



THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 47

Text: Rev. 20:1-6

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1. What the text meant. Exegesis of the Text:

Historical Aspects: A. [Binding and loosing Satan](#), vv. 1-3

External History B. [Reigning with Christ](#), vv. 4-6

Internal History

Literary Aspects:

Genre

Literary Setting

Literary Structure

2. What the text means.

MOVING TO JUDGMENT

Greek NT

20.1 Καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔχοντα τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ ἄλυσιν μεγάλην ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ. 2 καὶ ἐκράτησεν τὸν δράκοντα, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὃς ἐστὶν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, καὶ ἔδησεν αὐτὸν χίλια ἔτη. 3 καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον καὶ ἔκλεισεν καὶ ἐσφράγισεν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ, ἵνα μὴ πλανήσῃ ἔτι τὰ ἔθνη ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη. μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτὸν μικρὸν χρόνον.

4 Καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς καὶ κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς, καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν πεπελεκισμένων διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ οἵτινες οὐ προσεκύνησαν τὸ θηρίον οὐδὲ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἔλαβον τὸ χάραγμα ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτῶν. καὶ ἔζησαν καὶ ἐβασίλευσαν μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ χίλια ἔτη. 5 οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔζησαν ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη.

Αὕτη ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη. 6 μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος ὁ ἔχων μέρος ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ πρώτῃ· ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ δεῦτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν, ἀλλ' ἔσονται ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ

Gute Nachricht Bibel

20.1 Danach sah ich einen Engel* aus dem Himmel herabkommen, der hatte den Schlüssel zum Abgrund* und eine starke Kette in der Hand. 2 Er packte den Drachen*, die alte Schlange, die auch Teufel und Satan* genannt wird, und fesselte ihn für tausend Jahre. 3 Der Engel warf ihn in den Abgrund, schloss den Eingang ab und versiegelte ihn. So konnte der Drache die Völker tausend Jahre lang nicht mehr verführen. Wenn sie um sind, muss er für eine kurze Zeit freigelassen werden.

4 Dann sah ich Thronessel. Denen, die darauf Platz nahmen, wurde die Vollmacht erteilt, Gericht zu halten. Weiter sah ich die Seelen der Menschen, die enthauptet worden waren, weil sie an der Botschaft Gottes festhielten, an all dem, wofür Jesus als Zeuge einsteht. Ich sah auch die Seelen der Menschen, die weder das Tier noch sein Standbild angebetet hatten und auch nicht das Kennzeichen des Tieres auf ihrer Stirn oder ihrer Hand trugen. Sie alle wurden wieder lebendig und herrschten zusammen mit Christus tausend Jahre lang. 5 Die übrigen Toten wurden noch nicht wieder leb-

NRSV

20.1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while.

4 Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.)

This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who 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

NLT

20.1 Then I saw an angel come down from heaven with the key to the bottomless pit and a heavy chain in his hand. 2 He seized the dragon -- that old serpent, the Devil, Satan -- and bound him in chains for a thousand years. 3 The angel threw him into the bottomless pit, which he then shut and locked so Satan could not deceive the nations anymore until the thousand years were finished. Afterward he would be released again for a little while.

4 Then I saw thrones, and the people sitting on them had been given the authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony about Jesus, for proclaiming the word of God. And I saw the souls of those who had not worshiped the beast or his statue, nor accepted his mark on their forehead or their hands. They came to life again, and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come back to life until the thousand years had ended.)

This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are

βασιλεύσουσιν μετ' αὐτοῦ
[τὰ] χίλια ἔτη.

endig; das wird erst geschehen, wenn die tausend Jahre um sind.

Dies ist die erste Auferstehung. 6 Freuen dürfen sich die Auserwählten, die an der ersten Auferstehung teilhaben. Der zweite Tod, der endgültige, kann ihnen nichts anhaben. Sie werden Gott und Christus als Priester dienen und tausend Jahre lang mit Christus herrschen.

reign with him a thousand years.

those who share in the first resurrection. For them the second death holds no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him a thousand years.

INTRODUCTION

In this part of Revelation we encounter not just a beautiful picture of God's working over human history, but also about the most controversial section of the entire document. Yet it should be noted that the millennialism controversy that emerges from the first three verses actually touches only a very small segment of Protestant Christianity. The vast majority of Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians see little or no controversy here. But for many in the very conservative groups inside Evangelicalism, which is a part of Protestantism, one's salvation can depend on the particular view held regarding the millennial perspectives¹ advocated.² As an example, in the "old days" of

¹"Premillennialists hold that at Christ's return the Christian dead will be raised, and believers still living on earth will be caught up to meet him in the air (1 Thess. 4:17). They will reign on earth with Christ for 1,000 years (the millennium). After this Satan will be released for a time. This short period will be followed by the raising of the rest of the dead. In this way there is an explanation of the two resurrections. Finally there comes the judgment of the great white throne. Post-millennialists differ in seeing the return of Christ as taking place after the millennium. Sometimes they see the millennium as standing for the triumph of the gospel in this present age, sometimes as a literal 1,000 years at the end of time. Amillennialists hold that there is no literal millennium; the 1,000 year period is symbolical. It stands for the whole time between the life of Jesus on earth and his second coming. They usually see the first resurrection as the new birth of the believer, his rising from the death of sin." [Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 222–223.]

²This modern western view called dispensationalism traces itself back to the fringe preacher / lawyer in England and Ireland by the name of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). Moving out of the Church of England to the Brethren Church and then falling out with them, he was one of the founders of the Plymouth Brethren splinter group. His radical views were then promoted mostly in the US after the American Civil War, especially through the Niagara conferences (1870-early 1900s). This thinking underwent substantial revisions and emerged in many different forms usually connected to some particular fundamentalist preacher or Bible institute.

To get some idea of proportions here, the survey of the Pew Charitable Trust for 2014 in the US provides these estimates: Evangelical Protestant Churches - 26.3%; Mainline Protestant

DTS, one could not graduate from the seminary without pledging in written form to uphold the dispensationalist views of C.I. Scofield. But all this is a serious distraction from John's message to his readership, and ultimately a distraction to the modern reader as well.

Our uniform approach throughout our study of Revelation is that the scripture text speaks for itself within the framework of the first century world. Honest interpretation rejects the importing of foreign ideas from later times into the interpretive process. We will treat 20:1-6 the same way as the remainder of Revelation so as to not miss the rich message from John about God's working in our world.

John's message in chapter twenty continues the same message as in chapter nineteen. Evil is tumbling down into destruction. Christ has crushed the two beasts and the evil people of the world. The only one remaining to be crushed is the source of all evil, Satan

Churches - 18.1%; Roman Catholic Church 23.9%. These are percentages of the US adult population. The category of Evangelical Protestant Churches is further divided into sixteen subcategories with the survey registering individuals rather than exact denominational groups. Although difficult to estimate precisely, somewhere between 30 and 40% of these Evangelicals would call themselves millennialists of some stripe with a small minority of these using the term dispensationalist. And this could well be too generous an estimate. The majority of Evangelicals along with Mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians have no connection to any of the millennialist positions. This amounts to over 50% of the US adult population. When compared to a world wide survey the number of dispensationalists internationally would amount to less than one percent of the Christian population.

For details see **Pew Research & Public Life Project: Religious Landscape Survey** at <http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations>.

Dispensationalism, the best known of the millennialist views, began on the fringe of Christianity mainly in the US during the 1870s and has remained there very close to the categorization of cult status. It catches a lot more attention than other viewpoints simply because it makes a lot more noise with many of its very radical views through the media vehicles used by several well know TV preachers in the US. It is usually presented as normative and orthodox Christian while existing on the very fringe of commonly accepted Christian belief. .

himself. In chapter twenty we see a dramatic apocalyptic depiction of him being completely destroyed in his influence in the world and thus being banished to eternal torments along side the two beasts in the eternal lake of fire. Preparatory to this depiction is the parallel one in 12:7-9 where Satan begins his downward plunge.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Consideration of the relevant background issues here remain important as always.

Historical Aspects:

External History. In the centuries of the hand copying of this passage prior to the printing press, variations of wording in the text surface. Since no original copy of the passage exists today, the task becomes to evaluate these variations in order to determine “the most likely original reading of the text” -- the goal of the scholarly discipline called [Textual Criticism](#).

The Greek New Testament (UBS 4th rev ed) is commonly used in the English speaking world as the standard printed Greek text by Bible translators and others contains a feature, the Text Apparatus, where a few of the variations are listed in a coded structure for analyzing the differences. But only variations considered by the editorial committee to be significant for Bible translation are listed. For 19:1-6, only one variation is listed.



20:6 [τά], [the], {C}.³ The issue here is over the inclusion / omission of the article τὰ before χίλια ἔτη. The implication is the minor difference between ‘the thousand years’ or ‘a thousand years.’⁴ Because the

³{C} τὰ κ 046 1611 2053 2062 2329 syr^h cop^{sa,bo} // omit A 051 205 209 1006 1841 1854 2030 2050 2377 Byz cop^h arm eth Andrew

[Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

⁴“The variant reading has little if any significance for translation. The external evidence for the presence of the article τὰ before χίλια ἔτη (a thousand years) is almost evenly balanced by the evidence for its absence. Likewise, arguments regarding what the author or copyists would have written provide no clear answer. For this reason, the article is put in brackets to indicate uncertainty regarding the original text. In the context, the thousand years refers specifically to the thousand years mentioned in vv. 2–5, and receptor language requirements will determine whether an article should be used in translation. NRSV translates, ‘they will reign with him a thousand years,’ but REB says, ‘shall reign with him for the thousand years.’” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adap-*

evidence -- both internally and externally -- is so evenly divided the article is included but with brackets: [τὰ].

Of course, across the spectrum of several thousand manuscript copies of this passage in existence today, more than just this one variation surfaces. The Text Apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (N-A, 28th rev ed.) lists a much more complete referencing of all the known variations.⁵ Of the 24 places where variations surface,



tation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 548.]

