



# THE REIGN OF THE LAST ADAM:

A Case for the Future  
Millennial Reign of  
Christ

Revelation 19:11–20:6

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Louis  
Berkhof

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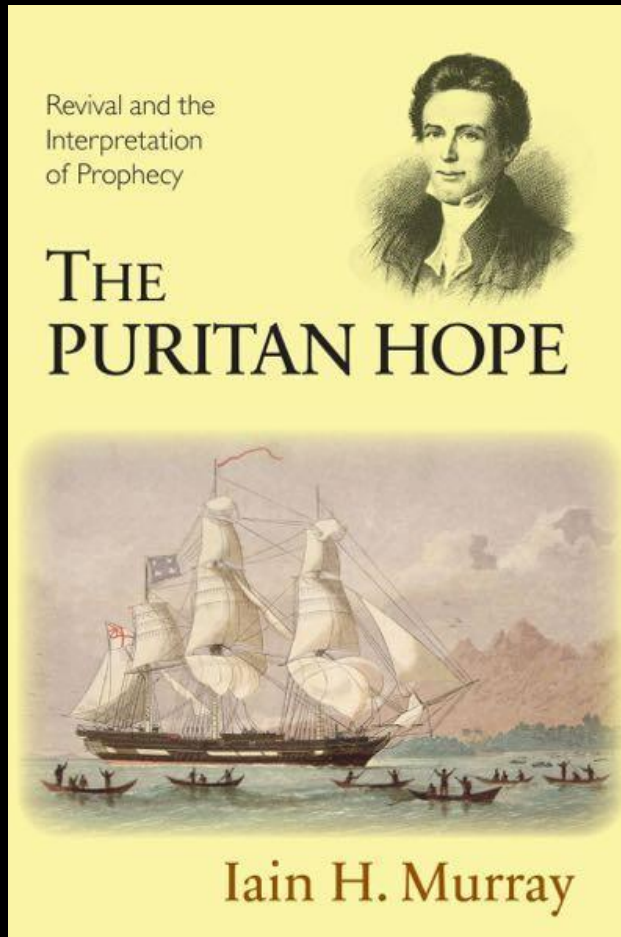
Principles  
of Biblical  
Inter-  
pretation

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“When a doctrine is supported by an obscure passage of Scripture only and finds no support in the analogy of faith, it can only be accepted with great reserve. Possibly, not to say probably, the passage requires a different interpretation than the one put on it. Cf. Rev. 20:1–4.”

—Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 166



“In view of the total absence of supporting evidence from the New Testament it is exceedingly hazardous to claim that a thousand years intervene between Christ’s coming and the end of the world on the grounds that Revelation 20 teaches a millennium.”

—Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, xix–xx

# Key Terms & Concepts

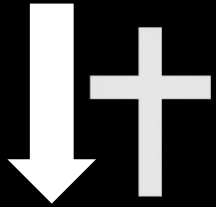
**Eschatology:** the study of the *last things* (from the Greek adjective ἔσχατος [*eschatos*], meaning “last, final”).

**Pivotal issues:** (a) the timing of the second coming of Christ in relation to the “millennial” reign described in Revelation 20:1–6; and (b) the nature of His rule in that “millennial” reign.

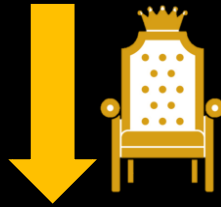
**Three views:** premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism.

Premillennialism: Christ's second coming occurs immediately before ("pre-") His millennial rule.

1<sup>st</sup> Coming



2<sup>nd</sup> Coming

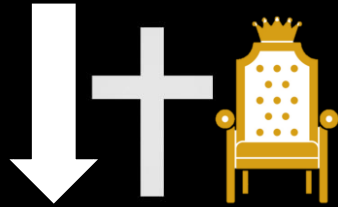


New Heaven  
& Earth

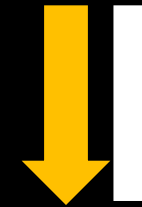
Millennial Reign  
(Rev 20:1–6) –  
understood literally

Amillennialism: Christ's second coming occurs without ("a-") a literal millennial rule.

