

The Millennium of Peace

Viewpoints

The word *millennium* means “a thousand years.” Bible scholars use it to describe the period in Revelation 20:4 when Christ will reign with His followers for a thousand years. “A thousand years” is referred to six times in Revelation 20:1-7.

Modern theological trends place great emphasis on the millennium. To most, it is the long-awaited period of peace brought about by the binding of Satan and the reign of Christ. The various viewpoints differ, however, on the details of these events. Current concepts can be summarized as follows:

Amillennialism

This view does not allow for a specific thousand-year reign, but applies the period to the whole of Church history. The period will culminate in the earth made new. The Old Testament prophecies pertaining to the Kingdom apply to Christ's spiritual reign in the Church. Roman Catholics and some conservative Protestant groups hold this view.

Postmillennialism

According to this view, the Kingdom is a present reality because Christ reigns in His Church. Also, this view states that all nations will be converted to Christ prior to the coming of Christ. The period prior to His coming will be peaceful and the Gospel will be spread to all nations. At the end of the millennium, there will be a period of apostasy and tribulation brought on by the reign of the Antichrist.

It is thought that Christ returns at the end of the millennium, and there is a single resurrection of the people who accepted God's way, and those who rejected Him. The resurrection of God's people (the first resurrection of Revelation 20) is equated with the new birth and is not considered literal. Both the Lutheran Augsburg Confession and the Puritan Westminster Confession express this view.

Premillennialism

This view suggests that Christ returns before the millennium to physically rule on the earth for a thousand years. There are two main schools of premillennialism:

Dispensational Premillennialism

This view allows for two literal resurrections from the dead: the followers of God before the millennium, and the rejecters of God after the millennium. This view also includes a secret rapture prior to the tribulation, just before Christ's Second Coming, and states that the literal Jewish nation will fulfill the millennial kingdom. This

doctrine also says that the Jews will be restored in Palestine, the temple will be rebuilt, and the sacrificial system will be reinstated.

Dispensational premillennialism makes many of Jesus' teachings obsolete to the Church. It makes all the warnings given to the Church about the time of trouble only applicable to the Jews. In fact, the whole of Matthew 24 and Luke 21 would then apply only to the Jews as "the gospel of the kingdom" would refer to the Jews only.

According to this view, only Jews are concerned with the Kingdom. This would mean that even the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come," only applies to the Jews. This view makes most prophecies in the Bible regarding the coming of Christ and His Kingdom meaningless to the Christian.

In contrast to this view, Paul preached the "gospel of the kingdom to the Jews and gentiles" (Acts 20:25; 28:23,31). Both Matthew 24 and Luke 21 apply to the Christian Church.

Dispensationalists do apply Matthew 24:40-41 to the Church, as they believe there is evidence for the secret rapture in these verses. But these views create a false hope. Christians expecting a rapture before the tribulation will not be prepared for the time of trouble. This doctrine also includes a false second chance for those who reject Christ's grace.

Dispensationalists believe that after the rapture, the Antichrist will reign. They believe that this will happen during a seven-year period, and that during that time all Jews will come to accept Christ. Paul clearly dispels this thought in his teachings about the day of the Lord's Coming:

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition. Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God..

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4, 7-8 NKJV).

The gathering of the brethren (verse 1) and the destruction of the wicked one (verse 8) will occur simultaneously at the coming of the Lord, not at two different times.

Historic Premillennialism

This view states that all the redeemed throughout history live on the earth during the millennium. The Church is the collection of all God's people. The millennial period will be the first thousand years of God's Kingdom on Earth.

Historic premillennialists place the end of probation at the beginning of the millennium. In this way, their view differs from all the other views. However, their concept of an earthly millennium is not consistent with the Scriptures, which say the earth will be destroyed and uninhabited during this period.

Scripture places the millennial judgment scenes in heaven. This is in harmony with Christ's promise to take the redeemed to mansions prepared for them in heaven. God's people will be gathered by angels and taken away from the earth to meet the Lord in the sky. At the same time, the unrighteous will be slain by the brightness of His coming.

What is the Judgment?

In order to understand end-time events, we must first understand the judgment. Contrary to what some believe, the judgment is not a quick decision made by God either at the time of a person's death or at the end of the world. The sanctuary service that God set up with the Israelites under Moses shows us the process of salvation. Through the rituals in that service, in particular on the Day of Atonement, we see how seriously God takes the process of judgment.

It is important to note that the millennium is not the reward. It is actually an important part of the lengthy judgment process.