⁵20,1

* αλλον κ² 2050 vg^{ms} sy^{ph} sa^{ms}; Beza (ἄλλον is inserted before ἄγγελον)

* κ* (ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ is omitted)

* εν τη χειρι κ 1611 (ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα is replaced)

2

* τον οφιν τον αρχαιον κ 046. 051. 1006. 1611. 1841. 1854. 2030. 2050. 2053. 2062. 2329. 2377 M (ὁ ὄφιν ὁ ἀρχαῖος is replaced)

‡ txt A

* ὄ κ 2050 (ὄς is replaced)

* ο κ 1611. 2050. 2053. 2062. 2329 (ὁ is inserted before Διάβολος)

° 051. 1854. (2050) M^A (ὁ before Σατανᾶς)

* (12,9) ο πλανων τὴν οικουμενην ολην 046. 051. 2030. 2377 M^K (syh) (ὁ πλάνων τὴν οικουμένην ὅλην is inserted after Σατανᾶς)

3

* εδησεν M^A (ἔκλεισεν is replaced)

* πλανα 046. 2030. (2050). 2377 M^K (πλανήση is replaced)

° 051 M^A bo (ἔτι is omitted)

°¹ 051. 1854 M^A (τὰ is omitted)

* και 051. 2050 M^A vg^{cl} bo (καὶ is inserted before μετὰ)

° κ 051 M^A latt (reversed sequence of λυθῆναι αὐτὸν)

4

* ειδον 1006. 1841. (ιδων 2050) ar; Beza (εἶδον is inserted after 2nd και)

* ουτε 051 M^A (οὐδὲ is replaced)

* αυτων 051. 1854 M^A vg^{ms} sy^{ph}; Beza (αὐτῶν is added before τὰς ψυχὰς)

° 051. 2062 M^A (°τοῦ before Χριστοῦ is omitted)

*¹ τα 046. 1006. 1841. 2030. 2377 M^K sy^h (τὰ is inserted before χίλια)

5

* κ 2030. 2053. 2062. 2377 M^K syh; Vic Beza (verse 5 is omitted)

* και 046. 051. 1006. 1841. 1854. 2050 M^A ar vgmss sy bo ἄ 2329 (καὶ is added before οἱ λοιποὶ)

‡ txt A 1611 lat

6

* θανατος ο δευτερος 051 M^A (ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος is re-sequenced)

* μετα ταυτα (2329) M^K (μετ’ αὐτοῦ is replaced)

° A 051. 1006. 1841. 1854. 2030. 2050. 2377 M ([τὰ] is omitted)

‡ txt κ 046. 1611. 2053. 2062. 2329 syh

[Eberhard Nestle and Erwin Nestle, *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus*, ed. Barbara Aland et al., 28. revidierte Auflage, Page 968

almost all are stylistic improvements. None alter the meaning of the text.

Thus will full confidence we can exegete the adopted reading of the text that it represents precisely what was originally written.

Internal History. Most all the spatial and temporal references in vv. 1-6 are more exegetical issues than background issues.

It may well be helpful to treat the historical background issue of the term τὰ χίλια ἔτη, the thousand years, here since a substantial background in Jewish apocalyptic writings stand behind the use of the term here.

The idea of capturing and binding Satan and/or demons in anticipation of final judgment was common among the Jewish writings.⁶

1 Enoch 10:1-21. 1. Then said the Most High, the Holy and Great One spake, and sent Uriel to the son of Lamech, and said to him: 2. '<Go to Noah> and tell him in my name "Hide thyself!" and reveal to him the end that is approaching: that the whole earth will be destroyed, and a deluge is about to come upon the whole earth, and will destroy all that is on it. 3. And now instruct him that he may escape and his seed may be preserved for all the generations of the world.' 4. **And again the Lord said to Raphael: 'Bind Azâzêl hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness: and make an opening in the desert, which is in Dûdâêl, and cast him therein.** 5. And place upon him rough and jagged rocks, and cover him with darkness, and let him abide there for ever, and cover his face that he may not see light. 6. **And on the day of the great judgment he shall be cast into the fire.** And heal the earth which the angels have corrupted, and proclaim the healing of the earth, that they may heal the plague, and that all the children of men may not perish through all the secret things that the Watchers have disclosed and have taught their sons. 8. And the whole earth has been corrupted through the works that were taught by Azâzêl: to him ascribe all sin.' 9. And to Gabriel said the Lord: 'Proceed against

(Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 781–782.]

⁶"For the combination of 'arrest' (κρατεῖν) and 'bind' (δεῖν) as part of the metaphor of capturing a felon, see Mark 6:17 (of John the Baptist). The notion of 'binding' (δεῖν), particularly when used of supernatural beings, is drawn from the world of magic (see under v 3 below). The metaphor of 'binding,' i.e., imprisoning Satan or demons, particularly until the day of judgment, occurs frequently in Judaism (1 Enoch 10:4, 11–12; 13:1; 14:5; 18:16; 21:3–6; Jub. 5:6; 10:7–11; 2 Enoch [Rec. J and A] 7:2; 2 Apoc. Bar. 56:13; see Jude 6). In Isbell's collection of inscriptions from Aramaic incantation bowls, text 18.4 speaks of 'the binding of Bagdana their king and their ru[ler], the king of dem[ons and devils, and the great] ru[ler of lilit[is]'" (Isbell, Incantation, 58; parallel formulas are found in 17.4–5, p. 56, and 20.4, p. 64). See also Tob 8:3 (MSS A and B), 'And when the demon smelled the odor he fled to the remotest parts of Egypt and the angel bound him [καὶ ἔδησεν αὐτὸ ὄργανος].' According to 1 Enoch 10:10–12 (see 4QEnb 1:4, 11; Milik, Enoch, 175), it is Michael who is commanded to bind evil angels for seven generations until 'the great day of their judgment'." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1082.]

the bastards and the reprobates, and against the children of fornication: and destroy [the children of fornication and] the children of the Watchers from amongst men [and cause them to go forth]: send them one against the other that they may destroy each other in battle: for length of days shall they not have. 10. And no request that they (i.e. their fathers) make of thee shall be granted unto their fathers on their behalf; for they hope to live an eternal life, and that each one of them will live five hundred years.' 11. And the Lord said unto Michael: 'Go, bind Semjâzâ and his associates who have united themselves with women so as to have defiled themselves with them in all their uncleanness. 12. And when their sons have slain one another, and they have seen the destruction of their beloved ones, **bind them fast for seventy generations in the valleys of the earth, till the day of their judgment and of their consummation, till the judgment that is for ever and ever is consummated.** 13. In those days they shall be led off to the abyss of fire: <and> to the torment and the prison in which they shall be confined for ever. And whosoever shall be condemned and destroyed will from thenceforth be bound together with them to the end of all generations. 15. And destroy all the spirits of the reprobate and the children of the Watchers, because they have wronged mankind. Destroy all wrong from the face of the earth and let every evil work come to an end: and let the plant of righteousness and truth appear: <and it shall prove a blessing; the works of righteousness and truth> shall be planted in truth and joy for evermore.

17 And then shall all the righteous escape,
And shall live till they beget thousands of children,
And all the days of their youth and their old age
Shall they complete in peace.

18 And then shall the whole earth be tilled in righteousness, and shall all be planted with trees and be full of blessing. 19. And all desirable trees shall be planted on it, and they shall plant vines on it: and the vine which they plant thereon shall yield wine in abundance, and as for all the seed which is sown thereon each measure (of it) shall bear a thousand, and each measure of olives shall yield ten presses of oil. 20. And cleanse thou the earth from all oppression, and from all unrighteousness, and from all sin, and from all godlessness: and all the uncleanness that is wrought upon the earth destroy from off the earth. 21. <And all the children of men shall become righteous>, and all nations shall offer adoration and shall praise Me, and all shall worship Me. And the earth shall be cleansed from all defilement, and from all sin, and from all punishment, and from all torment, and I will never again send (them) upon it from generation to generation and for ever.

1 Enoch 13:1-9. 1. **And Enoch went and said: 'Azâzêl, thou shalt have no peace: a severe sentence has gone forth against thee to put thee in bonds: 2. And thou shalt not have toleration nor request granted to thee, because of the unrighteousness which thou hast taught, and because of all the works of godlessness and unrighteousness and sin which thou hast shown to men.'** 3. Then I went and spoke to them all together, and they were all afraid, and fear and trembling seized them. 4. And they besought me to draw up a petition for them that they might find forgiveness, and to

read their petition in the presence of the Lord of heaven. 5. For from thenceforward they could not speak (with Him) nor lift up their eyes to heaven for shame of their sins for which they had been condemned. 6. Then I wrote out their petition, and the prayer in regard to their spirits and their deeds individually and in regard to their requests that they should have forgiveness and length <of days>†. 7. And I went off and sat down at the waters of Dan, in the land of Dan, to the south of the west of Hermon: I read their petition till I fell asleep. 8. And behold a dream came to me, and visions fell down upon me, and I saw visions of chastisement, <and a voice came bidding (me)> I to tell it to the sons of heaven, and reprimand them. 9. And when I awaked, I came unto them, and they were all sitting gathered together, weeping in 'Abelsjâil, which is between Lebanon and Sênêsêr, with their faces covered. 10. And I recounted before them all the visions which I had seen in sleep, and I began to speak the words of righteousness, and to reprimand the heavenly Watchers.