1<sup>st</sup> Coming



2<sup>nd</sup> Coming

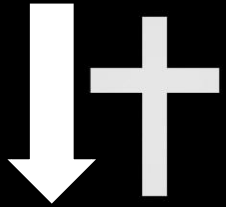


New Heaven  
& Earth

"Millennial" Reign  
(Rev 20:1–6) –  
understood non-literally

Postmillennialism: Christ's second coming occurs immediately after ("post-") the millennium.

1<sup>st</sup> Coming



2<sup>nd</sup> Coming



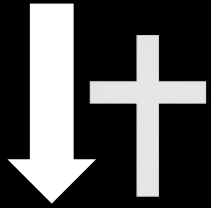
New Heaven  
& Earth



Millennial Reign  
(Rev 20:1–6) –  
understood in  
various ways

Panmillennialism: Who knows? It will all just pan out in the end!

1<sup>st</sup> Coming



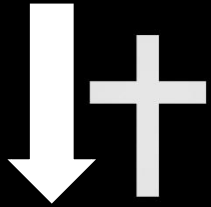
2<sup>nd</sup> Coming



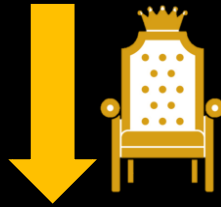


# Five Arguments in Defense of *Premillennialism* from Revelation 20

1<sup>st</sup> Coming



2<sup>nd</sup> Coming



New Heaven  
& Earth

Millennial Reign  
(Rev 20:1–6)

# 1. The Sequence of the Visions (Rev 19:11–21:8)

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- **19:11** – “And I saw” heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it *is* called Faithful and True . . . .”
- **20:1** – “Then I saw” an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.”
- Καὶ εἶδον (*Kai eidon*) – “and/then I saw” – a special formula used by John to indicate the start of a new vision.
- It occurs eight times from the vision of the coming of Christ (19:11) to the vision of the new heaven and new earth (21:1).



- All millennial positions agree on the sequential nature of these visions except the two described in 20:1–3 and 20:4–10 (the “millennium” visions).
- Premillennialists take all the visions as orderly in sequence.
- Amillennialists and post-millennialists contend that these two visions speak of events *prior to* the vision of 19:11.
- But there is no hint in the grammar to suggest that John intended these two visions to be understood as non-sequential.

“Many of these commentators . . . discount any predictive significance to these visions. That is not surprising given their view that biblical prophecy and apocalyptic is mythological. It is noteworthy, however, that when the issue of theological-historical significance is suspended *and the question is strictly literary*, there is general agreement that the events of the visions of 19:11–21:8 are correlative with or consequent to the Parousia of 19:11.”

—Craig Blaising, “Premillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, 213 (emphasis added)

## 2. The Incarceration of the Devil (Rev 20:1–3)

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- **20:1–3** – “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.”
- To what does the “binding of Satan” refer?



- Premillennialists view this binding of Satan as a consequence of the second coming of Christ—and therefore, something that is still *future*.
- Amillennialists and postmillennialists believe that this binding is *present*—descriptive of the church age prior to the coming of Christ (citing Matt 12:28; Luke 10:18–19).

