

The Return of Jesus Christ

Revelation 19:11-21

I. Introduction

- a. A century ago most people believed that history was progressing inevitably toward a man-made utopia.
- b. The Industrial Revolution, the march of scientific discovery, and the increasing pace of social reform seemed to promise nothing but brighter days ahead.
- c. Today, however, two world wars; countless regional, civil, and national wars; countless acts of terrorism and senseless violence; and the nearly complete collapse of moral values make such rosy optimism seem quaintly naive.
- d. The Bible teaches that things will be wonderfully better, but only after they become unimaginably worse.
- e. There is only one solution for the world's problems: the return of its true King, the Lord Jesus Christ, to establish absolute monarchy and authority in His earthly kingdom.
 - i. Only under His rule will there be peace instead of war, justice instead of inequity, and righteousness instead of wickedness.
 - ii. But that glorious event will not occur without fierce opposition from Satan, his demon hordes, and the world of wicked sinners.
 - iii. The Tribulation, the seven-year period immediately before Christ's return, will see the

greatest of all human world empires, headed by the evil genius known as Antichrist.

- iv. The earth will be infested with demons, those who have been here all along, those cast from heaven with Satan (12:9), and those released from imprisonment during the Tribulation (9:1–10, 14–20).
 - v. The Tribulation will also be a time of escalating human wickedness, despite the unprecedented outpouring of God’s wrath in the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments.
 - vi. Stubbornly hardening their hearts against the truth of the gospel, people even then will obstinately refuse to repent (9:20–21; 16:9, 11).
 - vii. Even the destruction of Antichrist’s magnificent capital city of Babylon (chaps. 17–18) will provoke loud laments, but no repentance.
 - viii. But while chaos and turmoil reigns on earth during the Tribulation, the raptured church will be presented in heaven.
 - ix. The church, the bride of the Lamb, will be eagerly awaiting the marriage supper of the Lamb in the millennial earth (19:7).
- f. But before that wonderful celebration can take place, the warrior King must win the final battle.
- i. The forces of heaven and hell will meet in the climactic slaughter of human history, the Battle of Armageddon.

- ii. At that final holocaust, man's day will end, all of Christ's foes will be vanquished, and His kingdom will be established.
- g. God's people throughout redemptive history have eagerly anticipated the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to defeat His foes and set up His kingdom.
 - i. That will be the time when the destruction of Satan is completed (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 16:20), when the true King receives the ruling scepter (Gen. 49:10), when God will establish the throne of David's greater Son (2 Sam. 7:13; Isa. 9:7), when the Son will rule the earth with a rod of iron (Ps. 2:6–9), when the armies of Gog and Magog will be shattered (Ezek. 38–39), when the nations will be judged (Joel 3:1–2, 12–14) after their defeat in battle by the returning King (Zech. 14:3–4), when Jerusalem will be the center of Messiah's kingdom (Zech. 12:3–9), when the angels will gather the wicked for judgment (Matt. 13:41–42; 25:41), when the wicked will face God's wrath and indignation (Rom. 2:5–9), and when the Lord Jesus Christ will descend visibly (Rev. 1:7) from heaven in flaming fire, bringing retribution on the persecutors of His people (2 Thess. 1:6–9; cf. Rev. 6:9–11).
- h. The second coming of Jesus Christ is the culmination of redemptive history.
 - i. Believers of all ages have eagerly anticipated that glorious event (cf. Isa. 64:1–2).

- ii. In fact, the apostle Paul defined Christians as those “who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).
 - iii. Many believers, however, are enamored by the things of the world and do not love Christ’s appearing as they should.
 - iv. Certainly the Tribulation believers will have no such problem. They will be persecuted, hunted outcasts (cf. 13:17), living constantly under the sentence of death (13:15) in an unspeakably vile, demon-infested world.
 - v. Christ’s coming will be what they long for and pray for.
- i. The Second Coming must be distinguished from the Rapture of the church prior to the seven-year Tribulation; the differing biblical descriptions of the two events indicate that they are distinct from each other.
- i. At the Rapture, Christ comes for His saints (John 14:3; 1 Thess. 4:16–17); at the Second Coming, He comes with them (see the discussion of v. 14 below).
 - ii. Furthermore, at the Rapture, Christ meets His saints in the air (1 Thess. 4:17) to take them to heaven (John 14:2–3); at the Second Coming, He descends with them from heaven to the earth (Zech. 14:4).
- j. This monumental, climactic passage may be divided into four sections: the return of the Conqueror, the

regiments of the Conqueror, the rule of the Conqueror, and the victory of the Conqueror.