Since the beginning of time, people have accused God of being unfair. When terrible things have happened, people have railed against God, blaming Him for the tragedy, the trial, and the pain.

Most of us have had an experience that made us question God. The millennium is God's answer to those questions. It is a beautiful part of the plan by which God will prove that His judgments, His actions, and His dealings have been just. It is the time when God will lay open the books of heaven to be examined.

During the millennium, we will be examining what God has been up to all this time, and why things turned out the way they did. We will be able to understand what really happened. We will be able to read the secret conversations, the private thoughts of each and every person who did not make it to heaven. We will finally be able to understand the "why" of the trials and pain of our lives.

So we see that the judgment involves more than just God judging us. In fact, the purpose of the judgment is three-fold:

- To decide who must be stricken from the Book of Life because they have chosen to reject God's sacrifice on their behalf (see Psalm 62:12; Proverbs 24:12; Romans 2:5-11; and Revelation 3:5, 20:15, 21:27, 22:12).
- To set the record straight about the origin of sin and to vindicate God's character and dealings with humanity (1 Corinthians 4:5; 6:2-3).
- To mete out the reward or sentence to each person who has ever lived—either by pronouncing them worthy of eternal life, raising them in the resurrection at Christ's coming, and taking them to heaven; or by permitting them to perish (Revelation 22:12).

Not all of these purposes are fulfilled at the same time. The first purpose is fulfilled before Christ's Second Coming. Before He comes, Christ must judge every person and decide who will receive the reward.

At Christ's Second Coming, His saints will receive their reward, but those that rejected Him die at the brightness of His coming and stay asleep for a thousand years while those that have been taken are given time to make sure God's judgments are correct.

During the thousand years of peace known as the millennium, we will be given the opportunity to review the judgments of God and determine their justness. After the millennium, those that have chosen to reject Christ's offer of eternal life will receive their punishment and perish forever. Only when this final phase takes place will judgment be officially complete.

The millennium is actually an opportunity for us to make sure that God has not made a mistake in His judgment. The millennium serves as an opportunity for God to be vindicated in all His dealings with humanity since the beginning of time.

The Pre-Advent Judgment

There are several phases to the judgment: investigation, vindication, and execution. The investigative, or pre-advent, judgment takes place before the Second Coming of Christ.

The Bible makes it clear that Christ will judge everyone before He returns: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12). See also John 5:22; 2 Timothy 4:1, 8; Hebrews 10:30; and Revelation 19:11.

We know from 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 that when the Lord comes, “the dead in Christ will rise first” and then those that are alive “will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (see also 1 Peter 4:17).

If Christ will know whom to raise from the dead, then logically He must have already decided before He arrived who gets which reward. This process of deciding who will be rewarded and resurrected is the first part of the judgment process, known as the investigative, pre-advent, or pre-millennial judgment, and will take place before Christ’s coming.

When Jesus returns to this earth, He will reward the obedient and punish the disobedient—those who have chosen to follow Satan's methods. The decision of who is saved or not saved will precede the coming of Christ. The reward for the saints is eternal life, and those people will be resurrected at the Second Coming.

The Standard of Judgment

Christ will judge everyone before He returns. What tool will He use as a standard of judgment?

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak, ye and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty (James 2:10-12).

The standard of judgment is the law of God, because “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4).

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

The law of Ten Commandments is the standard of judgment. It is also called the law of liberty because we can only be free of our sinful habits when we follow that law. God has appointed a day for judgment and Jesus Himself will judge using this law: *He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:31 NKJV).*

I said in my heart, “God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, For there is a time there for every purpose and for every work” (Ecclesiastes 3:17 NKJV).

The Old Testament and the Judgment

God uses the prophecies and the sanctuary service of the Old Testament to explain the judgment.

The Day of Atonement

God's work of salvation, judgment, and restoration can be too huge to grasp. That's why He gave us a miniature representation: the sanctuary service, set up during Moses' lifetime.

Everything in the sanctuary, from the articles of furniture to the rituals and practices of its services, pointed to Christ and His plan to redeem and save humanity. The sanctuary's articles of furniture typified actual places in heaven. The Ark of the Covenant typified God's throne in heaven. The feasts and rituals symbolized what God would do through Christ on Earth.

The Day of Atonement was the final cleansing of the sanctuary—the day God officially removed the record of sin standing between Him and His people. On that day, anyone who had not confessed his sin and made things right with God was put away from the Israelites. It was the most solemn day of the year.

