

THE MILLENNIUM

Premil? Postmil? Amil?

Does it Really Matter?

Yes! Yes it Does!

Are you a premillennialist, a postmillennialist, or an amillennialist? You'll notice that the operative word in all three of these positions is millennialist or millennium as in the thousand years of Christ reigning on the earth. But where is this doctrine actually taught in the bible and what are we to make of the millennium?

When considering the millennium, it is actually only one part of a group of diverse subjects that have to do with eschatology (the study of the end times). And because there is no way to hit on every eschatological rabbit hole that we could go down I am going to limit our study today to two or three subjects that are all directly related to the millennium and which are all found in the same immediate context in the book of Revelation.

In fact, Revelation 20 is the only place where you will find the concept of the millennium in all of the bible. So, what is the millennium? It depends on who you ask. But its main characteristic revolves around the second coming of Jesus Christ in relationship to a thousand-year reign of our Savior with his people as mentioned in Revelation 20, again the only explicit place in all of Scripture where you will find this particular idea.

Some will characterize the thousand years as a present ongoing undefined period of time between the first coming of Christ into this world and His second coming. This group would not believe in a literal rendering of the number 1,000, therefore, it's called amillennialism, meaning no millennium. However, they do subscribe to what they call a realized millennium where Christ is presently ruling and reigning at the right hand of the Father.

Others will define the millennium as a literal one thousand years where after a seven-year tribulation Christ returns to set up his kingdom on this present earth, called premillennialism, since Christ comes before or pre the one thousand years.

The third camp generally contends that the thousand-year kingdom could be literal though it may be figurative and will be inaugurated not after Christ returns but before Christ returns, called postmillennialism, as Christ comes post or after this golden age of universal peace and prosperity. Clear as mud yet? Yeah, well it gets more complicated as there are a number of variants to all of these perspectives, which is why I will be painting in broad strokes regarding these different positions.

I should point out that there is actually a fourth view called Panmillennialism. This position concedes that no one really knows how to define the events surrounding the millennium and thus concludes it will all pan out in the end as God knows the beginning from the end. However, this is kind of a cop-out, since the Scriptures are actually pretty clear in defining the millennium. By the way, from this point forward I will simply address all three groups as either premil, postmil, or amil.

So, if we're going to get a proper biblical understanding of the millennium the best place to start is with the actual text of Scripture where this teaching is introduced. As I stated earlier it's found in only one place in all of the bible, the book of Revelation chapter 20. To treat this teaching with any justice we need to read the entire text in its context.

Revelation 20:1-8 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I *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; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these

the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore.

The end of the chapter then sums up how this war comes to its ultimate conclusion at the close of the thousand years.

Revelation 20:14-15 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

That is the text in which is found the teaching of the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ. So, the obvious question should be, if this is the only place where the millennium is defined in all of Scripture, it should be pretty easy to get to the bottom of what it means, right?

Apparently not, because, as we've seen, there are at least three very different views on this issue, which if we were to be honest cannot all be true. And the reason for these differences is actually quite simple to understand. It has to do with the color of glasses you're wearing. Glasses? Yeah. It's a way of describing how people come to the Scriptures with their presuppositional underpinnings or preconceived ideas that colors their interpretation. These presuppositions may or may not be valid.

An example of looking at evidence with a presupposition can be found by looking at two scientists, a creation scientist and an evolution scientist, who both look at the same identical rocks and fossils yet come away with very different views about what they see. The evolutionist looks at the evidence and sees millions and billions of years over which species evolved because of his secular education (his colored glasses if you will) that excludes God from the equation of origins. In contrast, the young earth creationist believes God created all things according to the Bible, (his set of glasses) and looks at the same evidence and sees thousands of years in light of a world-wide flood. Same evidence yielding two very different views because of presuppositions held.

It's the same principle, when it comes to interpreting any part of the bible, specifically for our purposes today,

Revelation chapter 20 and the millennium. Presuppositional ideas or “one’s particular set of glasses” will affect the interpretation of a text of Scripture and will certainly color one’s conclusions as to what the thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20 actually means. That said, if you come to the word of God with the intent to faithfully interpret any portion of Scripture while wearing a faulty set of glasses, then your flawed focus will determine your interpretation, which will suffer. So, let’s look at the different sets of glasses, which is actually a metaphor for the different types of hermeneutic each of these three groups employ as it relates to the millennium. And remember, hermeneutics is simply the fancy way of describing your method of interpretation.

How do you undergird or defend what you see from the evidence in the bible? There are two basic methods of interpretation as it relates to Scripture and each of these three groups, premil, postmil, and amil comes to the table with one of these two methods or a combination of these methods. And here again I am generalizing for time’s sake. Alan Cole from an article entitled: The Grammatical-Historic Hermeneutic, states, “Throughout the history of the church, there have been primarily two competing schools of thought on the proper method of interpretation. One is the grammatical-historical or literal method, and the other is the allegorical method. A literal method seeks to understand the words of the passage in their normal, natural, and customary meaning within the context. This method searches for the intended meaning of the Biblical author”. The other method, according to Rolland McCune, is an allegorical method which seeks to understand the words of the passage in a deeper, more obscure way; it searches for the spiritual meaning that is beyond the intent of the author. And so, when we come to Revelation chapter 20 how do we want to treat this section of scripture? I think that most Christians would want to get to the bottom of the meaning of the actual words that the apostle John wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and use the grammatical-historical or literal approach.

So, let’s look at the actual words found in Revelation chapter 20 and see if we can get to the bottom of the meaning of a thousand years as it relates to the millennial reign of Jesus Christ.

In Revelation 20:1-2 it says Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. So that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed.

Notice that John sees something, keeping in mind that what he sees is in the context of a vision from God. He sees an angel coming down from heaven and this angel, whom some argue is Christ, holds a key and a chain in his hand. He then grabs the dragon, who according to verse 2 is Satan. So, he grabs Satan and binds him, presumably with the chain along with lock and key as he throws him into the abyss or place of confinement. Most premil adherents, who say they subscribe to the literal method of interpretation would not necessarily take these images literally, to their credit. For that matter both postmils and amils would agree with them about this section of Revelation. The agreement is that the literal method of interpretation allows for symbolism in language to help describe the narrative of Satan's binding. *Afterall what physical chain could hold a spirit?* But notice what else is nestled right in the middle of all this symbolic language. It's the thousand-year designation for Satan's incarceration. All three groups would agree that this portion about the binding of Satan is describing a real historic account, but using figurative language. Yet, in the very next section of the verse, the premil advocate immediately switches to a literal understanding rather than keeping with a symbolic one. More on that point later.

For now, all three millennial positions acknowledge the symbolic nature of the binding of a dragon found in chains, keys, and a pit as they look at the normal meaning in light of the context of the passage. If they failed to do this, they could be accused of going beyond the literal method to a *literalistic* one. To be literalistic goes beyond the normal meaning in light of the context and actually moves closer to the allegorical method of interpretation where something is read into the meaning of these words that isn't there. Remember, the book of Revelation is an Apocalyptic/prophetic book that is visionary. A failure to keep this in mind would lead one to a *literalistic approach*,

which does not allow the language to be defined in a normal common-sense way.

An overt example of the difference between a literal approach or a literalistic one is found in Psalm 36:7 How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings.