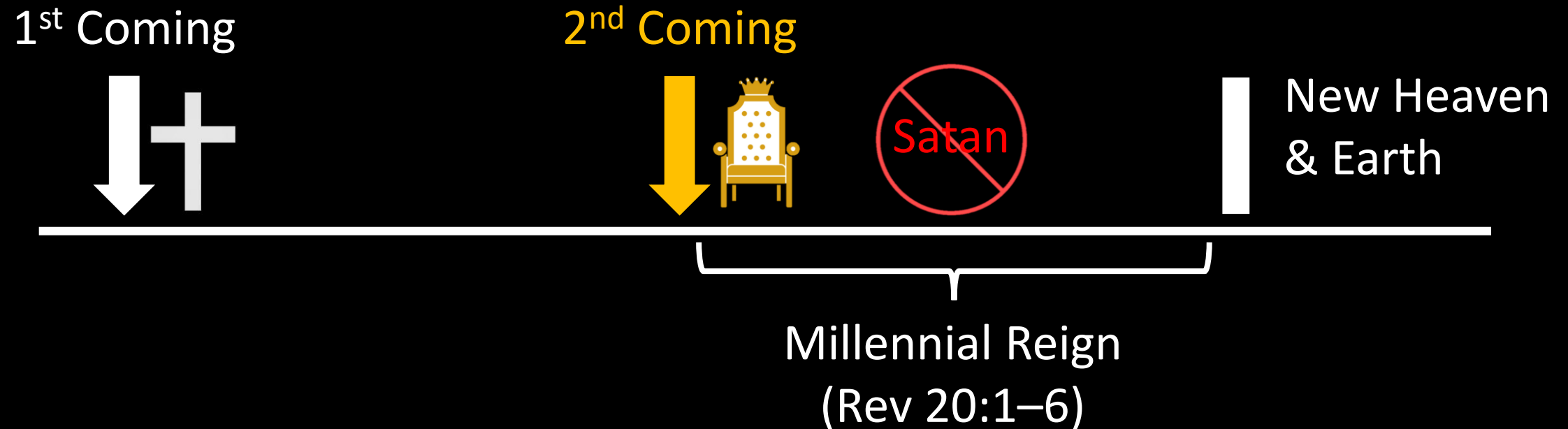
“Before the [first] coming of Christ, Satan controlled the nations; but now his death-grip has been shattered by the Gospel, as the good news of the Kingdom has spread throughout the world.”

—David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 199

“The great moment of the breaking down of Satan’s rule has come and at the same time that of the coming of the kingdom of heaven. The redemption is no longer future but has become present. In this struggle it is Jesus himself who has broken Satan’s power and who continues to do so.”

—Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 62f

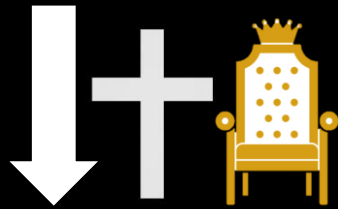
Premillennialism: Satan is literally incarcerated during Christ's future rule on earth.



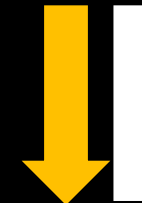


Amillennialism: Satan is figuratively incarcerated during the present church age during which Christ reigns spiritually.

1<sup>st</sup> Coming



2<sup>nd</sup> Coming

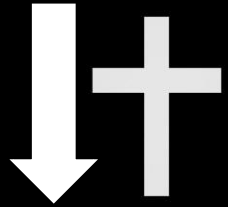


New Heaven  
& Earth

“Millennial” Reign  
(Rev 20:1–6)

Postmillennialism: Satan is figuratively incarcerated during the era in which Christ reigns through the church on earth.

1<sup>st</sup> Coming



2<sup>nd</sup> Coming



New Heaven  
& Earth



Millennial Reign  
(Rev 20:1–6)

- The angel “laid hold” and “bound” Satan—language used to describe the procedure of arresting a prisoner (e.g., Mark 6:17).
- The angel “threw him into the abyss” and “shut and sealed it”—language used to refer to complete confinement.
- The “abyss” is not a term used to refer to the earth—a place *below heaven*; it is term used to describe the abode of the dead, the “netherworld”—the place *below earth*.
- The purpose is to confine Satan completely from any activity on earth: “so that he would not deceive the nations any longer” (Rev 20:3b).

“The elaborate measures taken to ensure his custody are most easily understood as implying the complete cessation of his influence on earth (rather than a curbing of his activities).”

—Robert Mounce, *Revelation*, 353

“Confinement to the abyss . . . requires a complete termination of his activity in the sphere of the earth. The uniform testimony of the NT is that Satan is not bound during the period between Christ’s two advents.”

—Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, 404

- Satan is called “the god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4).
- He is the one John describes as “in the world” (1 John 4:4).
- He “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8).
- He appears in this world as “an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14).
- He is a source of temptation (Acts 5:3; 1 Cor 7:5; Eph 4:27).
- He hinders ministers of the gospel (1 Thess 2:18).

