

Animal Sacrifices in the Millennium¹

INTRODUCTION

1. According to several OT passages, Jesus' future earthly kingdom will include a temple in Jerusalem along with Levitical priests and animal sacrifices (e.g., Isa. 19:19–22; 56:6–8; 60:1–7; Jer. 17:24–27; 33:1–11; Ezek. 40:38–47; 42:13–14; 43:18–27; 44:15–31; 45:13–25; 46:1–15, 19–24; Hag. 2:6–9; and Zech. 14:16–21).
2. Jesus hints at animal sacrifices in the coming kingdom during the Last Supper. Jesus tells his disciples, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God" (Luke 22:15–16; cf. Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; all Scripture citations are from the NASB unless indicated otherwise).
3. These texts raise two questions: (1) What is the purpose and function of animal sacrifices in Jesus' millennial kingdom, and (2) Do millennial sacrifices conflict with Christ's once-for-all sacrifice for sin?

THE BIBLE IDENTIFIES THREE DISTINCT LEVELS OF DIVINE FORGIVENESS

Divine forgiveness operates on three distinct levels and the effectiveness for each level is based on the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

1. The first or highest level is the once-for-all forgiveness provided in salvation or justification (Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 10:15).
2. The second or intermediate level is the ongoing forgiveness that is a necessary part of the believer's progressive sanctification (cf. 1 John 1:9).
3. The third or lowest level is the forgiveness that provides religious or ceremonial cleansing (Leviticus 4:20).
4. The forgiveness provided by Old Testament (OT) sacrifices was temporary and operated only on the second and third levels.
 - a. On the *second* level, the OT sacrifices provided true forgiveness and removed the sinner from divine discipline. This was for believers, and only in connection with genuine repentance.
 - b. On the *third* or lowest level, These sacrifices provided true forgiveness for all those within the nation, saved and unsaved alike, but only on the ceremonial or religious level.

Jesus illustrated the difference between the first level (justification) and second level (sanctification) during the Passover meal on the night he was betrayed (John 13:5–10).

¹ Summary of notes from Dr. Bruce Compton, Professor of New Testament (retired) at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary.

The Author of Hebrews explains the difference between the first level (justification) and third level (ceremonial). The latter provided “cleansing the flesh” (Hebrews 9:13); the former “cleansing the conscience” (Hebrews 9:14). One was internal and permanent, a cleansing of the heart (first level); the other was external and temporary, a cleansing of the body (third level).

HOW WILL ANIMAL SACRIFICES FUNCTION IN THE FUTURE KINGDOM?

