

# The Last Rebellion

Revelation 20:7-10

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2018-08-26

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## Text

7 Now when the thousand years are finished Satan will be released from his prison, 8 and he will come out to deceive the nations that are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war, whose number is like the sand of the sea. 9 They arose up onto the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down out of heaven from God and devoured them. 10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the Lake of Fire and brimstone, where the Beast and the False prophet also are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

## **I. Introduction**

I will begin with some confessions - telling a bit about my pilgrimage on this passage. Back in the 1970s I took the common Amillennial view that this passage vindicates the idea that things will get worse and worse as time progresses and that eventually toward the end of history, unbelievers will vastly outnumber believers. After all, the nations of Gog and Magog will come from the four corners of the earth (which I interpreted back then as the four corners of the globe - in other words, all nations will be apostate), and these unbelievers will be innumerable ("like the sand of the sea" - which is exactly what the text says), and will completely surround the beleaguered saints like a suffocating avalanche. If they can surround them, then surely they must be more than the saints. To me that seemed to be the most straightforward reading of the passage. The true believers would be a tiny minority.

When I became a Postmillennialist, other Scriptures forced me to be a bit more optimistic about how many Christians would be around. Based on one passage I had misinterpreted, I believed it would be two Christians for every unbeliever. So it would still be a wheat field, not a tare field, but it would be a heavily infested wheat field. I considered the common Postmillennial view that Jesus will come back to a thoroughly Christianized world to be impossible to fit into this paragraph. But I still insisted on wearing the label, "Postmillennialist." I (along with Gentry, Chilton, and quite a few other modern Postmillennialists) believed that the last generation would still be professing Christians, but "Christian" in name only, and would be easily

deceived once Satan was allowed to deceive them. I thought that a straightforward reading of the text forced me to believe that it had to be a lot of people - like the sand of the sea. And though it did look like everything Jesus had worked to achieve was swept away by this apostasy, I at least comforted myself that every enemy had been conquered by Jesus at least by some of the generations before the final generation. In any case, I thought the traditional Postmillennial view was way too optimistic. But my lack of optimism was primarily based on this passage. So all the charts of the millennial views that I have produced in the past have a little dip at the end of history. My superficial exegesis of this passage seemed sufficient to definitively prove a final apostasy. (Famous last words!)

What blew me out of the water not too many years ago was a section of a commentary by Francis Nigel Lee. He pointed to one exegetical problem after another with the apostasy view. And not only did he show exegetical problems from within the text, but he pressed upon my conscience numerous Scriptures that describe the last day of history as showing a world that had everything in submission to Jesus except for death. This really challenged my thinking. He pointed out correctly that 1 Corinthians 15 indicates that at Christ's Second Coming, death will be the sole survivor that had not yet been conquered by Christ's reign. And of course, that flat-out contradicted my interpretation of this passage.

But he resolved the problem by showing how this text itself absolutely necessitates that this be describing the long-dead unbelievers and long-ago-bound demons that had just been released from Hades on the very last day of history and it is not describing an apostasy of still-living nations at all. I couldn't believe that I had missed something so crystal clear in the text. And hopefully it will become clear to you by the end of this sermon.

Since I changed my view on this passage I have discovered that this was the view of Baptists like John Gill, Presbyterians like BB. Warfield, church fathers like Hippolytus, and modern thinkers like Martin Selbrede. Actually, Selbrede had written about this back in 1998. I just had never read his essay. I thought I owned all the editions of the Journal of Reconstruction, but I was missing that one until I read it online this past week. So I was already convinced by the time I read his article. And there are a host of very respected commentators who have insisted that the world will be a 100% Christian world when Jesus comes back.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Universal conversion is the view of Warfield, Boettner, Rushdoony, Saunders, McElhinny, Ned Stonehouse, Francis Nigel Lee, Martin Selbrede.

***A. It is common to believe that this paragraph is a reference to the vast bulk of humanity apostatizing from Christianity after Satan is released and then attempting to exterminate the faith.***

Now, this interpretation I am giving to you may at first seem very strange - especially if you have been exposed to popular teaching on Revelation. Go ahead and be skeptical. You know that I want you to be Bereans who check out everything I say against the Scripture. But at least consider the following problems with believing a final apostasy and keep an open mind. And the bulk of this sermon is going to be working into the meaning backwards - by ruling out the opposite. This list of problems is only an introduction into a much larger list of passages that I now believe deny a final apostasy is possible.

