The Genmillennial View (a generational millennium)

The focus of this presentation will be to prove that the doctrine of the millennium found in Revelation 20 fits within a forty-year generation, the transition period from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, also known as the second exodus from AD 27–67. I will focus on establishing the four following primary assumptions that are critical to this view:

1. Revelation 20 is a recapitulation of what has already been thoroughly stated three times throughout the book of Revelation. It is a summary chapter intended to wrap up or summarize information previously given in the preceding chapters in a method referred to as “progressive parallelism” by many postmillennial and partial preterist theologians, as well as critical scholars.

2. The Apostles, and even Jesus Himself, understood without elaborating that the entire redemptive scheme, including the millennium, was contained within all of their Old Testament eschatological hopes. Jesus and the Apostles applied Old Testament prophecy, types, shadows, and texts to the first-century generation which would then usher in the eternal Kingdom Age or New Covenant Age, which was the “age to come.”

3. All biblical eschatology hinges upon the Jewish festal calendar (the seven Feast Days). Whatever that calendar relates in hidden symbolism or foreshadowing should indicate where or how the millennium fits within the scheme of redemptive history. If the Apostles and Jesus fulfilled the feast day’s typology within the first-century generation, then the millennium must fall within that generation as well.

4. The millennium is a specific period of time which has a definitive end and also fits within the scope of redemptive history. The Kingdom or church Age has no end and is distinct and separate from the millennium. All discussion concerning the millennium involves a period of time with a beginning and an end, regardless of the amount of time the millennium is believed to extend.

The assumptions above will be demonstrated by showing that the Bible does not clearly elaborate on the idea of two distinct millenniums in Revelation 20 as argued within perpetual millennialism and bimillennialism. If John wanted his audience to discern two different, distinct or separate millenniums, he certainly did a poor job of making that distinction. Furthermore, neither did Jesus, the Apostles, or the disciples elaborate on a perpetual or bimillennial scheme. In fact, the idea of a millennium
can only be specifically found in Revelation 20 and in extra-biblical texts within second temple Jewish literature. Both “two-millennium” schemes are forced to formulate sophisticated arguments to suggest that the millennium of Revelation 20:1-3 is somehow different from that of verses 4ff. This will be the focus of our counter arguments as well as our presentation of Revelation 20.

Progressive Parallel Approach to Revelation

Our general approach to the book of Revelation as a whole is known as *progressive parallelism*. This approach and similar interpretive methodologies are defended primarily by critical scholars such as Charles H. Giblin, David L. Barr, Adela Yarbro Collins, G. K. Beale, and Elisabeth Schusselr Fiorenza, as well as postmillennial theologians such as Kenneth Gentry and William Hendriksen. While there are certainly some differences between a full preterist or realized eschatological scheme and partial preterist applications of the progressive parallel approach, the framework that brings us to understand Revelation 20 in the manner that we do first derives from this general systematic understanding.

The basic parallel structure of the book of Revelation has been documented throughout church history. In one of the earliest extant commentaries on Revelation, Victorinus of Pettau (ca. AD 305) proposed that the seven bowl plagues (cf. Revelation 15:1–16:21) do not chronologically follow the seven trumpet plagues (cf. Revelation 8:6–11:15) as part of a continuous series but are actually parallel accounts of the same events, which they recapitulate in another form. Victorinus’ principle of recapitulation was taken up by Tyconius who applied this rule in his influential commentary on the book of Revelation, written about AD 385.

G. K. Beale (The Book of Revelation, 532-534) observed that “the trumpets go over the same ground as the seal woes, but from a different perspective” and “the bowl woes are temporally parallel with the trumpets.” Throughout each of the three major scenes in Revelation (i.e. 7 Seals, 7 Trumpets, and 7 Bowls), each has a separate focus. In a 2014 article on *Recapitulation in Revelation: Part 2*, Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. highlighted this with fantastic precision:

> It even seems that the three septets reflect a perspective from three aspects of Israel: The seals emphasize the people, as we see in their climax in the protective numbering of the 144,000 and the vision of the great multitude in heaven in Revelation 7 (these will be spared God’s judgments). The trumpets emphasize the temple, as we may discern from their beginning at the golden altar of incense in heaven
(8:3–5) and in their climax in the trampling of the earthly temple (11:2) and the opening of the heavenly one in 11:19. And the vials highlight Jerusalem, as we note in their climax in the judgment of the great city in Revelation 16:19; 17–18. Of course, all of these focus on first-century Israel whose judgment is Revelation’s theme.¹

The primary consideration for our presentation is the actual structure of Revelation 20. Using the same progressive parallel approach that we find throughout the book, John concludes his third and final parallel section in chapter 19 with a review and summary section beginning in chapter 20. B. B. Warfield sees Revelation as “advancing in a spiral fashion to its climax.” The previous parallel scenes in Revelation have all advanced and spiraled toward the climactic summary chapters 20-21, with the epilogue in chapter 22 of the book.²

The ultimate goal of John’s Apocalypse is to take the reader on a journey toward the end-game, which is the ushering in of the New Covenant Kingdom Age, depicted in chapter 21 by the entrance of the city (e.g. New Jerusalem) within the New Heavens and Earth coming down from heaven. The literary context of these images in the full preterist framework defines the city as the church, and the New Heavens and Earth is defined as the New Covenant Kingdom Age or era, surpassing the Old Covenant or Old Heavens and Earth Age and Jewish cultus. Thus, chapter 20 serves as a summary outline of everything John has envisioned in his parallel scenes up to this point. It is the climax that takes the reader through the entire scope of the book of Revelation in order to reveal the ultimate goal bookended with its conclusion in Revelation 21-22.

The Parameters of Revelation and the Millennium

John established some very important parameters for us in the first chapter of Revelation which help us to define the period of time in which the millennium ought to fit. In Revelation 1:19 John was told to write the things that he had seen, the things that were currently taking place and the things that were about to take place.

¹ https://postmillennialworldview.com/2014/03/05/recapitulation-in-revelation-part-2/ (accessed July, 14, 2017). Gentry is a conservative and reformed pastor, postmillennial writer, and conference speaker, as well as the director of GoodBirth Ministries, a non-profit religious educational ministry.
The literal Greek phrase for “about to take place” is “…mellei genestei meta tauta (μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα).” According to Wigram’s Analytical Greek Lexicon and A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament by J. H. Mayer, the Greek word mellei (when used as a present participle, present infinitive, present subjective, or a present indicative) is, without exception, used for an eager expectation of something about to take place. This word is a strengthened form of mello which means to “defer” or to “put something off for a later date.” Of the 111 occurrences, this word is used in the New Testament, almost always referring to something that will soon take place or that has an expectation of taking place in the very near future. For our discussion, Revelation 1:19 and the use of mellei here is used in the present indicative form, which means it is a reference to an “action in progress ongoing at the present time.”