- Satan snatches the seeds of the gospel (Matt 13:19; Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12).
- He holds unbelievers under his power (Acts 26:18; Eph 2:2; 2 Tim 2:26; 1 John 5:19).
- He buffets believers (2 Cor 12:7) and attacks the church (Eph 6:11–17; 2 Cor 2:11; 11:3).
- The book of Revelation itself explains that Satan is engaged in efforts *on this earth* until the Second Coming of Christ (Rev 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20).

- Ultimately, amillennialists and postmillennialists concede that the wickedness and false teaching seen in the world today are still traced to Satan's direct influence.
- To reconcile this with their view that Satan is nonetheless "bound in the abyss" already, they dismiss the language of Revelation 20:1–3 as symbolic and non-prophetic.
- Yet inconsistently, they continue to take the language of the coming of Christ (19:11–21), the great white throne judgment (20:11–15), and the establishment of the eternal state (21:1ff) as literal prophecy.



“One cannot have Satan bound and loose  
at the same time; the logic of language  
will not permit it.”

—Charles Feinberg, *Millennialism*, 331



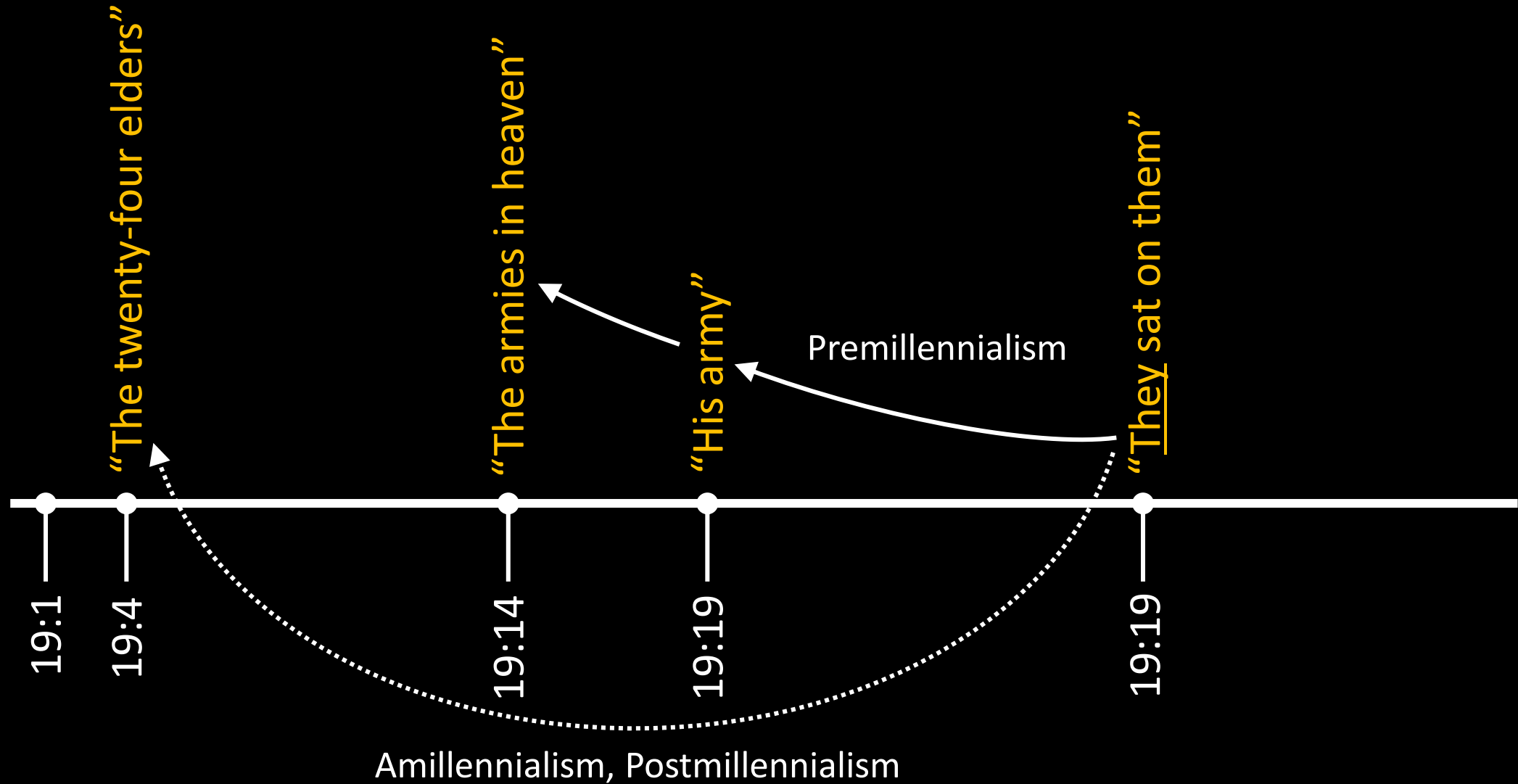
### 3. The Coregency of the Saints (Rev 20:4a)