II. The Return of the Conqueror.

a. 19:11–13

b. As it did in 4:1, **heaven opened** before John's wondering eyes.

i. But unlike 4:1, heaven opens this time not to let John in, but to let Jesus out.

ii. The time has come at last for the full, glorious revelation of the sovereign Lord.

iii. This is the time to which all of Revelation (as well as all of redemptive history) has been pointing, the time of which Jesus Himself spoke in Matthew 24:27–31:

c. As the dramatic scene unfolds, John stands transfixed, his attention riveted on the majestic, regal, mighty Rider.

d. Jesus is about to receive the kingdom that the Father promised Him.

i. No longer is Jesus portrayed as He was in His humiliation, "humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9).

ii. Instead, He rides the traditional **white horse** ridden by victorious Roman generals in their triumphal processions through the streets of Rome.

iii. **White** also symbolizes the spotless, unblemished, absolutely holy character of the Rider.

- iv. The **horse**, like the crowns (v. 12), the sharp sword (v. 15), the rod of iron (v. 15), and the wine press (v. 15) is symbolic; Christ's coming is reality.
 - v. The symbolic language represents various aspects of that reality—Christ's victory over His enemies, His sovereign rule, and His judgment of sinners.
- e. Continuing his description of the astonishing scene before him, John notes that **He who sat on the white horse is called Faithful and True.**
- i. There is no more appropriate name for the Lord Jesus Christ, who earlier in Revelation was called “the faithful and true Witness” (3:14).
 - ii. He is **faithful** to His promises (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20) and what He speaks is always true (John 8:45–46; Titus 1:2).
 - iii. Though some would like to pick and choose which teachings of Jesus they wish to accept, He is just as faithful to His promises of wrath and judgment as He is to His promises of grace and salvation.
 - iv. The description of Jesus as **Faithful and True** is in marked contrast with the unfaithfulness and lies of Satan (12:9), Antichrist's evil empire (18:23), and wicked people (2 Tim. 3:13).
 - v. The very fact that He is coming again as He promised confirms that Jesus is **Faithful and True.**

- f. Because Jesus is faithful to His word and righteous character, it follows that **in righteousness He judges**.
- i. His holy nature demands a holy, righteous reaction to sin.
 - ii. And because He always does what He says, He must judge the wicked (Matt. 16:27; 25:31–46; John 5:22, 27; cf. Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 2 Thess. 1:7–9; 2 Tim. 4:1).
 - iii. Jesus came the first time as Savior; He will return as Judge.
 - iv. When He came the first time, wicked people, including Pilate, Herod, Annas, and Caiaphas judged Him; when He returns, He will judge all wicked people (Acts 17:31).
 - v. And He will not only be their judge, but also their executioner (vv. 15, 21).
 - vi. Angels may gather the wicked for judgment (Matt. 13:41), but the Lord Jesus will pass sentence on them.
- g. No longer the Suffering Servant of His incarnation, the Lord Jesus Christ is seen in this vision as the warrior King who **wages war** against His foes.
- i. He is the executioner of all ungodly, unbelieving sinners.
 - ii. The only other reference in Scripture to Jesus waging war is in Rev. 2:16, when He warned the worldly church at Pergamum, “Repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.”

- iii. This is not out of keeping with God's character, however.
- iv. After their deliverance from the Egyptian forces at the Red Sea, Israel sang, "The Lord is a warrior" (Ex. 15:3; cf. Pss. 24:8; 45:3–5).
- h. Jesus' adversaries this time will be the hardened sinners who have defied His judgments and scorned the gospel message during the Tribulation.
- i. Despite all the devastating judgments they will have experienced, and the powerful gospel preaching they will have heard, they will stubbornly refuse to repent (9:20–21; 16:9, 11).
- j. Since neither judgment nor preaching moves them to repent, Jesus will return to destroy them and send them to hell.
- k. Unlike other conquerors the world has seen, covetousness, ambition, pride, or power will not motivate this Conqueror.
 - i. He will come in utter righteousness, in perfect holiness, and in strict accord with every holy interest.
 - ii. Heaven cannot be at peace with sin, for God's "eyes are too pure to approve evil, and [He] can not look on wickedness with favor" (Hab. 1:13).
 - iii. There is a limit to God's patience. Justice cannot always tolerate injustice; truth cannot forever tolerate lies; rebellion cannot be permitted to go on forever.

- iv. Persistent, incurable, hardened sinners will face destruction; mercy abused and grace rejected will ultimately bring judgment.
- l. Describing the personal appearance of the majestic, awe-inspiring Rider, John writes that **His eyes are a flame of fire**.
- m. Nothing escapes the notice of His penetrating, piercing vision.
 - i. He can see into the deepest recesses of the human heart, because “all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13).
 - ii. Those **eyes** had reflected tenderness and joy as He gathered little children to Himself.
 - iii. They had reflected compassion when He observed distressed and dispirited people, wandering aimlessly through life like sheep without a shepherd.
 - iv. And they had reflected forgiveness when He restored Peter, who had been crushed by guilt over his shocking denial of his Master.
 - v. The eyes that wept over the fate of unrepentant Jerusalem and over the sorrow, suffering, and death in this sin-cursed world, John sees flashing with the fire of judgment.
- n. **On His head** John noted that Christ wore **many diadems**, a transliteration of the Greek word *diadēma*, which refers to a ruler’s crown (cf. 12:3; 13:1).
 - i. In this case, they are worn by Jesus to signify His royal rank and regal authority.