1 Enoch 14:1-25, 1. The book of the words of righteousness, and of the reprimand of the eternal Watchers in accordance with the command of the Holy Great One in that vision. 2. I saw in my sleep what I will now say with a tongue of flesh and with the breath of my mouth: which the Great One has given to men to converse therewith and understand with the heart. 3. As He has created and given <to man the power of understanding the word of wisdom, so hath He created me also and given> me the power of reprimanding the Watchers, the children of heaven. **4. I wrote out your petition, and in my vision it appeared thus, that your petition will not be granted unto you <throughout all the days of eternity, and that judgement has been finally passed upon you: yea (your petition) will not be granted unto you>. 5. And from henceforth you shall not ascend into heaven unto all eternity, and <in bonds> of the earth the decree has gone forth to bind you for all the days of the world.** 6. And (that) previously you shall have seen the destruction of your beloved sons and ye shall have no pleasure in them, but they shall fall before you by the sword. 7. And your petition on their behalf shall not be granted, nor yet on your own: even though you weep and pray and speak all the words contained in the writing which I have written. 8. And the vision was shown to me thus: Behold, in the vision clouds invited me and a mist summoned me, and the course of the stars and the lightnings sped and hastened me, and the winds in the vision caused me to fly and lifted me upward, and bore me into heaven. 9. And I went in till I drew nigh to a wall which is built of crystals and surrounded by tongues of fire: and it began to affright me. And I went into the tongues of fire and drew nigh to a large house which was built of crystals: and the walls of the house were like a tessellated floor (made) of crystals, and its groundwork was of crystal. 11. Its ceiling was like the path of the stars and the lightnings, and between them were fiery cherubim, and their heaven was (clear as) water. 12. A flaming fire surrounded the walls, and its portals blazed with fire. 13. And I entered into that house, and it was hot as fire and cold as ice: there were no delights of life therein: fear covered me, and trembling got hold upon me. 14. And as I quaked and trembled, I fell upon my face. 15. And I beheld a vision, And lo! there was a second house,

greater than the former, and the entire portal stood open before me, and it was built of flames of fire. 16. And in every respect it so excelled in splendour and magnificence and extent that I cannot describe to you its splendour and its extent. 17. And its floor was of fire, and above it were lightnings and the path of the stars, and its ceiling also was flaming fire. 18. And I looked and saw <therein> a lofty throne: its appearance was as crystal, and the wheels thereof as the shining sun, and there was the vision of cherubim. 19. And from underneath the throne came streams of flaming fire so that I could not look thereon. 20. And the Great Glory sat thereon, and His raiment shone more brightly than the sun and was whiter than any snow. 21. None of the angels could enter and could behold His face by reason of the magnificence and glory and no flesh could behold Him. 22. The flaming fire was round about Him, and a great fire stood before Him, and none around could draw nigh Him: ten thousand times ten thousand (stood) before Him, yet He needed no counselor. 23. And the most holy ones who were nigh to Him did not leave by night nor depart from Him. 24. And until then I had been prostrate on my face, trembling: and the Lord called me with His own mouth, and said to me: 'Come hither, Enoch, and hear my word.' 25. <And one of the holy ones came to me and waked me>, and He made me rise up and approach the door: and I bowed my face downwards.

1 Enoch 18:1-16, 1. I saw the treasures of all the winds: I saw how He had furnished with them the whole creation and the firm foundations of the earth. 2. And I saw the corner-stone of the earth: I saw the four winds which bear [the earth and] the firmament of the heaven. 3. <And I saw how the winds stretch out the vaults of heaven>, and have their station between heaven and earth: <these are the pillars of the heaven>. 4. I saw the winds of heaven which turn and bring the circumference of the sun and all the stars to their setting. 5. I saw the winds on the earth carrying the clouds: I saw <the paths of the angels. I saw> at the end of the earth the firmament of the heaven above. And I proceeded and saw a place which burns day and night, where there are seven mountains of magnificent stones, three towards the east, and three towards the south. 7. And as for those towards the east, <one> was of coloured stone, and one of pearl, and one of jacinth, and those towards the south of red stone. 8. But the middle one reached to heaven like the throne of God, of alabaster, and the summit of the throne was of sapphire. 9. And I saw a flaming fire. And beyond these mountains 10. is a region the end of the great earth: there the heavens were completed. 11. And I saw a deep abyss, with columns <of heavenly fire, and among them I saw columns> of fire fall, which were beyond measure alike towards the height and towards the depth. 12. And beyond that abyss I saw a place which had no firmament of the heaven above, and no firmly founded earth beneath it: there was no water upon it, and no birds, but it was a waste and horrible place. 13. I saw there seven stars like great burning mountains, and to me, when I inquired regarding them, 14. The angel said: 'This place is the end of heaven and earth: this has become a prison for the stars and the host of heaven. 15. And the stars which roll over the fire are they which have transgressed the commandment of the Lord in the beginning of their rising,

because they did not come forth at their appointed times. 16. **And He was wroth with them, and bound them till the time when their guilt should be consummated (even) <for ten thousand years>.**⁷

1 Enoch 21:1-10. 1. And I proceeded to where things were chaotic. 2. **And I saw there something horrible: I saw neither a heaven above nor a firmly founded earth, but a place chaotic and horrible.** 3. **And there I saw seven stars of the heaven bound together in it, like great mountains and burning with fire.** 4. **Then I said: 'For what sin are they bound, and on what account have they been cast in hither?'** 5. **Then said Uriel, one of the holy angels, who was with me, and was chief over them, and said: 'Enoch, why dost thou ask, and why art thou eager for the truth?'** 6. **These are of the number of the stars <of heaven>, which have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and are bound here till ten thousand years, the time entailed by their sins, are consummated.'** 7. And from thence I went to another place, which was still more horrible than the former, and I saw a horrible thing: a great fire there which burnt and blazed, and the place was cleft as far as the abyss, being full of great descending columns of fire: neither its extent or magnitude could I see, nor could I conjecture. 8. Then I said: 'How fearful is the place and how terrible to look upon!' 9. Then Uriel answered me, one of the holy angels who was with me, and said unto me: 'Enoch, why hast thou such fear and affright?' And I answered: 'Because of this fearful place, and because of the spectacle of the pain.' 10. **And he said <unto me>: 'This place is the prison of the angels, and here they will be imprisoned for ever.'**

Jubilees 5:1-20,⁷ V. And it came to pass when the children of men began to multiply on the face of the earth and daughters were born unto them, that the angels of God saw them on a certain year of this jubilee, that they were beautiful to look upon; and they took themselves wives of all whom they chose, and they bare unto them sons and they were giants. 2. And lawlessness increased on the earth and all flesh corrupted its way, alike men and cattle and beasts and birds and everything that walketh on the earth—all of them corrupted their ways and their orders, and they began to devour each other, and lawlessness increased on the earth and every imagination of the thoughts of all men (was) thus evil continually. 3. And God looked upon the earth, and behold it was corrupt, and all flesh had corrupted its orders, and all that were upon the earth had wrought all manner of evil before His eyes. 4. And He said: "I shall destroy man and all flesh upon the face of the earth which I have created." 5. But Noah found grace before the eyes of the Lord. 6. **And against the angels whom He had sent upon the earth, He was exceedingly wroth, and He gave commandment to root them out of all their dominion, and He bade us to bind them in the depths of the earth, and behold they are bound in the midst of them, and are (kept) separate.** 7. And against their sons went forth a command from before His face that they should be smitten with the sword, and be removed from under heaven. 8. And He said "Thy spirit will not always abide on man; for they also are flesh and their days shall be one hundred and twenty years." 9. And He sent His sword into

their midst that each should slay his neighbour, and they began to slay each other till they all fell by the sword and were destroyed from the earth. 10. And their fathers were witnesses (of their destruction), and after this they were bound in the depths of the earth for ever, until the day of the great condemnation⁸ when judgment is executed on all those who have corrupted their ways and their works before the Lord. 11. And He †destroyed† all from their places, and there †was† not left one of them whom He judged not according to all their wickedness. 12. And He †made† for all His works a new and righteous nature, 1 so that they should not sin in their whole nature for ever, but should be all righteous each in his kind alway. 13. And the judgment of all is ordained and written on the heavenly tables in righteousness—even (the judgment of) all who depart from the path which is ordained for them to walk in; and if they walk not therein judgment is written down for every creature and for every kind. 14. And there is nothing in heaven or on earth, or in light or in darkness, or in Sheol or in the depth, or in the place of darkness (which is not judged); and all their judgments are ordained and written and engraved. 15. In regard to all He will judge, the great according to his greatness, and the small according to his smallness, and each according to his way. 16. And He is not one who will regard the person (of any), nor is He one who will receive gifts, if He saith that He will execute judgment on each: if one gave everything that is on the earth, He will not regard the gifts or the person (of any), nor accept anything at his hands, for He is a righteous judge. [17. And of the children of Israel it hath been written and ordained: If they turn to Him in righteousness, He will forgive all their transgressions and pardon all their sins. 18. It is written and ordained that He will show mercy to all who turn from all their guilt once each year.] 19. And as for all those who corrupted their ways and their thoughts before the flood, no man's person was accepted save that of Noah alone; for his person was accepted in behalf of his sons, whom (God) saved from the waters of the flood on his account; for his heart was righteous in all his ways, according as it was commanded regarding him, and he had not departed from aught that was ordained for him. 20. And the Lord said that He would destroy everything which was upon the earth, both men and cattle, and beasts, and fowls of the air, and that which moveth on the earth.

Jubilees 10:1-17,⁸X. 1 And in the third week of this jubilee the unclean demons began to lead astray †the children of† the sons of Noah; and to make to err and destroy them. 2. And the sons of Noah came to Noah their father, and they told him concerning the demons which were, leading astray and blinding and slaying his sons' sons. 3. And he prayed before the Lord his God, and said: God of the spirits of all flesh, who hast shown mercy unto me, And hast saved me and my sons from the waters of the flood, And hast not caused me to perish as Thou didst the sons of perdition; For Thy grace hath been great towards me, And great hath been Thy mercy to my soul; Let Thy grace be lift up upon my sons, And let not wicked spirits rule over them est they

⁸Here we have (in x. 1-15) another fragment of the lost Apocalypse of Noah (as in vii. 20-39). The Hebrew original of 1-2 and 9-14 of this section is extant.

⁷This is the LXX rendering of Gen. vi. 2 (R.V. "sons of God"), and represents the older Jewish exegesis, which was later given up.

should destroy them from the earth. 4. But do Thou bless me and my sons, that we may increase and multiply and replenish the earth. 5. And Thou knowest how Thy Watchers, the fathers of these spirits, acted in my day: and as for these spirits which are living, imprison them and hold them fast in the place of condemnation, and let them not bring destruction on the sons of thy servant, my God; for these are malignant, and created in order to destroy. 6. And let them not rule over the spirits of the living; for Thou alone canst exercise dominion over them. And let them not have power over the sons of the righteous from henceforth and for evermore.” **7. And the Lord our God bade us to bind all. 8. And the chief of the spirits, Mastêmâ, came and said: “Lord, Creator, let some of them remain before me, and let them hearken to my voice, and do all that I shall say unto them; for if some of them are not left to me, I shall not be able to execute the power of my will on the sons of men; for these are for corruption and leading astray before my judgment, for great is the wickedness of the sons of men.” 9. And He said: “Let the tenth part of them remain before him, and let nine parts descend into the place of condemnation.” 10. And one of us He commanded that we should teach Noah all their medicines; for He knew that they would not walk in uprightness, nor strive in righteousness. 11. And we did according to all His words: all the malignant evil ones we bound in the place of condemnation, and a tenth part of them we left that they might be subject before Satan on the earth. 12. And we explained to Noah all the medicines of their diseases, together with their seductions, how he might heal them with herbs of the earth. 13. And Noah wrote down all things in a book as we instructed him concerning every kind of medicine. Thus the evil spirits were precluded from (hurting) the sons of Noah. 14. And he gave all that he had written to Shem, his eldest son; for he loved him exceedingly above all his sons. 15. And Noah slept with his fathers, and was buried on Mount Lûbâr in the land of Ararat. 16. Nine hundred and fifty years he completed in his life, nineteen jubilees and two weeks and five years. 17. And in his life on earth he excelled the children of men save Enoch because of the righteousness, wherein he was perfect. For Enoch’s office was ordained for a testimony to the generations of the world, so that he should recount all the deeds of generation unto generation, till the day of judgment.**

2 Enoch [Rec. J and A] 7:1-5, 7

[About how Enoch was taken to the 2nd heaven. Word “6.”]⁹

1* And those men picked me up and brought me up to the second heaven. And they showed me, and I saw a darkness greater than earthly darkness. **And there I perceived prisoners under guard, hanging up, waiting for the measureless judgment. 2 And those angels have the appearance of darkness itself, more than earthly darkness. And unceasingly they made weeping, all the day long. And I said to the men who were with me, “Why are these ones being tormented unceasingly?” 3 Those men answered me, “These are those who turned away from the LORD, who did not obey the LORD’s commandments, but of their own will plotted together and turned away with their prince and with those who are under restraint in the fifth heaven.”**

⁹James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (New York; London: Yale University Press, 1983), 112–114.