The literal method of interpretation would take this verse and acknowledge that a figure of speech is being used to make a point. In this case where God is seen as a refuge using the imagery of a bird protecting her chicks under her wing. The literalistic understanding would be that God is actually a big bird.

Aside from common sense, the common literal meaning recognizes that context may include different forms of speech, in the case of this psalm the form of speech comparing God to a protective bird is a type of poetic approach which defines much of the genre or type of books found in the psalms and proverbs as a poetic section of scripture. The genre of the book of Revelation, however is not primarily poetic but apocalyptic/prophetic that generally utilizes symbolic language in a visionary setting. And so, we would want to use the grammatical-historical or literal method of interpretation, while guarding against being literalistic.

Let's look at another an example from the book of Revelation itself that sets the stage for how we arrive at the literal meaning rather than a literalistic meaning. At the very beginning of the Book of Revelation, Jesus Christ himself, makes clear that this is a vision of things to come. John states in **Revelation 1:10-11** I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like *the sound* of a trumpet, saying, Write in a book what you see, and send *it* to the seven churches.

John identifies the circumstances under which the Lord Jesus revealed certain things to him concerning what is to soon take place, according to Revelation 1:1.

He was in the Spirit which is to say, he was found to be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit so as to receive this vision. But, in the vision he hears something. It was a voice, but a voice that had the characteristics of a loud trumpet. And the voice told him to write whatever he sees

and then send it to the 7 seven churches. And when he turned in the direction of the voice what did he see?

Revelation 1:12-13 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lamp stands *I saw* one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash.

Keeping in mind that this is visionary language, the literal meaning to these visionary words must be defined by the one delivering these words, Who is Jesus Christ, because there is a natural or literal meaning to these figurative words that cannot be taken literalistically. We actually know the meaning of one like a son of man clothed in radiant clothing because only a few verses later this one like a son of man reveals himself.

Revelation 1:8 I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Revelation 1:17-18 I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

Now we would all jump to the conclusion that this is Jesus Christ, but notice Jesus does not use His name to reveal Himself. Instead, He identifies Himself using Scriptural language reserved only for God. The reference here in Revelation is actually found in the book of Isaiah where it begins, Thus, says the LORD, [this particular word for Lord is capitalized in most bibles and it's capitalized for a reason. This word in the Hebrew is often characterized with four letters YHWH, what is called a tetragrammaton which is the formal name of the Creator/God, often pronounced Yahweh or Jehovah. This is the same God who instructed Moses to go back and tell the Jews in Egypt that I AM has sent you. So, this is the same Yahweh or Almighty God who is speaking to Isaiah and John as we continue to read in Isaiah.

Isaiah 44:6 Thus says the LORD the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: I am the first and I am the last, And, there is no God besides Me.

John knew his Old Testament and he would immediately have connected this language that he heard and the vision that he saw, while he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, to

Yahweh himself, the Son of God, which of course he acknowledges in the very first verse of Revelation one.

Revelation 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; So, though John knows that it is God who is giving him this revelation he also familiar with the one identifying Himself as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the one who was dead and behold is alive forevermore. Only one person fits the bill, the God/man Jesus Christ. And so, though the language here is somewhat opaque, the literal meaning jumps out from the pages of Scripture. So, the language being used here to describe this scene to include one like a son of man, is visionary language that utilizes symbols that represent spiritual realities. Though John sees lampstands in this vision that is not to be interpreted literalistically, since lampstands are meant to identify something else in this context. You may know where I'm going with this. The literal interpretation of the lampstands is found in **Revelation 1:20** the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Do you see how this works? Unless we use the language as it was first introduced by God to John with the understanding that God himself gives us the key to understanding how to literally get at the correct interpretation of the message, we will see symbols without understanding what those symbols represent. And in turn we may be tempted to assign them a literal meaning when the context does not allow it, thus allegorizing it. And so, the historic/grammatical or literal method of interpretation that we employ for any OTHER portion of the word of God must also be utilized when interpreting the book of Revelation.

So, back to the premise of our study today. How do we interpret the words found in Revelation 20 that addresses a thousand years of Satan being bound in relationship to God's people ruling and reigning with the risen Christ for that same period of time? We must keep in mind that if the thousand years are not interpreted properly in the context of Revelation, with the understanding that this section of God's word is purposefully utilizing symbolic language in a visionary setting, then our entire system of interpretation will suffer.

This brings up the other issue that premils, postmils, and amils usually introduce at this point and that is secondary passages of Scripture that they use to support their thousand-year understanding of the millennial reign of Christ. The problem is however, if we've misunderstood the primary passages of Revelation 20, and they are actually incorrect, (as all three of these positions cannot be correct) then, any other secondary passage cannot be used to support a faulty conclusion.

For example, the premil insists on a temple being built in Jerusalem as the focal point for Christ's reign during the millennium by utilizing the last part of Ezekiel's vision of a new temple for Israel where the premil takes what is arguably symbolic language in that Ezekiel vision and gives it the literal meaning of a new temple to be built in Jerusalem at some point in the future. And so, the premil would utilize Old Testament (OT) promises from God concerning Israel, especially the land prophecies, and conclude that the son of David, who is identified as Jesus Christ, must sit on David's throne in Jerusalem for a thousand years. But in doing this they actually undermine the New Testament (NT) understanding of the temple by making the OT the primary tool for defining the temple in the New Testament. This is actually backwards as the NT is the primary tool to interpret the shadows of the Old as the New Covenant in Christ's blood has fulfilled all of those images and shadows, including the temple.

This goes back to our hermeneutic that utilizes certain biblical rules that we've already discussed that deal with the genre of a book along with accepted figures of speech, but one particular rule addresses how Scripture cannot contradict itself and so if there is a less understandable set of passages, they always take a back seat to the clearer verses that addresses the same subject. It never works in reverse. This rule is called the of analogy of faith.

This same rule comes into play when comparing OT prophecy with fulfilled prophecy in a new covenant context. Jesus did this all the time when he demonstrated how He is the fulfillment of all prophecy where in one instance He told the Jews

John 2:19-21 Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

Paul adds to this discussion when describing Christ's church.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

So, when it comes to the issue of the temple the premil falls prey to violating this rule as Scripture; as the Old Testament (OT) has been fulfilled by the New through Christ. Likewise, the postmil advocates use certain OT passages to promote a golden age of universal peace and prosperity on this present sin-filled cursed world after which Christ then returns. To arrive at this conclusion however, they employ a set of glasses with a presupposition that the Kingdom of God must necessarily have a positive expression on this planet, either literally as a thousand years or figuratively as a long period of time, whereby a world-wide Christian civilization or culture will be established and secured for a substantial duration before the second return of Christ. I'll give you one passage among many that they apply to the present church age.

Psalms 22:27-28 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations will worship before You. For the kingdom is the LORD'S And He rules over the nations.

Though the psalmist is addressing the earth and the nations of the earth, does this mean that the earth that is being addressed in Psalm 22 is necessarily this present earth in this present age as the postmil group concludes? Could there be another scenario that would fulfill this OT prophecy where all the nations will worship before the Lord? And the answer is yes as the New Testament brings it to light. In describing the new heavens and the new earth in the book of Revelation John records this.

Revelation 21:24-26 The nations will walk by [the] light [of the lamb], and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.