So the sequence of the verse is continuous and does not contain gaps, delays, or different periods, but is sequential. In other words, everything written within the book of Revelation contains events, images, or descriptions of things that took place in the past, which are immediately followed by things that were currently happening when John wrote the book, which are then followed by things that would take place immediately afterward, in John’s near future. Most preterists are in agreement here, so we need not belabor the argument here. Since John indicated that at least some of the things in the book would “soon” take place, we can postulate that the final portions of each of John’s parallel, progressive visions look forward to his near future, which would include those events described in the final, climactic, summary chapters of the entire book.3

Thus, according to John, the events of Revelation which were not yet fulfilled were soon about to take place or were ready to be fulfilled shortly after he had written the book. Consider that the following events were to take place in chronological order:

- The First Resurrection (those in Christ and coming to life throughout the Great Commission from AD 27–66), which is synonymous with those reigning and ruling during the forty-year millennium

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3 While some futurist Christian theologians argue for “certainty” regarding mello, the consensus view among Historical Jesus Scholarship, Historical-Critical Scholarship, Liberal Scholarship, Historians, etc., is that the word mello is defined as “near imminence,” and especially in its strengthened form mellei. The only authors and commentators to our knowledge who don’t recognize this clear definition are futurist theologians who deny a first-century coming of the Lord of any kind and who are then forced to re-define the word in order to substantiate their view of a future imminent coming of Jesus. In doing so, they deny the present indicative form rules of the Greek language.
• The Martyrdom (those killed for their testimony near the end of the millennium from AD 63–66)
• Flight of the Christians to Pella and elsewhere (AD 66)
• The Resurrection of the “Rest of the Dead” who had died in ages past (AD 66)
• The Great Tribulation and Falling Away of national Israel (AD 66–70, which lasted exactly 3.5 years and is the period in which the satan or adversary is released for a “little while” to deceive the nations of Israel)
• The Judgment of Israel, the passing away of the Old Covenant Jewish Law (Torah), Temple and cultus, and the coming of the Lord (AD 70)
• The consummation and the full inauguration of the eternal New Covenant Kingdom Age or the New Heavens and Earth (AD 70)

Since the final events listed near the end of each of John’s visions and at the end of the book were to be fulfilled soon in John’s future, then if the millennium was to take place prior to the inauguration of the eternal Kingdom and the New Heavens and Earth, this precludes the possibility of the millennium extending beyond AD 70. This was the time in which the judgment of Israel reached its climax and the old order passed. To place any millennial scheme outside of this first-century context one would need to argue that the millennium of Revelation 20:4ff refers to the very same Kingdom Age without end described in chapters 21-22.

It is our opinion that Revelation 20 recapitulates the previous three major visions or scenes throughout the book in summary fashion (as we argued before in our presentation). Revelation 20 serves as a summary chapter and then it flows directly into chapters 21-22 to present the climactic end of the Old Covenant Age and the establishment of the eternal New Covenant Kingdom Age. The millennium of chapter 20 takes place prior to the establishment and ushering in of the New Heavens and Earth and the City of Jerusalem from Heaven in chapters 21 and 22. Those things described were to be fulfilled or inaugurated soon for John and his contemporary audience.

Simply put, the millennium could not extend beyond the inauguration of the Kingdom and New Heavens and Earth of chapters 21–22 if chapter 20 is a summary outline of all the previous scenes in Revelation. To the contrary, Revelation 20 flows immediately into the visions of chapters 21–22 which not only do not recapitulate / repeat the millennium, but also they do not describe a different millennium; rather, chapters 21–22 succeed the millennium and usher in the Kingdom Age expectation. The millennium was a defined period of time. The Kingdom Age is an age
without end. The temporary millennial age existed to bring about the inauguration of the eternal Kingdom Age. They are not one and the same.

As an early date advocate for the book of Revelation, it is our belief that John wrote only a few years prior to AD 70 during the time of the 5th emperor or king of Revelation 17:10 (viz. Nero). If the case can be made that the resurrection of the rest of the dead, the Great Tribulation, the Judgment, and the New Heavens and Earth were all that remained to be fulfilled when John wrote the book (all things that John and his contemporary audience continuously indicated they eagerly awaited and believed would soon be upon them), then it follows that John and his audience were nearing the end of the millennium. This corresponds to the chronology of Revelation 20. Remember, the millennium was to take place prior to the coming of the Lord at the end of all things. All of the Apostles and New Testament writers stated that the coming of the Lord was near or at hand. Therefore, the end of the millennium was near or at hand when John wrote the book of Revelation.

The Parallelism of Revelation 20

In Revelation 20 there are three parts separated by the initial phrase, “Then I saw”: 20:1, 20:4, & 20:11. In the first three verses of chapter 20 we have the first part as a summary outline of the angel (Jesus) holding the key, seizing the dragon (the satan or the adversary), and binding him for the thousand years (the millennium) until it is completed. This was to prevent the adversary from deceiving the nations of Israel during the forty-year Great Commission (AD 27–67). This period of time saw the establishment of the church with Jews from every nation coming to accept the gospel message (cf. Acts 2:5). Following this, the satan was released for a “little while” which we see stated again in Revelation 20:7ff. The pericope of Revelation 20:1-3 encompasses Jesus’ ministry, the Great Commission (i.e. the Second Exodus), and the time of the release of the adversary at the end of the millennium. It could be shown as follows:

Summary outline of all of Revelation, the Ministry of Jesus, the binding of the satan during the millennium, the end of the millenium, and the release of the satan predicted.

In the next three verses (vv. 4-6) we find a description of the audience of those reigning and ruling with Christ, even despite their later martyrdom near the end of the millennial period. The interlude identifies the characters participating with Jesus in verses 1-3 and then picks back up in verse 7 with what happens immediately after verse 3.
Part 2: Revelation 20:4-10 (interlude) – “Then I Saw...”
Identity of those being raised to life and ruling with Jesus as priests and kings during the millennium despite their later martyrdom, the end of the millennium, the release of the satan, the nations of Israel fall away and are deceived, the great battle, and the satan/beast/false prophet are destroyed.

John then concludes the pericope and summary of this section with the White Throne Judgment and the description of the earth and sky (the Jewish Temple and Cultus) having fled away, which would have taken place in AD 70. The books open up, and then all of the dead are judged according to their “works” (under Torah Law).


The Great White Throne Judgment, the Jewish cultus gone, and the books are opened.

This entire section will be explored in more detail later. For now, it is sufficient to merely mention the general structure of chapter 20 within the broader context of some of the other themes we will now explore.

Daniel 9 and the 70 Weeks

It is not our goal here to debate or object to the details of every view surrounding the millennium; however, it is important to note that it must fit within the context of Daniel 9 and the 70 Weeks of Years regardless of one’s eschatological position. Since practically all preterists (orthodox, historic, partial, realized, idealist, or full) agree that Daniel’s 70 Weeks were entirely fulfilled during the first century and prior to AD 70, our position here is simply to make the case for the inclusion of the millennium within that eschatological framework. By doing so this would preclude the millennium doctrine from extending beyond AD 70 at the conclusion of the 70 Weeks of Daniel 9. According to both Evans and Gumerlock, Daniel’s 70th week was...

“... completely fulfilled in the first century A.D. by the combination of Jesus’ ministry and the Jewish War.”