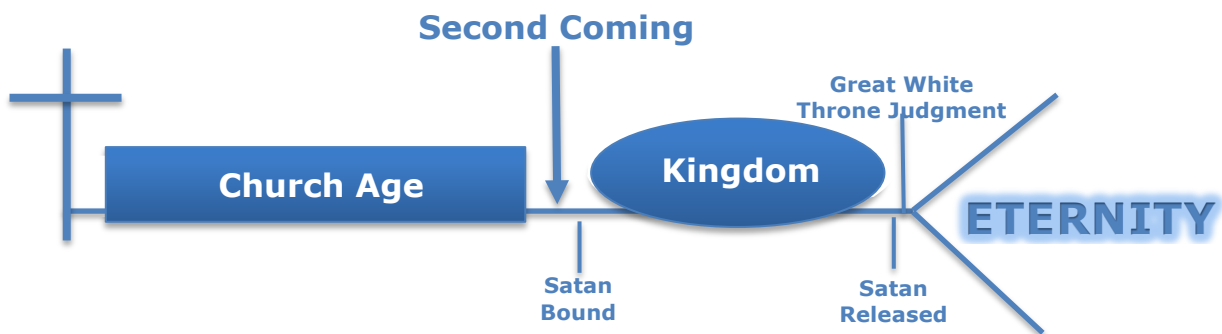
1. Based on comparing Scripture with Scripture (the analogy of faith), animal sacrifices in the kingdom will function *essentially* in the same way as they functioned in the OT. First, they will point to the sacrifice of Christ. Second, they will provide a tangible expression of genuine repentance for believers in progressive sanctification. Three, they will grant ceremonial cleansing for all worshippers, saved and unsaved alike.
 - a. According to both Testaments, only a remnant or small percentage of Jews throughout Israel’s history are described as believers, as those who have experienced God’s saving grace (1 Kings 19:18; Isa 10:20–22; Rom 9:27–29; 11:2–5).
 - b. The majority of Jews at any point in Israel’s history who offered sacrifices according to the Mosaic Law were not saved (cf. Rom. 11:1–10; Heb. 3:7–19).
 - c. Nevertheless, these enjoyed the same ceremonial cleansing from the sacrifices as did believers.
 - d. Depending on the nature of the sin, those who failed to offer the appropriate sacrifices were either killed or banished from the covenant community and from all the blessings enjoyed by that community (Leviticus 17:8–9).
 - e. The same will be true in the future kingdom. All who offer the appropriate sacrifices (both saved and unsaved) will receive religious or ceremonial cleansing and the right to enjoy the benefits of kingdom life in the millennium. Those who fail to offer the appropriate sacrifices will suffer the consequences (cf. Zechariah 14:16–19).
2. With that said, there are two differences between OT sacrifices and millennial sacrifices:
 - a. The *first difference* is that sacrifices in the kingdom, although pointing to the sacrifice of Christ, will be retrospective rather than prospective, similar to how the Lord’s Supper functions today (1 Corinthians 11:24–25).
 - b. The *second difference* is that only believers in their natural bodies will need to offer sacrifices as a tangible expression of their repentance and confession of sin.
 - (1) Only those who are regenerated will enter the kingdom (John 3:5). Those believers who survive the Tribulation judgments will enter the kingdom in their natural bodies (Matt 25:31–46). All other believers (the saved in the OT, NT, and Tribulation) will enter the kingdom in resurrected or glorified bodies.
 - (2) Believers in glorified bodies will not need to offer sacrifices as the tangible expression of repentance since we will have no sin (Rom 8:23; 1 Cor 15:42–57).
 - (3) Believers in glorified bodies will offer sacrifices but only as a memorial and reminder of what Jesus has done for them in salvation.

Premillennialism²

THREE VIEWS OF THE MILLENNIUM AND THE SECOND COMING

A. Premillennialism (the position of CBC)

1. The term *premillennialism* literally means “before the Millennium.” That is, Jesus’s second coming to earth will take place before the thousand-year kingdom mentioned in Revelation 20. In premillennial eschatology, the order of events are:
 - a. The Second Coming
 - b. The Kingdom — thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth
 - c. The Eternal State

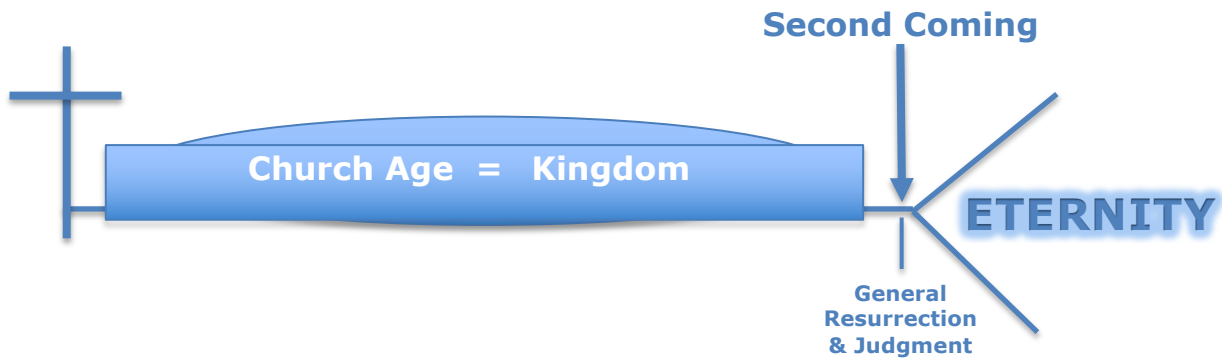


2. Michael Vlach says: “This premillennial kingdom is an ‘intermediate kingdom’ since it comes after the present age but before the Eternal State. God’s future kingdom, therefore, has a millennial phase and then an eternal kingdom phase” (*Premillennialism*, 13).
3. More specifically the order of events are:
 - a. The second coming of Christ to the earth (Rev 19:11–21).
 - b. Satan bound for the thousand years of the Millennium (Rev 20:1–3).
 - c. Christ will reign on the earth for a thousand years (Rev 20:4).
 - d. Satan is released, mounts a rebellion, and then cast in the lake of fire forever (Rev 20:7–10).
 - e. The Great White Throne Judgement of unbelievers (Rev 20:10–15).
 - f. The eternal state begins with the creation of the new heaven and earth (Rev 21–22).