***B. There are many problems with this interpretation***

**First, it contradicts the many Scriptures showing a Christianized world at the end of history (Is. 2:4; 9:7; 11:9; 66:23; Jer. 31:34; Dan. 2:35; Ps. 37:9-11,22,28,29; 1 Cor. 15:20-28; Rom. 11:12,14,16,25-27; Matt. 5:18; John 1:29; 12:32; 2 Pet. 3:9; Heb. 12:27 with Haggai 2:6-7 - “all nations”; Matt. 6:10; Jer. 31:34; Rom. 5:20-21; Matt. 6:10)**

The first one I want to look at is in Isaiah 2. After Isaiah 2 describes the thorough conversion of all nations in the world, it goes on to say this in verse 4:

They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore.

Well, on Gentry’s interpretation of Revelation 20 (which was also my old view), we will have nations learning war once again at the end of history and they will lift up their swords against other nations. On my old interpretation Gog and Magog will be nations that previously were Christian (at least in name) prior to the supposed apostasy. But Isaiah 4:2 guarantees that once Jesus has Christianized the world, no nations will ever learn war again.

That’s a major problem for the apostasy view.

Seven chapters later, in Isaiah 9:7, the prophet says of Jesus, that

Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this

That passage is quite clear that Christ’s kingdom will never stop its growth in terms of both His government and of peace. And the word “peace” is

Shalom, and refers to the reversal of everything impacted by the curse. So Christ is continuing to conquer more and more of life, philosophy, etc through His army, the church, until the end of time. But in the process He is continuing to gradually reverse every effect of the curse. So both the government and shalom of Jesus will increase with no end from that time forward and even forever. And to those who think this is impossible, the last sentence assures us not to worry, for “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” But on your typical Amil scheme, things are getting worse and worse, not increasing. On your typical modern Postmil scheme things get better for a while and then take a major backward hit as they go from 100% Christianized to the last generation having so many unbelievers that they are like the sand of the sea shore. That is a major contradiction to this passage.

The whole of Isaiah 11 also seems to be contradicted by that theory as it describes a pervasively Christian world. Verse 9 says of all nations, “they shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain.” But doesn’t Revelation 20:9 describe nations surrounding the camp of the righteous and the beloved city and attempting to hurt them? Yes it does. How do you reconcile the two?

Isaiah 66:23 says that from one Sabbath to another, “all flesh shall come to worship before Me” and the very next verse, which is the last verse of Isaiah describes what happens on the last day of history - the “all flesh” that has been already sincerely worshiping God will look upon the corpses of men who have transgressed and see them burning in hell. That perfectly parallels Revelation 20. All flesh (or 100% of men) worshiping God, yet later in that same day looking at a vast multitude of resurrected bodies judged by God in hell.

Daniel 2:35 shows the stone cut without hands striking the part of the statue representing the fourth kingdom, Rome, and gradually growing worldwide so that the kingdom of Christ triumphs. And of that entire statue that represents rebellious humanism, it says,

Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. [Are there traces of Rome and Greece today? Absolutely, yes there are. Homeschoolers are resurrecting those empires and adoring those empires. But this says that at some point in history, no trace of them will be found. It goes on to say:] And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. Still within the scope of history there is coming a time when even the dust particles of the rebellious image are being blown away so that eventually no

trace of the dust particles are found. That contradicts this massive apostasy interpretation.

The whole of Psalm 37 is a refutation of the apostasy theory. It is a Messianic Psalm. It's a prayer of Jesus explaining the progress of His kingdom from overwhelming numbers of enemies at the beginning of His reign (and He does rule in the midst of His enemies), but He keeps ruling until finally there are no enemies left. Verse 10 says,

For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more. But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

That is the goal of history. And verse 29 insists that the righteous will not be dispossessed once again after that. It says, "The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell in it forever." So while the righteous possess the land forever, the wicked are no more and even if you carefully search for them around the globe, you will not find them. And that is all before judgment day, and that has not yet happened. That is the goal of history.

Selbrede's and BB Warfield's interpretation of Romans 11 (if true) leaves no room for apostasy. All the Gentiles and all of Israel will be saved at some point in history, and the next event in history after that is a literal resurrection (on their interpretation) or a metaphorical increased blessing on John Murray's interpretation. Either way you interpret the phrase, "life from the dead," in Romans 11, it still points to a universal fulfillment of the Great Commission prior to that resurrection.