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…fulfilled in the life and ministry of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans several decades afterward. [Early church writers arguing this same point] include Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Julianus Africanus, Eusebius of Caesarea, Ambrosiaster, Isidore of Seville, Isho’dad of Merv, Andrew of Saint Victor, and Peter of Blois … the interpretation that the seventieth week of Daniel’s prophecy has been fulfilled in the first century in the Roman-Judean war is not a modern construction. Rather it has a long history among some of the most illustrious ancient Christian writers. ⁵

If Daniel’s 70 Weeks were fulfilled or applied to the first century, then only three scenarios concerning the placement and timing of the millennium would be feasible:

1. The millennium began immediately following the completion of the 70 Weeks and does not fit within the eschatological framework of the 490-year prophecy of Daniel 9.

2. The millennium fits within the eschatological framework of the 490-year prophecy of Daniel 9, fulfilled during the first century at the conclusion of the 70 Weeks.

3. There is a millennium within the 490-year prophecy of Daniel 9 as well as a millennium outside of Daniel’s 70-Week prophecy following its conclusion in the first century, thus postulating two millenniums: one that is eschatological and in relation to Old Covenant Israel, and one that is not.

Therein lies the dilemma that typically leads to either a partial preterist paradigm (postmillennialism, historicism, or amillennialism) or, in the case of one of the perspectives of this book, a perpetual millennium. According to some partial preterists, the doctrine of the millennium falls completely outside the prophetic timeline or eschatological application of redemptive history. It isn’t found within Daniel’s 70 Weeks nor within the Feast Days typology which we will discuss shortly. This is quite odd since it is typically argued by preterists of all varieties that every type and shadow of prophecy in the Old Testament belongs to Israel and that all biblical

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prophecy fits within Israel’s redemptive history. If the conclusion of the 70 Weeks of Daniel 9 and the Feast Days appointed times for Israel were fulfilled or applied in the first century, and if the millennium does not fit within the 70 Weeks or the Feast Days typology, then the millennium is a new prophetic doctrine that does not belong to Old Covenant Israel or within the scheme of Israel’s redemptive history. However, as we have and will continue to demonstrate in this presentation, it is our belief that the millennium coincided with the completion of Daniel’s 70 Weeks, leaving no unfulfilled prophecy, foreshadowing, or eschatological application remaining beyond AD 70. Indeed, the millennium was not to take place following the 70 Weeks, nor is it or was it defined as anything to be inaugurated at the conclusion of those 70 Weeks; rather, it was to be fulfilled within the time-frame established by Daniel between the 69th and 70th weeks, which was the appointed time of waiting as indicated by the feast days typology.

Daniel 9 and the Levitical Feast Days are strictly parallel and provide a prophetic picture of the entire scheme of redemptive history. If the millennium is eschatological, and if all eschatology is fulfilled, then the millennium is fulfilled. The Kingdom “age to come” and New Heavens and Earth was an everlasting age without end. The millennium is a defined period of time regardless of how long one might prescribe it to be, which takes place prior to the Kingdom Age. The Levitical picture provided by the Old Testament prophets and patriarchs does not provide any details or descriptions of an eternal millennial age. The second temple period authors also attribute a finite period of time to the temporary messianic millennial kingdom, irrespective of the length they assign to it. The Levitical feast days provide a picture of the eternal Kingdom Age, which was the New Covenant Age expected in the first century by the Apostles. This is the age in which we now live and have lived since AD 70.

The Feast Days and The Millennium

The Jewish Feast Days were typological of all that Jesus was going to fulfill in the first century. It presented a picture of the entire redemptive scheme for Israel and the church. Most futurist Christian authors and theologians argue that the final three feast days of the Jewish calendar remain in our future because they point to the final judgment (Day 5: The Feast of Trumpets), the gathering and harvest (Day 6: The Feast of Atonement), and the New Heaven and Earth of Revelation 21-22 (Day 7: The Feast of Tabernacles). In the typical futurist schemes, the church Age fits within the gap between the 4th and 5th Feast Days.
Premillennialists argue that the church Age precedes the millennium which they suggest fits into the final three days of the festal calendar. Partial Preterists argue one of two primary applications of the feast day’s typology. First, the millennium is the church Age between the 4th and 5th feast days, and they still look forward to the completion of the final three feast days in fulfillment. Second, the feast days were entirely fulfilled while the current, ongoing millennium today is not part of Israel’s prophetic promises depicted in the feast days. Both of these arguments are highly problematic.

The first argument contradicts partial preterist doctrines that Israel was entirely absolved and dealt with in the first century because the prophetic feast days were given to Israel and were appointed times belonging to Israel. To divorce the final three feast days from Israel’s Old Testament promises and appointed times and suggest they were typological for the church alone is a gross abuse of prophetic application and a position most preterists of all varieties would not defend. The second argument is problematic because it argues that the millennium is separate from Israel’s Old Covenant promises and wasn’t even a part of the typological feast days and appointed times given to Israel.  

If the feast days were entirely fulfilled as argued by most partial preterists, and if the millennium follows the final feast day and is concurrent with the church Age, then the millennium is nowhere to be found in the Old Testament promises given to Israel or its redemptive scheme; rather it is a new invention only revealed for the first time in the New Testament and only belonging to the church. This contradicts the very thing that Paul taught concerning their hope and all of their eschatological promises: Paul preached nothing but the hope of Israel found in Moses and the prophets (cf. Acts 24:14f; 26:21f).

One should be able to produce an Old Testament prophecy that foretold or foreshadowed the millennium, even in some typological or mystical sense. But where in the Old Testament do we find such a prediction if the millennium falls outside all of Israel’s eschatological promises, including the feast days and Daniel’s 70 Weeks? According to some preterists you don’t, and that contradicts what Paul and the Apostles taught.

For our purposes here, we believe that the millennium falls between the 4th and 5th Feast Days. Outside of a few fringe preterists, there is no church historian or commentator of which we are aware who has or would place the millennium beyond the scope of the 7th Feast Day typology (Tabernacles). Nor would they suggest that it is not contained within that overall redemptive scheme of the eschatological feast days appointed by God, included within Israel’s hopes and promises.
The Jewish Feast Days are divided into four spring and three fall feasts. They are:

*Four Spring Jewish Feasts:*

*Three Fall Jewish Feasts:*
5. Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah), 6. Atonement (Yom Kippur), 7. Tabernacles (Sukkot).

“In studying the feasts … they fall into two different groups: the spring feasts and the fall feasts … and the timing between the feasts are important. The spring feasts picture the events surrounding Jesus Christ’s first coming, and the fall feasts picture the events surrounding His second coming.”

Leviticus 23:1-2 describe the feast days as “appointed times” and “holy convocations.” In other words, they were set and appointed by God with significant meaning, and they display a timeline of events that were symbolic of something far greater that would occur in Israel’s future. These feast days could not be violated, changed, or ignored. They were to be remembered, followed precisely, and practiced specifically as designed by God. In fact, God told Israel that the days were His appointed times, not Israel’s appointed times. Prophetically speaking, this is significant because it represents an appointment of time that he is signifying about what he is going to do with, for, and to Israel. It is additionally significant because it signifies that all of Israel’s eschatological hopes and promises can be found within the appointed feast days which God established as His own timeline and which were not conditional.

**The Appointed Time of Waiting**

Following the fourth spring feast of Pentecost or Shavuot was a continual celebration of the gathering of the harvests until the time of judgment at the first fall feast, the Feast of Trumpets. This appointed time of waiting lasted approximately 120 days, which is a threefold division of forty days. There are a few very significant numerical ideas that need to be explained concerning this appointed time of waiting as it relates to the doctrine of the millennium. First, the symbolism of a three-fold witness in Scripture is plain, and all scholars recognize this concept.