- ii. **Many** indicates His collecting of all the rulers' crowns, signifying that He alone is the sovereign ruler of the earth.
- iii. Collecting the crown of a vanquished king was customary in the ancient world.
- iv. Christ alone will be sovereign, since He alone is "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (v. 16), and "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever" (11:15).
- v. The many crowns Christ will wear are indeed a fair exchange for a crown of thorns (cf. Phil. 2:8–11).
- o. Further, John notes that Jesus had **a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself**.
 - i. All speculation as to the meaning of that **name** is obviously pointless, since the text plainly states that **no one knows it except Jesus Himself**.
 - ii. Even the inspired apostle John could not comprehend it.
- p. Describing the final element of Christ's appearance, John writes that **He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood**.
 - i. The **blood** is not representative of that which He shed on the cross; this is a picture of judgment, not redemption.
 - ii. The **blood** is the blood of His slaughtered enemies.
 - iii. The question arises as to why His garments are blood spattered before the battle has begun.
 - iv. But this is not His first battle; it is His last battle.

- v. He has fought for His people throughout redemptive history, and His war clothes bear the stains of many previous slaughters.
- vi. At that day, they will be stained as never before when He “treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty” (v. 15).
- q. That the Rider’s **name is called The Word of God** identifies Him unmistakably as the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1).
 - i. The second Person of the Trinity, the incarnate Son of God is called **The Word of God** because He is the revelation of God.
 - ii. He is the full expression of the mind, will, and purpose of God, “the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature” (Heb. 1:3).

III. **The Regiments of the Conqueror.**

- a. Who returns with Him?
- b. 19:14
- c. The Lord Jesus Christ will not return alone, but will be accompanied by **the armies which are in heaven** (cf. 17:14).
- d. Four divisions make up these glorified troops.
 - i. Earlier in chapter 19 the bride of the Lamb (the church) was pictured wearing **fine linen, white and clean** (vv. 7–8).
 - 1. Those glorified believers will accompany Christ.
 - ii. So will the Tribulation believers, who are also pictured in heaven wearing white robes (7:9).

- iii. The third group is the Old Testament saints, who are resurrected at the end of the Tribulation (Dan. 12:1–2).
 - iv. Finally, the holy angels will also accompany Christ (Matt. 25:31).
 - e. The **white horses** ridden by the heavenly cavalry are not literal horses, anymore than those ridden by hell's cavalry in 9:7 and 16.
 - f. Unlike the Lord Jesus Christ, the heavenly army is unarmed; He alone will destroy His enemies. The saints will come not to fight with Jesus, but to reign with Him (20:4–6; 1 Cor. 6:2).
- IV. **The Rule of the Conqueror.**
- a. 19:15–16
 - b. The rule of the King is described in graphic, powerful imagery.
 - c. John notes first that **from His mouth comes a sharp sword.**
 - i. The apostle had seen that **sword** in an earlier vision (1:16), where it was used to defend the church against the onslaught of Satan's forces.
 - ii. Here it is the **sword** of judgment, the flaming **sword** dealing death to the King's foes.
 - iii. That the **sword comes** out of **His mouth** symbolizes the deadly power of Christ's words.
 - iv. Once He spoke words of comfort, but now He speaks words of death.
 - v. The armies that accompany Christ when He returns carry no weapons. He alone wields the **sword** with which He will slay the wicked.

- d. And Christ will wield that **sword** with deadly effect as **He strikes down the nations.**
- i. His elect, both from the Gentile nations and from Israel, will be preserved; the wicked He will slaughter instantly.
 - ii. The dead will include all those gathered for battle at Armageddon; none will escape.
 - iii. The rest of the world's unredeemed people will be judged and executed at the sheep and goat judgment (Matt. 25:31–46) that follows Christ's return.
 - iv. This is the final stroke of death in the Day of the Lord (cf. Isa. 66:15–16; Ezek. 39:1–4, 17–20; Joel 3:12–21; Matt. 25:31–46; 2 Thess. 1:6–9; 2:8).
- e. The stern, swift judgment that marks the onset of Christ's kingdom will be the pattern of His rule throughout the Millennium.
- i. During His thousand-year reign, **He will rule** the nations **with a rod of iron** (cf. 12:5; Ps. 2:8–9);
 - ii. He will swiftly judge all sin and instantly put down any rebellion.
 - iii. All people will be required to conform to His law or face immediate judgment.
- f. Using the same imagery of ruling **with a rod of iron**, Jesus promised that believers would rule under Him in the kingdom: “He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces,

as I also have received authority from My Father” (Rev.2:26–27).