For the postmil advocate Psalm 22 and others like it, is part of a series of passages that necessarily looks forward to a millennial reign, or a time of Christian dominion in this

present world, before Christ returns, thus it necessarily takes place in a world where sin and the curse is still in existence. This is the same position of the premil in the sense that they both employ a set of glasses that looks at the New Testament but their view of the kingdom of God is skewed as they misunderstand the relationship between OT scriptures and their ultimate fulfillment in the New Covenant found in Christ. And so, the similarity between these two groups, premil and postmil is that though the timing of the inauguration of the millennium is different, the age in which the millennium happens in history is identical for both groups. It's all taking place in the same cursed world where sin still abides.

This is not as much an issue for the amil since he does not see a literal thousand-year reign on this earth in the same way as the other two groups. We'll see the importance of this distinction later in this study. But there's a bigger issue at hand as it relates to this present sin-filled cursed world that puts redemptive history into perspective. Though some will identify 7 ages or dispensations in redemptive history, there are really only 2 ages. The one age of sin and curse after the fall of man, followed by an entirely different age after the second coming of Christ where sin and the curse have been eliminated by God. Jesus identifies these two over-arching ages as this age and the age to come. And by the way Kim Riddlebarger has written extensively on this 2-age model. But, let's take a look at these 2 ages as defined in God's word. Jesus says in

Matthew 12:32 Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come.

Luke 18:29-30 And He said to them, Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life.

Ephesians 1:20-21 [the Father] raised [Christ] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

The question needs to be raised. In what age are we told that Christ will rule and reign a thousand years? Both the premil and postmil see the millennial reign in this present age on this present cursed world. But is this what Scripture actually teaches as the ultimate rule and reign of Christ?

Jesus actually answers this question when being interrogated by Pilate when He said, My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm. Therefore, Pilate said to Him, So You are a king? Jesus answered, You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.

Why would Jesus tell Pilate that His kingdom is not of this world, and yet he makes it clear that He is a King? What kingdom is Jesus referring to and in what age is that Kingdom realized? Jesus once said to His disciples, **Luke 22:29-30** just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

In light of what Jesus told Pilate, that His kingdom is not of this world, is this verse a reference to a kingdom in this age or in the age to come? Matthew's gospel actually adds some information regarding when His disciples will sit on these twelve thrones.

Matthew 19:28 Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, (what is also called the regeneration) when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

So, it's clear from the lips of Jesus that His disciples will sit on thrones, not in this world but in the new world. But it turns out this future kingdom that Christ shares with His disciples was prophesied in the OT. When the prophet Isaiah addresses the throne of David, he puts it into some perspective as he points to a kingdom and its King as he prophesies of this coming King.

Isaiah 9:6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders;

And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

This same child is the one who was born of a virgin as He took on flesh becoming God incarnate, the same one Luke records at the beginning of his gospel where he gives the account of the angel Gabriel announcing the miraculous birth of a child. Gabriel then told Mary this.

Luke 1:32-33 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.

This same Son of the Most High recorded in Luke is the same one that Isaiah goes on to identify as the One who sits on David's throne.

Isaiah 9:7 There will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace, On the throne of David and over His kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

Notice that in both Luke and Isaiah the rule and reign of the Son of David is identified as forever, having no end continuing on and forever more, where there will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace. No end of peace, which is to say eternal peace in His government or rule.

The premil stance on the millennial reign of Christ does not end in peace, but in war; the war of Har-Magedon, which is why we cannot avoid the elephant in the room when Jesus made clear to Pilate, My kingdom is not of this world which is necessarily this present cursed age. And yet what are we told of the rule and reign of Christ after His return to this earth? He returns the second time to establish an entirely new kingdom without the curse, which by default excludes this present age. This too is found in the book of Revelation chapter 22.

Revelation 22:3 There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him;

The premil will protest saying that chapter 22 comes chronologically after chapter 20 that introduced the millennium, thus making this a different rule and reign on a different earth, distinguishing between a thousand-year

reign on this present earth that subsequently moves into an eternal reign as Jesus then creates the new heavens and new earth after he destroys all his enemies at the end of the millennium. But there's only one reign of the son of David found in Scripture and it is on an eternal throne in the age to come, not a temporal rule and reign on a cursed earth.

Nowhere in the word of God does it even hint of the eternal rule and reign of Christ being divided into a literal thousand years on this cursed earth and then a subsequent rule on the eternal new earth. This goes back to the set of glasses we spoke of earlier. The premil position sees the book of Revelation as a book that is meant to be read chronologically from chapter one to twenty-two where one event follows the other as they rely on the statements from John, I saw this vision and then I saw another vision and then another and so on. But John is not putting these visions in to a chronological order, but is simply identifying different visions, one after the other, which happen to be describing some of the same events from a different perspective, what is referred to as *recapitulation, or recapping* the same event in a little different way.

How does that work? Keep in mind that Revelation 20 is all about war and the final destruction that God brings about so as to establish His eternal kingdom. Remember, this war started in the garden of Eden. And this war will continue to the very end, contrary to the postmil position that champions a pause for a golden age of peace on the earth before Christ's return. Listen to the words recorded in Revelation 16:12-16 that describes the war of Har-Magedon. The sixth *angel* poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east. And I saw *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.

This is the final battle which is described here as the war of the great day of God. And yet, this is actually the same war that is described three chapters later, not in a chronological

manner but in another vision that John received describing the same event in a little different way.

Revelation 19:18-21 And I 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. And 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; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. 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.

My point in all of this is that unless we have on the correct set of lenses, we will be tempted to think that the book of Revelation is written chronologically rather than recapping some of the same events in a new vision. But we can't lose sight of the over-arching premise of the entire book of Revelation, because if we do, we will only see the trees and not the forest. The forest or the big picture is defined in the very beginning of Revelation.

Revelation 1:3-6 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near. John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood-- and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father-- to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The book of Revelation is meant to be first and foremost a blessing to those who read and heed the words of this prophecy, for the time is near, John says. Who first read this book? The seven churches who were experiencing persecution. Jesus Christ is initially addressing the church in the first century and one of the ways he encourages these saints was to remind them that no matter how the enemy tried to destroy them, He would ultimately destroy the enemy, the last enemy being death. And one of the ways He reminded them of His personal presence in their midst is found in Revelation 2:1 [I'm] the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, what we know to be His church. This book was meant to bless and comfort as well as exhort the

church of Jesus Christ as he reminds them that though they may walk through the valley of the shadow of death he is there with them, walking among them. But it is also a book that reminds these Christians in the first century that they are more than conquerors in Christ. The very message Paul gave to the church in Rome in the first century.

Romans 8:35-37 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED. But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

The war that started in the garden is waging all around the church in the first century and Christ reminds them that the battle belongs to the Lord. Take heart and fight the good fight in the power of the Spirit. First century Christians were not worrying about the armies of the east coming to invade the middle east, but they were concerned about how the spiritual war would affect them and their families. Jesus reminds them that He is the one who will ultimately destroy all the kingdoms of the earth who come against His people.

In fact, this is the very message that the prophet Daniel spoke to a fretful King Nebuchadnezzar who had a disturbing dream that Daniel was able to identify and then interpret. It involved a huge statue made of different materials representing a number of nations that are then crushed by God. The interpretation of this dream turns out to be the very vision that is revealed in the book of Revelation that describes the kingdoms of the earth being destroyed in a final battle. Look at what God told Daniel about this final battle.

Daniel 2:36-45 In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and *that* kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.