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In a Jewish court of law, two witnesses were required to bring an accusation against another person, but three witnesses represented a divine decree and judgment. This can be seen in 1 John 5:7-8, “For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater…” And again in 2 Corinthians 13:1, “This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.” Also in Deuteronomy 19:15, “…on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.” And finally, in Hebrews 10:28, “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses.”

Additionally, anything multiplied by a quantity of three or shown in a tri-fold division (e.g. 10x10x10 = 1,000, or 12x12x1,000 = 144,000 which itself is a double triplet since the number 1,000 is a multiplier of three 10s) was considered perfect, complete, or had the quality of fullness and purity without blemish. The significance of three divisions represented completeness, fulfillment, and fullness. The 120-day celebration and harvest represented by the three divisions of forty days of waiting holds a much larger key to unlocking the mystery of the doctrine of the millennium.

The appointed time of waiting which paralleled the time of the Great Commission, the betrothal period, and the engagement of the bride to the groom, included an in-gathering firstfruit barley harvest following Pentecost (depicted in the Levitical Feast Day of Shavuot) as well as the wheat harvest leading up to the Feast of Trumpets (judgment). The significance of the number 40 here with a tri-fold division cannot be understated; the Great Commission or betrothal period was to last approximately forty years, a period also known as the Second Exodus (the forty-year period of Moses and Israel’s wanderings in the Old Testament).

So the time of waiting (the engagement) symbolized in the Jewish Feast Days from Pentecost to Trumpets is indicated as a direct parallel. This was the pre-harvest, firstfruits in-gathering of the elect, the general harvest, and the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant at the consummation of the marriage between the Bride of Christ (the church) and the Husband (Jesus). But this is not all.

During the third forty-day period of the appointed 120 days, the Jews were instructed to blow their trumpets each day leading up to the Feast of Trumpets. The fact that God set apart a specific time of forty days during the harvest following Pentecost is also highly significant. Again, the parallelism of the forty days from the resurrection of Jesus to Pentecost in Acts 2 with the forty years from Moses and the Exodus and also with the forty years from Pentecost to the judgment (AD 30–70) are unmistakable. Not only this, but also during the final week of the third forty day
period of celebration, the Jewish priests would begin to blow their *shofar* trumpets which were special rams’ horns blown during a time of war. These trumpets would historically be blown as they gathered for battle and surrounded their enemies (e.g. Jericho in the book of Joshua). For the final seven days leading up to the Feast of Trumpets the Jews would blow the Shofar trumpets to indicate that “the time was near” for judgment to begin. Israel was to listen to the sounds of the *shofar* trumpets as a sign for them to repent, and they would know to prepare for the judgment where God would scrutinize their deeds and works from the previous year. The correlation to Revelation 20 and the white throne judgment of works is quite clear here. That judgment relates to the Feast of Trumpets, which follows the millennium in Revelation 20:7-14. If the judgment took place in AD 70, and if the judgment is the Feast of Trumpets (the 5th Feast Day) being entirely fulfilled, then the millennium falls before the Feast of Trumpets and the judgment, which agrees with Revelation 20 and its depiction and chronology of events.

An astute reader of the Bible will make the connection to the statements made by Jesus warning of the “signs” which would indicate when the time of his coming and judgment were near. During the years leading up to and including the eventual destruction of the Jewish Temple in AD 70, the Apostles all began to declare that the “time is near” and “at hand” and “at the door” and that the coming of the Lord would take place “in a very, very little while.” The *shofar* trumpets were blowing and warning the people of what was about to take place. The time was at hand for all who heard the Apostles’ warnings to repent. Judgment was near, and the millennium was approaching its end.

This matches the symbolic and ritualistic acts of the 5th feast day as practiced by all Israelites, including the declaration of the time at hand and of Israel being told to repent and make herself ready. Since this is true, and since the Apostles all began declaring that “the time is near” in their letters, then the time leading up to the 5th feast day was the appointed time of waiting following the 4th feast of Pentecost, which correlates to the forty-year Exodus as well as the forty-year millennium during the Great Commission and ministry of the first-century Apostles.

The Prophetic Year (360 Days)

In ancient times and in Israel’s history the prophetic year was also known as the apocalyptic year. Our modern calendar is the Julian calendar made up of 365 days, but Israel’s calendar was based on the Babylonian year of 360 days. In Daniel 9, the prophecy of the 70 Weeks was given in Jewish captivity in Babylon. The seventieth week is admittedly a period
of seven years by the majority of scholars and theologians. Half of this period is referred to in Daniel and in the book of Revelation on three occasions as “a time, times, and half a time” or “the dividing of times.” It is referred to twice as forty-two months and twice as 1,260 days. But 1,260 days are exactly equal to forty-two months of thirty days. That period of time is exactly three and a half years of 360-day years, which was the prophetic year during the Babylonian exile of Israel.

This is highly significant for our presentation. Forty years of 360 prophetic calendar days for Israel was equal to 14,400 days. This is equal to a tri-fold division of 12x12x100. We see the exact same division in Revelation 7 and 14 with 12x12x1000 when it speaks of the number of those being sealed for God out of Israel (144,000). The number 12 is a reference to the 12 Tribes of Israel and the 12 Apostles (the Old and New Covenants). We can see it more clearly here:

- Prophetic People (True Israel): 12x12x100 = 144,000
- Prophetic Time (Forty Years): 12x12x100 = 14,400 (360x40)

With respect to the people of Israel, this numerical division was used to express the fulfillment of those being saved during the Great Commission or the time of waiting, which was also the great harvest between the 4th and 5th feast days. With respect to time, this numerical division was used to express the fulfillment of the prophetic calendar and for the nation of Israel herself. It is no accident that the typological expression of 120 days for the time of waiting during the Jewish Feast Days is a tri-fold division of forty days. The number forty is significant because it parallels the forty-year prophetic 360-day period which points to Israel’s eschatological feast days and appointed times. The time of waiting takes place before the 5th Feast Day of Trumpets (judgment). The millennium takes place before the judgment as described in Revelation 20. Therefore, the millennium is the period of time also known as the time of waiting which falls within the forty-year time of waiting from Pentecost (4th Feast Day) to Trumpets (5th Feast Day).

**The Harvests before the Judgment**

It is important to understand the meaning behind the various harvests to discern the order, symbolism, and meaning of these harvests in the feast days and how they are fulfilled in the first-century gathering period of the Great Commission. With the Feast of First Fruits (3rd Feast Day) Jesus was the first of the firstfruits offering. His resurrection and the acceptance of his offering is symbolized in the phases of harvest gathering. For
every harvest there are three gathering phases: firstfruits barley harvest, the general harvest of wheat, and the gleanings. However, the firstfruits barley harvest also consisted of three phases: marking, gathering, and presenting.