- g. Returning to the judgment at the outset of Christ’s rule, John writes that **He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.**
 - i. That vivid symbol of God’s wrath comes from the ancient practice of stomping on grapes as part of the wine-making process.
 - ii. The splattering of the grape juice pictures the pouring out of the blood of Christ’s enemies (cf. 14:18–20).
 - iii. The imagery of a **wine press** also portrays judgment in the Old Testament.
- h. In a final look at the returning King, John saw in his vision that Christ wore a banner around **His robe and on His thigh** (across His chest and hanging down on His upper leg as He rides), on which **He has a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS”** (cf. 17:14; Deut. 10:17; 1 Tim. 6:15).
- i. This is the third name given to the Lord Jesus Christ in this passage.
 - i. The incomprehensible name of verse 12 may express the mystery of His essential deity.
 - ii. Verse 13 calls Him the Word of God, expressing His incarnation as the Son of God.
 - iii. The name **“KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS”** expresses His sovereign triumph over all foes and His absolute rule in His soon to be established kingdom.

V. **The Victory of the Conqueror.**

- a. 19:17–21

- b. Once again **an angel** plays a key role in one of the end-time scenarios described in the Apocalypse.
- c. John saw this **angel standing in the sun**.
 - i. He stands in a conspicuous, prominent place to make this important announcement.
 - ii. Evidently the worldwide darkness associated with the fifth bowl (16:10) has been lifted, since the **sun** is again visible.
- d. As angels have frequently done in Revelation (7:2; 10:1–3; 14:15; 18:1–2), the angel **cried out with a loud voice**.
 - i. He addresses **all the birds which fly in midheaven** (cf. 8:13; 14:6), inviting them to feed on the results of the carnage that will shortly ensue.
 - ii. The angel thus declares Christ’s victory before the battle is ever fought.
 - iii. His invitation to the **birds** is reminiscent of Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:27–28: “For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather” (cf. Luke 17:37).
- e. The angel commands the **birds to come and assemble for the great supper of God**.
 - i. The brief but catastrophic Day of the Lord destruction will result in an unprecedented slaughter, with uncounted millions of dead bodies strewn throughout its entire two-hundred-mile length (14:20).

- f. At the great supper, the birds will **eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.**
- i. That all-inclusive statement reveals the worldwide extent of the slaughter.
 - ii. To have one's unburied body left as food for birds is the ultimate indignity, especially for proud **kings** and mighty military **commanders**.
 - iii. That same degrading fate awaits all the proud, God-hating rebels everywhere in the world, **both free men and slaves, and small and great** (cf. 11:18; 13:16).
- g. As the next stage in his incredible vision unfolded, John **saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.**
- i. The **beast** is Antichrist (11:7; 13:1–8), leader of the last and greatest empire in human history.
 - ii. The **kings of the earth** are the ten kings who rule the ten sectors into which Antichrist's worldwide empire is divided (17:12–14).
 - iii. **Their armies have assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse (v. 11) and against His army (v. 14; Zech. 14:5).**
 - iv. The formidable and seemingly invincible armed might of the beast, with all its firepower, awaits the arrival of the Rider.
- h. But before there is any battle, it is all over.

- i. In an instant, **the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image** (13:11–17).
 - i. These two demonically empowered political and religious leaders of the world are dealt a horrible blow; **these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire.**
 - ii. This is the first mention in Scripture of the **lake of fire**, the final hell, the ultimate destination of Satan, his angels, and the unredeemed (Matt. 25:41).
 - iii. Isaiah described it as the place where “their worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched” (Isa. 66:24), a description echoed by the Lord Jesus Christ in Mark 9:48.
 - iv. In Matthew 13:42 Jesus added that it will be a place where “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
 - v. Revelation 14:11 says of those who suffer there, “The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night.”
- j. Apparently, these two don’t die, but are transformed miraculously into eternal form to burn in hell.
 - i. They are the first of millions of men (20:15) and angels (Matt. 25:41) to arrive in the **lake of fire.**
- k. Hell has always existed, but this is its final form.
 - i. Unlike Hades, the **lake of fire** is not a temporary holding place (cf. Luke 16:23) but a permanent place of incarceration and punishment.

- ii. **Brimstone** is frequently associated with the fire of judgment (cf. 9:17; 14:10; 20:10; Luke 17:29).
 - iii. That the **beast** and the **false prophet** are still in the **lake of fire** a thousand years later when Satan is cast there (20:10) is a convincing refutation of the false doctrine of annihilationism.
 - iv. As the two most evil, vile, blasphemous people who have ever lived, it is only fitting that these two be the first to arrive in that awful place.
 - v. The New Testament is clear on the eternality of punishment (cf. 14:10–11; Matt. 13:40–42; 25:41; Mark 9:43–48; Luke 3:17; 12:47–48).
1. **And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.**
- i. Deprived of their commanders, Antichrist's leaderless forces will then be destroyed, as the **rest** of those gathered to fight against Christ **were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse.**
- m. As I said earlier 15, the rest of the unredeemed throughout the world will be judged at the sheep and goat judgment, which takes place at this time.
- i. Then, just as the angel foretold, **all the birds were filled with their flesh.**
- n. Describing the almost inconceivable carnage, John Phillips writes: Then suddenly it will all be over. In fact, there will be no war at all, in the sense that we think of war. There will be just a word spoken from Him who sits astride the great white horse. Once He spoke a word to a fig tree, and it withered away. Once