Similarly, on the antitypical Day of Atonement, the heavenly sanctuary must likewise be cleansed of the record of humanity's sins since the beginning of time. On a much grander scale, the services on the Day of Atonement will take place in real time. What took one day in the sanctuary service on Earth will take much longer in heaven.

The Prophecy of Daniel

Daniel describes this great judgment scene in heaven:

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

In this scene, the judgment is set and books are opened. These books are records of the deeds of all those who are to be judged. There are a number of books mentioned in the Bible, such as the *Book of Life* and the *Book of Remembrance* (Malachi 3:16, Revelation 20:12).

The Bible tells us that our lives are recorded in heaven:

For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

But I say to you, That for every idle word men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy works thou shalt be condemned (Matthew 12:36-37).

And the LORD said unto Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of

My book (Exodus 32:33 NKJV).

This judgment should not be taken lightly, and has implications for our lives today.

Judging the Heart

God's purpose is the permanent destruction of sin. He is destroying sin now in the believer, but the time will come when the Lord will do "his strange work" (Isaiah 28:21) and eradicate both the perpetrators of sin and sin itself from His Kingdom. The Bible calls it a "strange act" because destruction is so contrary to God's character.

God desires to save every person, but those that have rejected Him have allied themselves with sin and selfishness. Those that wish to cling to their sin cannot be permitted to mar the universe forever. Sin has been the cause of all the grief and sorrow on this planet. In order to finally remove all pain and sorrow and ensure that it will never rise again to disturb the peace and harmony of the universe, sin will be destroyed. If people cherish sin and do not allow God to mold their characters into His divine similitude, God has no choice but to allow their destruction with the very sin they cherish.

The Process of Sanctification

The judgment is a serious issue. Because judgment begins with God's people, it is essential that we examine our lives. Christ wants to transform our characters through sanctification. Sanctification is the daily process of becoming like Christ in our characters.

God wants to give us hearts of flesh instead of hearts of stone (Ezekiel 11:19). We have nothing to fear from the judgment, unless we refuse to submit to the sanctifying power of God. As we are judged and sanctified, God reveals our character to us and chastens us, that we may be refined (1 Corinthians 11:32).

When we are refined through the daily process of sanctification, we become fit for heaven, where no evil thing or sin is permitted to enter to defile the place. Sin is the reason we have been separated from God in the first place (Isaiah 59:2), so it makes sense that God would have a process by which He would remove sin from our lives so that we can be with Him and speak again to Him face to face.

Daniel saw a scene of the judgment in vision. He saw it as part of his complete vision of the kingdoms of the world and the Antichrist. It is important to note that this scene of judgment came in between the other scenes of Daniel's vision, showing that the judgment was taking place while other events were transpiring here on Earth: *I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened. I beheld*

then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame (Daniel 7:9-11).

The prophet then describes the coming of one “like a Son of Man” with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:13). This coming of Christ is not the Advent of Christ with the clouds of heaven to this earth, but rather the coming of Christ to the throne of God in heaven. Christ's mediating ministry will cease, and He will put on His kingly robes prior to His return as King of kings.

And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:14).

Don't be Caught Unprepared

Probation will cease when Christ's mediating ministry ceases, but those who rejected God won't know. To those who refuse to allow the sanctifying Spirit of God to work in their lives, life will seem to carry on as usual. They will not have made the Scriptures their guide. When the time comes for Christ's return, they will be not be ready.

Believers are urged to study the Scriptures and the signs of the times so they will not be unprepared on that day:

For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:2-9 NKJV).

Probation and God's Promises

What is the Close of Probation?

When Christ has finished His pre-advent investigative judgment, the final decision will have been made as to who will be saved and who will not. When that time comes, probation (the opportunity to choose between serving God or Satan) will close.

At that time, people will have already made their final decision. Once probation closes, the final events will move forward quickly. Since there will be no more opportunity to change one's master, there will be no more reason to continue living in Satan's realm.

Why must Probation End?

Time has lasted as long as it has because God is unwilling to give up one soul that might yet choose eternal life. However, it has to come to an end at some point. The Bible is full of promises to God's people that they will soon be rescued from this world of sin and pain. Since the beginning of time, people have looked forward to that redemption.

The Bible tells us in Hebrews 11 of a long list of faithful people who passed through this life and died, "not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them...But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly" (Hebrews 11:13,16).

Abraham, we are told, sojourned in the land of promise, dwelling in tents, "for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). God must deliver on His promise to all of His children waiting in the grave.