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- **20:4a** – “Then I saw thrones, and **they** sat on them, and judgment was given to them.”
- Who sits on these “thrones” and exercises authority over the earth?
- Since amillennialists and postmillennialists see this as a *present* (not future) *reality*, they contend that the reference is to “the twenty-four elders,” whom they interpret as a symbolic representation of the church.

- Indeed, these “twenty-four elders” are mentioned throughout the book of Revelation, even as recent as 19:4.
- But there are two problems with this view: (a) the twenty-four elders are not mentioned in the immediate context of 20:4–6; and (b) there is a closer, more grammatically-appropriate antecedent to the pronoun “they” (20:4a).
- **19:14, 19** – “And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white *and* clean, were following Him on white horses. . . . And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.”

# Who sat on “the thrones” (Revelation 20:4)?



- The description of Christ's armies coming with Him to earth (19:14, 19) fits seamlessly with the description of these armies then sharing in His reign once He establishes it (20:4a).
- The church—having been snatched (ἁρπάζω, *harpazō*) from the earth to be presented before the Father blameless (1 Thess 4:17)—returns with Christ as the “armies” to rule with Him.
- **2 Timothy 2:12a** – “If we endure, we will also reign with Him.”

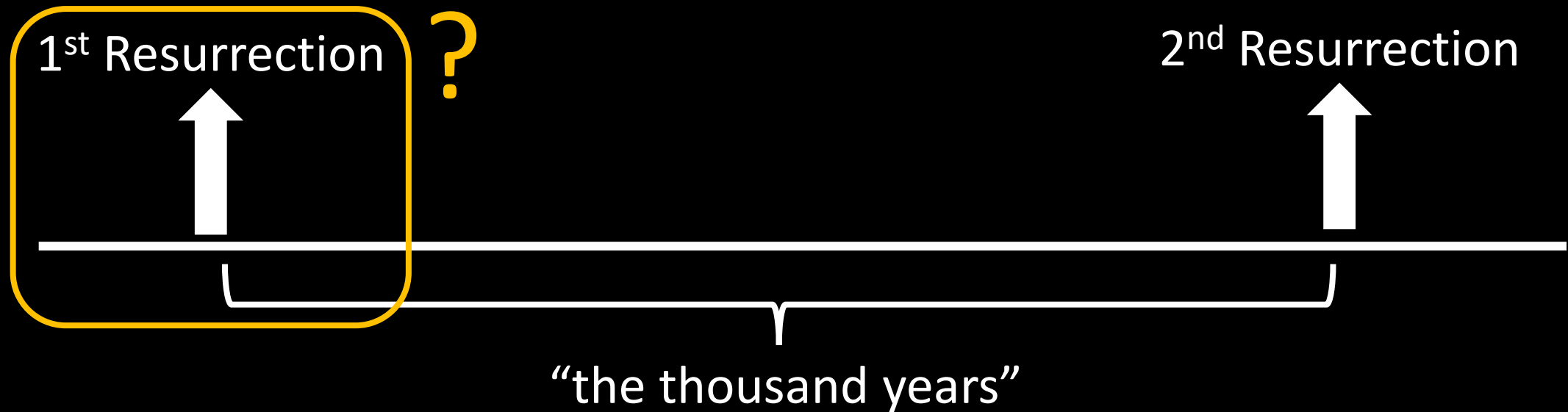
- **Revelation 2:26–27 (citing Ps 2:8)** – “He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received *authority* from My Father.”
- **Revelation 3:21** – “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”
- **Revelation 5:9–10** – “. . . You have made them to be a kingdom of priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”