Sometime read Martin Selbrede's fascinating interpretation of Matthew 5:18. His is a much stronger interpretation than Bahnsen's. He gives the credit to B.B. Warfield for his viewpoint. That verse says,

For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

When does heaven and earth pass away? When every jot and tittle of the law is being fulfilled in the world. I have found his interpretation of "till all is fulfilled" very convincing. When the law is being 100% lived out in this world, there will be nothing left in God's prophetic plan to put under Christ's feet, so the final event (heaven and earth passing away) can then happen.

That interpretation is in perfect harmony with the eschatology of 1 Corinthians 15. Neither passage leaves any room for a final apostasy. And I have listed a sampling of other Scriptures that require all to be believers at the end of history. Of course, this has forced me to rethink Matthew 24. My son has been working on me on that passage. I think Joel is right that the break has to come later.

Hebrews 12:27 is another passage that is often overlooked. It shows a spiritual shaking that replaces everything that can be shaken (that's pretty universal) and leaving nothing but the good that can't be shaken. And there is no reversal. It says,

Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

The victory of the kingdom of heaven remains on earth during history and will remain into eternity. And in context of the Haggai passage that Hebrews quotes, those "all things" include "all nations." Haggai 2:7 (which Hebrews is exegeting) says,

...and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts.

If (as Hebrews asserts) all things will be transformed by Christ in history and will remain, then that includes all converted nations. But the apostasy view says that all nations do not remain as Christian nations; many of them apostatize. They do not remain.

These and many other Scriptures are used by Warfield, Boettner, Rushdoony, Saunders, McElhinny, Ned Stonehouse, Francis Nigel Lee, Martin Selbrede to prove that Christ's victory in history will be a real victory and a permanent victory showcased in a consistently Christianized world that fulfills the Great Commission by obeying all things that Christ has commanded. The Great Commission will not only be a full success, it will never be reversed. That's the key thing I want to press home today; once fulfilled, it will never be reversed.

Jeremiah 31:34 declares that at the end of history,

No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

It is quite clear that it will not be merely a tiny percentage of the world's population that is saved. It says "they shall all know Me" and evangelism will no longer need to take place. The kingdom of heaven will by that time have pervasively leavened the lump. I don't long for the good old days of America. I long to press into the good new days of future.

And isn't that what we pray for in the Lord's Prayer? "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." God's will is being perfectly done in heaven, but that prayer asks that it would be just as pervasively done on earth. Is He asking us to pray for something impossible? No. Is the Great Commission an impossible command to fulfill by His grace? No. With God all things are possible. The question is not possibility, but what has God commanded? What has He purposed?

How great is your view of God's grace? How great is your view of the Great Commission? Or do you still believe that Satan and sin are greater than God's grace? Romans 5:20-21 shows that Christ's grace will end up causing Christ's reign of righteousness to be much more pervasive than the reign of sin and death has ever been. Why? Because, (it says) "where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that just as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness..." But most eschatologies don't take that seriously. They have the reign of sin and death as being far more powerful than the reign of righteousness and life through Jesus. And Amils respond that it will be greater once eternity comes. But will it? On their view, the non-elect burning in hell will vastly outnumber the elect. On BB. Warfield's view, the elect who end up in heaven will vastly outnumber the non-elect.

Now, I have barely dipped into because chapter 21 picks up on those things much more. But I wanted to give enough Scripture to show that systematic theology seems to contradict the apostasy interpretation and should make us at least check our exegesis to make sure that it doesn't have any mistakes in it. Isaiah 2:4 affirms that the Christianized world of our future will never again learn war once worldwide peace has been achieved.

### **Exegetical problems with believing that the final generation of living nations are mostly apostates**

But it is not just systematic theology that shows problems with the apostasy view; exegetical theology also demands that it be reevaluated. We don't want to read Postmillennialism into this passage. If it is true, it will flow out of this passage. And it does. But the truth of Scripture is united; there are no contradictions. So let's look at hints in the text itself.

***Revelation 20 requires that Satan's release and deception of nations occur on the last day of history. Thus is there is no time to gather living nations. But there would be no problem with deceiving the just resurrected nations that have been with him in Hades. Proof that verses 7-10 occur on the last day of history just before the elect are resurrected:***

First of all, Revelation 20 requires that Satan's release and deception of nations occur on the last day of history, not years before the last day (as is required by the apostasy theory). You see, on the apostasy theory there simply is no time for nations from Africa, Asia, Russia, Europe, and America to to build arms, to coalesce under a wicked leader, to gather an army under a supposed United Nations in order to exterminate Christianity. There's no time for that to take place if Satan is released on the last day of history. So

the apostasy advocates say that a conspiracy foments over a period of years, leading to arms build up and training, and finally the time needed to travel to the place of this great battle. But this passage indicates that Satan is released at the very end of the thousand years.