He spoke a word to howling winds and heaving waves, and the storm clouds vanished and the waves fell still. Once He spoke to a legion of demons bursting at the seams of a poor man's soul, and instantly they fled. Now He speaks a word, and the war is over. The blasphemous, loud-mouthed Beast is stricken where he stands. The false prophet, the miracle-working windbag from the pit is punctured and still. The pair of them are bundled up and hurled headlong into the everlasting flames. Another word, and the panic-stricken armies reel and stagger and fall down dead. Field marshals and generals, admirals and air commanders, soldiers and sailors, rank and file, one and all—they fall. And the vultures descend and cover the scene. (*Exploring Revelation*, 236)

- o. These sobering truths serve as a warning to unbelievers to repent (2 Pet. 3:9), and also to stimulate believers to godly living (2 Pet. 3:11).
- p. “The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Rom. 13:12–14).¹

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 12–22*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2000), 210–226

The Earthly Kingdom

Rev 20:1-10

I. Introduction

- a. Though not an exhaustive description of the earthly kingdom, this text caps off all the biblical revelation about the Millennium by revealing four essential truths about it: the removal of Satan, the reign of the saints, the return of Satan, and the revolt of society.

II. **The Removal of Satan.**

- a. 20:1–3
- b. The first matter for the King’s attention as He sets up His kingdom is the confinement of the chief rebel.
- c. The removal of “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4), “the prince of the power of the air ... the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2), will dramatically change the world.
- d. By this time, God will have destroyed all human rebels.
 - i. Those who survived the Tribulation judgments will have been executed at Armageddon (19:11–21) or the goat judgment (Matt. 25:41–46).
 - ii. The ringleaders of the worldwide rebellion, the beast (Antichrist) and the false prophet, will have been thrown into the lake of fire (19:20).
 - iii. The final step in preparation for the kingdom will be the removal of Satan and his demon hosts, so that Christ reigns without the opposition of supernatural enemies.

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- e. As it frequently does in Revelation the phrase **And I saw** indicates chronological progression.
- i. The location of this passage in the chronological flow of Revelation is consistent with a premillennial view of the kingdom.
 - ii. After the Tribulation (chaps. 6–19) Christ will return (19:11–21) and set up His kingdom (20:1–10), which will be followed by the new heavens and the new earth (21:1).
 - iii. Thus the millennial kingdom comes after Christ’s second coming but before the establishing of the new heavens and the new earth.
- f. The passage clearly teaches that Christ’s return precedes the millennial kingdom—a scenario incompatible with postmillennialism and amillennialism, but exactly what premillennialism teaches.
- g. The identity of the **angel** whom John saw **coming down from heaven** to bind Satan is not disclosed, but he may be Michael the archangel, the great adversary of Satan (12:7; cf. Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9).
- i. Whoever the angel is, he possesses great power. He is sent to earth with a specific agenda: to seize Satan for the thousand-year duration of the kingdom, bind him, cast him into the abyss and seal it, and then release him at the end of the thousand years.
- h. *Abussos* (**abyss**) appears seven times in Revelation (cf. 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8), always in reference to the temporary place of incarceration for certain demons.

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- i. The abyss is not their final place of punishment; the lake of fire is (Matt. 25:41).
 - ii. Nevertheless it is a place of torment to which the demons fear to be sent (Luke 8:31).
 - iii. The prisoners in the abyss are among the most vile and evil of all demons and include the “spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah” (1 Pet. 3:19–20).
 - iv. Those demons, who attempted to corrupt the human race by cohabiting with human women (Gen. 6:1–4), will never be released (Jude 6).
 1. They will be transferred directly from their temporary incarceration in the **abyss** to their permanent place of punishment, the lake of fire (cf. Isa. 24:21–22).
 2. Other demons sentenced to the **abyss** will be released at the fifth trumpet judgment to torment sinners (9:1–12).
 - i. The **key** given to the angel by God signifies his delegated authority (cf. 9:1); he has the power to open the **abyss**, and then to shut it after casting Satan inside.
 - j. The angel **laid hold of** Satan, who is unmistakably identified by the same four titles given him in 12:9.
 - i. First, he is called **the dragon**, a title given him twelve times in Revelation (cf. 12:3, 4, 7, 9, 13, 16, 17; 13:1, 2, 4; 16:13). It emphasizes his bestial nature, ferociousness, and oppressive cruelty.