**The Barley Harvest (firstfruits gathering in early/mid-spring)**

The marking of the barley harvest identified the first maturing barley bound in a sheaf, typically with a red cord for easy spotting. The chosen barley was gathered and bound as a sheaf and then brought to the high priest to be presented or waved before God at the altar (cf. Leviticus 23:10-11). The fulfillment of the firstfruits barley harvest was in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, followed by his ascension to the throne where his offering was formerly presented to and accepted by God in heaven. Ten days after the ascension Pentecost occurred, as depicted in the 4th Feast Day. However, Jesus was not the only firstfruits offering we find in Scripture.

As we see in James 1:18, Revelation 14:4, and elsewhere, the Apostles who were with Jesus were given the power and authority to bind and loose as well as to proclaim the Great Commission message of the Gospel through their testimony. They were also chosen as firstfruits with Jesus to be a sacrificial offering to inaugurate the New Covenant. We see in Revelation 20:4ff that those martyrs were killed for their “testimony.” However, their testimony was given prior to their martyrdom. They were among the firstfruits offering along with Jesus himself.

Paul indicated in Colossians 1:21-22, “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him…” According to Paul, Jesus was not merely presenting his own offering on behalf of the people, he was also going to present the offering and sufferings of the Apostles before God. Paul stated it even clearer when he continued, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.” Paul argued that their sufferings and afflictions were being presented along with those of Christ on behalf of the church and the body as a whole. Christ’s afflictions were “lacking,” meaning that they were not complete or full without those suffered by the Apostles. This is reflected in the firstfruits barley harvest gathering, which was typological of Jesus and the Apostles together.
In review, prior to Pentecost we have the firstfruits, represented by the early spring barley harvest, which was the commencement to go forth to all nations, to gather people from everywhere. “In a process called winnowing, the barley kernels are tossed into the wind to separate the kernels from the chaff. This is done because the head of the barley is very soft and easily crushed … the barley is the first to be harvested. It is like the church was winnowed from the world.” Following the early spring barley harvest is the late spring wheat harvest. The barley represented the firstfruits, which was Jesus, the Apostles, and the very first Christians empowered at Pentecost were marked and identified to participate in Christ’s sufferings as the firstfruit offering.

The Wheat Harvest (general gathering in late spring)

The late spring and later harvests are indicative of those gathered after Pentecost and more specifically during the time of the tribulation prior to the final years before the judgment, which occurred during the fall Feast of Trumpets.

Since the head of the wheat is hard, it must be threshed or crushed to separate the wheat from the chaff. A man who is threshing the wheat stands on a large board, which has bits of glass underneath it, and is pulled by a horse over the wheat to do the crushing … the board is called by a Latin word: tribulum… It is interesting that you can tell the difference between a field of wheat and a field of barley. While the heads of the stock of barley bend down like they are bowing in humility, the heads of stocks of wheat stay straight up (cf. Deu. 31:27).8

The wheat harvest was literally the time of testing, the time in which the church was to make herself ready as a chaste virgin. It was a time of preparation and trial in which the betrothed bride was to remain pure, waiting steadfastly and patiently for her groom despite great testing and impatience. The wheat harvest primarily took place during the tribulation (AD 63–67). It was here that a great falling away took place, and the hour of testing was upon the church under duress from their persecutors and enemies. Those who bowed in humility and remained pure were saved, while those who stood upright in defiance were bound for a harvest of judgment. It is important to note that this wheat harvest took place near the very end of the spring season, shortly before fall. As fall approached, the wheat harvest came to an end as the appointed time of waiting also concluded.

7 Ibid, 40.
8 Ibid, 41.
What would follow the late spring wheat harvest would coincide with the Shofar Trumpet blowing and would also indicate that the time was near for the fall fruit harvest and judgment to begin (the 5th Feast Day). The temporary millennial, messianic kingdom was drawing to a close. The inauguration of the eternal Kingdom Age was nearing.

The Fall Feasts

In the majority of Christian books, articles, and evangelical futurist belief systems, the final three feast days are viewed as yet unfulfilled. The “time of waiting” or the interval between the spring and fall feasts has now lasted for more than two thousand years and counting within these systems. The primary reason for this is quite simple: Futurists who hold to this perspective *rightfully* understand the significance of the typological application of the feast days to eschatology and God’s prophetic clock. They identify the Feast of Trumpets as the judgment of God, and they see the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles as the final victory of God and the establishment of the New Heavens and Earth where God dwells with man forever.

In our opinion, evangelical futurists have it right at least insofar as their understanding that all eschatological and prophetic events fall within the framework set forth for us within the feast days. The primary difference here between the futurist and the preterist is that the former believes that the prophetic events are yet to be fulfilled and that God isn’t done with the nation of Israel as a theocracy, thus placing a gap between the spring and fall feasts lasting thousands of years or longer. They see the church Age falling within this “gap” period prior to the 5th Feast Day.

The preterist sees the same implication of requiring all prophetic events fitting within the entire scheme of the feast days, but hold that all prophecy was fulfilled in the first century. For the full preterist, it is within this framework that we approach the Fall Feast Days. Like futurists, we believe that all prophecy remaining to be fulfilled at the time John wrote the book of Revelation is contained within these final three feast days and that there is indeed a gap between the 4th and 5th Days. However, unlike futurists we believe that the fall feast days are now fulfilled in the past, just as the spring feasts were, and that the millennium also falls within the appointed time of waiting between the spring and fall feasts.
The Feast of Trumpets: Rosh Hashanah (The Time of Judgment)

The timing of the Feast of Trumpets was to coincide with the fall fruit harvest following the spring wheat harvest. During the fruit harvest the grapes are picked and then placed in the winepresses. This is parallel to the judgment of Revelation 14:18-20 and chapter 18, as well as Revelation 20:7-15 and Revelation 21:8. Interestingly, the Jews also refer to Rosh Hashanah by other Hebrew names which indicate the prophetic context of this feast day: Yom Teruah (Day of Awakening Blast or Resurrection); Yom Hadin (Day of Judgment); Yom Zikaron (Day of Remembrance); and Yom Hamelech (Day of Coronation of the King).

This 5th Feast Day was a time of impending judgment, resurrection, personal and national reflection or introspection, and the coming of the King. These events point to those described at the final coming of the Lord and those found in the latter portions of Revelation 20 which concur with those things that took place in AD 70. During Rosh Hashanah the Jews would blow multiple Shofar trumpets signifying either a king's coronation or an alarm, accompanied by crying, mourning, or wailing.

One of the trumpeters would blow a Teruah, which was a series of short, staccato notes extending over a period of about three seconds. This was a sound made for the reception of the King and for the people to stand on guard because the King was about to arrive. In Scripture we have multiple examples of the idea that Jesus would come with the shout of a trumpet and a loud blast announcing that the time for his appearing had come. The various trumpets that were blown throughout the Feast of Trumpets were called the Tekiah, the Tekiah Hagedolah (sounds of triumph and joy), the Shevarim, and the Teruah (sounds of pain/suffering/repentance). Ironically, both salvation and judgment are seen here together, which correlates exactly to what is predicted throughout the New Testament to occur in the first century – the time of the salvation and judgment of Israel at the last day of the Old Covenant Age.