### **Satan is bound for the full 1000 years (v. 2)**

There are six references to the thousand years that I have underlined in my Bible. If you underline them they will help you with the timeline.

First, look at verse 2. It says, “And he seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is a slanderer, even Satan, who deceives the whole inhabited earth, and bound him for a thousand years.” Note the reference “for a thousand years.” He doesn’t get out before the thousand years is ended.

### **He cannot deceive nations until the 1000 years is finished (v. 3)**

Look at verse 3. “...he threw him into the Abyss and locked and sealed it over him so that he should not deceive the nations any more until the thousand years were finished.” And then it goes on to describe him being released for a short undefined period. But notice that his deceptive work cannot happen until the thousand years were finished. It’s not before they are finished, but when they are finished.

### **The saints reign for the same full 1000 years (v. 4)**

Look at the last sentence of verse 4. Speaking of the saints it says, “And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” That’s the same Greek. They don’t stop their reign any earlier. And there is no evidence from other Scriptures that their reign gets interrupted for a few years. No, they reign for exactly the same duration that Satan is bound. Since I interpret the “short time” of verse 3 as exactly one hour long (and I do so based on two statements in John 5), this can be taken literally. And we’ll get to that in a bit.

### **The rest of the dead that were not raised in the first century are raised at exactly the same time - when “the thousand years is finished” (v. 5)**

Then look at verse 5. When does the Second Resurrection happen? It says, “Now the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were finished.” In other words, they come to life at exactly the same terminal point of each of the other events. I believe they are resurrected on the same day that Satan is released.

**Again, the saints are said to reign for the entire thousand years (v. 6)**

Then look at the last two clauses of verse 6. “they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him a thousand years.”

**Satan is released when the thousand years if finished (v. 7); that is, he is released at exactly the same time when “the rest of the dead” are released/resurrected (v. 5)**

Then verse 7 repeats an earlier thought: “Now when the thousand years are finished Satan will be released from his prison.” Well, when you compare that with verse 5, that is the exact same time when the rest of the dead are released and resurrected. Six times John emphasizes that all of these things happen at the same time. This first exegetical issue is a huge one.

***Further proofs that verses 7-10 is dealing with the events of Resurrection Day:***

But let’s look at some further proofs that verses 7-10 is dealing with the events of resurrection day.

**Gog and Magog were 100% eradicated in the time of Esther (Ezek. 38:21; 39:4,7,11), and thus God “will not let them profane My holy name anymore” (Ezek. 39:7). If all of Gog and Magog are dead, then v. 7 confirms that the nations deceived by Satan are the unbelieving nations resurrected on the same day Satan was unleashed.**

The next proof is that Gog and Magog are at least part of the nations that gather against the saints. But there is a major problem if this is dealing with still-living Christian nations. First, Christian nations would not be identified as Gog and Magog even as symbols because Gog and Magog never were believing nations in the Old Testament. If it’s a symbol, it doesn’t fit an apostatized nation.

But more to the point, 100% of Gog and Magog are suffering in Hades right now. According to God’s inerrant word, none survived. And even Premillennialists agree that this battle of Gog and Magog has to be a different battle than the battle of Ezekiel 38-39. So, if you want to turn to Ezekiel 38-39, I want to show that none of Gog and Magog survived that earlier battle; not one single soldier.

In my Esther series I proved with detailed exegesis that the great battle of Ezekiel 38-39 happened during the time of Esther to bring God’s people to repentance and bring them back out of the nations.<sup>2</sup> A remnant had indeed

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<sup>2</sup> Not all of my work has been converted to the web yet, but a summary of my Esther views can be seen at <https://kaysercommentary.com/category.md?category=Bible/Esther>

returned to Israel, but Haman the Agagite (one of the members of the Gog nation) sought to exterminate Israel, and God by a remarkable series of events turned that all around and had 100% of Gog and Magog killed.