B. Amillennialism

² Summary of notes from Dr. Bill Combs, Professor of New Testament (retired) at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary and former elder at CBC.

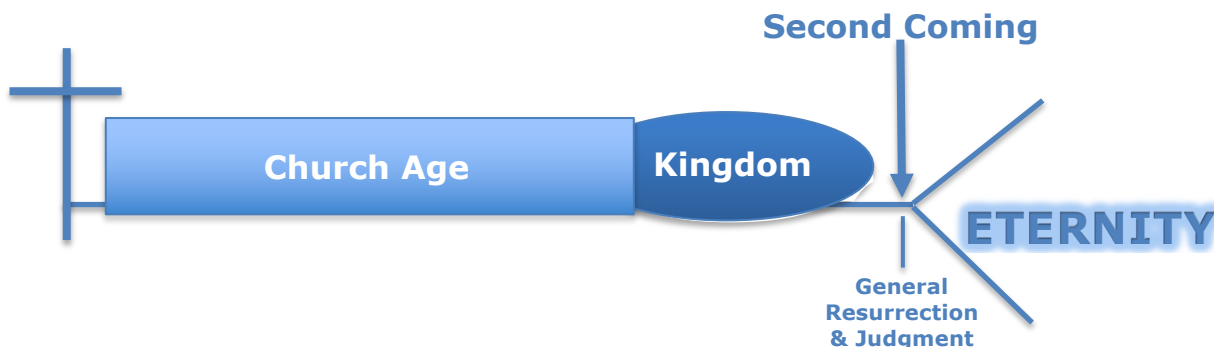
1. The prefix *a* that begins the word *amillennialism* means “no” (in Greek), so *amillennialism* literally means “no millennium.” But that is not exactly correct. Amillennialism denies there will be a future, literal reign of Christ on the earth for 1,000 years following his second coming, but amillennialism does believe in a millennium of sorts. The present church age in its entirety is understood to be the Millennium. The thousand years of Revelation 20 is not taken literally, but figuratively or spiritually of the entire church age. Christ is said to be now reigning spiritually over the church. Amillennialism believes (1) that the Old Testament blessings and promises to Israel of a future kingdom apply to the church, (2) that the church has replaced Israel, and, thus, (3) there is no future for national Israel in God’s prophetic program.



2. No one doubts that for the first 300 years the early church held to premillennialism. In the 4th century, due to the efforts of Augustine (354–430), the church turned away from premillennialism and adopted amillennialism. Christians like Augustine were influenced by two factors coming from Greek philosophy and popular culture:
 - a. Platonic dualism — The body is inferior to the soul in value and the material world is inferior to the immaterial world. This led to an increasing emphasis on asceticism in the church. Asceticism emphasizes a lifestyle of abstinence from worldly pleasures in order to be holy.
 - b. Allegorical interpretation — In contrast to normal (literal) interpretation, allegorical interpretation regards the literal sense as a vehicle for a secondary more spiritual and more profound sense. This is also called spiritualization. This method of interpretation was used by Greek philosophers who were embarrassed by their own national literature, the writings of Homer, in which the gods were pictured as sinful and immoral. Jews in Alexandria were influenced by these ideas, and used allegorical interpretation to reinterpret things they found offensive in the Old Testament.
3. Augustine said that he turned from premillennialism because he felt that the idea of an earthly millennial kingdom with emphasis on material blessings would promote carnality. In amillennialism Old Testament promises of an earthly, millennial kingdom are spiritualized to apply to the church in the present age, rather than Israel. For example, Isaiah prophecies during the Millennium: “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them” (11:6). John Calvin explained this means that before salvation people are like savage beasts, but in the church believers will live in peace with each other.

4. With the rise of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages and the identification of the Church with the kingdom, premillennial views were suppressed. The Reformation leaders continued to hold to amillennialism, believing that premillennialism had long been rejected by the church. The irony is that the Reformers rejected the allegorical interpretation of Scripture upon which it was based. Amillennialism is found in the mainline denominations and some evangelical ones.