4* And I felt very sorry for them; and those angels bowed down to me and said to me, “Man of God, pray for us to the LORD!” 5 And I answered them and said, “Who am I, a mortal man, that I should pray for angels? Who knows where I am going and what will confront me? Or who indeed will pray for me?”

2 Apocalypse of Baruch 56:1-16,¹⁰ 56 1 But now, since you have asked the Most High to reveal to you the explanation of the vision which you have seen, I have been sent to say to you 2 that the Mighty One has let you know the course of times, namely those which have passed and those which in his world will come to pass, from the beginning of his creation until the end, (the times) which are known by deceit and by truth. 3 For as you saw a great cloud which came up from the sea and went and covered the earth; this is the length of the world which the Mighty One has created when he took counsel in order to create the world. 4 And it happened when the word had gone out from him, that the length of the world was standing as something small, and it was established in accordance with the abundance of the intelligence of him who let it go forth. 5 And as you first saw the black waters on the top of the cloud which first came down upon the earth; this is the transgression which Adam, the first man, committed. 6 For when he transgressed, untimely death came into being, mourning was mentioned, affliction was prepared, illness was created, labor accomplished, pride began to come into existence, the realm of death began to ask to be renewed with blood, the conception of children came about, the passion of the parents was produced, the loftiness of men was humiliated, and goodness vanished. 7 What could, therefore, have been blacker and darker than these things? 8 This is the beginning of the black waters which you have seen. 9 And from these black waters again black were born, and very dark darkness originated. **10 For he who was a danger to himself was also a danger to the angels. 11 For they possessed freedom in that time in which they were created. 12 And some of them came down and mingled themselves with women. 13 At that time they who acted like this were tormented in chains.** 14 But the rest of the multitude of angels, who have no number, restrained themselves. 15 And those living on earth perished together through the waters of the flood. 16 Those are the first black waters.

What one encounters in these Jewish apocalyptic texts, along with some others that could be cited, is a clear picture that Satan and his host of angelic followers will be bound in anticipation of final judgment that will result in eternal banishment and torments. Different Jewish writers had differing ideas about how this would work, some with the binding as a transition from this evil age to the age to come, while others see this coming out of the Genesis six wrath of God connected to Noah’s generation. Differing ideas on the significance of the binding surface ranging from it signifying protection of Covenant Israel from evil to complete limitation on activity by Satan and his angels. What this very diverse

¹⁰James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (New York; London: Yale University Press, 1983), 641.

background reflects is the wide range of viewpoint about how God limits the activities of Satan both in human history and how He will ultimately remove Satan completely. Those, among John's first century readership with some Jewish background and awareness of this literature, would have some frames of reference to understand what John was seeking to communicate. It should be noted that this literature is overwhelmingly Diaspora Jewish writing and not traditionalist Jewish writings connected to Jerusalem and Judea. Also most of this literature ranges from the first century BCE to the end of the first century AD, with the latter writings seeking to make sense out of the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in 70 AD. John is writing in a Diaspora Jewish atmosphere near Ephesus at the end of the first century.

The language of binding evil angels in anticipation of final judgment shows up in Jude. 6 and 2 Peter 2:4.

Jude 6. ἀγγέλους τε τοὺς μὴ τηρήσαντας τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἀρχὴν ἀλλ' ἀπολιπόντας τὸ ἴδιον οἰκητήριον εἰς κρίσιν μεγάλης ἡμέρας δεσμοῖς αἰδίοις ὑπὸ ζόφον τετήρηκεν, *and angels who did not keep their own position but left their own habitation, for the great day of judgment in eternal chains they are being kept in deepest darkness.*

2 Peter 2:4. Εἰ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἀγγέλων ἀμαρτησάντων οὐκ ἐφείσατο ἀλλὰ σειραῖς ζόφου ταρταρώσας παρέδωκεν εἰς κρίσιν τηρουμένων, *for since God did not spare angels sinning but in chains of deepest darkness having cast them while being kept He handed them over for judgment.*

The picture here is clear that those angels who sinned before the creation of the world God bound them in chains in anticipation of the final day of judgment for banishment into eternal torments. And yet for both Peter and Jude such a 'binding in chains' functioned only to limit their evil activity against people rather than prevent them from tempting individuals to evil. Interesting this binding of evil angels is the first in Peter's sequential listing that goes next to Noah's generation then to Sodom and Gomorrah with Lot, the in v. 9 to his Christian readers. Note that we are dealing with a single Greek sentence starting in v. 9 and ending in v. 11.

The time references -- χίλια ἔτη, *thousand years* (vv. 2, 3, 4, 6, 7); μικρὸν χρόνον, *short time* (v. 3) -- have been understood very differently if they surfaced in the Jewish apocalyptic writings. In **4 Ezra 7:28-29**¹¹ (ca.

¹¹**4 Ezra 7:26-44.** "For indeed the time will come, when the signs that I have foretold to you will come to pass, that the city that now is not seen shall appear, and the land that now is hidden shall be disclosed. Everyone who has been delivered from the evils that I have foretold shall see my wonders. *For my son the Messiah shall be revealed with those who are with him, and those who remain shall rejoice four hundred years. After those years my son the Messiah shall die, and all who draw human breath. Then the world shall be turned back to primeval silence for seven days, as it was at the first beginnings, so that no one shall be left. After*

90 AD) sees a 400 year period followed by 7 days of primeval silence that is followed by general judgment of all. **Second Enoch 32:2-33:1** (ca. late 1st century) builds a concept of 'seven weeks' from the seven days of creation in Gen. 1-2. The idea then is a seven thousand total period of human history with an eighth week of 'righteousness' being equivalent to eternity after the end of human history.¹² But this final 'week' is a 'Messiah-less' time. A somewhat similar but yet very different picture in **1 Enoch 91-104** (esp. 91:12-17¹³)

seven days the world that is not yet awake shall be roused, and that which is corruptible shall perish. The earth shall give up those who are asleep in it, and the dust those who rest there in silence; and the chambers shall give up the souls that have been committed to them. The Most High shall be revealed on the seat of judgment, and compassion shall pass away, and patience shall be withdrawn. Only judgment shall remain, truth shall stand, and faithfulness shall grow strong. Recompense shall follow, and the reward shall be manifested; righteous deeds shall awake, and unrighteous deeds shall not sleep. The pit of torment shall appear, and opposite it shall be the place of rest; and the furnace of hell shall be disclosed, and opposite it the paradise of delight. Then the Most High will say to the nations that have been raised from the dead, 'Look now, and understand whom you have denied, whom you have not served, whose commandments you have despised. Look on this side and on that; here are delight and rest, and there are fire and torments.' Thus he will speak to them on the day of judgment—a day that has no sun or moon or stars, or cloud or thunder or lightning, or wind or water or air, or darkness or evening or morning, or summer or spring or heat or winter or frost or cold, or hail or rain or dew, or noon or night, or dawn or shining or brightness or light, but only the splendor of the glory of the Most High, by which all shall see what has been destined. It will last as though for a week of years. This is my judgment and its prescribed order; and to you alone I have shown these things."

¹²"In 2 Enoch 32:2–33:1, the seven days of creation become the speculative basis for anticipating seven thousand years of history concluded by an eighth period of one thousand years, which will in fact last forever (based on a speculative combination of Gen 2:2, which mentions the seven days of creation, with Ps 90:4, where a day is said to equal a thousand years). Though the notion of a millennium is found here, no distinction is made between a temporary and an eternal age, nothing is said about a Messiah, and the passage is probably a very late (medieval) interpolation into the text (this passage is found in MS A, the longer text of 2 Enoch, which perhaps originated in the late Middle Ages [Milik, Enoch, 107–18], but is missing from MS B, the shorter, probably earlier and more reliable MS). Jub. 1:27–29 seems to refer not to a temporary kingdom but to the eternal rule of God on earth with no mention of a Messiah. Jub. 23:27 says that the righteous will live to be a thousand years old, while 23:31 ("And their bones will rest in the earth, and their spirits will increase in joy") apparently refers, though vaguely, to a kind of postmortem existence (see Cavallin, *Life after Death*, 60–72)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1105.]