## 4. The Distinction of the Resurrections (Rev 20:4–6)

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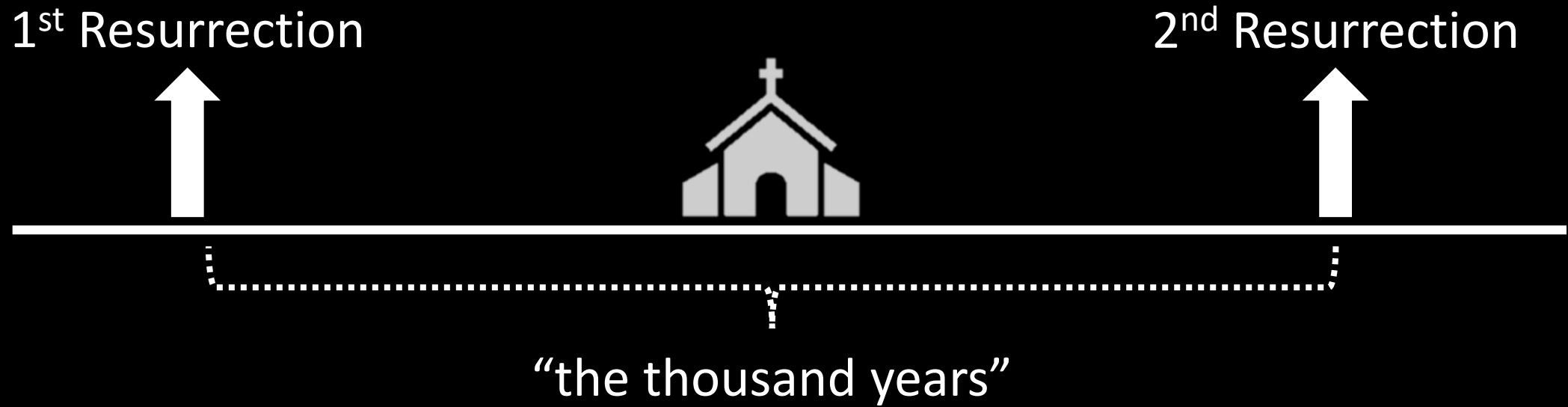
- **20:4b–6** – “And I *saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.”

- John sees *two* resurrections in Revelation 20:4–5: (a) the “first,” which comes at the *beginning* of this “millennium,” and (b) a second, which comes at the *end* of this “millennium.”



- All positions believe in the literalness of the 2nd resurrection; central to the debate is the nature of this 1st resurrection.

- If this “millennium” is a *present* reality (amillennialism and postmillennialism), then this first resurrection *already took place*.



- But this 1st resurrection must then be necessarily treated as *spiritual* in nature (e.g., regeneration at conversion, or perfection in heaven at death), and not *physical*.