The destruction of all earthly kingdoms by the stone [the stone the builders rejected, the chief cornerstone] that was cut without hands is the God of heaven who will destroy all kingdoms at the end of this present age as he then establishes his forever kingdom in the age to come. This is what Daniel prophesied as does John.

In Revelation 20:7-10 John writes, when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The book of Revelation was written to a first century church who needed to be reminded that Christ is on His throne today ruling and reigning and yet is intimately involved in the life of his church as He walks among the churches. But this book was also meant to be read and encouraged by every church in this present age, you and I included, with the same message of hope in the midst of a world that wants to destroy the kingdom of God found in Christ and His church as John so aptly put it.

Revelation 12:17 So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

This is why the premil eschatological construct has a war at the end of the millennium where Satan is loosed on the world after a thousand years to raise up an army of rebel human beings to fight against the rule of Christ. But this view can only happen in a world where sin still exists, which is the position of both premils and postmils. But is that actually being taught in Revelation 20? As I said in the beginning If you start with a faulty set of glasses, or a false premise, when looking at any portion of the word of God, you end up with a faulty interpretation.

So, let's ask some more questions that any good investigator would ask. As we saw earlier when looking at the first three verses of Revelation 20 almost all would agree that an angel holding a key and chain binding a dragon to the pit would be symbolic language describing a literal understanding of Satan being bound. And we'll get into the binding of Satan in more detail in just a moment. But when we come to the middle of verse 3, according to the pre-mil position, we are supposed to then abandon the symbolic language of keys, chains, a dragon and a prison, and suddenly pivot to literal language when it comes to the number 1,000 as this dragon is bound for a thousand years and then not released until the thousand years has run its course. The question has to be raised, why the change to literal language regarding this number, when the entire immediate context is all symbols? Where in our hermeneutic does it allow such a shift without a legitimate reason? The answer is that the context does not allow a good reason to move from symbolic language to literal language. So, then how are we to understand the number one thousand in Revelation chapter 20? To do this we need to revisit the first three verses that are using symbolic language, that of keys, chains a pit and a dragon which are describing the binding of Satan for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:2-3 And [the angel] laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed.

The common understanding among premils and some postmils is that this binding keeps Satan from having any overt negative activity in the earth for one thousand years which would make sense if Christ is in control of a conquered earth where he's ruling with a rod of iron. And in this scenario Satan has no access to the earth, until the thousand years are completed. And this would be true if the text actually said that, but it doesn't. Notice what it says. The angel bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would *not deceive the nations any longer*. There is nothing in this verse that indicates that any and all activity of Satan ceases, only that he is restricted from doing one thing, deceiving the nations or the world.

Remember, throughout the entire book of Revelation it is being made clear that this is a continuance of the war that began in the garden between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. And this war between these two seeds started with a deception.

Genesis 3:13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, What is this you have done? And the woman said, The serpent deceived me, and I ate.

If a human being without a sin nature before the fall can be deceived by the serpent, what chance do all subsequent human beings have who are born in Adam, having inherited his fallen nature? The answer is none, and yet in the grace of God the Lord has chosen to open the eyes of those who belong to him so that they will not be deceived so as to receive their savior by faith. This doesn't mean Christians, for example, can't be deceived on one level. This is why Paul spent so much time warning against the wiles of the devil who goes about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

2 Corinthians 11:3 But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity *of devotion* to Christ.

Paul does not mean to suggest that born again Christians can be deceived into rejecting their messiah so as to lose their salvation, only that their deception could cause them to compromise their devotion to Christ.

Satan has been deceiving mankind since the beginning with almost complete impunity, until the seed of the woman crushed the head of the seed of the serpent. In fact, this is the very language the apostle Paul uses when identifying the people of God with the work of Christ.

Romans 16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. In the very letter to the seven churches in the book of Revelation what are we told?

Revelation 12:9 And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Part of God's judgment on Satan and his angels allows for him to deceive the whole world, which aligns with the judgment on Adam's offspring who are spiritually dead in

Adam. But notice the next verse, Revelation 12:10 where it juxtaposes Satan's deception of the world with the coming of the Messiah in salvation and power.

Revelation 12:10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God, day and night.

Notice that in verse 9 the dragon, that is Satan, was thrown down to the earth, along with his angels, a reference to his rebellion in heaven where he was judged and cast out of heaven. And yet in the very next verse, having already been thrown down to earth, we are told that because of the power and authority of Christ he [Satan] was thrown down, he who accuses the brethren before our God, day and night. In what sense is Satan thrown down in both of these instances? The act of throwing down in these verses allude to judgment. In verse 9 the judgment resulted in God throwing Satan down from his presence in heaven. In verse 10 judgment is still on the table but this time the throwing down is a reference to how that judgment is carried out by the Christ who came into the very world Satan was thrown down to. So, if Satan was thrown down from heaven and then subsequently thrown down again at the coming of the incarnate Son of God, born of a virgin, in what way was he thrown down this second time? Jesus answers this question when addressing the Pharisees during his earthly ministry.

Matthew 12:28-29 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong *man*? And then he will plunder his house.

A couple of things to notice here. The first is that Jesus is casting out demons by the Spirit of God. The Greek word for cast is *ekballo*. It's essentially the same word found in Revelation 12 for the great dragon being THROWN DOWN, where the Greek word for thrown down is *ballo*. This is why the NAB in Revelation 12:10 says, For the accuser of our brothers is cast out. In both instances it is God doing the throwing down or casting out. But who is the specific person connected with people being possessed by demons in Matthew 12:28? Jesus identifies this person as the strong man. But notice that the strong man is identified as having a house with property which is

describing his residence in this world, what is ostensibly his kingdom. But Jesus says, that because I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, the kingdom of God has come upon you. This is describing two kingdoms and how one superior kingdom overcomes the other with the result of God not only binding the prince of this world, but taking his property against his will as he plunders the strong man's house. What property is Jesus plundering from this strong man as he first binds him? It's the same property that has lived in the house of the strong man since the early days of the fall. It's the people of this world who have been bound in deception who have the strong man for a father, whom they love.

John 8:44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire.

Back to our hermeneutic of comparing Scripture with Scripture to get the plain meaning of the text; belonging to your father the devil and being the property of the strong man is describing the same thing. How does God break that chain of deception on people? By binding the strong man or as John puts in our text in Revelation 20, the angel laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, Up to the point of Christ coming into the world the nations by and large were in the dark, with the exception of one chosen nation of God called Israel, where even they would prove themselves to have been deceived as Jesus now addresses them during his earthly ministry as having the devil for their father. But what happens after Christ enters the strong man's house? He binds the strong man and plunders his house as the strong man no longer has the ability to deceive the nations as the Holy Spirit through the redemptive work of Christ has overcome the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is precisely what Jesus told Peter and the disciples when he made the statement in **Matthew 16:18** I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. This is a statement that the gospel is now going to crash the gates of Hades that cannot prevent this message of hope from going out to the world where Satan's deception of the world has now been curbed as he is bound in the sense that the world will not be deceived like it was before because God's kingdom, in Christ, is upon us and our Lord has crushed the kingdom of

Satan to the degree that Christ is now ruling and reigning at the right hand of the Father. The word for bind, as in Christ binds the strong man and then plunders his house, and the word bound for a thousand years in Revelation 20 as it relates to the serpent, are the exact same words in Greek. The bindings are the same in both contexts as will see as we systematically move through Revelation 20, as they happen in the same time frame; in this present age.

