

Examining Revelation 20:1-10 from the Inside Out

I. Revelation 20:1-10 (Binding of Satan, Reign of Saints, Release of Satan) Timeline data:¹

A. Before / During the Millennium v. 4

Souls beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, and they who² had neither worshiped the beast nor his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. This (v.4) is the First Resurrection: Souls who overcame came to life and reigned.

B. Start of the Millennium vv. 1-5. Satan is bound.

C. During the Millennium vv. 4, 6.

Overcomers sat upon thrones and judgment was committed to them. Reigned with Christ for a thousand years. Priests of God and of Christ.

D. End of Millennium vv. 5, 7-9. Rest of dead come to life.

Satan released and will go out to deceive the nations. Nations deceived by Satan to gather them to battle. Nations surround camp of the saints. Fire comes down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

II. If these are the facts of Revelation 20 (see the timeline/chart), what is notable?

A. What is not explicitly stated: *Nothing in vv. 4-6 about the earth, the Jews, Palestine as center of this reign, or a civil, political reign like David's. Nothing about the believers still on earth during this "Millennium". It deals exclusively with believers who have died. [Hoekema, summarized by CkP]*

B. What is the nature of this first resurrection? Premillennial View: "Resurrected Bodies"
The primary reason the "first resurrection" in Revelation 20 must refer to a physical resurrection concerns the terminology itself. The word "resurrection" (ἀνάστασις) is used almost exclusively in the New Testament to refer to "the elimination of the condition of physical death through bodily resurrection." The word is used 41 times in the New Testament, and in 38 out of its 39 uses outside of Revelation 20, it refers to a physical resurrection.³ In addition, since the physical resurrection of "the rest of the dead" in verse 5a is described with the word ἔζησαν ("they came to life"), and the identical form of the same verb ἔζησαν ("they came to life") is used to describe the resurrection of the saints at the end of verse 4, this resurrection must also be physical. The issue here is not merely the repetition of the same form of the same verb, but also the way in which these two verbs are connected. When John writes, in effect, "Some of the dead ἔζησαν (v. 4b), but the rest of the dead did not ἔζησαν until later (v. 5a)," he makes it clear that the verb refers to the same act or experience in both uses. Therefore, whatever happened to one group also happened to the other—if one resurrection is physical, the other must be physical as well.⁴

1 Cf. *Notes on the Bible*, by Albert Barnes, [1834]. <https://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/barnes/rev020.htm>

The chapter [Rv 20] comprises the following parts:

- I. The binding of Satan, [Rev 20:1-3](#).
- II. The millennium, [Rev 20:4-6](#).
- III. The release of Satan, [Rev 20:7-8](#).
- IV. The final subjugation of Satan, and destruction of his power on the earth, [Rev 20:9-10](#).
- V. The final judgment, [Rev 20:11-15](#).

2 If "souls" (ψυχὰς) were the antecedent, one would expect a feminine relative pronoun, αὐτῶν, (e.g., Acts 3:23 ψυχῇ ἡτίς). The masculine form, οὗτων, seems to indicate a group different from the beheaded souls.

However, οὗτων agrees grammatically with v. 4 "judgment was given to them (αὐτοῖς)"

3 Waymeyer, M. "The First Resurrection in Revelation 20" *Masters Seminary Journal* 27 / 1 (Spring 2016), p. 6.

4 Waymeyer, M. "The First Resurrection", p. 7. *CkP: The author's footnotes have been omitted in this and the previous citation.*

C. What general interpretive principals might be helpful?

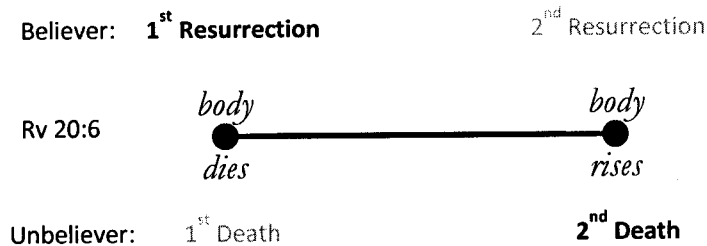
To determine whether something in Scripture should be interpreted symbolically, it is helpful to ask three questions. First, *does it possess a degree of absurdity when taken literally?* Second, *does it possess a degree of clarity when taken symbolically?* And third, *does it fall into an established category of symbolic language?* The thousand years of Revelation 20 meets none of the proposed criteria. . . . In fact, if God had wanted to communicate that the reign of Christ would last for a literal thousand years, how else could He have done it? What else could He have said?⁵

D. What, textually, indicates extent of Satan's binding? Contrast literature of 1-3 with 3b, 7-8. If Satan is completely bound, how is it possible that unbelievers exist during the Millennium?

E. Who are these saints? All believers? Only believers who have died? Only martyrs? *v. 4 says "Souls" Revelation's Thrones (except Satan's or "new earth") are in heaven.⁶ Came to life and reigned. Those who take part in the first resurrection (= all saints). Seated on Thrones = reign in vv. 4-6. Priests serve in God's presence.*

F. What is the nature of this first resurrection? A-/Post-Millennial View⁷

1. In v. 5, what does "This" (or "First") refer to in "This is the first resurrection."⁸ Cf. 20:14.
2. Kline: "Just as the resurrection of the unjust is paradoxically identified as "the second death" so the death of the Christian is paradoxically identified as "the first resurrection." "



3. v. 7. "Over such the second death has no power."

These words about the second death imply that the "first resurrection" which John has just mentioned is not a bodily resurrection. For if believers should here be thought of as having been physically raised, with glorified bodies, they would already be enjoying the full and total bliss of the life to come, in which "death shall be no more" (Rev. 21:4), and it would not need to be said that over them the second death has no power. [Anthony Hoekema]

5 Waymeyer, M. "What about Revelation 20?" *Christ's Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer*. Mayhue & MacArthur, eds.

6 Daniel 7:9 I watched till thrones were put in place, And the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, And the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, Its wheels a burning fire; 10 A fiery stream issued And came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, And the books were opened.

Matthew 19:28 So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that *in the regeneration*, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

What about Psalm 122:5 "For thrones are set there [Jerusalem, vv. 2-3] for judgment, The thrones of the house of David."?

7 The first resurrection describes entrance into and life of the intermediate state after the Christian's death. It results from spiritual participation in Christ. As they are united with Christ, the saints share in His resurrection and all its associated benefits, including living and reigning as priests with Him, as well as "over such, the second death has no power".

8 Waymeyer, M. "The First Resurrection", p. 5, fn 11.

when John refers to the "first resurrection" in the next part of verse 5, he is pointing back to the coming to life described at the end of verse 4. This appears to be the general consensus on both sides of the millennial debate.