¹³"And after this there will be another week, the eighth, that of righteousness, and a sword will be given to it that the righteous judgment may be executed on those who do wrong, and the sinners will be handed over into the hands of the righteous. And at its

has ten weeks with a non-messianic eighth week and eternity arriving in the tenth week. In 2 Apocalypse of Baruch three visions are set forth in which a Messiah is mentioned: 27:1-30:5; 36:1-40:4; and 53:1-76:5. The messianic era, which has no time limits, will come after twelve waves of evil plague the earth. The messianic era will mean unparalleled abundance on earth and at its end the Messiah will appear to set up final judgment. Yet, the notion of a temporary messianic kingdom in Jewish writings emerges only after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD as an outgrowth of this disaster to Judaism.¹⁴

The huge diversity and often contradictory views set forth in the Jewish writings have in common a period of evil that is transformed into one of righteousness at the end of time. This is accomplished by God, with or without the help of a Messiah, who is never perceived as divine, and only empowered by God. The length of the period of evil differs significantly depending upon with the 7 days of creation or the 12 tribes of Israel is the symbolic system of counting. Each 'day' or 'tribe' can vary in length from a thousand years down to forty

end they will acquire houses because of their righteousness, and a house will be built for the great king in glory for ever. And after this in the ninth week the righteous judgment will be revealed to the whole world, and all the deeds of the impious will vanish from the whole earth; and the world will be written down for destruction, and all men will look to the path of uprightness. And after this in the tenth week, in the seventh part, there will be the eternal judgment which will be executed on the watchers, and the great eternal heaven which will spring from the midst of the angels. And the first heaven will vanish and pass away, and a new heaven will appear, and all the powers of heaven will shine for ever (with) sevenfold (light). And after this there will be many weeks without number for ever in goodness and in righteousness, and from then on sin will never again be mentioned." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1105–1106.]

¹⁴"The notion of a temporary messianic kingdom became a subject for speculation within Judaism after A.D. 70. 2 Esdras 7:26-29 anticipates an intermediate messianic kingdom lasting four hundred years (after which the Messiah dies), while an indefinite period is mentioned in 2 Apoc. Bar. 40:3 (cf. 2 Esd. 12:34; 1 Cor. 15:24-28). Various rabbinic sages reportedly proposed that the messianic kingdom would last from forty to seven thousand years. What is the function of such a temporary messianic kingdom? It reconciles the expectation of a messianic kingdom with the notion of the final realization of the eternal reign of God. Jewish messianic expectation was based on the hope of the restoration of the house of David (cf. Pss. Sol. 17). Yet Jewish eschatological expectation tended to focus not on the restoration of a dynasty, but on a single messianic king sent by God (hence a dispensable theocratic symbol) to restore the fortunes of Israel. A messianic interregnum, therefore, functions as an anticipation of the perfect and eternal theocratic state that will exist when primordial conditions are reinstated forever. Since the Messiah was not a supernatural being in Jewish thought, he must eventually die (as in 2 Esd. 7:29)." [James Luther Mays, ed., *Harper's Bible Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 1317.]

days.¹⁵ The messianic era may be equivalent to eternity or distinct and preparatory for it, depending on the view of the Jewish writer.

Thus John's depiction in 20:1-6 comes against a backdrop of symbolical understanding of every set of numbers that are employed by the individual writer. Both the χίλια ἔτη, *thousand years* (vv. 2, 3, 4, 6, 7) and the μικρὸν χρόνον, *short time* (v. 3) have symbolical meaning and should not be taken literally.¹⁶ Never loose sight of this being apocalyptic vision, not historical description.¹⁷ The task of the exegesis below is to

¹⁵"Later rabbinic literature attributes a variety of opinions to various sages (here the traditional dates of the sages mentioned have no necessary relationship to the dates of the traditions associated with their names, and often are much later): R. Akiba (died A.D. 135) reportedly proposed a messianic kingdom lasting forty years; R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus (ca. A.D. 90) proposed two thousand years (the most widely held opinion); R. Jehoshua (ca. A.D. 90) proposed seven thousand years; and R. Abbahu (ca. A.D. 300) also proposed seven thousand years." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1108.]

¹⁶"Assuming the validity of these distinctions in 20:1–6, John, for example, employs the words 'one thousand years,' 'resurrection,' and 'life' because he saw, at the visionary level, people who were resurrected and given life for one thousand years. Because the objects he sees and what he hears are seen and heard in a vision, they are not first to be understood literally but viewed as symbolically portrayed and communicated, which is the symbolic level of the vision. That this vision is shot through with symbols is apparent merely from the obvious symbolic nature of such words as 'chain,' 'abyss,' 'dragon,' 'serpent,' 'locked,' 'sealed,' and 'beast.' Therefore, the words 'resurrection' and 'life,' for example, do not by themselves give a clue about whether the visionary, symbolic portrayal has a one-to-one (literal) correspondence to its historical referent together with a figurative meaning or only an indirect figurative relation. Thorough exegesis must decide in each case." [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 973–974.]

¹⁷"It is important to remember the genre of Revelation in approaching 20:1–6, especially the programmatic nature of 1:1, which states the general symbolic nature of the communication from the mediating angel to John. Further, the repeated introductory 'I saw' (or similar expressions) throughout the book introduces symbolic visions (e.g., 4:1ff.; 12:1–3; 13:1–3; 14:1; 17:1–3; see on 1:1 and pp. 50–69 in the Introduction). Since "I saw" (εἶδον) introduces both 20:1–3 and 20:4–6, we can assume that there are at least three levels of communication in vv 1–6: (1) a visionary level, which consists of the actual visionary experience that John had in seeing resurrected people and the other objects of his vision, (2) a referential level, which consists of the particular historical identification of the resurrected people and the other objects seen in the vision, and (3) a symbolic level, which consists of what the symbols in the vision connote about their historical referents. Those who interpret the majority of the book literally formally acknowledge these distinctions in their general approach. But at significant points throughout, including 20:1–6, they typically neglect the visionary and symbolic levels of communication by collapsing

attempt to determine this meaning of the symbols. In that section attention will also be given to subsequent interpretations of these references by Christian commentators from the church fathers to the present.

Literary Aspects:

As usual the literary aspects ultimately play a greater influence on the understanding of a passage like this, than do the historical aspects.

Genre: Rev. 20:1-6 continues the apocalyptic vision of John begun in 4:1, as part two of the general vision containing all the contents of the document. Thus the symbolic meaning of the details of the vision needs to be identified in order to grasp the spiritual points being made by John.

Subforms seem to be identifiable in vv. 1-3 and 4-6, although the uniqueness of John's depiction raises questions about strict use of existing genre forms. More accurately some forms stand in the background that provided conceptualizations which John utilized in his own unique manner.

The conquest of Satan in vv. 1-3 was first alluded to in 12:9 in the defeat of Satan by Michael in 12:7-12. Thrown down to earth, Satan has but a short time -- ὀλίγον καιρὸν, v. 12 -- in which he can oppose God and then he is doomed for eternity. In 12:7-9 the same series of names of Satan -- ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὄλην -- is used as in 20:1-3. His attempt to attack God's people on earth is limited by God's protecting power (12:13-17). Upon enlisting the services of two beasts -- two human leaders who deceive all but God's people -- Satan is unable to control any but the evil people on earth since God's people do not fall for the deception (chapter 13).

Elsewhere in the NT such ideas are not found. Col. 1:12-13 speaks of a βασιλεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, **kingdom of Christ**, but only as a present reality and not a future one. Unquestionably in Paul's writings the Parousia of Christ moves directly in the judgment of the world without any interim between: e.g., 1 Cor. 1:7-8; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16. To understand John as injecting an interim kingdom of Christ between His return and final judgment is to set John in serious contradiction of the apostle Paul.

What does stand in the background of 20:1-3 is not a genre form but isolated imagery that John utilizes. In particular the use of apocalyptic chains to bind Satan is commonly employed: 1 Enoch 54:3-5; 2 Apoc. Bar. 56:13; Sib. Or. 2:289; Jude 6; 2 Pet. 2:4. This image has deep roots in the ancient Hittite succession myth of

them into the referential, historical level.³⁷ [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 973.]

the chaining of the Hekatonchaires, the 'hundred-handed ones' (Appollodorun 1.1.2) and the Titans in Tartarus (Hesiod Theog. 718; Hyginus Fabulae 150). Also the tradition of the chaining of Prometheus in the Odyssey 11.293 (cf. also Hesiod Theog. 522; Aeschulus Prom. 52-56). The image speaks of limitations or curbs on activity but not cessation of activity.

Interestingly the images of a key and chains are only found here in Revelation. The literal ἄλυσις, **chain**, stands in contrast to πέδη, **shackle**, which is for the feet, as Luke. 8:29 clearly illustrates. Thus ἄλυσις is the binding of the hands in the sense of a handcuff. The κλεῖς, **keys**, signal literally a device for locking a door and at the figurative level a symbol of control over someone or something, as the six NT uses illustrate. In Rev. 1:18, Jesus says to John, ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾄδου. **I have the keys of Death and of Hades**. And then in the only other use in Revelation in 20:1, the angel has τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ ἄλυσιν μεγάλην ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ, **the key of the Abyss and a large chain in his hand**. Here also the apocalyptic key is a symbol of control over the abyss.

The idea of the ἄβυσσος, **abyss**, as where Satan is 'chained' was first introduced in chapter 9:1-12 with the fifth trumpet. The evil 'locusts' were permitted to exit the pit and torment people for 'five months.' In v. 11, Satan is described as ἐπ' αὐτῶν βασιλέα τὸν ἄγγελον τῆς ἀβύσσου, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἑβραϊστὶ Ἀβαδδὼν, καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἑλληνικῇ ὄνομα ἔχει Ἀπολλύων, **as their king the angel of the abyss, which is called in Hebrew Abaddon and in Greek Apollyon**. In 11:7, the beast comes up from the abyss to make war on the two witnesses at the end of their three and a half month witness on earth. In 17:8, the beast at the end comes up out of the abyss in order to go into destruction, εἰς ἀπώλειαν. For John the abyss is the underworld, or the realm of the dead. According to Lk. 8:31 it is the habitation of demons.

In the Jewish background (Ἀβαδδὼν, for the Hebrew אַבְדֹּן, Abaddon) the ideas behind this word ἄβυσσος center on the meaning of **destroyer**, as John illustrates with the Greek defining term Ἀπολλύων.¹⁸ Related are

^{18c}The name is taken from the OT. In Job 26:6; 28:22; Prv. 15:11 and Ps. 88:12 רִבְצָה (the "place of destruction", from רָצַח) is used to describe the world of the dead (→ ἄδης);¹ LXX ἀπώλεια. The personification of רִבְצָה, found in Job 28:22, where רִבְצָה and תְּהַי are introduced as speakers, has given rise to the notion of an angel of hell who in Rev. 9:11 is identified with the prince of the underworld (Eth. En., 20, 2; Apc. Elias, Steindorff, 10, 7 ff.; 2 b. Sanh. 52a; b. Shab. 104a; b. Ar. 15b).³

The Greek rendering of the name as Ἀπολλύων is influenced 1. by the LXX ἀπώλεια and 2. by the thought of Apollyon in his quality as the God of plague and the destroying angel; already in Aesch. Ag., 1082 the name of the God is derived from ἀπόλλυμι."

[Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Page 975

concepts connected to the place of destruction. Both Ἀβαδδών and Ἀπολλύων are meant to define ἄβυσσος, which itself is defined in broader terms in the Greek language itself.¹⁹ The sense of the realm of the dead where demons and Satan can also be confined is the primary sense of the nine uses in the NT with seven of them in Revelation: 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7, 8; 20:1, 3. The image of being chained in the abyss is a picture of divine limitation imposed upon Satan.

Literary Setting: The setting of 20:1-6 is defined around the context of [final triumph](#)

1. The marriage of the Lamb (19:6-10)
2. The coming of Christ (19:11-16)
3. The battle of Christ and Antichrist (19:17-21)
4. **The binding of Satan and the resurrection(20:1-6)**
5. The final destruction of Satan and death (20:7-15)

Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 1:4.]

¹⁹“ἡ ἄβυσσος (originally adj. to a γῆ which is to be filled up but is never completely covered == ‘unfathomably deep’) is used in later Greek to describe the depths of original time (Preis. Zaub., III, 554; IV, 2835; Corp. Herm., III, 1, XVI, 5), the primitive ocean (Test. Sol., II, 8, B. C. MacCown, 15*), and the world of the dead (Diog. L. 4, 5, 27). In LXX it is mostly used for תְּהוֹמוֹת, which in the OT describes the original flood or floods of water, and is once used in the plural to denote the realm of the dead (Ps. 71:20). In later Judaism תְּהוֹמוֹת signified 1. the original flood;¹ 2 the depth of the earth, or interior of the earth, in which are corpses causing defilement;² and 3., under the influence of Persian and Hellenistic conceptions,³ the place in which runaway spirits are confined (Jub. 5:6 ff.; Eth. En., 10:4 f.), 11 ff.; 18:11 ff. etc.; Jd. 6; 2 Pt. 2:4).” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 1:9.]

^{20.1} And

550 I saw an angel
 descending down
 out of heaven
 having the key
 | of the abyss
 | and
 | a large chain
 in his hand.

^{20.2} And

551 he seized the dragon,
 the old serpent,
 who is the Devil
 and
 Satan,

and

552 he chained him
 for a thousand years

^{20.3} and

553 he threw him
 into the abyss
 and

554 he locked (it)
 and

6. The new creation (21:1-8)

The depiction of the battle of Harmagedon surrounds this pericope in 19:17-21 and 20:7-15. This ultimate triumph depicts first victory over the two beasts and their supporters in 19:17-21 at the second coming of Christ. The second depiction repeats aspects of the ‘battle’ but now with focus on the defeat of Satan himself. Both the two beasts and Satan are tossed into the lake of fire for eternal torments. The supporters are all killed and will be ‘resurrected’ to face God’s wrath in banishment to the same lake of fire for eternal punishment (cf. 20:11-15). Thus 20:1-3 summarizes human history from creation to the end in terms of God’s limiting control over Satan until the very end when he is ‘set up’ for destruction in this final battle. Thus 20:1-3 parallels the pattern of the seven seals (5:1-8:1), and trumpets (8:2-14:20) in a summarizing manner. The seven bowls of wrath (15:1-16:21), along with the focus on Babylon in 17:1-18:24), focus upon setting up this final battle described in 19:17-21 and 20:7-10. Those who have died in the Lord during this period of time share the bliss of heaven with Christ as they await the ushering in of the eternal order described beginning in 21:1-8. In the return of Christ and the final judgment, those believers living on earth at the end will join them in this eternal existence with God.

Literary Structure: The block diagram highlights the primary and secondary idea structure of vv. 1-6 so that a progression of idea expression is more apparent.

555 **he put a seal**
upon it,
so that he should not still deceive the nations
until the thousand years were completed.

after these things

556 **It is necessary to loose him**
for a short time.

20.4 And

557 **I saw thrones**
and

558 **they sat**
on them
and

559 **judgment was given to them,**
and

560 **(I saw) the lives**
of those having been beheaded
| because of their witness to Jesus
| and
| because of the Word of God
| and
who did not worship the beast
| nor
| his image
| and
----- did not receive the mark
on the forehead
and
on their hand.

and

561 **they lived**
and

562 **they reigned**
with Christ
for a thousand years.

563 20.5 **the rest of the dead did not live**
until the thousand years were completed.

564 **This is the first resurrection.**

565 20.6 **Blessed and holy (is) the one having a share**
in the first resurrection;
upon these

566 **the second death has no authority,**
but

567 **they will be priests**
of God
and
of Christ

and

568 **they will reign**
with Him
for a thousand years.

Analysis of Rhetorical Structure:

Again the discourse marker role of καὶ εἶδον, **And I saw**, clearly divides this unit into two subdivisions: 1)

#s 550 - 556, the binding of Satan; and 2) #s 557-568, the reign of the martyred believers with Christ. An ex-

amination of the underlying Greek version of the block diagram reflects John's return to a more pure form of Hebrew thinking, after chapter nineteen reflects stronger Greek influence on his thought patterns. Here in vv. 1-6 most everything core idea is presented in very short, concise expression without a lot of expansion elements added. This signals influence from his Jewish background and awareness of the Jewish apocalyptic concepts that he utilizes for terms and phrases in order to create his apocalyptic picture.

In the first subunit (#s 550-556) the depiction centers on two sets of actions by the angel: a) capturing Satan (#s. 550-555) and b) then later setting him loose (# 556).

In the second subunit (#s 557-568), the focus is a) (#s 557-563) on the reign of the martyrs with Christ, and b) (#s 564-568), the blessedness of the first resurrection. The second subunit characterizes the first one.

Exegesis of the Text:

The exegesis of this passage will follow these natural, internal divisions of the text.

The central aspect binding these two units of text together is the symbol of τὰ χίλια ἔτη, **the thousand years**. This picture is viewed first negatively in terms of the binding and subsequent loosing of Satan at the end. But the second unit pictures it positively as the experience of martyred believers experiencing the blessings of being with Christ. The negative is positioned below the earth in τῆς ἀβύσσου, **the abyss**, while the positive is above the earth in heaven where the θρόνους, **thrones**, are.

In 20:1-6, the promise of God in 6:11 made to the martyred saints is realized in response to their plea (6:10): καὶ ἔκραξαν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγοντες· ἕως πότε, ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; **And they cried out with a loud voice, "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?"** ²⁰Their waiting for God to vindicate

²⁰**Rev. 6:9-11.** 9 Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν πέμπτην σφραγίδα, εἶδον ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐσφαγμένων διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον. 10 καὶ ἔκραξαν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγοντες· ἕως πότε, ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; 11 καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἐκάστῳ στολή λευκὴ καὶ ἐρρήθη αὐτοῖς ἵνα ἀναπαύσονται ἕτι χρόνον μικρόν, ἕως πληρωθῶσιν καὶ οἱ σύνδουλοι αὐτῶν καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτῶν οἱ μέλλοντες ἀποκτείνεσθαι ὡς καὶ αὐτοί.

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given; 10 they cried out with a loud voice, "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?" 11 They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed

dicating Himself as a righteous and holy God takes place in heaven, however, in celebration of God's greatness, as is depicted in 7:9-17.²¹ The day of the great battle between God and evil both human and supernatural comes at the end and will thoroughly vindicate God as One who always keeps His promises for He is holy and righteous.²² Those who harm His people will be held fully accountable by God for their evil deeds.

as they themselves had been killed.

²¹**Rev. 7:9-17.** 9 Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ὄχλος πολὺς, ὃν ἀριθμῆσαι αὐτὸν οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο, ἐκ παντὸς ἔθνους καὶ φυλῶν καὶ λαῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν ἐστῶτες ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου περιβεβλημένους στολὰς λευκὰς καὶ φοίνικες ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτῶν, 10 καὶ κράζουσιν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγοντες· ἡ σωτηρία τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ.

11 Καὶ πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι εἰστήκεισαν κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ ἔπεσαν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου ἐπὶ τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν καὶ προσεκύνησαν τῷ θεῷ 12 λέγοντες· ἀμήν, ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ σοφία καὶ ἡ εὐχαριστία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δύναμις καὶ ἡ ἰσχὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων· ἀμήν.

13 Καὶ ἀπεκρίθη εἷς ἐκ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων λέγων μοι· οὗτοι οἱ περιβεβλημένοι τὰς στολὰς τὰς λευκὰς τίνες εἰσὶν καὶ πόθεν ἦλθον; 14 καὶ εἶρηκα αὐτῷ· κύριέ μου, σὺ οἶδας. καὶ εἶπέν μοι· οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ ἐρχόμενοι ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης καὶ ἔπλυναν τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐλεύκαναν αὐτὰς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ ἀρνίου. 15 διὰ τοῦτο εἰσὶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ λατρεύουσιν αὐτῷ ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς ἐν τῷ ναῷ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου σκηνώσει ἐπ' αὐτούς. 16 οὐ πεινάσουσιν ἔτι οὐδὲ διψήσουσιν ἔτι οὐδὲ μὴ πέση ἐπ' αὐτούς ὁ ἥλιος οὐδὲ πᾶν καῦμα, 17 ὅτι τὸ ἀρνίον τὸ ἀνά μέσον τοῦ θρόνου ποιμαίνει αὐτούς καὶ ὀδηγήσει αὐτούς ἐπὶ ζωῆς πηγᾶς ὑδάτων, καὶ ἐξαλείψει ὁ θεὸς πᾶν δάκρυον ἐκ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν.

9 After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

11 And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" 14 I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb 15 For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. 16 They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; 17 for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

²²In the depiction of the seventh trumpet (10:7), this end time action of God is labeled τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ, the mystery of God, and it will be fully accomplished in that action.

A. Binding and loosing Satan, vv. 1-3.

20,1 Καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον
καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ⁵⁵³
ἔχοντα τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβύσσου
καὶ ἄλυσιν μεγάλην ἐπὶ τὴν⁵⁵⁴
χεῖρα αὐτοῦ. 2 καὶ ἐκράτησεν⁵⁵⁵
τὸν δράκοντα, ὁ ὄφεις ὁ
ἀρχαῖος, ὃς ἐστὶν Διάβολος
καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, καὶ ἔδησεν
αὐτὸν χίλια ἔτη 3 καὶ ἔβαλεν
αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον καὶ
ἔκλεισεν καὶ ἐσφράγισεν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ, ἵνα μὴ
πλανήσῃ ἔτι τὰ ἔθνη ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη. μετὰ
ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτὸν μικρὸν χρόνον.