When Christ came into this world and accomplished His atoning work on the cross for His people the enemy's head was crushed fulfilling the promise to Adam and Eve. In that crushing the serpent or strong man was necessarily bound so as not to be able to deceive the nations from hearing and embracing the gospel of Jesus Christ. With that said however, this binding did not eliminate the work of Satan from being able to continue to accuse and confuse in other ways, even utilizing false brethren and false teachers within the church. This is why Paul warned Timothy of the roaring of this lion that still had teeth.

1 Timothy 4:1-2 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron.

Even after Christ bound and plundered the strong man's house, the Lord in his providence gave Satan enough leash to affect what God allowed him to affect for God's purposes, which are many, not the least of which is to help prove our faith in the promises of God. Job comes to mind.

Again, the binding that is demonstrated in Revelation 20 mentions only one aspect of being bound; so as not to deceive the nations, which Jesus defines as a reference to the gospel succeeding in the world as our risen Lord crashes the gates of Hades. Since the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ the gospel has gone out into all the world despite the opposition of the world and Satan's influence. But there's something else that is interesting about this binding of Satan in Revelation 20 that should not go unnoticed as it relates to what happens in the previous chapters of Revelation. Remember, the premil position is by and large, a chronological approach to reading the book of Revelation where one chapter follows the next in time.

But this raises an issue in regard to the binding of Satan so as not to deceive the nations according to Rev.20:3.

Sam Storms in his book Kingdom Come frames the dilemma this way. [The] action designed to prevent the Satanic deception of the nations [have] already been deceived and consequently destroyed in Revelation 19:19-21. In other words, it makes little sense to speak of protecting the nations from deception by Satan in Revelation 20, after the nations have been both deceived by Satan and destroyed by Christ at his return in the previous chapter.

Let's look at the passages that Sam Storms addresses as he makes this point.

Revelation 19:19 And I 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.

This is a picture of a world-wide confederation of the great war where the armies of the earth fight against the one who **sat on** a white horse, and *is* called Faithful and True, [who] in righteousness judges and wages war.

This is the context where the satanic enemies of Christ are preparing to wage war with the Lamb in chapter 19 of Revelation. And then we read this in the next set of verses of chapter 19.

Revelation 19:20 And 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; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. 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.

So, here's the question. Why does Satan need to be bound from deceiving the nations for a thousand years in chapter 20 if everyone has already been deceived and subsequently killed in chapter 19 with the sword which came from the mouth of him who sat on the throne?

The outcome is the same in both chapters because *both chapters are describing the same great and final war with the same result with a few added details*. But when in human history does this binding of Satan take place? As I

showed earlier the premil position places this binding just before the millennium where Christ will be seated on David's literal throne in Jerusalem where at the end of this thousand-year reign Satan is loosed by God to gather rebels for the final war. The postmil position places the binding of Satan sometime between cross and our Lord's second return. The amil takes a similar approach as the postmil as they identify the binding of Satan as taking place at the cross or the resurrection depending on who you ask in that camp. So, have we answered what this thousand-years is as it relates to the binding of Satan? Not quite yet, because there is another group who are operating within this same one thousand years who are an integral part of the answer. For this we have to revisit Revelation 20.

Revelation 20:4-5 Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I *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; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.

Remember, we're still in the vision mode as John sees something, in this case thrones with someone sitting on these thrones. Some will distinguish those sitting on the thrones who are given judgment from the group identified as the souls of those who had been beheaded for their faith. However, that doesn't change the location of those sitting on thrones and those who were beheaded as residing in heaven. And this is the crux of the matter. Notice who these people in verse 4 are not. They are not saints living on the earth reigning with Christ for a thousand years. If we look at the imagery in this vision setting with a correct set of glasses, we would see these are people in heaven reigning with Christ from heaven for a thousand years.

How do we know with certainty that these are saints who are absent from the body but present with the Lord in heaven? Look at the end of verse 4 as these martyrs do what in this context? They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. Wait a minute. In what way do they come to life if they're already in heaven? In fact, the text is very clear as verse 5 identifies saints in heaven by

juxtaposing those who died in Christ with the rest of the dead who did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This tells us that two distinct groups were *physically* dead. One group, who died in their faith in Christ, now in heaven, have already come to spiritual life while the other group who is dead and not in heaven will not come to life until the thousand years are completed.

What does all of this mean? What set of glasses are we wearing? The thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ with his saints, according to verse 4, is not on the earth. The martyred saints in this context, are reigning a thousand years in heaven. And again, don't lose sight of the fact that we're reading about a vision with symbolic language. But in what way do these saints in heaven come to life if not by resurrection? The short answer is that they do come to life by resurrection. But which resurrection? Wouldn't you know that the text of Revelation 20:5 gives us the answer. Let's look at it again in light of verse 4 telling us that the martyrs came to life while they were in heaven and reigned with Christ in heaven for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.

Let's first deal with the rest of the dead who did not come to life, first. If you were to look at death and life as described in the book of Revelation, we see two of each state. There is what is described as a second death in Revelation 20:14, and a first resurrection in verse 5. In light of these two truths there must be a first death and a second resurrection. In other words, there is a first and second death and there is also a first and second resurrection.

Let's define the second death first as we jump down to the end of Revelation 20 where we read, **Revelation 20:14-15** Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Okay so, we've defined the second death. But what about the first death? What is that? The first death is actually defined by our first parents, Adam and Eve. Let me remind you of what God told these two prior to their rebellion.

Genesis 2:16-17 The LORD God commanded the man, saying, From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.

And what did Adam and Eve do with this command from God? They debated with Satan as to whether or not his word was true.

Genesis 3:4-5 The serpent said to the woman, You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

The woman reasoned that this would be a good thing to pursue for herself and mankind since we know that she and Adam were to be fruitful and multiply.

Genesis 3:6-7 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

What transpired from that moment would change the world in the most dramatic way as they went from spiritual life to spiritual death conferring that spiritual death on all their offspring, as in Adam all die. The moment they ate of the fruit, which God commanded them not to eat, the promise from God that they would die was immediately put into effect, and the result is seen in God's judgment on both Adam and Eve together with the serpent who deceived them.

Genesis 3:14-15 The LORD God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life; And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.

Adam and Eve died spiritually that day in the Garden, and yet God promised to send a deliverer through the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the seed of the serpent which is to say that God would reverse the curse of sin which is death, through the seed of the woman. This is the first death that the apostle Paul speaks of in **1**

Corinthians 15:22 in light of a resurrection. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. Paul is not teaching universalism here. He is not making a one-to-one correlation which suggests that because all are dead in Adam, that all, without exception will be made alive in Christ. Rather he is distinguishing between all who are spiritually dead and how one is actually brought from the first death to life in Christ. But then Paul continues his thought in the next verse regarding coming to life in Christ. He says, but each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, [second coming] then *comes* the end.

When Paul speaks of coming to life in Christ he puts this life into the category of chronological sequences. He begins with coming to life with Christ and tells us that there is a sequence happening with this special life and it begins with Christ as the first; Christ the first fruits is the way Paul puts it. But he already defined it only a couple of verses earlier.

1 Corinthians 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

In other words of those who have fallen asleep, a metaphor for physical death, Jesus is the first fruits of life with the anticipation that those who have died will likewise be bodily raised from the dead.

We see this analogy with Lazarus, with a caveat. It was Lazarus, the friend of Jesus who died and for four days he laid in a tomb before Jesus came to be with Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus. Remember when Martha said, Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You. Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again. Martha said to Him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?