The New Moon Night Watch

The Jews always announced the commencement of the Feast of Trumpets on the “new moon.” However, the exact day or hour of the start of the feast is not entirely clear. Since Passover varied from year to year (March or April), the counting of the Omer or the time of waiting usually lasted approximately 120 days from Pentecost (50 days after the Feast of Firstfruits). However, this 120-day period would vary to coincide with the new moon which began their Gregorian New Year. Prior to the Exodus, the Jewish New Year began with the Feast of Trumpets. After the Exodus God decreed for them to change their New Year to Passover.
The precise moment that the priests would declare that the new moon was in full view was not entirely scientific or precisely known. While the countdown of 120 days during the counting of the Omer and the time of waiting gave the Jews a very close and approximate timeline, and while the blowing of the Shofar trumpet during the final seven days of the third and final forty-day period gave them a signal that the “time was near,” the Jews would wait until the priest announced that the new moon was ready before the official start of the Feast of Trumpets was to begin.

According to the Talmud, the rabbis watch for the appearance of the new moon, because no one knows the day or hour when it will appear! They observe the feast for two days to make sure that they celebrate the feast on the exact day of the new moon, whichever day it would appear… Also a parallel or picture in the Jewish wedding custom is noteworthy. After a prospective bride accepts the betrothal, the groom goes to prepare a chamber for his bride at his father’s house. After the groom finishes preparing the bridal chamber, he must wait for his father to tell him when he can go to take his bride. Of course, only the father knows when the proper time will be (cf. Mark 13:32).9

As indicated by the watchfulness of the priests to identify the new moon as well as the statement made by Jesus in Mark 13:32 to watch and be prepared, we have a fairly clear indication that all of these things are describing the same event. The new moon watch correlates to the bride making herself ready, as well as the final days of the Great Commission where the Apostles were declaring that the “time was near” for judgment to begin and for the Lord to come with his wrath upon his enemies and for salvation for his people. While the New Testament saints would not know the exact day or the hour of the coming of their King, they would know the approximate time once the signs given to them by Jesus were readily visible to them. This is similar to the New Moon becoming visible to the high priest by watching the signs in the sky.

Reigning and Ruling for 40 Years

Another forty-year parallel that is of great significance to our presentation is that of the Davidic reign and Jesus’ reign during the Great Commission and the appointed time of waiting we earlier described. This period of time is also commonly referred to as the “second exodus” as it parallels the very same typological occurrences we see with Moses and the Exodus account (which also lasted forty years). Those arguing for the Perpetual Millennial scheme would suggest the first-century Apostles’

9 Ibid, 63-64.
reign with Christ continued far beyond the first century and into the Kingdom Age, but that it should also be defined as the second millennium since language found in Revelation 20:4-6 says that they would be judging and reigning for a thousand years.

While Revelation 22:5 does describe the servants of God as reigning forever and ever under the guidance of the light of God, there is no mention of this with reference to the millennium or only a thousand-year period. On the contrary, this section of scripture follows the account of Revelation 20 where the millennium is contained and where it precedes the final judgment.

We find the promise of a forty-year reign in 2 Samuel 7:12 and Psalm 132:11, wherein a seed of King David would be established on David’s throne. We also find Davidic statements in Jeremiah 30:9 and Ezekiel 34:23-24, 37:24-25 regarding the promised seed to come. King David was from Bethlehem (cf. 1 Samuel 17:15; Luke 2:4), as was Jesus (cf. Matthew 2:1; John 7:42). As a type of Christ, King David served as another picture of things to come in the New Covenant Age. A prophecy was given in Hosea 3:5 in which we see that David would be Israel’s King “in the last days.” We also know that Jesus was referred to as the “Son of David.” King David was also to be a “shepherd to God’s people” (cf. Ezekiel 34:23-24, 37:24-25), which harkens the reader to Jesus’ own statements in John 10:1 and verse 14. The disciples also recognized and understood these references and applied them to Jesus as the promised King and Messiah (cf. Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4; and Revelation 7:17).

Therefore, given the parallels between Jesus and King David, if David and his reign as king over fleshly Israel was the type and shadow for Jesus’ reign over Israel after the Spirit, then determining the period and length of his messianic reign (the temporary millennial reign) should also not be difficult to calculate (cf. 2 Samuel 5:4; 1 Kings 2:11). King David reigned for forty years. Thus, the temporary, messianic reign of Jesus over Israel would also last for forty years (AD 27–66). The Apostles and first-century Christians reigned with him up to the time of the Great Tribulation and judgment beginning in AD 66.

Remember at his ascension Jesus was given a throne from which to rule and reign. It was at this time that the Apostles and disciples would also sit on thrones reigning over the twelve tribes of Israel with Jesus (cf. Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:29-30; 1 Corinthians 6:1-6). This was also the time that Jesus would be ruling in order to “make his enemies his footstool” (cf. Acts 2:34-35; Hebrews 2:5-9). The promise of sitting on thrones and judging parallels Revelation 20:4. This sets the context for our millennial discussion and also echoes Daniel 7 which describes thrones being set up and the Son of Man coming in glory and judgment. Numerous New Testa-
ment passages attest to the glory received by Jesus at his ascension when he took His throne and the expected judgment to come within that generation (a period of forty years).

We find at the end of the millennial reign of Jesus with the Saints (when his enemies are made his footstool) that the Great Tribulation and judgment was then set to occur at the coming of the Lord. Jesus was to deliver the Kingdom to the Father at this time as well (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:23-28). If it is accepted that the enemies of Jesus were also the enemies of the first-century Saints, that is, the Pharisees and Jewish persecutors who were also guilty of all the blood of the prophets and of killing Jesus (cf. Matthew 23), then we can be sure that the ruling and reigning period over the twelve tribes of Israel was only to last until nationalistic Israel was defeated and brought to her final judgment in AD 70. Beyond this, what enemies do Jesus and the saints need to rule and reign over in order to receive vindication and to bring about the consummation of the New Covenant Kingdom? All that stood in the way of inaugurating the New Covenant Kingdom Age was the Old Covenant Temple and Judaic economy still standing and threatening to keep God’s people in bondage.

After the judgment in AD 70 Jesus was to deliver the Kingdom to the Father and also subject himself to the Father so that he could be all in all, to rule and reign forever (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:24-28). His reign at that time becomes subject to the Father as one in purpose and scope. Jesus was made lower than the angels for a short time during his incarnation, but he would return to his former glory that he had with the Father before the foundation of the world (cf. Hebrews 2:9; John 17:5). The purpose of ruling and reigning with the saints in Revelation 20:4 was fulfilled during the first century. That authority to judge served a purpose which was relegated only to nationalistic Israel and did not continue beyond this scope.

It should also be noted that Revelation 20 does not suggest that Jesus would reign for only a thousand years; rather, it states that those who were seated on thrones and those who are also killed for their testimony would reign with Christ for a thousand years. Therefore, the limit on the ruling and reigning does not preclude Jesus reigning or ruling beyond the judgment of the House of Israel during the first century; nor does it limit the saints or servants of God from reigning beyond this period. Rather, the limitation is placed on the duration of the saints ruling and reigning with Jesus during this time as judges over Israel in vindication from their enemies. The millennial rule and reigning of the saints with Christ was the time in which Israel was to remain a nationalistic entity as the enemy of Jesus and persecutors of the church. Thus, the saints were to reign with Christ until the duration of their reign (the transitional millennium) came to
an end, at which time Christ was to be all-in-all and the everlasting Kingdom was established.