Once probation closes, the rest of the judgment will take place.

Consequences Begin

Once the pre-advent phase of the judgment has been completed and the pronouncement of judgment has been issued (Revelation 22:11-12), God's judgments will fall upon the earth. This is the executive phase of the judgment, which means the phase where the punishments are set in motion.

The first judgments to fall upon the earth after the close of probation will be the seven last plagues. The seven angels with the seven last plagues will be instructed to pour out their vials on the earth (Revelation 16). The plagues will fall and these judgments will be declared righteous by the angels of God.

*And I heard the angel of the waters saying: "You are righteous, O Lord,
The One who is and who was and who is to be,
Because You have judged these things.
For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
And You have given them blood to drink,
For it is their just due (Revelation 16:5-7 NKJV).*

The plagues will fall prior to the coming of Christ. Again we are warned to be prepared. Those that aren't watching the signs of the times and preparing for Christ's return will be caught unawares:

Behold, I am come as a thief. Blessed is he who watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame (Revelation 16:15).

Only the righteousness of Christ can shield us from the effects of the plagues:

*He shall cover you with His feathers,
And under His wings you shall take refuge;
His truth shall be your shield and buckler.
You shall not be afraid of the terror by night,
Nor of the arrow that flies by day,
Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness,
Nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.
A thousand may fall at your side,
And ten thousand at your right hand;
But it shall not come near you.
Only with your eyes shall you look,
And see the reward of the wicked (Psalm 91:4-8 NKJV).*

The plagues will fall while the righteous (those who chose God's way) are still on the earth. Just as in the last seven plagues that fell on Egypt, God's people will be shielded from the plagues, but not removed from their presence. Christ's prayer is, "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are...I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one" (John 17:11,15 NKJV).

Christ promises protection, not removal. In Revelation 7 we read, "these are they which came out of the great tribulation" (Revelation 7:14). God's saints will pass through the tribulation, but will be delivered out of it in the end.

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book (Daniel 12:1).

Deliverance and Armageddon

Deliverance will take place during the seventh plague. Babylon's support base will be eroded during the sixth plague and the death decree will be proclaimed against all who would not worship the Beast and his image or accept his mark. The proclamation of this final decree will invoke God's intervention, and Christ will then return to deliver His people.

God's people will not fight against Satan, because they have no power against his alliance. It is only Christ who will be able to deliver them, and He will fight the pre-millennial war called Armageddon on their behalf. During the seventh plague, the enemies of God will be destroyed by the earthquake, hail, and the brightness of Christ's coming (Psalm 110:5-6; Job 38:22-23, Isaiah 28:17; Jeremiah 4:23-27 and 25:33-38; Zephaniah 1:1-3)

*Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty and makes it waste,
Distorts its surface
And scatters abroad its inhabitants.
And it shall be: As with the people, so with the priest;
As with the servant, so with his master;
As with the maid, so with her mistress;
As with the buyer, so with the seller;
As with the lender, so with the borrower;
As with the creditor, so with the debtor...
The world languishes and fades away;
The haughty people of the earth languish...
Because they have transgressed the laws,
Changed the ordinance,
Broken the everlasting covenant (Isaiah 24:1-5 NKJV).*

The prophet Isaiah clearly shows here that God is just in all His dealings. There is no favoritism, and also no room for error in what Christ will do when He returns. The earth will be utterly destroyed, but in the midst of this destruction, the Lord promises deliverance.

*In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
"Do not fear;
Zion, let not your hands be weak.
The LORD your God in your midst,
The Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness,
He will quiet you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing" (Zephaniah 3:16-17 NKJV).*

In the midst of earthquakes and hail under the seventh plague, a loud voice will be heard (1 Thessalonians 4:16), and the armies of heaven will intervene (Micah 5:10-15).

*The LORD will cause His glorious voice to be heard,
And show the descent of His arm,
With the indignation of His anger
And the flame of a devouring fire,
With scattering, tempest, and hailstones.
For through the voice of the LORD
Assyria will be beaten down (Isaiah 30:30-31 NKJV).*

In Old Testament times, Assyria was one of the cruelest nations that Israel had to contend with. This nation serves as a type for the cruel master that Christ will destroy with "the brightness of his coming." Christ's redeemed of all ages will be

raised from the dead, and the living people of God will be translated. They are then to be gathered by the angels and meet the Lord in the sky (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain (Isaiah 26:19-21).

After the war, the earth will be desolate and dead, and the millennium of peace will then begin.