Jesus then went on to call the dead Lazarus to life. That of course was a resurrection of sorts, but it's not the resurrection that Paul is ascribing to Jesus as the first fruits from death to life. Remember, Lazarus was physically brought back to life, but it goes without saying, that he physically died again. One of the few people in the world who had two separate funerals after having died twice. In

fact, after Lazarus was brought back to life by Christ, we're told that the Jews wanted to kill him.

John 12:9-10 The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He [Jesus] was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also;

The resurrection of Jesus was a one-time unique event in history where the Son of Man chose to bring himself back to everlasting life in a glorified body. Remember only born-again believers are promised a glorified body so theirs is free of corruption and capable of living in God's presence forever. However, unbelievers will also be raised bodily, but to judgment not glory. That's the whole point of Paul's letter to the Corinthians in chapter 15 when he equates the resurrection of Jesus Christ with the type of resurrection mortal men will have one day who have trusted Christ as Lord and Savior. And here Paul falls back on categories, not of sequence this time but categories of glory.

1 Corinthians 15:41-42 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable *body*, it is raised an imperishable *body*;

Lazarus was not raised by Jesus with an imperishable body. He physically died again. Jesus is the first fruits of a resurrection that is of a glory that far exceeds any glory in this world, and Paul is saying that we who are in Christ will share in that glory found in the risen Christ who went before us as the first fruits. This is what the apostle John tells us in his first epistle.

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, [speaking of his second coming] we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

This is what Scripture would point to as the second resurrection in light of the first resurrection that John acknowledges in Revelation 20 in relation to the saints in

heaven reigning with Christ for a thousand years. And Jesus actually points out both of these resurrections when describing the resurrection to Martha at the tomb of Lazarus. Look at it again.

John 11:23 Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again. What resurrection was Martha thinking of when Jesus made this statement? Well, we know which resurrection she had in mind in her response.

John 11:24 Martha said to Him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.

Martha is referencing the bodily resurrection of God's people as she connects this resurrection of her brother Lazarus to the last day. She not only knew of this resurrection according to OT teaching on the resurrection, she had undoubtedly heard it from the lips of Jesus that we find back in chapter 6.

John 6:38-39 For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

This is a reference to the bodily resurrection of the saints. And notice that the resurrection of God's people takes place on the last day, what the apostle Peter describes as the day of the Lord which is the great judgment of God on the last day where the entire universe is subject to his judgment.

2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

Enter the fires of Revelation 19 and 20. We'll come back to that. But back to Martha and Jesus. Though Martha rightly connects the bodily resurrection of God's people on the last day, Jesus adds to what resurrection means in light of death.

John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?

Let's take a closer look at these words of Jesus to Martha. He who believes in Me will live even if he dies. Keeping the context in mind here of Jesus being the resurrection and the life, this statement is identifying a life that begins when a person believes on Christ which is tied to resurrection.

What kind of life are we talking about that does not cease even if one physically dies? The apostle Paul addresses this phenomenon when writing to the church in Rome.

Romans 6:5-? For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, Now, if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Remember, Paul is talking to people who are physically alive and yet he is speaking in the present tense describing their spiritual status before a holy God as those who are presently dead to sin, but also presently alive in Christ. There's a lot going on here but it's important that you see Paul's logic in this argument. He of course is speaking of the bodily resurrection of Christ, but he ties the believer not only to the resurrection of Christ but also to the death of Christ. So, in a sense Paul is saying that what Christ did by dying on the cross and then rising from the dead so as to defeat death, you and I did, vicariously of course. We didn't actually die on the cross to completely satisfy the requirement of the law that demands perfection before a holy God, and we did not bodily rise from the dead. Rather, we are united with Christ through faith now having received all the benefits of his death on the cross along with the all the benefits of Christ rising from the dead. This is why Paul said, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.

Prior to us coming to Christ by faith our old self was not united to Christ, but united to Adam, whose death we inherited. God says, that death, our first death in Adam, is gone for the believer. Don't lose me here because we're still talking about the first resurrection and hopefully you can see where I am going with this. Listen again to what Paul says to the Romans. Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. In the same way, you and I in Christ have been raised from the dead where we will never die again. Never to die again? I thought all people die; no one escapes death, not even Christians. That's the point Jesus was making with

Martha. He who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.

Well, if we die physically and yet we will never die if we are united to Christ, what life are we talking about and what death are we talking about? This takes us full circle back to the saints in Revelation 20 who died in and for their faith and came alive and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. Yes, we're still dealing with the millennium. If we were dead in our transgressions and sins, what is called the first death, which was in Adam, but we are now presently alive in Christ through faith in him alone, and are told that we will never die again what have we experienced even if we die physically? Let's go back to our text.

Revelation 20:4-5 And they [believers who have physically died in Christ, absent from the body but present with the Lord] came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. This is the first resurrection.

Revelation 20:6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

If we have participated in the first resurrection (born-again-regeneration of our spirit) we are promised not to partake of the second death, the lake of fire at the very end of this present age. But if the first resurrection is identified with these saints in heaven who are absent from the body but present with the Lord, how does that work for we who are still on this planet?

What John is doing in identifying these martyrs in heaven with a first resurrection is two-fold. On the one hand they have passed from physical death to spiritual life. In this way they have been elevated from this present cursed earth to be in the presence of the Lord where they can never die again. But in what way were they allowed to move from this cursed earth to the present heaven? Remember what Paul said to saints in Rome who were physically alive as they are united to Christ? Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus, present tense. To have been delivered from death unto life necessarily involves resurrection, albeit in light of the resurrection of Christ. How can we be resurrected in the here and now when we all know that resurrection involves the body being physically raised from the dead? Only if there is more than

one type of resurrection. If the saints in heaven are experiencing the first resurrection and yet are still absent from the body it necessarily means they are waiting for the only other resurrection, which has to be identified as the second resurrection, a bodily resurrection. So, the first resurrection is spiritual in nature. In fact this is exactly what we read in **Ephesians 2:4-6** But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions [first death], made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, [first resurrection] and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, **Colossians 2:12** having been buried with Him in baptism [a reference to the first death], in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God [a reference to the first resurrection].

We who have trusted Christ as Lord and Savior have been raised from spiritual death to spiritual life, and just like those saints in heaven, all of God's people have experienced a first spiritual resurrection from death to life that guarantees we'll never taste the second death which is the lake of fire. By the way, this also explains the statement in **Revelation 20:5** The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed.

If the saints in heaven have come to life after their physical deaths on planet earth, (absent from the body, present with the Lord) who are the rest of the dead who did not come to life until the thousand years are completed? There's only one answer, the rest of the dead are those who died outside of Christ awaiting the day they will be resurrected out of their tombs when the thousand years are over.

John 5:28-29 Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment.

For the believer who has received his first resurrection from spiritual death to spiritual life by faith in Christ, this verse is describing the second resurrection (bodily) for them on the last day. For the unbeliever it is a coming out of their tomb, described in Revelation 20 as them coming to life, so as to be judged in their bodily resurrection state. So, what do we do with these saints in heaven who are

presently reigning with Christ for a thousand years, if this resurrection that is attached to them is spiritual in nature? Let's go back to Revelation 20.