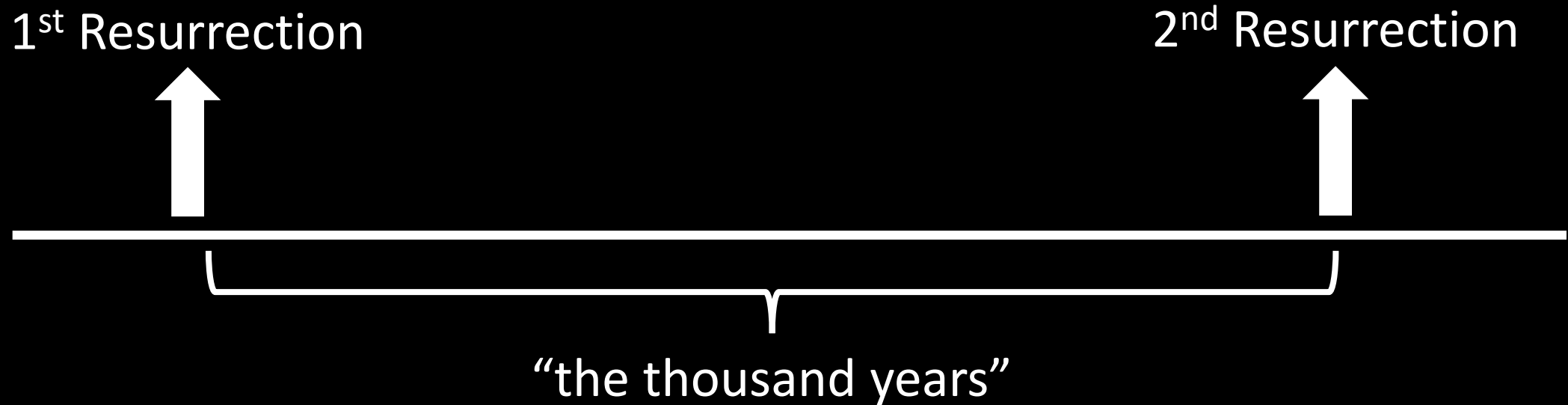
- To do this, proponents of amillennialism and postmillennialism arbitrarily change the meaning of the verb “came to life” (ἐζήσαν, *ezēsan*) between v. 4 and v. 5:
  - **20:4** – “they came to life” = spiritual resurrection
  - **20:5** – “they did not come to life until . . .” = physical resurrection
- Yet every time the verb is used in Revelation (2:8; 13:14), it never describes *spiritual* regeneration or perfection; it always is used to describe *physical* resurrection.

- Even more importantly, those who “came to life” in 20:4 (at the 1<sup>st</sup> resurrection) are those who previously “had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus” (20:4b).
- Why would these still need spiritual regeneration or perfecting in heaven?

“Because both the first and second resurrections are described in identical terminology, ἐζησαν [‘came to life’], and because no qualifying adjectives or adverbs or anything else indicate that the two resurrections are different in kind, the attempt to make them different appears to be purely arbitrary.”

—Millard Erickson, *A Basic Guide to Eschatology*, 99

- Therefore, since this first resurrection is a *physical* resurrection, it must be future since it has not yet happened.
- It will happen to the tribulation saints, at the coming of Christ, at the start of the thousand years.



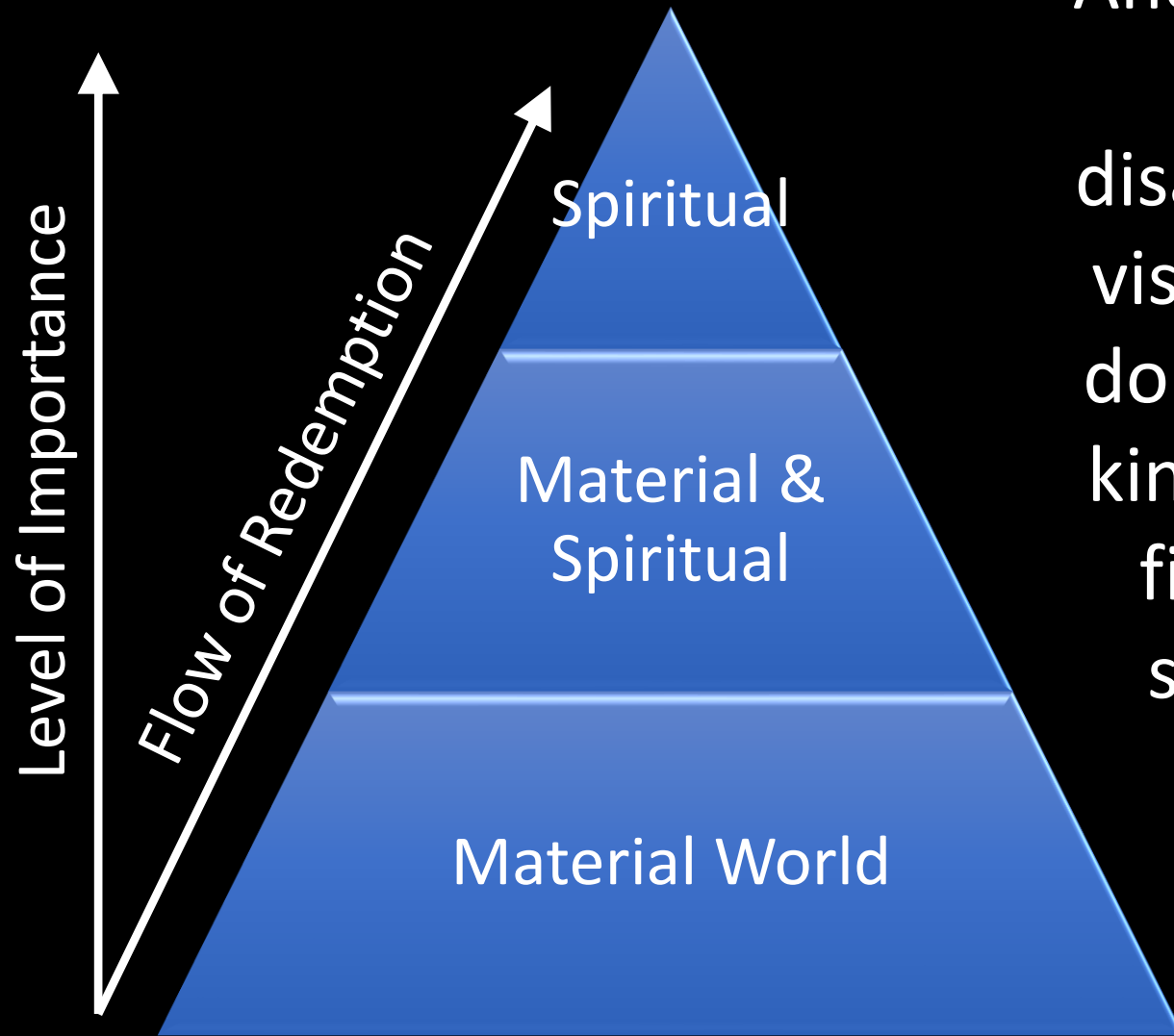
## 5. The Necessity of the Adamic Reign (Rev 20:6)