20.1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while.

The picture of the thousand years is developed from the beginning and the ending aspects with virtually no details of the in between segment. The angel plays the dominate role in binding Satan as verses 1-3a describe. But the loosing of Satan at the end is framed in the Greek to signal that God lets him loose.

The introductory vision expression, Καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, *And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven*, not only opens up a new visionary scene but sets up the depiction that follows in vv. 1-3. An angel descending to earth out of heaven has been described previously in 10:1, ἄλλον ἄγγελον ἰσχυρὸν καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, *another mighty angel coming down out of heaven*, and in 18:1, ἄλλον ἄγγελον καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, *another angel coming down out of heaven*. The first one in 10:1 had ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ βιβλαρίδιον ἠνεωγμένον, *in his hand a open scroll*. His mission was to announce the impending end of all things. The second one in 18:1 simply had ἐξουσίαν μεγάλην, *great authority*, and announced to the world, ἔπεσεν ἔπεσεν Βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη, *Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great*. All three of these angels focus attention on the very end with the downfall of Babylon as a symbol of the evil people in the world.

The actions of the angel are described very concisely and in rapid fire manner:

20.2 And
551 he seized the dragon,
the old serpent,
who is the Devil
and
Satan,

and
he chained him
for a thousand years
and
he threw him
into the abyss
and
he locked (it)
and
he put a seal
upon it,
so that he should not still deceive the nations
until the thousand years were completed

Notice this clearly in the above diagram in statements 551-555. The image centers on the angel quickly and thoroughly taking control over Satan with the stated intention ἵνα μὴ πλανήσῃ ἔτι τὰ ἔθνη ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη, *so that he would not indeed be able to deceive the nations until the thousand years were completed*. Although at first this seems to terminate completely Satan's activity, the background meanings of *the abyss*, τὴν ἄβυσσον, and τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβύσσου, *the key of the abyss*, represents limitation of activity rather than total elimination of activity. This we noticed in the above [Historical Setting](#) discussion of these terms. The consistent emphasis of the first four of each of the seals (6:1-8) and trumpets (8:2-13) make the same point of God exercising severe limitation over the activity of Satan on earth during the time from creation to eschatological end. This rapid fire succession of strong action verbs reflecting the angel's activity dramatically stress his taking control over Satan. By them John graphically summarizes the actions in the seals and trumpets. Although to John's targeted readers it may not have seemed that God had control over Satan who used Rome to make life hard for them, John is adamant that viewed apocalyptically God did indeed have Satan under His thumb.

On the back side of this symbol (v. 3b) comes a somewhat surprising declaration that God will let Satan loose for a short time at the end: μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτὸν μικρὸν χρόνον. The use of the impersonal verb δεῖ followed by an infinitive subject, λυθῆναι, is a consistent construction used repeatedly inside the NT -- under the influence of the LXX -- to highlight an action mandated or taken by God Himself. The aorist passive infinite form λυθῆναι, *to be loosed*, with the accusative of reference infinitive 'subject,' αὐτὸν, further highlights this action taken by God. But this 'liberation' from God's severe control won't last but a μικρὸν χρόνον, *short time*. That is, just enough time to gather all his supporters together for the great battle against God at the very end.²³ This battle is described here in

²³Notice the different image here in 20:3b to that in the fifth trumpet (9:1-6 where the key to the abyss was used to open its lid to let out the swarm of apocalyptic locusts who wreaked hav-

two parts in 19:17-21 and 20:7-10 -- on either side of our passage of 20:1-6. Thus 20:1-3 serves to set up vv. 7-10 with a focus on the final capturing and eternal banishment of Satan as he is defeated along with his human supporters first depicted in 19:17-21 as the two beast, the kings of the earth and the rest of evil humanity with the focus on the two beasts. In 20:7-10, the depiction of them centers on Satan as leader of all the nations gathered for battle. Here all unredeemed humanity is destroyed by a massive fire out of heaven.

Side note:²⁴ **where do the amillennialists go**

oc on the earth for a short period. Their 'king' was τὸν ἄγγελον τῆς ἀβύσσου, the angel over the abyss, who then is identified by Greek and Hebrew terms used of Satan. This different depiction highlights the last time Satan will be 'let loose' to harm the earth. This is referenced by John's comment in 9:12 of this locust plague constituting the first woe, Ἡ οὐαὶ ἡ μὴ, and two more yet to come with the third one alluding to the seven bowls of wrath happening at the very end.

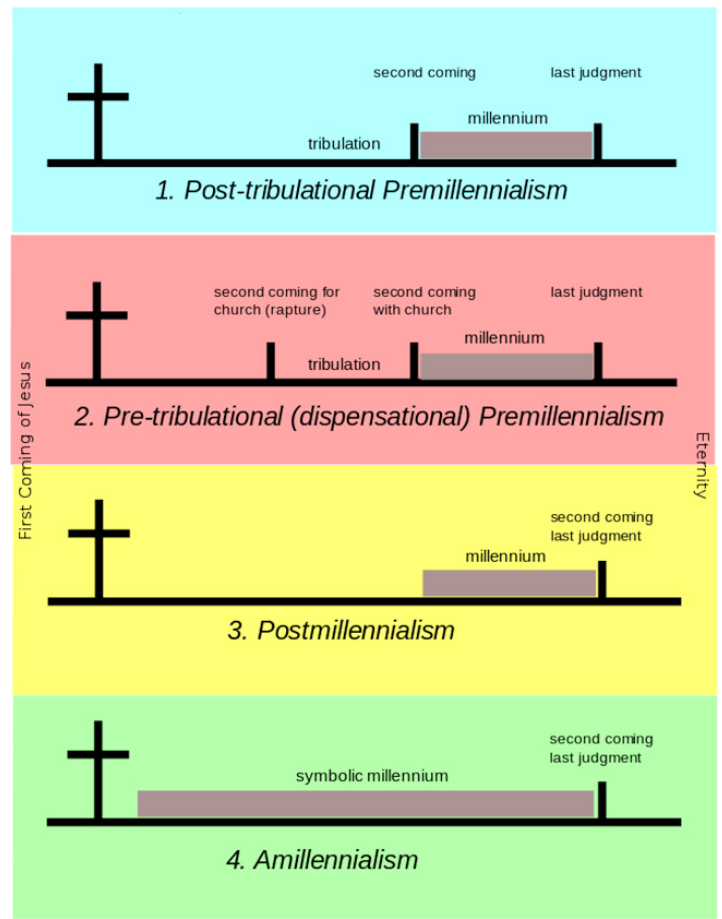
²⁴First a bit of personal history. I had never heard of dispensationalism until I reached college in August of 1960. On one earlier occasion in the small rural Baptist church of about 175 people during my 'junior high' days, I can vaguely remember a guest revival preacher taking about something while using a huge chart that stretched all the way across the front of the church sanctuary. I didn't have a clue as to what he was talking about. The huge chart was what caught my attention in that I had never seen one that big. I do remember our pastor coming back the following Sunday and systematically correcting all the mistakes the guest preacher had made in his message -- something a bit unusual but not all that much in 1950s Baptist church life in rural Texas.

My initial encounter with a dispensationalist came at East Texas Baptist College at Marshall, Texas, in my first semester of university studies. He as an unusually short kid from deep east Texas. What stood out was that he carried a huge family Bible (KJV translation of course) with him absolutely everywhere he went -- to class, to the cafeteria, to the bathroom, I do mean everywhere. He was constantly pestering everyone, students and professors alike, with quotes from his Bible. Many of them were dire warnings that the end is near and they needed to repent so they wouldn't get left behind when Jesus came. Even in the rather conservative atmosphere of Marshall Texas in 1960, he was the laughing stock of the campus.

The more I was introduced to dispensationalism the weirder it sounded to me. At Wayland Baptist University where I transferred in my second year of college, some of the ministerial students were dispensationals, some historical premillennialists, and the majority amillennialists. I don't remember a post-millennialist in the group. Sane conversations about all this were frequent but huge inconsistencies in most of the viewpoints remained glaringly obvious to me.

Upon arriving at Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth in the summer of 1964 to begin work on my master's degree, the discussions were less frequent and almost always began with a reference to the legendary NT professor there and later at Southern Seminary, Dr. Ray Summers. His hugely influential work *Worthy Is the Lamb* had moved SWBTS from a post millennialist view held by the founder B.H. Carroll to the amillennialist view then held by virtually all the faculty and staff at the seminary. What provoked growing discussions, however, was the rapidly rising popularity of the publication by Prof. [George E. Ladd](#), a Baptist professor at

Comparison of Christian millennial teachings



Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA, entitled [The Gospel of the Kingdom](#) that had been published in 1959. Ladd's work was helping the 1940s and 50s Presbyterian radio preacher, Charles Fuller, realize his dream of breaking the back of the influence of dispensationalism in conservative Protestant circles. Prof. Ladd regularly came to Southwestern to present lectures in chapel and in various NT classes, and was very popular among the students. He proposed what was labeled a Historical Premillennialist view as an alternative to dispensationalism. To be sure, as I personally heard him acknowledge numerous times in his visits to Southwestern (after I came on to the faculty in 1974, there were several personal conversations with him), that his view was not too different from the amillennialist view of Dr. Summers. His clear compassion for the Gospel, his noticeable Christian gentleman demeanor that respected alternative views, his Christian response to the vicious, ungodly villainizing of him by numerous dispensationalist advocates etc. gave him a convincing manner in his presentations. Plus, he obviously was a careful, exceedingly intelligent and well trained Bible scholar.

Over the years since becoming a professor in 1974 the convictions have grown that the entire millennial discussion virtually always misses the point of John in the book of Revelation. His message is one of certain hope in the holiness of God and His willingness and actions to stand up for His people. The chosen vehicle for presenting this hope is apocalyptic vision. To turn such a vehicle into a historical oriented debate utterly and totally misunderstands John. His focus is on God; this debate is on history that has no connection whatsoever to John's focus.

It has been interesting to watch a renewed interest in Revelation over the past two decades in English language circles beyond conservative branches of evangelicalism. The most recent and

astray in their approaches to 20:1-6?