Revelation 20:4 And I *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; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

If these saints who died in Christ are presently ruling and reigning with Christ in heaven then it necessarily means that all saints in Christ who are absent from the body and present with the Lord are presently reigning with Christ, which is a reign in heaven. These are not people on earth though as we'll see in a moment it necessarily involves Christ's saints presently on earth. Remember when we talk about reigning with Christ, we are talking about the Kingdom of God into which we have been adopted as those who were raised to spiritual life in Christ, where we go from being enemies of God to now being a friend of God, sons and daughters of God in Christ. When Paul was addressing the physical and thus the second resurrection of the saints, he makes the point there is a present reality of reigning with him today since we have been given the downpayment by the Holy Spirit today for that future hope.

1 Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. Present tense.

The context here certainly alludes to a spiritual resurrection as saints on earth are presently alive in Christ. But the entire context of 1 Corinthians 15 is addressing the bodily resurrection of those who are in Christ. So, this would be a reference to the second resurrection at the coming of Christ, what Jesus plainly acknowledged as happening on the last day. And this is where the premils massage the meaning of the second coming of Christ by identifying it in a two-stage process with two separate events. The first event in their two-stage return is called the rapture where Christ comes in the clouds and takes those saints who are alive on earth to heaven without technically touching down on earth, where that event starts the countdown for the seven year tribulation at the end of which Christ actually comes back as he touches down on earth to set up a physical kingdom in Jerusalem where he will reign from his throne for a thousand years. But there is nowhere in Scripture that

makes this distinction between a secret coming in the clouds and a separate physical return to earth where presumably people on earth at that time reign with him for a thousand years found in Revelation 20, despite the fact that Revelation 19 tells us that the final war not only has the enemies of God being thrown into the lake of fire but also that the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. So, if everyone has been killed in this final war, who's left to inhabit, let alone reign on the earth for a thousand years? Things that make you go hmmmmmm.

There are only two comings of Christ into this world, mentioned in the Scriptures, not three. His first coming was in Bethlehem when he was born into this world. The second coming of Christ was announced to the disciples at the ascension of Christ back to heaven. It's found in the book of Acts.

Acts 1:9-11 And after [Jesus] had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.

How was Jesus taken up from the earth into heaven?

Bodily. When he comes back to the earth in the same way, according to the angel, how will he come back this second time? Bodily. Remember when Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the bodily resurrection of those who are in Christ, he connects our bodily resurrection to the bodily resurrection of Jesus and then he tells us when we will be resurrected. And when will that be?

1 Corinthians 15:23 those who are Christ's [will be resurrected] at His coming, which of course would be his second and final coming. But who will receive their glorified immortal bodies when Christ comes? Every saint in Christ. You mean those who are dead in Christ like the saints in heaven who are presently reigning with Christ as well as everyone else who is alive when Christ returns? Exactly. That's what Paul told the Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

Two groups are being identified here as it relates to the second and final coming of Christ. We who are alive and remain on this earth until the coming of Christ are on this planet waiting for his second return. The second group are those who have fallen asleep. Who are those folks? The same group in Revelation who have died in the faith who are absent from the body and presently reigning with the Lord, who are waiting for the second resurrection where they get their glorified bodies, just like those who are waiting on earth. Paul says our corruptible bodies are sown in dishonor they will be raised in glory. Yeah, but what about the rapture, doesn't that happen first? The answer is a resounding no. The rapture happens second.

Paul says, that we who are alive will not precede those who have fallen asleep or died. The premils teach the opposite. They teach we who are alive will be raptured first and then at some future point everyone else, including those who have fallen asleep will be resurrected. But that's not what Scripture teaches. Those who have died in Christ will get their immortal bodies first through a resurrection and then everyone else who is living on planet earth who is in Christ, when he returns on the last day, will get their incorruptible bodies through a special transformation or changing, not a resurrection in the technical sense. And it could not be made much clearer as Paul continues to give the run down on how this happens.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead (those who have physically died) in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive (have not physically died) and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we [both groups] shall always be with the Lord. Do you see the progression here? Those who are dead in Christ will rise first. But then Paul addresses a second group of people who are alive on planet earth when Christ returns. And what happens to them? They will be caught up. What is this strange language that is describing a catching up? Yeah, the rapture. Everyone concedes that the word rapture doesn't appear anywhere in the word of God, but the concept does and it's found right here in 1 Thessalonians. The phrase caught up is only one word in the Greek; harpazo and it means to seize, catch up, snatch away. We don't speak of being harpazo'd, out of this world

we speak of being raptured. The word rapture comes from the Latin word for being caught up.

But what does rapture actually entail as it relates to the resurrection? The rapture of the church on earth at Christ's second coming on the last day, is just another way of saying that our physical bodies are transformed into our immortal glorified bodies. Technically those who are caught up to meet the Lord in the air along with the saints who have died in Christ do not have the same type of experience as those whose bodies are in the ground and are raised out of their tombs. Think of Jesus. His dead body came to life and he walked out of that tomb. Those who are alive when Christ comes back do not raise out of a tomb. Why? Because they are alive, thus they are changed on the very day when those who are dead in Christ are raised out of their tombs. Paul describes it this way.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep [that is we will not all die], but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we [those who are alive] will be changed.

Paul is again making a distinction between those who have fallen asleep, that is those who have died in Christ, and we who have not fallen asleep, that is we who are alive when Christ comes back. Paul calls it a changing. The changing means we are changed from mere mortal corruptible human beings to immortal incorruptible human beings as we are changed into our glorified physical bodies. How long does that take according to Paul? In the twinkling of an eye.

Do you know what all of this means? It means that when Christ returns on the last day, the resurrection of those who are in their tombs who have died in Christ and those who have not died when Christ returns both get their glorified bodies at almost the identical time, within the twinkling of an eye from each other.

There is no rapture that takes place prior to the actual second coming of Christ. The resurrection of those in their tombs and the rapture of those who are alive when Christ returns both happen at the same time and on the same day what Paul identifies as the day when the last trumpet sounds. What is that? It's a description of the final

judgment of mankind as Christ returns as King and Lord and Judge. This final judgment is described in Matthew. Matthew 24:27-31 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. But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

Jesus puts the resurrection/rapture, or the gathering of his elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky, into perspective and gives us the day on which he raises his people who are either dead or alive when he comes.

John 6:38-39 For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

We know the last day is not only the day of Christ raising his people up in the second resurrection, together with rapturing those who are alive in Christ, it is also the same day of judgment for all people outside of Christ.

John 12:48 He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.

Okay, so how does all of this fit into a thousand years where Christ's saints reign with him? And why is it important that we get it right?

Ask yourself, what is the common thread to all three views of the millennium? It's hope in a particular teaching as it relates to our futures. Many premls have on the top of their list the hope of escaping death in the rapture as the rest of unbelieving mankind is left behind to face tribulation. The postmil is looking forward to a golden age where justice is finally served through the law of God as this world is transformed into a kingdom where all people acknowledge

that Christ is king and then Christ returns. The amil says that the kingdom of God is already among us as Christ rules and reigns at the right of the Father together with all born-again believers, those who are alive and those who have physically died and are reigning with Christ in heaven today, and that one day, Christ will come back in glory to receive us unto himself, a bodily resurrection, thus a delayed hope. These are three very different views and as I said early on, they can't all be biblically true. Each has their hope placed in Christ but with a different emphasis on their futures in relationship to the millennium. But hope that is misplaced or misunderstood can actually lead to despair. If one's hope is constrained to a time that is necessarily fulfilled in this present sin-filled cursed world, be it in a golden age, or prematurely escaping this planet to meet the Lord in the air, then our hope is not focused in the promise that God wants us to hope in and when that hope will be fulfilled.