Where there are certainly parallels with the millennial reign and the reign of the saints beyond AD 70 with Christ and the Father as one, they are not one and the same. It may be a matter of semantics, but the millennium is specifically defined as a period within Revelation 20 which deals with preparation for judgment and binding and loosing and nationalistic rule over Israel. Following this period, all believers would be kings and live under subjection to the Father and Christ forever, reigning under his guidance in the eternal Kingdom Age (cf. Revelation 22:3-5). There is no mention of “millennium” or “thousand years” in Revelation 21–22 or when attributing the everlasting reign of Jesus or the Saints to the post AD 70 Kingdom Age.

The parallel or the contrast of David’s forty-year reign with the temporary messianic reign of Jesus during the first century seems to be without question. The proceeding New Covenant Kingdom was and is a kingdom that was established forever in AD 70. However, the purpose of the temporary messianic, millennial kingdom was not to literally last thousands of years or for millennia beyond the point in which the enemies of Jesus were soundly defeated. This took place during the AD 70 destruction of the Jewish Theocracy, Temple, Sacrificial system, Mosaic economy and cultus, and all that accompanied those things. The millennium served its purpose. It was the transition period of forty years from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. It was the Second Exodus during the Great Commission.

Another critical aspect of understanding the biblical doctrine of the millennium is exploring and understanding the second temple period expectation of the temporary messianic kingdom, followed by the age to come. In the first century there were various positions and differing views. The development of those expectations in the preceding centuries leading up to the time of Jesus and the Apostles is crucial to our understanding of the millennium. While there isn’t complete agreement between the Jewish expectations of a temporary messianic kingdom and the Christian application of that kingdom during the first century, there was at least major continuity with regard to the existence of such expectations during the life and times of the Apostles. This is very important when considering the context for Revelation 20.

In the end, the doctrine of the millennium expressed by John in Revelation 20 was a compromise between the older prophetic view of second temple apocalyptic which looked forward to an eternal, earthly kingdom and cosmic transformation, and of the later transcendental second temple perspective which transferred that hope to a future age or mode of
existence beyond the present order or the present evil age. The compro-
mise that resulted was the reality of the temporary messianic kingdom on
earth, but in a spiritual sense (i.e. heaven on earth concurrently). This con-
cept is found throughout the New Testament and correlates to the millen-
nium found in Revelation 20.

There is absolutely no reason to see the transitional, temporary
nature of the millennium as extending beyond into an eternal state when
this would have been disconnected from all pre-Christian and Christian
expectations. This concept would have been entirely foreign to the
Apostles, to Jesus, to the first-century Christians, and to Jews hearing of
the Gospel message. To the contrary, upon hearing or reading of the
millennium in Revelation 20, the audience would have readily and
immediately recognized the context of the temporary messianic kingdom
expectation, knowing and understanding that the two were synonymous
and that the conclusion of the millennium would have ushered in the
eternal kingdom age they longed and hoped for.

**Revelation 20:4a, 4b, 4c**

In the same way John began verse 1 with “Then I saw…” to set the
summary of the chapter’s context, he does so again in verses 4ff to
recapitulate the same story. He’s drawing attention back again to the
context of verses 1-3. This is the natural methodology of progressive
parallelism as described earlier in our presentation. First you set the
overall stage (vv. 1-3), then you give the story more substance or body
(vv. 4-6), and finally you end the story with the climactic conclusion (vv.
7ff) – three parts of the same picture. It makes perfect sense for John to
conclude all of Revelation this way because there have already been
three primary scenes in Revelation which paralleled previous to chapter
20. The seals, trumpets, and bowls all depicted different scenes of the
same events, each spiraling progressively toward a more climatic picture
of all the events described in conclusion in Revelation 20. Verses 1-3
provide the summary statement. Then verses 4ff depict the scene in detail.

4a Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the
authority to judge was committed.

4b Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the
testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not
worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on
their foreheads or their hands.

4c They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.
In verse 4a the people in view are the Christians who received salvation during and after the ministry of Christ, who came to life and reigned with Him during the millennial period. During this time of reigning and ruling, the saints were witnesses against nationalistic Israel, proclaiming judgment upon her during her disbelief. Later, many of these saints were killed for their faith during the Neronic persecutions. It is our view that those seated on thrones are the Apostles and saints to whom Jesus gave authority to rule, judge, and bind and loose, as has been previously discussed and shown. Their ruling and reigning is parallel with Revelation 20:1-3 where Jesus is the angel with the key who also binds the strongman so that the nations cannot be deceived. It was during this time that the Great Commission went out to cause Jews from every nation of Israel to believe the Gospel (cf. Acts 2).

In verse 4b John is not being strictly chronological here (rather he is simply identifying the audience in question from verse 4a), and he indicates that he also sees the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony, which refers to the martyrs using the beheading imagery. Clearly those who had been on thrones reigning and ruling in verse 4a were the Apostles who ruled and reigned with Christ with power and authority during the Great Commission which was when they were giving their testimony. The overwhelming evidence for the contextual parallelism of these saints and those who reigned during the 40 years is substantial. They are one and the same group of saints, many of which are later martyred near the end of the Great Commission during the years AD 63–67 (the time of great testing and trial for the church).

Because these saints had been martyred, John clearly emphasizes that they too ruled and reigned for the thousand years described earlier in verses 2-3, despite their later deaths. Again, the entire purpose of Revelation 20:4a-c isn’t to chronologically describe a different period from verses 1-3; rather, it is to provide substance and context to verses 1-3 by identifying those involved and to describe their function during that period.

The context of the saints’ martyrdom in verse 4b is near the end of the millennium, at which time their authority and rule was to come to a close as the Chief ruler would preside in final judgment over their enemies with them. The period of time during which these saints were “not worshipping the Beast or its image or received the mark” was not during the Great Tribulation of AD 66–70; rather, it was during the reign of Nero prior to AD 66, which would still fall within the time frame of near the end of the millennium (AD 63–66). The context of the verse tells us that they were martyred prior to the Great Tribulation, during Nero’s reign and because of their previous testimony during the Great Commission. That is because we find in verses 7ff after the millennium that the nations
of Israel are once again deceived with the release of the satan (or the adversary) from the pit as they gathered for battle. This took place in AD 66–70 when the Jews revolted against Titus and the Roman armies and were utterly destroyed. The Jews who formerly had their eyes opened and were accepting the Gospel from every nation under heaven (cf. Acts 2:5) were now once again falling into a great deception.

Verse 4c informs us that the martyred Christians came to life and reigned for a thousand years. The “they” in this context refers back to those in verses 4a and 4b. It is “those to whom authority was given” (v. 4a) and “those who had been beheaded for their testimony” (v. 4b). Verse 4c is simply reflecting on the fact and reality of the saints’ power over death, despite their martyrdom near the end of their ministries. Though they had been killed, they had come to life with Christ and reigned with Him over their enemies, bearing witness against them during the time of their testimony for the time of judgment yet to come.

This is not a chronological passage (vv. 4a-4c) suggesting that they didn't come to life or reign for the thousand years until after their martyrdom; coming to life to rule and reign was something that took place for every believer at the moment of conversion in Christ, not at physical death or martyrdom. Christians were already formerly “dead” in their sins before accepting salvation in Jesus. To believe in Him was to be made alive. Jesus himself said that “…anyone who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live” (cf. John 11:25). Resurrection, ruling, and reigning was not a physical death and resurrection event to take place after martyrdom; it was a present reality for the saints which would continue despite their eventual potential martyrdom. The millennial reign began during the period of their testimony during the Great Commission, not after their physical martyrdom near the end of the millennium.