Satan is Bound

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years should be fulfilled: And after that, he must be loosed a little season (Revelation 20:1-3).

The destruction of those who reject God and the removal the saints from the earth will leave the earth desolate. In Revelation 20, John describes an angel who binds Satan with a great chain and throws him in the abyss. The term *abyss* is used in Scripture to denote the grave, death, destruction, and the prison of the demons (Romans 10:7, Luke 8:31).

The term *abyss* is also used in the Greek version of the Old Testament to describe the state of the uninhabited world when it says, "The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2).

The description of the earth after the coming of Christ, given by the prophet Jeremiah, is an apt description of the formless and void earth:
I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld and lo the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD, by His fierce anger (Jeremiah 4:23-26).

The whole world will be turned into a great prison for Satan and his demons. The great chain with which he is bound is the chain of circumstances that will prevent him from deceiving the nations, as they will have already been destroyed and no one remains on the earth. The Biblical records abound with examples of chains of circumstances: Psalm 2:3; 107:10,14; 116:16; Ecclesiastes 7:26; Isaiah 28:22, 52:2, and 58:6; Jeremiah 40:4; and Lamentations 3:7.

*It shall come to pass in that day
That the LORD will punish on high the host of exalted ones,
And on the earth the kings of the earth.
They will be gathered together,
As prisoners are gathered in the pit,
And will be shut up in the prison;
After many days they will be punished. (Isaiah 24:21-23 NKJV).*

In these verses, we see that God's judgments fall not only upon the kings of the earth, but also on the demonic forces ("the host of exalted ones"). The evil confederacy will be shut up in prison of isolation and after one thousand years they shall be released (Revelation 20:3). During the millennium, Satan and his army will thus be captives on the desolate earth, while God's people are taken to heaven.

God's People will Judge

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: Then I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for their witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark on their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6).

These prophetic verses will take place in heaven where John had earlier seen God's throne and the 24 elders (Revelation 4:4). The saints will be given the promise that they would reign on the earth (Revelation 5:10), but prior to this reign, they will first judge the nations.

Precisely who the 24 elders are is not revealed. The number 24 is the sum of the number of patriarchs and apostles. The gates of the New Jerusalem have written on them the names of the 12 tribes of Israel and the foundation stones have the names of the 12 apostles, thus unifying God's people under the old and new covenant. Revelation 20:4 tells us that amidst this heavenly scene, the people of God will also become judges.

When Christ returns, He will already know who accepted Him and who rejected Him. The judgment given to those who accept Him must therefore be a judgment of verification. God's righteousness and justice must forever be vindicated before the universe.

During the thousand years, every case will be scrutinized—no lingering doubts may remain—and with one voice all will proclaim, "Great and marvellous are thy works,

Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints” (Revelation 15:3).

God's judgment will be declared righteous (Romans 2:5, 2 Thessalonians 1:5, Psalm 19:9). In this millennial judgment, God's dealing with the evil angels and rejecters of His truth will be scrutinized (Hebrews 10:26-27; 2 Peter 2:4,9; Jude 6). God's people will thus judge the world.

Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life (1 Corinthians 6:2-3 NKJV).

The Postmillennial Return of Christ

After the millennium, once God's people have verified His judgments, Christ will return to the earth to execute final judgment on those who rejected His truth. He will take back what is rightfully His. Then, the kingdom will be given to His faithful ones—the ones that have been in heaven for a thousand years.

The prophet Zechariah describes the coming of the Lord with all His people, and how the feet of the Lord touch the earth to create a great plain. This will not happen at the Second Coming (see Zechariah 14:4-5).

This ancient prophecy made to literal Israel could have had its fulfillment in Israel of old if they had been obedient to God. But when the Jews rejected the Messiah, the old covenant promises were transferred from literal Israel to spiritual Israel, which is the Church. The essence of the prophecy in Zechariah thus still applies and will reach its final fulfillment in the return of Christ after the millennium.

The New Jerusalem will then descend from heaven:

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Revelation 21:2).

From the safety of the city, the redeemed will then witness the final events that finalize the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

The Resurrection of Those who Reject Christ

Satan Freed at the Resurrection of the Rejecters of God

Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the

beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them (Revelation 20:7-9 NKJV).

Chains of circumstances will bind Satan when the rejecters of God are slain. For a thousand years, Satan and his evil angels will be trapped on the empty earth, with nothing to do but to contemplate the results of their chosen path. The rebellious people will come back to life when the thousand years was over (Revelation 20:5).