C. Postmillennialism



1. The Latin word *post* means “after,” so postmillennialism literally means “after the Millennium.” That is, Jesus’s second coming to earth takes place after the Millennium. In postmillennialism, the kingdom comes into being through the Christianizing of the world. The kingdom is brought in by the preaching of the gospel; the Great Commission will be completed and the world converted (most of the Puritans, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, Loraine Boettner). Postmillennialists were very enamored by social and scientific progress. Boettner has a chapter in *The Millennium* titled “The World is Growing Better.”
2. Postmillennialism has much in common with amillennialism. In fact, amillennialism could be thought of as postmillennial since it places the Second Coming *after* the present church age or Millennium. But postmillennialism is optimistic about the future, while amillennialism believes that conditions will deteriorate until the coming of Christ. As in amillennialism, postmillennialism views the thousand years of the Millennium as only symbolic of a long period of time. Postmillennialism originated in the 18th century and was most popular in the 19th century. But it all but died out primarily due to historical events (2 World Wars). Numerous Scripture passages predict things will be worse before the end of the age. Cf. Matt 24:21–30; 2 Thess 1:6–10; 2 Tim 3:1–5.

Matt 24:3, 21-22, 24 - As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” ²¹For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. ²²“If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. ²⁴For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

2 Tim 3:1-5 - There will be terrible times in the last days. ²People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—⁵having a form of godliness but denying its power.

3. A few postmillennialists can be found today (postmillennialismtoday.com). In more recent times a form of postmillennialism has arisen that looks to the Christianization of the world through the institution of the Mosaic Law (Rousas Rushdoony [1973, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*], Douglas Wilson), commonly called Christian Reconstructionism. Large role in Christian education, especially homeschooling, and in Christian political movements (Moral Majority). There are about four postmill churches in Michigan.

ARGUMENTS FOR PREMILLENNIALISM

A. Hermeneutics — Normal Interpretation

1. Normal interpretation of prophecy results in premillennialism. In premillennialism, the normal or literal method of interpretation is used for all Scripture. Normal interpretation gives to each word the same basic meaning it would have in normal customary usage whether in writing or speaking. Normal interpretation recognizes the use of figures of speech (“Lamb of God,” John 1:28) and symbols (color “white,” Rev 4:4, 7:9), only that they are interpreted normally. “Lamb of God” is a figurative expression that expresses truth about a real person. In Rev 4 the 24 elders are wearing white. Rev 7, “After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”
2. Amillennialists and postmillennialists agree that if all Old Testament prophecies are interpreted normally, then premillennialism results. O. T. Allis says: “The Old Testament prophecies if literally interpreted cannot be regarded as having been fulfilled or as being capable of fulfillment in this present age” (*Prophecy and the Church*, 238). Floyd E. Hamilton says: “Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures” (*The Basis of the Millennial Faith*, 38). Loraine Boettner says: “It is generally agreed that if the prophecies are taken literally, they do foretell a restoration of the nation of Israel in the land of Palestine with the Jews having a prominent place in that kingdom and ruling over the other nations” (*The Meaning of the Millennium*, 95).

B. Prophecies of a Future Earthly Kingdom for Israel

1. In 2 Samuel 7, David wants to build the Temple in Jerusalem to replace the Tabernacle. Nathan the prophet informs David that his son will be the one to build it: “¹²When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” The angel Gabriel says to Mary: “³²He [Jesus] will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 2:32–33). Amillennialists interpret the Bible literally when it comes to Gabriel’s announcement to Mary that she, a virgin, will give birth to a son, but spiritualize the statement that Jesus “will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever” to mean the church in the present age.

2. Numerous Old Testament passages point to an intermediate kingdom that is better than the present age but not perfect like the eternal state. We noted earlier: “This premillennial kingdom is an ‘intermediate kingdom’ since it comes after the present age but before the Eternal State. God’s future kingdom, therefore, has a millennial phase and then an eternal kingdom phase.”

