transferred from the *abyssos* into the lake of fire, from the first death to the second death. This interpretation has been called “new creation millennialism” (Webb, Mealy), since the millennium is, here, coexistent with the new creation.

The thousand-year period is specifically connected with the binding of Satan in the *abyssos*, resulting from Jesus' return, and the renewed deception of the unrepentant by Satan, resulting from Satan's release from the *abyssos*. Satan's renewed attempt to vanquish God and his people, aided by the people whom he had deceived before and now deceives again, results in both Satan and the unrepentant being moved from the *abyssos* to the lake of fire, from Hades to Hell. Satan's renewed deception does not interrupt or interfere with the blessings of God's presence among his people, the followers of the Lamb.

Believers in Jesus do not wait for the rapture or the antichrist or the end of the millennium for the fulfillment of God's promise that they will see God face to face. Believers in Jesus Messiah wait for his return. They pray *μαράνα θά*, “come, Lord” (1 Cor 16:22), expecting that the coming of the Lord Jesus will usher in the full reality of the glory and dominion of God the Father (Rev 1:6) and the blessing and honor and glory and might of Jesus Messiah, the crucified and risen Lamb of God, whom they serve and worship forever and ever (5:13).