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- ii. The title **serpent of old** hearkens back to the Garden of Eden and Satan’s temptation of Eve (Gen. 3:1–6; 2 Cor. 11:3).
 - iii. *Diabolos* (**devil**) means “slanderer,” or “malicious gossip” (1 Tim. 3:11; 2 Tim. 3:3; Titus 2:3)—an appropriate title for the “accuser of our brethren” (12:10).
 - 1. Satan is a malignant liar; in fact, he is “the father of lies” (John 8:44).
 - iv. *Satanas* (**Satan**) and its Hebrew root *satan* are used fifty-three times in Scripture.
 - 1. Both words mean “adversary,” since Satan opposes God, Christ, and all believers.
 - k. The length of the period for which Satan will be **bound** is defined as a **thousand years**, the first of six precise and important references to the duration of the Millennium (cf. vv. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).
 - l. Satan’s binding poses a serious difficulty for both postmillennialists and amillennialists.
 - i. Amillennialists argue that Satan is already **bound**, since they believe we are in the Millennium now (though they do not view it as one thousand literal years in length).
 - ii. Many postmillennialists also believe that Satan is presently **bound**, because otherwise it is difficult to see how the church could usher in the Millennium.
 - iii. Yet the biblical description of Satan’s activity in this present age makes it impossible to believe he has already been **bound**.

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- iv. Satan plants lying hypocrites in the church (Acts 5:3), schemes against believers (2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:11), disguises himself as an angel of light to deceive people (2 Cor. 11:14), attacks believers (2 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:27) and must be resisted (James 4:7), hinders those in the ministry (1 Thess. 2:18), and leads believers astray (1 Tim. 5:15).
 - m. Amillennialists and postmillennialists generally argue that Satan was bound at the Cross, and that his binding simply means that he can no longer deceive the nations and keep them from learning God's truth
 - n. The testimony of Scripture is that Satan is anything but bound in this present age, but will be during the coming earthly kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - i. It is only then that he will be incarcerated in **the abyss**, which will be **shut ... and sealed ... so that he cannot deceive the nations any longer**.
 - ii. His activity in the world will not be merely restricted or restrained, but totally curtailed; he will not be permitted to influence the world in any way.
 - iii. As will be explained later, that does not mean that the living people in the Millennium will be incapable of sinning.
 - iv. Amazingly, a vast part of the population, born of the believers who alone entered the kingdom, will in that perfect environment love their sin and reject the King.

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- v. They will be judged with a rod of iron (2:27; 12:5; Ps. 2:9), and those who engage in open rebellion under Satan's leadership when **the thousand years are completed** and Satan **must be released for a short time** will be utterly destroyed (see the discussion of vv. 8–10 below).

III. **The Reign of the Saints.**

- a. 20:4–6
- b. With Satan, his demon hosts, and all God-rejecting sinners out of the way, the millennial kingdom of peace and righteousness will be established.
- c. The supreme ruler in that kingdom will, of course, be the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - i. Yet He has graciously promised that His saints will reign with Him.
 - ii. They will rule subordinately over every aspect of life in the kingdom, and being glorified and perfected, they will perfectly carry out His will.
- d. In this vision, John sees the panorama of God's people resurrected, rewarded, and reigning with Christ.
 - i. He **saw thrones**, symbolizing both judicial and regal authority, **and God's people sat on them, and judgment was given to them.**
 - ii. The glorified saints will both enforce God's will and adjudicate disputes.
- e. Several suggestions have been offered concerning the identity of the saints who **sat on the thrones**, but they can best be identified by determining who God promised would reign.

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- i. Daniel 7:27 promises that the Old Testament saints will reign in the millennial kingdom: “Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.”
 - ii. Jesus promised the apostles that “you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28).
 - iii. New Testament believers are also promised that they will reign with Christ. In 1 Corinthians 6:2 Paul wrote, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” while 2 Timothy 2:12 declares, “If we endure, we will also reign with Him.”
 - iv. In Revelation 2:26 Jesus promises, “He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations,” and in Revelation 3:21 He adds, “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”
 - v. Revelation 5:10 makes it clear that the saints will reign on the earth, not in a spiritual sense or in the heavenly sphere: “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”

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- f. The present passage introduces the last group of saints who will reign with Christ in His kingdom.
- i. As his vision continued, John **saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand.**
 - ii. These are the martyred believers from the Tribulation (6:9; 7:9–17; 12:11).
 - iii. Because the Tribulation saints were faithful to the death, evidencing their true salvation (cf. Matt. 24:13; Col. 1:21–23; Heb. 3:14), **they too came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.**
- g. Then John adds the footnote that **the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed.**
- i. These are the unbelieving dead of all ages, whose resurrection to judgment and damnation is described in verses 11–15.
 - ii. John calls the resurrection of the saints from all ages **the first resurrection.**
 - iii. That resurrection is also called in Scripture the “resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15), the “resurrection of life” (John 5:29), the resurrection of “those who are Christ’s at His coming” (1 Cor. 15:23), and the “better resurrection” (Heb. 11:35).