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- **20:6** – “Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.”
- The early church fathers believed that Christ would return to establish this millennial kingdom on earth.
- But their premillennialism was eroded by a “spiritual vision model”—a belief that God’s purposes are ultimately *spiritual* or *heavenly*, not *material* or *earthly*.

“Chiliasm [Millennialism] is not of Christian but of Jewish and Persian origin. It is always based on a compromise between the expectations of an earthly salvation and those of a heavenly state of blessedness. . . . It would appear that chiliasm’s strength lies in the Old Testament, but actually this is not the case. The Old Testament is decidedly not chiliastic.”

—Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4.655-56



“Ancient Christian premillennialism weakened to the point of disappearance when the spiritual vision model of eternity became dominant in the church. A future kingdom on earth simply did not fit well in an eschatology that stressed personal ascent to a spiritual realm.”

—Blaising, “Premillennialism,”

- **Q:** Why, then, is a future earthly kingdom necessary?
- **A:** To complete unfinished business.
- **Genesis 1:26–28** – “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

“Jesus as the Last Adam is destined to successfully rule from and over the realm (earth) that was tasked to the first Adam. Adam failed but the Last Adam will succeed. Jesus’ kingdom reign will be from and over the earth and He will share His reign with His followers and complete the kingdom mandate of Genesis 1:26–28.”

—Michael Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 543



- We recognize the importance of the Last Adam with respect to *the responsibility to obey God's law* (Rom 5:12–21).

First Adam and obedience to God's law → *failure/sin/death*

Last Adam and obedience to God's law → *success/righteousness/life*

- We must also recognize the importance of the Last Adam with respect to *the responsibility to rule God's creation* (Gen 1:26–28).

First Adam and the reign over God's world → *failure/chaos/decay*

Last Adam and the reign over God's world → *success/order/prosperity*

- Full representational headship is what premillennialism advocates.

## **Five Arguments in Defense of *Premillennialism***

1. The Sequence of the Visions (Rev 19:11–21:8)
2. The Incarceration of the Devil (Rev 20:1–3)
3. The Coregency of the Saints (Rev 20:4a)
4. The Distinction of the Resurrections (Rev 20:4–6)
5. The Necessity of the Adamic Reign (Rev 20:6)