A [mountain of publications](#) exist systematically exposing the failures of most all the millennialist approaches, and especially that of [dispensationalism](#). It should be also noted that the primary focus of the criticisms centers on the theological house of cards that dispensationalism has created out of a twisted abuse of scripture coupled with a subsequent form of seventeenth century German rationalism labeled Scottish common sense realism. The harshest and most vocal critics come out of conservative Presbyterian traditions with a strict [covenantal theology](#) view point.

What is listed below represent my personal observations on the failure of amillennialists in handling Revelation, coming out of interaction with professor friends representing most all of the millennialist positions over forty plus years of teaching ministry. These observations have been sharpened and greatly deepened in the process of writing this lengthy 1,200 plus page commentary on Revelation. The *major criticisms* I would offer are limited to the following:

1. Failure to understand apocalyptic vision presentation of religious truth. How does God think? And then express Himself to us mortals? That God thinks differently than humans is affirmed repeatedly in scripture. Perhaps one of the clearest illustrations is found in 2 Peter 3:8, "Ἐν δὲ τούτῳ μὴ λανθανέτω ὑμεῖς, ἀγαπητοί, ὅτι μία ἡμέρα παρὰ κυρίῳ ὡς χίλια ἔτη καὶ χίλια ἔτη ὡς ἡμέρα μία. **But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.** Quite vivid here is Peter's adaptation of Psalm 90:4 (LXX 80:4), ὅτι χίλια ἔτη ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς σου ὡς ἡ ἡμέρα ἢ ἕχθές, ἥτις διήλθεν, καὶ φυλακὴ ἐν νυκτί. **For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.**

For the eighth century and later OT prophets, one of the major ways that God communicated to humans was through visions given to the prophets for delivery to covenant Israel. Often coming to the prophet at night in his sleep in dream form, the vision centered on seeing God's communication more than hearing it. This focused the communication on graphic images put in the prophet's mind that represented meaning and ideas. As the vision form of communication evolved, the apocalyptic vision emerged out of the prophetic vision. At the heart of this type of vision is symbol communication through images that often paint non-human or non-earth bound kinds of experiences. The core issues being communicated center on God in conflict with evil of some kind.

most influential commentaries now being released never mention the so-called millennial issue, whereas prior to the 1960s this was the first and primary issue discussed in the commentary introduction in the vast majority of publications.

This we have repeatedly noticed in our study of Revelation. The challenge here is a difficult balancing act. On the one side, their weirdness reflects vagueness that outsiders cannot understand. But to insiders, i.e., God's people, enough clarity must be contained so that meaning can be derived from the images. Successful balancing of these two opposing dynamics is not easily achieved as a casual reading of most of the Jewish apocalyptic writings illustrate. But the apocalyptic vision does accomplish some important things. It dramatically underscores, especially to insider readers that God thinks dramatically differently than do humans. But also through these symbols one can grasp in part at least the thinking of this awesome, powerful God who is infinitely greater and wiser than any human.

Through the vehicle of symbolic communication through visual images one comes to understand that these represent timeless thoughts of God, and are in no way history bound thoughts. For example, sequential scenes presented as symbols are always logical sequences, rather than chronological sequences in historical time. Images often quickly and suddenly shift although communicating the same core thought of God. This is perfectly normal since each different image seeks to underscore one aspect of God's thought. It only causes readers problems if they try to take the images literally and/or historically.

What appears to me as a consistent failure is the tendency of amillennialists, especially the dispensationalists, to either fail to understand that Revelation is one big apocalyptic vision. Or, else only lip service is given to this reality and then historical issues are injected into the understanding of the text over and over. The above chart at the beginning of this discussion visually illustrates this fatal error. Revelation is in no possible way a history text book of human history from beginning to end! Instead, it is a graphic picture of God's thinking on how He deals with evil that contaminates His creation and harms His people. In a point, God slaps down evil repeatedly and will ultimately destroy it completely with the spoken words of His Son in the blink of an eye, Thus He sends evil into the eternal lake of fiery torments in order to set up an existence for His people freed completely from its harming influence.

2. Faulty methods of interpretation that make six verses in chapter twenty the stack pole around which the rest of the document is to be interpreted.

Such an inordinate, unjustified emphasis upon a literal thousand years falsely elevates the role of 20:1-6 to a level of importance that it does not possess in the text. The charting out of the rest of Revelation both backwards and forwards starts with 20:1-6. This is awful interpretive methodology and hermeneutics! This

pericope functions contextually as one piece of the puzzle of the great final battle between God and evil. God's destruction of evil in this battle is presented first in 19:17-21 with one focus and then again in 20:7-10 with another focus. 20:1-6 helps set up this second depiction with a summarizing of the seals and trumpets in their 4 + 3 structure stressing God's wrath on evil (vv. 1-3) and His protection of His people (vv. 4-6).

3. Failure to hear God speaking through Revelation by seeking to tell God and everyone else how the end is going to happen. One of the most objectionable aspects to me of dispensationalism especially is its arrogant and elitist manner of approaching the text. I suspect a lot of this 'anger' posture is born of its roots first with Darby in England and then in North America with the likes of Scofield and others. They began on the fringe of Christianity and have remained there pretty consistently. A fighting spirit was bred into these leaders. They were viciously anti-denominational, anti-clerical, and anti-creedal. This early atmosphere of the Plymouth Brethren movement permanently stamped the leaders with this posture. In the US side, added to this for most of the leaders was a radical authoritarian pastoral leadership style freely using unholy means of coercion to keep members in line with their views. The authority of the pastor over the congregation is absolute with no disagreement tolerated. This pushes such churches increasingly into cult status and completely alien to teachings about pastoral leadership set forth in the NT.

I cannot count the number of times I have heard pastors out of this mindset claim that God only speaks to them and that their word is absolute law in their church.²⁵ I will never forget the amazement I experienced in my last pastorate in Fort Worth (1968-1974) when someone gave me a copy of the church constitution of a neighboring Baptist church. It gave the pastor sole authority to let people in as voting members, and likewise sole authority to excommunicate them from membership. The number one specified reason in the constitution to get kicked out of the church was to disagree with anything the pastor said. To be sure, this is on the extreme side, and not all amillennialists are like this. But I have personally encountered it as a dominating pattern over half a century of Gospel ministry. Fear of the loss of personal control and a craving for power over others go together with this approach to Christianity.

B. Reigning with Christ, vv. 4-6.

4 Καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς καὶ κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς, καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν

²⁵Roman Catholic priest friends of mine have teasingly commented to me in conversations about this over the years that not even the pope claims this kind of authority!

πεπελεκισμένων διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ οἵτινες οὐ προσεκύνησαν τὸ θηρίον οὐδὲ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἔλαβον τὸ χάραγμα ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτῶν. καὶ ἔζησαν καὶ ἔβασίλευσαν μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ χίλια ἔτη. 5 οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔζησαν ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη.

Αὕτη ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη. 6 μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος ὁ ἔχων μέρος ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ πρώτῃ· ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν, ἀλλ' ἔσονται ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν μετ' αὐτοῦ [τὰ] χίλια ἔτη.

4 Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.)

This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who 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 positive side of this thousand year image reaffirms and underscores a continuing message of Revelation from the beginning: God takes care of His people. Pictured here are those who have died as believers in Christ. They are pictured by John as now in heaven enjoying victory over the evil they faced on earth. These individuals are first mentioned in 6:9, τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐσφαγμένων διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον, *the lives of those having been slaughtered because of the Word of God and because of the witness which they had given.* Here the depiction is repeated first from 6:9 as τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν πεπελεκισμένων διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, *the lives of those having been beheaded because of their witness to Jesus and because of the Word of God.* Then they are identified in terms of the mark of the beast in 13:11-18. The two indicators of true faith in Christ from 13:11-18 are presented here again in terms of refusing to worship the image of the beast or accepting the mark of the beast on either their hand or forehead. Those who do these things will be banished to the torments of Hell forever according to 14:9-11. The faithful who die in the Lord are promised rest and divine blessing in 14:12-13.

Now we see these being described again here in vv. 4-6. The same promises are repeated in different terms of divine blessing. First, εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς καὶ κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς, *I saw thrones and they sat upon them and judgment was given to them.* Although the subject of the verb ἐκάθισαν is not stated

specifically, the context demands it be understood as these martyred saints with Christ in heaven. The image of them sitting on thrones is defined subsequently as ἐβασίλευσαν μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, *they reigned with Christ*, in v. 4c. That is, they shared in the reigning authority of Christ over Satan in victory rather than defeat. Note the richness of John's images of these folks. In 6:9, they are pictured as ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου, *under the altar*. They are close to God on His throne, and are protected from harm inside God's heavenly altar. Here in 20:4, they are seated upon thrones sharing in the power of Christ over Satan. God's judgment of ultimate condemnation of Satan has been given to them to enjoy as they anticipate the coming event in vv. 7-10.

Second, John declares ἐζησαν, *they came to life*, (v. 4), and this he labels as Αὕτη ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη, *this is the first resurrection* (v. 5). Satan in killing them on earth thought he had defeated them. But God in raising them to life brought them into heaven with Him in glorious victory. Now they enjoy divine blessings as they anticipate the final gigantic battle of God with Satan that will spell his doom in the eternal lake of fire.

What a glorious promise of God through John. Being faithful to Christ in this life brings us with certainty into His glorious presence in heaven. If death comes for us before His return we continue enjoy that presence with Christ in heaven as we await the massive destruction of evil at the end. For those whose early death is due to martyrdom, God turns their being killed into a marvelous victory over evil.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

I don't know about you, but when I read this text with proper understanding as laid out in the exegesis above, my heart erupts into joy and excitement about meeting my Lord in eternity. The realization that my life will be scrutinized by God in judgment is overcome by the abundant joy of seeing my Lord face to face and experiencing His warm embrace of His people, and especially those killed on earth because of their commitment to Him. I strongly suspect this was the response of those many believers in the churches of Asia at the end of the first century. They knew first hand the extreme brutality of Rome and just how evil people come become. But the certainty of being with Christ in triumph over all this evil that John gives here had to have brought them enormous joy and hope.

My plea to you the reader is to resist getting bogged down in all the conflicting and twisted interpretations that exist in the endless number of books on Rev. 20:1-6. Instead, just bask in the glorious joy and hope given to you by God through John's penning of this text. Read it repeatedly and reflectively to allow God's voice to come through loud and clear!