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- iv. The use of *anastasis* (**resurrection**) offers further evidence that the resurrection described in verse 4 is a physical resurrection.
 - v. The word is used forty-two times in the New Testament, always of a physical resurrection (except in Luke 2:34, where the context clearly demands another meaning).
 - h. The phrase **blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection** introduces the fifth of seven beatitudes in Revelation (cf. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 22:7, 14).
 - i. Those who have **a part in the first resurrection** are blessed first of all because **the second death has no power** over them.
 - ii. The **second death**, defined in verse 14 as “the lake of fire,” is eternal hell.
 - iii. The comforting truth is that no true child of God will ever face God’s eternal wrath.
 - iv. “Having now been justified by His blood,” Paul wrote, “we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him” (Rom. 5:9).
 - v. To the Thessalonians he added, “Jesus ... rescues us from the wrath to come.... For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9).
 - i. Those who participate in the **first resurrection** are also blessed because **they will be priests of God and of Christ** (cf. 1:6; 5:10).

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- i. Believers are already “a royal priesthood,” called to “proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called [them] out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).
 - ii. Believers now serve as priests by worshiping God and leading others to the knowledge of Him, and will also serve in that capacity during the millennial kingdom.
 - j. A final blessing for the participants in the **first resurrection** is that they **will reign with** the Lord Jesus Christ **for a thousand years**, along with believers who survived the Tribulation.
 - k. Politically and socially, the rule of Christ and His saints will be universal (Ps. 2:6–8; Dan. 2:35), absolute (Ps. 2:9; Isa. 11:4), and righteous (Isa. 11:3–5).
 - l. Spiritually, their rule will be a time when the believing remnant of Israel is converted (Jer. 30:5–8; Rom. 11:26) and the nation is restored to the land God promised to Abraham (Gen. 13:14–15; 15:18).
 - m. It will be a time when the Gentile nations also will worship the King (Isa. 11:9; Mic. 4:2; Zech. 14:16).
 - n. The millennial rule of Christ and the saints will also be marked by the presence of righteousness and peace (Isa. 32:17) and joy (Isa. 12:3–4; 61:3, 7).
 - o. Physically, it will be a time when the curse is lifted (Isa. 11:7–9; 30:23–24; 35:1–2, 7), when food will be plentiful (Joel 2:21–27), and when there will be

physical health and well-being (Isa. 33:24; 35:5–6), leading to long life (Isa. 65:20).

IV. The Return of Satan.

- a. **When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, (20:7)**
- b. Satan and his demon hordes will be imprisoned in the abyss for the duration of the Millennium, in which the Lord Jesus Christ will rule with unopposed sovereignty.
- c. They will not be permitted to interfere in the affairs of the kingdom in any way. Satan's binding will end, however, **when the thousand years are completed** and he is **released from his prison** to lead a final rebellion of sinners.
- d. To review briefly, Scripture teaches that no unsaved people will enter the kingdom.
 - i. Only the redeemed from among the Jewish (12:6, 13–17; Isa. 60:21; Rom. 11:26) and Gentile (7:9–17) survivors of the Tribulation will go into the kingdom in their normal, physical bodies.
 - ii. The perfect environmental and social conditions of the Millennium, coupled with the lengthened life spans of those physically alive (Isa. 65:20), will cause their children to proliferate.
- e. Though the initial inhabitants of the millennial kingdom will all be redeemed, they will still possess a sinful human nature.
 - i. And as all parents have done since the Fall, they will pass that sin nature on to their offspring.

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- ii. Each successive generation throughout the thousand years will be made up of sinners in need of salvation.
 - iii. Many will come to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - iv. But amazingly, despite the personal rule of Christ on earth, despite the most moral society the world will ever know, many others will love their sin and reject Him (cf. Rom. 8:7).
 - v. Even the utopian conditions of the Millennium will not change the sad reality of human depravity.
 - vi. As they did during His incarnational presence on earth, sinners will refuse the grace and reject the lordship of the King of all the earth.
 - vii. That is not surprising, since even the perfect conditions of the Garden of Eden were not sufficient to keep sinless Adam and Eve from rebelling against God.
- f. The issue regarding salvation is never lack of information (cf. Rom. 1:18–20); it is love of sin (John 3:19).
- i. But enough unrepentant sinners will be alive at the end of the Millennium for Satan to lead a worldwide rebellion.
 - ii. When Satan is loosed, he will provide the cohesive supernatural leadership needed to bring to the surface all the latent sin and rebellion left in the universe.

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- iii. He will pull together all the rebels, revealing the true character and intent of those Christ-rejecting sinners and making it evident that God's judgment of them is just.
 - iv. Satan's desperate wickedness and violent hatred of God and Christ will not be altered by his thousand years of imprisonment in the abyss.
 - v. When he is released, he will immediately set about fomenting his final act of rebellion.
- V. The Revolt of Society,
- a. (20:8–10)
 - b. At the end of his thousand-year imprisonment, Satan **will come out to deceive the nations** (cf. vv. 3, 10; 12:9).
 - c. Satan's imprisonment cannot alter his God-hating nature.
 - i. In fact, he will hate Christ more than ever.
 - ii. Satan will find fertile soil in which to sow his seeds of rebellion.
 - iii. Many unsaved descendants of those who entered the millennial kingdom in their physical bodies (all of whom will be redeemed) will love their sin and reject Christ.
 - iv. They will be as unmoved by the peace, joy, and righteousness of the Millennium as sinners were by the devastating judgments of the Tribulation.
 - d. The actual strategy and method of Satan's deception is not revealed, but it will succeed in duping the unregenerate people of the world into revolting against the Lord Jesus Christ.