Now, there are some people who have never seen those historical facts, so they see Gog and Magog as fighting against Israel in AD 70. I totally disagree. There are many problems with that view. But my point today is that even if you thought this occurred in Revelation 19 immediately before the thousand years, the same point is still made that they are all killed according to Ezekiel in the first battle, and therefore they had to get resurrected in order to be in the battle of Revelation 20. So, let me see if I can make my case. I'm just going to read a few key verses from Ezekiel 38-39.

Ezek. 38:21 I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains," says the Lord GOD. "Every man's sword will be against his brother."

Ezek. 39:4 You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured.

Notice that all the troops of Gog and Magog are destroyed and all the peoples they were associated with.

Ezek. 39:7 So I will make My holy name known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not let them profane My holy name anymore. Then the nations shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel.

Even if you believed that Gog and Magog were allowed to survive (which the text does not allow for), you would still have to believe that they could no longer profane God's name by attempting to annihilate believers. But that is precisely what the apostasy theory says will happen at the end of history. But there is no contradiction if Revelation 20:7-10 is talking about a resurrection of Gog and Magog and others associated with them.

Ezek. 39:11 "It will come to pass in that day that I will give Gog a burial place there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea; and it will obstruct travelers, because there they will bury Gog and all his multitude. Therefore they will call it the Valley of Hamon Gog.

If Gog and all his multitude were buried, they can't be around today. So Gog and Magog were 100% eradicated in the time of Esther. The only way they could be around when Satan is unleashed from Hades is if they were unleashed from Hades as well - and at the same time.

**Note that Gog and Magog are "in the four corners of the land (γῆς)" of Israel, where they had previously all been buried (Ezek. 38:21; 39:4,11-20).**

Now, keep your fingers in Ezekiel 38-39 because I want to mention one more clue about Gog and Magog from Revelation 20. That clue is that our

text says that Gog and Magog are “in the four corners of the land,” and we have seen that the word for land or earth is γῆς, which is used in this book to refer to the land of Israel. Were all of Gog and Magog buried in Israel? It appears so. Let me read phrases from those same Scriptures in Ezekiel.

Ezek. 38:21 I will call for a sword against Gog [where?] throughout all My mountains,” says the Lord GOD. “Every man’s sword will be against his brother.

So they died within the boundaries of Israel.

Ezek. 39:4 You shall fall [Where?] upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured.

God had ordained that they die within the land of Israel so that their resurrection could take place from the four corners of the land of Israel.

Now, there are other nations that join them too, but Gog and Magog are highlighted to make it clear that these are resurrected nations. This is John’s clue to us that these are resurrected nations. That, by the way, may be why they attack the closest capitol available - the Christianized capitol of Israel.

Look at Ezekiel 29:11 and following.

Ezek. 39:11 “It will come to pass in that day that I will give Gog a burial place there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea; and it will obstruct travelers, because there they will bury Gog and all his multitude. Therefore they will call it the Valley of Hamon Gog. 12 For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land. 13 Indeed all the people of the land will be burying, and they will gain renown for it on the day that I am glorified,” says the Lord GOD. 14 “They will set apart men regularly employed, with the help of a search party, to pass through the land and bury those bodies remaining on the ground, in order to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make a search. 15 The search party will pass through the land; and when anyone sees a man’s bone, he shall set up a marker by it, till the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon Gog. 16 The name of the city will also be Hamonah. Thus they shall cleanse the land.”

And there are several other verses that show the bodies of Gog and Magog to be buried in the land of Israel. So it makes sense that the land of Israel is where Gog and Magog get resurrected from in Revelation 20.

But was Gog and Magog like the sand of the sea? Were they innumerable? It appears so by the seven months it took to bury them. It also appears to be the case because of the use of the Hebrew word hamon (הַמֹּן) or “multitude.”

That word is used three times to describe Gog and Magog, and the valley where they were buried was called the Valley of Hamon Gog, or Multitude Gog. Of course, I believe they are just two representative nations of all unbelieving nations through history. But at least they will rise in Israel. OK, back to Revelation 20.

**Note that the unbelieving nations “arose up onto the breadth of the earth.” The word for “arose up” is the same word used for demons and men arising in Rev. 9:2; 11:7; 13:11; 17:8. See Paul’s interpretation of that word in Ephesians 4:8-9.**

The third exegetical problem with the apostasy view is that the unbelieving nations are said in the future to have “arose up onto the breadth of the earth.” That’s verse 9. The word for “arose up” is the same word used for demons arising from the Abyss in Rev. 9:2; 11:7; 13:11; 17:8. So when these nations arose up from the earth, where were they? In Hades, which is in the center of the earth. Now, if you are understandably skeptical, I want you to turn with me to Ephesians 4 to see the theological point that Paul makes with this Greek word, ἀναβαίνω, which dictionaries define as to be in motion upwards (see, eg., BDAG). Ephesians 4:8-9.