- a. There will be universal peace and righteousness:

Isaiah 2:1–4: “¹This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: ²In the last days the mountain of the LORD’S temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. ³Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’ The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”

- b. The curse on creation will be removed:

Isaiah 11:6–9: “⁶The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. ⁷The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest. ⁹They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” Calvin: “the people of Christ will have no disposition to do injury, no fierceness or cruelty. They were formerly like *lions* or *leopards*, but will now be like *sheep* or *lambs*; for they will have laid aside every cruel and brutish disposition. By these modes of expression he means nothing else than that those who formerly were like savage beasts will be mild and gentle.”

Isaiah 35:1–2: “¹The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, ²it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God.”

- c. Longevity will characterize the people living during the Millennium:

Isaiah 65:20: “Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.” Here we read that there will be no more infants who die in infancy, and no more old men who die prematurely, something far different from this present age. But death and sin will still be present, for the child who is one hundred years old shall die, and the sinner who is one hundred years old “will be considered accursed.”

C. The New Testament Still Speaks of a Future Kingdom

1. Numerous passages place the reign of Jesus and believers in the future.
 - a. 1 Corinthians 6:2: “Or do you not know that the Lord’s people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?”
 - b. 2 Timothy 2:12a: “if we endure, we will also reign with him.”
2. The book of Revelation explicitly speaks of the future millennial kingdom.
 - a. The book of Revelation can be divided into two main sections as indicated by John in Revelation 1:19, “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.” Thus, we can outline the book as follows:
 - I. Introduction, 1:1–8
 - II. The Revelation of Jesus Christ Concerning the Things Which Are, 1:9–3:22
 - III. The Revelation of Jesus Christ Concerning the Things Which Shall Take Place after These Things, 4:1–22:5
 - b. In Revelation 5:9–10, sixty years into the church age (ca. a.d. 90), John is permitted to view a scene in heaven where the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders “sang a new song, saying: You [the Lamb, Jesus] are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. ¹⁰You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” Those who have been saved are believers in heaven, who, though now positionally related to the kingdom, are waiting for the actual establishment of the kingdom when they “will reign on the earth.” Cf. 1 Corinthians 4:8, “Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you!”
 - c. Revelation 19 and 20 clearly teach the second coming of Jesus will be followed by the millennial kingdom.
 - (1) The Second Coming of Christ to Earth, 19:1–21
 - (a) Events Surrounding the Return of Christ, 19:1–10
 - (b) The Battle of Armageddon, 19:11–21
 - (2) The Millennial Kingdom, 20:1–10
 - (a) The binding of Satan, 1–3
 - (b) The first resurrection and Millennium, 4–6
 - (c) The judgment of Satan, 7–10
 - (3) The Great White Throne Judgment, 20:11–15
 - (4) The Eternal State, 21:1–22:5



Revelation 19:11–21 Second Coming

Jesus Christ returns to earth and defeats his enemies at the Battle of Armageddon. Jesus's second coming is before the Millennium in chapter 20—thus, premillennial. In both postmillennialism and amillennialism Jesus's second coming is after the Millennium.

¹¹I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True.... ¹⁴The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter...." ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.... ¹⁹Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. ²⁰But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf.... The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. ²¹The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Revelation 20:1–3 Binding of Satan

Satan is not bound until after the Second Coming. Satan is bound at the beginning of the Millennium. Since, according to amillennialism, we are now in the Millennium (i.e., church age), Satan is presently bound in the Abyss. But cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 Peter 5:8; 1 Jn 5:19. 2 Cor 4:4, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

1 Pet 5:8, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

1 John 5:19, "We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one."

¹And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. ²He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and **bound him for a thousand years**. ³He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore **until the thousand years were ended**. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

Revelation 20:4–6 1st Resurrection and Millennium Those who “came to life” and “reigned with Christ a thousand years” in v. 4 are called the “first resurrection” in v. 5. The word “resurrection,” used in v. 5, always refers to a physical resurrection. This first resurrection happens before the Millennium. This first physical resurrection has not taken place yet, so we cannot be in the Millennium. Since amillennialists say we are now in the Millennium, the first resurrection must have taken place. They argue that the first resurrection is spiritual, not physical, and refers either to spiritual birth (salvation) or the entrance of believers into heaven.	⁴I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.
Revelation 20:7–10 Judgment of Satan	⁷When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. ⁹They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.
Revelation 20:11–15 2nd Resurrection and Great White Throne Judgment	¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. ¹⁴Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.