The resurrection of the rebellious of all ages will loose Satan's chains of circumstances, and he will spurn on the resurrected millions to take the Holy City (the New Jerusalem), which will come down from heaven, in one final effort to retain power (See Zechariah 14:4-5, Revelation 21:2,10).

God fights the Final Battle

In Ezekiel 38:2 and 39:6, Gog the king of Magog is described as an enemy of God's people. He is the leader of the host that would attack restored Israel (Ezekiel 38:2, 14-19), but he will meet his end “after many days” (Ezekiel 38:8).

“And it will come to pass at the same time, when Gog comes against the land of Israel,” says the Lord GOD, “that My fury will show in My face. For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: ‘Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel’” (Ezekiel 38:18-19 NKJV).

God will destroy Gog. God shows in this prophecy that Israel does not battle at all. Gog stands as a symbol of the leader of rebellion—Satan himself.

At the end of time, God will permit the final act of rebellion (the attack on the New Jerusalem) by Satan, his hosts, and the resurrected wicked. He will do this to dispel any lingering doubt that the unrighteous—those in opposition to God and His people—are evil. Good and evil will stand opposite each other: God's people within the city, Satan's people without.

The Crowning of Christ

At the majestic sight of Christ on His throne, the masses of unrighteous outside the city will pause.

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged by the things which were written in the books, according to their works (Revelation 20:12).

When the books are opened, each person will see their life pass before them, and with unmistakable clarity they will see the great mercy they have rejected. They will come to a final realization of the great effort heaven has made on their behalf to do

everything possible to save them, and they will see the many times they have spurned the efforts of heaven.

They will realize that they have indeed chosen this end, willfully and knowingly. Each act of defiance, each rejection of God's grace, will be made apparent. The consequences of these choices are eternal (Hebrews 6:2). Across the surface of the earth, every knee will bow. All thoughts of rebellion and victory will fade (Romans 14:11-12, Isaiah 45:22-24).

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and of things in earth, and of things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11).

This is the final coronation of the Son of God. The final judgment will then take place:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15 NKJV).

The final sentence is death:

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries (Hebrews 10:26-27 NKJV).

Those who choose to believe Satan rather than God (John 8:45) have had their characters formed according to their master. They would never be happy among the people of God where there is no room for selfishness. The atmosphere that permeates heaven is an atmosphere of self-sacrifice and joy. All will be satisfied and realize that God's judgments are true and just.

*"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
To receive power and riches and wisdom,
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"
And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such
as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying:
"Blessing and honor and glory and power
Be to Him who sits on the throne,
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!" (Revelation 5:12-13 NKJV).*

Satan's allegations against God and His government will be proved groundless. Christ will stand vindicated and ready to perform his "strange act" (Isaiah 28:21).

The Punishment for Those who Reject God

Satan and his followers will be destroyed by fire (Revelation 20:9-15).

*"For behold, the day is coming,
Burning like an oven,
And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble.
And the day which is coming shall burn them up,"
Says the LORD of hosts,
"That will leave them neither root nor branch...
You shall trample the wicked,
For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet
On the day that I do this,"
Says the LORD of hosts (Malachi 4:1,3 NKJV).*

The unrighteous will be burnt to ashes and the fire will consume them until they are no more. In Malachi, the root is Satan and the branches are his followers.

At that time, Satan and his host will be destroyed, and the great controversy will finally end. The source of the pain and sadness this world has known for more than six millennia will be over, and the peace and happiness that God intended for His creation in Eden will be realized. The redeemed ones will finally be able to continue where Adam and Eve left off, and thus begin an entirely new and wonderful story—a story "which goes on forever; in which every chapter is better than the one before."ⁱ

The Earth made New

The fire that will destroy Satan's followers will also cleanse the earth:
But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Peter 3:10-13).

God will restore the earth to its original beauty, making the earth new:
And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there

shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful" (Revelation 21:3-5 NKJV).

God's home will be among His people. The sorrows of the world will be passed away and will no longer come to mind:

*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;
And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create;
For behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing,
And her people a joy.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
And joy in My people;
The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her,
Nor the voice of crying (Isaiah 65:17-19 NKJV).*

The kingdom of God will be restored. The new earth will be the final home of the saints.

*The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD's;
But the earth He has given to the children of men (Psalm 115:16 NKJV).*

This article is adapted from the book *Truth Matters* by Dr. Walter Veith.

i. C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1984).