Consider the first century Jews. They had a misplaced hope regarding the Kingdom of God. Many had their hope NOT in the Messiah's first coming prophesied in the Scriptures to redeem men from sin. Rather their hope was to overcome Rome as they wanted to force Jesus to become a King and sit on an earthly throne in Jerusalem. Likewise, many today have a misplaced hope as they look to an earthly kingdom in Israel where true biblical prophecy regarding the eternal kingdom of God is replaced with the most current events in the middle east found in the pages of the New York times or by people frantically scanning their phones waiting with bated breath for the next news cycle, rather than longing for our eternal inheritance, which is the true hope the apostle Paul longed for. He addresses what this hope is when testifying to King Agrippa. Listen closely to his use of the word hope several times in the same sentence and what that hope actually is.

Acts 26:6-8 And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; *the promise* to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve *God* night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. Why is it considered incredible among you *people* if God does raise the dead?

Some might argue that Paul highlights the twelve tribes here to create a special and unique hope for the nation of Israel. But remember, Paul is making a defense of the gospel to King Agrippa in light of his Jewish brethren

falsely accusing him of being a traitor to the nation for his stance against the law as being the means to salvation.

Acts 26:2 In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today;

Paul is actually distancing himself from the Jews and their take on the hope of Israel which they characterized as a sort of resurrection to power in Israel as a rebirthed nation. Paul is correcting their misguided understanding of what the promises of God to Israel really are as he defines the promise as the resurrection of God's people that was demonstrated through Christ's redemptive work that was culminated in his bodily resurrection.

This is the same hope of the saints who surround the throne in heaven found in Revelation 20, not in their first resurrection, which was being born-again by faith in Christ alone, but looking to their second resurrection, their glorified bodily resurrection. Those who place their hope in any aspect of the temporal world will be sorely disappointed as the world has no place for hope, outside of our hope in Christ who says, my kingdom is not of this world, which is to say, his kingdom fulfilled is in the age to come. To suggest that there will be a golden age in this world, or that there will be a literal thousand-year reign of Christ on the present sin-filled world is misguided, and both views will only lead to a false hope that will not deliver. Like the angel holding a chain who grabs a dragon and throws him into a pit is symbolic language describing how God has placed Satan on a short leash, so too is the thousand years, or the millennium, in that immediate context, which is not a literal number, but a symbolic representation of the time in which Satan is curbed from his unhindered deception of the world as Christ's kingdom goes forth through the power of the gospel.

Our hope is not tied to this world or anything of this world. I cannot emphasize it enough. Jesus said it, My kingdom is not of this world. If this world is part of your hope, you have divided your allegiance between this age and the age to come. Paul reminded the Corinthians of this very thing when he said,

2 Corinthians 1:9-10 indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so

great a *peril of* death, and will deliver *us*, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us.

But our hope of resurrection that Paul longed for is not a hope that is merely found in our bodies being raised in glory. It includes the hope of WHERE we resurrected saints will rule and reign with Christ forever, not just a thousand years. Remember the intermediate state of being absent from the body and present with the Lord in the present heaven is not the ultimate destination for the glorified resurrected bodies of believers.

Many Christians, and I mean Christians from any one of these three eschatological camps, have a tendency to see their final resting place as the present heaven. But Scripture doesn't teach this. I understand why most Christians say they would rather be in heaven with Christ than having to live on a sin-filled cursed earth as did the apostle Paul. But in most of our hearts there are things in this world that we understandably don't want to leave. Family, friends; the beauty of a world many have not had the chance to discover first hand. This world, as awful as it can be, is still a place where we feel comfortable. Why? One reason and it's the best reason- It's where God created us to be forever. We were formed by God from the dust of the earth to spend our lives on the earth, and in the beginning, it was a beautiful place with a paradise as the home base for mankind to go out from and populate the earth and take care of it as we were to rule and reign with our God on this earth. That all changed with Adam's rebellion as in him we all die, spiritually and physically.

But even in death earth is still our home and the hope that Paul longed for was a return to a new earth in a glorified incorruptible body. That was his bitter sweet perspective knowing that though he would be absent from the body and present with the Lord, which would be better, he also knew it was not God's best, as our Creator has much bigger plans for his people in Christ. Paul put it this way when writing to the Romans.

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

What glory is Paul talking about, heaven? Nope. He's talking about the resurrection in a very specific setting. Let's continue to read.

Romans 8:19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.

The revealing of the sons of God in this context is addressing the bodily resurrection of the saints. But notice what is waiting for the revealing of the sons of God found in the beginning of this verse.

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.

How does creation, and by this Paul means the universe, wait eagerly for the resurrection of the sons of God?

Let's read on.

Romans 8:20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it.

What futility was the creation subjected to against its will? The futility that God placed on it as he cursed the ground because of man's sin.

But Paul goes on.

Romans 8:20-21 in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

There's that hope word Paul used to describe the hope of Israel that pointed to the resurrection and how he uses it again in relationship to the resurrection except now he includes the creation itself that is hoping to be delivered from its slavery to corruption [that is the curse] into the freedom of the glory of the children of God, where both creation and man are made new.

Nowhere does Paul hint at a hope that includes a world enslaved to corruption where Christ returns to set up a thousand-year kingdom. Paul places the bodily resurrection of man and the restoration of the universe as both being experienced together at the same time, the last day of this age and the start of the eternal age to come. And what world is Paul talking about that would be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God where both would find their ultimate hope? The apostle Peter addresses this.

2 Peter 3:13 But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

And why wouldn't we be looking for new heavens and a new earth, when in fact this was always God's plan for his people as the prophet Isaiah point out.

Isaiah 65:17 For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.

Our hope is in Christ as the first-fruits of resurrection to which we long as we await the revealing of our new incorruptible bodies either through resurrection or rapture both happening on the last day at the same time. And where would a glorified physical body reside for eternity? On the very planet God designed for us in the beginning now made new without the curse, which takes us back to Revelation.

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea.

Revelation 21:3-4 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

Is this your hope or is your hope still relegated to a corruptible world that Christ makes plain is not where his kingdom ultimately belongs for any length of time? Is heaven all you can hope for or do you see the blessed hope of a new heavens and new earth in righteousness ruling and reigning in our glorified physical bodies with our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ forever?

My prayer for you is the prayer Paul prayed on behalf of the Ephesians about this very subject.

Ephesians 1:18-19 *I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.

It is in this context that Peter sums it all up for we who have this hope and how we should live in the hope of our Lord Jesus returning as we go forward as servants of our most high God with a message of hope for the world with the understanding that the risen Christ has been seated for

the last two thousand years, and is continuing to be seated at the right hand of the Father ruling and reigning from his throne today, what John symbolically describes as the millennium. To borrow the words from Francis Schaffer in light of this hope, “How then should we live?” I’ll let Peter help us out here as he addressed the new heavens and new earth.

2 Peter 3:14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless.

Remember, Christ is the Victor of the Spiritual Battle. As believers Christ has made us more than conquerors. We belong to the One presently ruling and reigning and Who has empowered us for the mission of making disciples with the Gospel until He comes again. I would be remiss if I didn’t include those words found in Titus 2:11–13: For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.