Revelation 20:5-6

5(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended). This is the first resurrection. 6Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Most scholars recognize that the first part of verse 5 is likely a commentary added later by an early church scribe. The primary reason this statement is questioned is because it isn’t found in any of the oldest manuscripts of the book of Revelation, including the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Alexandrinus, in addition to the earliest Syriac and Aramaic manu-
scripts. Not only was this part of the verse not originally included in those early manuscripts, it simply does not fit the clear and normal flow of the context of the verse. In fact, many translators recognize the problem immediately and often place this part of the verse in parentheses to indicate the apparent problem. The NIV and NLT are two examples.

The reason this is important is to avoid the misunderstanding that the “first resurrection” took place at the “end” of the thousand years. When the beginning of verse 5 is read as a parenthetical statement, or one that should not be in the text at all, the first resurrection refers back to those who “came to life and reigned with Christ” throughout the millennium and during the Great Commission. In this case, the first resurrection would then refer to the life and resurrection obtained at the beginning of the millennium mentioned in verse 4c.

Now if we allow for the addition of the parenthetical statement in verse 5, then it is our opinion that the writer or scribe suggested that the “first resurrection to life” (which the New Testament saints were experiencing during the millennium) would not be experienced for the “rest of the dead” until after the period of the “thousand years” was over. We are then told that the ones who share in the “first resurrection” are blessed and holy and that they will reign with Christ during the thousand years over their enemies. Thus, the “first resurrection” does not follow the thousand years, but refers back to those in verses 4a-c who had ruled and reigned and including the martyrs who had also come to life and ruled and reigned during the millennial forty-year transition period.

There is strong evidence to support the idea that the first-century Christians were experiencing the “first resurrection” during the ministry of Jesus and after Jesus’ ascension:

- Acts 13:46-48
- Romans 2:7, 5:21, 6:4, 11-13, 22-23; 8:11
- 2 Corinthians 5:17; Gal 2:19; 6:8, 15
- Ephesians 2:1-6; 4:22-24; 5:14
- Colossians 2:12-13; 3:1-3, 10
- 1 Timothy 6:12
- Titus 1:2, 3:7
- 1 John 1:2, 2:25, 3:15
- 1 Peter 2:24
- Jude 1:21

If the first-century Apostles, disciples, and Christians were coming to life during that time, and if they were reigning and ruling with Christ already, what reason do we have to disassociate this from the first resurrection
spoken of in Revelation 20:4-6? What authority do we have to divorce the ruling and reigning, the binding and loosing, as well as the authority they had to judge from the description found in Revelation 20:4-6?

Revelation 20 specifically states that during the millennium those who experienced the “first resurrection” would be those who reigned and ruled with Christ over his enemies (cf. Mat. 22:44, Mark 12:36, & 1 Cor. 15:25) until the loosing of the satan and the subsequent judgment of the city of Jerusalem, the beast, the false prophet, and the satan himself which we find in Revelation 20:7ff. Jesus predicted His wrath or Day of Judgment and said it would come upon that “evil generation” (cf. Matthew 23).

In Matthew 23 Jesus pronounced seven woes upon the Pharisees. (Remember the seven seals of Revelation and the seven scrolls?) They were the harshest of rebukes, and He even declared that they would fill up the measure of their sin and that they were guilty of the blood of all the martyred saints from Abel to Zechariah. If His wrath and judgment was to occur in their lifetime and in that generation, how then could the millennium be anything other than the generational period of forty years from AD 27–66? Since the judgment of Israel takes place after the millennium in the context of Revelation 20, shouldn’t we see the millennium within the first-century period of time preceding the AD 70 judgment?

In ancient Sumerian texts it was recorded that their kings had lived long lives, even as long as thousands of years or more in some cases. In Revelation 20 John said that these resurrected saints would “reign and rule” with Christ during the thousand years. Why is that significant? Because in the ancient near eastern literature and accounts, only kings, rulers, pharaohs, and deities could reign and rule, and only they were said to have lived unnaturally long lives. Thus, New Testament, first-century Christians were described as reigning and ruling as kings, and the ancient symbolic concept of a millennial age represented this group as being those who would first experience eternal life, who would be given crowns as kings, who would be raised from the dead, and who would express authority to rule over their enemies through their testimony and the power of God. This was to occur during the Great Commission. Paul said that they had already died a death like Jesus, but would be experiencing a resurrection to life as well. Being raised from the dead (the first resurrection) to newness of life was this resurrection. They were priests and kings, ruling and reigning, identified as such within a millennial construction similar to the long life-spans of ancient near eastern kings and rulers.
Revelation 20:7-10

7And when the thousand years are ended, satan will be released from his prison 8 and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. 9And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the holy people and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, 10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Revelation 20:7 picks up right where verse 3 left off. Verses 4-6 are parenthetical, identifying the audience in view from verses 1-3 and their function. But the story could have simply begun with Revelation 20:1-3 and then continued right along with verses 7-10 to gain the larger picture. Verse 6 concludes with the reigning of the saints for the thousand years, parallel to verses 2-3. Verse 7 immediately picks up on that idea and states that when that thousand-years are over the release of the satan for the little while begins. Seen together, the scene of verses 1-3 continuing with verses 7-10 is chronological with respect to these passages:

1Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while... 7And when the thousand years are ended, satan will be released from his prison 8 and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. 9And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the holy people and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, 10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

In the midst of all these events (vv. 1-3 & vv. 7-10) is a period described as the thousand years. Using his parallel methodology consistent with the rest of the book, John gives clarity to the context of this period. He
clearly describes the people in view, describing them in a separate vision which depicts who is involved and what they would be doing during that time. However, it is critical to understand that this is neither chronological nor sequential to verses 1-3, but is an elaboration or an explanation to further clarify the context of the previous vision. As John ends verse 6 by saying, “they will reign with him for a thousand years,” he immediately picks up in verse 7 with “and when the thousand years were ended, satan will be released…” These two statements of the millennium speak of the same period of time. It describes them reigning during that time, and then as it comes to an end the satan is released from imprisonment in the pit to deceive the nations of Israel.

Conclusion

It must be realized that the text, grammar, and structure of Revelation 20:6 to verse 7 are seamless. There is no clue or textual indication provided by John that the thousand years of verse 6 is now a different thousand years than that of verse 7. The parenthetical vision of verses 4-6 flow perfectly to the conclusion of verses 7-10. When seen together with verses 1-3 the chapter is undivided and tells the story of one millennium, not two. It is our conviction that John did not make any delineation of the millennium between verses 6 and 7; rather, they are one and the same context. The millennium is a definite period of time which had an end, while the Kingdom Age or eternal New Covenant reign of God with Jesus and the servants of God does not have an end.

Essentially, if it can be shown that verses 4-6 deal with the same millennial context as that of verses 1-3 and 7-10, then our case is made. If not, there must be substantial evidence provided to give the reader cause for the delineation and distinction.

~Joe Vincent (August 2017)