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- i. His deception, however, will fit within God's purpose, which, as noted above, is to manifest His justice when He destroys the rebels. Satan's actions are always under God's sovereign control (cf. Job 1:12; 2:6), and his gathering together of these wicked rebels will be no exception.
 - e. Satan will collect the deceived **nations** from **the four corners of the earth** (cf. 7:1; Isa. 11:12), an expression referring, not to a flat earth, but to the four main points of the compass: north, south, east, and west.
 - i. In other words, the rebels will come from all over the globe.
 - ii. John gives these enemies of the King of Kings the symbolic title **Gog and Magog**, naming them after the invasion force that will assault Israel during the Tribulation (Ezek. 38–39).
 - f. The name **Gog** appears to be used in Scripture as a general title for an enemy of God's people (the Septuagint uses it to translate "Agag" in Num. 24:7).
 - i. In Ezekiel 38–39, the name **Gog** describes the final Antichrist of the Tribulation.
 - ii. Most likely, then, **Gog** is used in verse 8 to describe the human leader of Satan's forces.
 - iii. **Magog** the term is used in this passage to describe the sinful rebels from all the nations who will **gather together for the final war** in human history.
 - g. Amazingly, John saw that **the number of the rebels will be like the sand of the seashore**—a figure of

speech used in Scripture to describe a vast, uncountable multitude (Gen. 22:17; Josh. 11:4; Judg. 7:12; 1 Sam. 13:5; 1 Kings 4:20; Heb. 11:12).

- h. The ideal conditions of health, prosperity, safety, and peace that will prevail during the Millennium, coupled with the long life spans of its inhabitants, will lead to a massive population explosion.
 - i. Incredibly, vast numbers of those people will join Satan in his final act of rebellion against God.
- i. The earth's topography will have been drastically reshaped by the catastrophic events of the Tribulation (cf. 16:20; Zech. 14:4, 9–11).
- j. That will allow the rebel forces to come **up on the broad plain of the earth** and surround the **camp of the saints and the beloved city**.
- k. *Parembolē* (**camp**) is used six times in Acts to describe a Roman military barracks (Acts 21:34, 37; 22:24; 23:10, 16, 32).
 - i. The saints will be encamped around **the beloved city** of Jerusalem (cf. Pss. 78:68; 87:2), which is the place of Messiah's throne and the center of the millennial world (cf. Isa. 24:23; Ezek. 38:12; 43:7; Mic. 4:7; Zech. 14:9–11), enjoying the glorious presence of the Lord Jesus Christ (Isa. 24:23; Jer. 3:17) when the attack comes.
- l. Like Armageddon a thousand years earlier (19:11–21), the "battle" will in reality be an execution.
 - i. As the rebel forces moved in for the attack, **fire came down from heaven and devoured them**.

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- ii. They will be swiftly, instantly, and totally exterminated.
 - iii. Sending **fire ... down from heaven** is often the way God judges sinners (cf. Gen. 19:24; Lev. 10:2; 2 Kings 1:10, 12; Luke 9:54).
 - m. Satan's forces will be physically killed, and their souls will go into the realm of punishment, awaiting their final sentencing to eternal hell, which will take place shortly (20:11–15).
 - n. Nor will their evil leader escape his fate: **the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone.**
 - i. There he will join his cronies **the beast and the false prophet**, who by that time will have been in that place of torment for a thousand years (19:20).
 - ii. That those two humans are still there after that time refutes the false doctrine of annihilationism.
 - o. Hell is a place of both mental (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28) and physical torment (14:10–11; Matt. 25:41; Mark 9:43–44; Luke 16:23–24).
 - i. Those sentenced to that terrible place **will be tormented day and night.**
 - ii. There will not be a moment's relief **forever and ever.**
 - p. Scripture explicitly teaches that hell is eternal.
 - i. The same Greek phrase translated **forever and ever** is used in 1:18 to speak of Christ's eternity;

in 4:9–10, 10:6, and 15:7 of God’s eternity; and in 11:15 of the duration of Christ’s reign.

- ii. Unbelievers will “be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night” (14:10–11).
- iii. Jesus taught that the punishment of the wicked is as eternal as the eternal life of the righteous (Matt. 25:46).
- iv. He also taught that hell is a place of “unquenchable fire” (Mark 9:43), “where their worm does not die” (Mark 9:48).
- v. Second Thessalonians 1:9 teaches that the destruction of the wicked in hell stretches throughout all eternity.¹