8 Therefore He says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.” 9 (Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

The word for “He ascended” is used of Christ’s soul coming up from Hades. And Paul interprets that word as necessitating that for Jesus to rise up or to ascend must mean that he also first descended into the lower parts of the earth. He says that is the implication of that word. Christ’s soul was in Hades, and when His body was resurrected, his soul came up onto the earth. Well, exactly the same thing happened to Gog and Magog. Their bodies are in (the Greek word ἐν - in) the land of Israel. That’s verse 8. But their souls are in Hades, where Satan was, so verse 9 describes what happens to their souls when their bodies are resurrected. It uses the same language used of Christ’s soul arising when His body was resurrected. It says, “They arose up onto the breadth of the earth/land...”

And it is not just Postmillennialists who see this as being resurrected nations. W. Metzger sees these resurrected nations as the nations that had previously fought in chapter 19 before the thousand years.<sup>3</sup> I disagree with that part of his interpretation, but he does see these nations as absolutely having to be resurrected nations. Mathias Rissi<sup>4</sup> says this is the “kingdom... of all the dead in the underworld.” There are Premillennialists like J. Webb Mealy<sup>5</sup> who have been writing very technical books and articles that prove that verses 7-10 is dealing with the second resurrection that verse 5

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3 W. Metzger, “Das Zwischenreich,” in M. Loeser (Hg.), *Auf dem Grunde der Apostel und Propheten*. Festschrift Theophil Wurm, 1948, 100-118. Using Google translate.

4 Mathias Rissi, *The Future of the World: An Exegetical Study of Revelation 19:11-22:15* (Scm-Canterbury Press, 1972).

5 J. Webb Mealy, *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20* (JSOT Press, 1992). J. Webb Mealy, *The End of the Unrepentant* (Wipf and Stock, 2012).

anticipates. They have some incredibly strong exegesis to back it up.

**Thus, where verses 4-6 primarily deal with the first resurrection of v. 5b and verses 7-10 primarily deal with the second resurrection of v. 5a.**

Thus, where verses 4-6 primarily dealt with the first resurrection before the thousand years, verses 7-10 deal with the Second Resurrection mentioned in the parenthesis in verse 5. The first resurrection happens before the thousand years and the Second Resurrection happens at the end of the thousand years.

### **Order at the resurrection**

Now, not all agree with me that the Second Resurrection comes in two phases - the ungodly first and the righteous second. And even among those who agree that there are two phases, some (like Francis Nigel Lee) say the righteous rise first. I'll deal a bit more with this next week. But let me outline what I see as the order of events that happens on the last day of history, with probably only an hour separating the events.

Briefly, both Matthew 13 and Revelation 20 show the non-elect rising first (and I'll prove that in a bit), with the elect rising later that day. So if you look at Revelation 20, verses 7-10 is the resurrection of those not in the Book of Life. Verses 11-13 shows the resurrection of those who are in the book of Life. Based on John 5, I believe they are raised within the same hour of that day - there's only about an hour that separates the resurrection of the ungodly and the resurrection of the godly. And there is even an order in which the elect are raised. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 indicates that the dead in Christ will rise before the elect who are still alive are taken up to be with the Lord. That's the general order.

***Non-elect rise first (vv. 7-10 with Matthew 13:24-30,37-43) and surround the living generation of Christians***

***The elect dead rise next (probably an hour later, as will see)***

**Among the elect, the dead elect rise first (1 Thes. 4:16)**

**Among the elect, the living rise second (1 Thes. 4:16).**

**All of this happens on the "last day" (John 6:39,40,44,54; 11:24; 12:48) and probably within an hour (John 5:25,28)**

But turn to Matthew 13, where Jesus gave the parable of the wheat and tares.

That parable indicates that the tares will be resurrected first and even bound before the wheat is resurrected. Matthew 13:30 says,

First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn. (v. 30)

They first gather the tares; then they gather the wheat. Jesus interprets the parable a little further on. We are going to start in the middle of verse 37.

Jesus says,

“He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. 39 The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. 40 Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. 41 The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, 42 and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

So the tares from the beginning of time to the end of time are still in Christ’s kingdom. Philippians 2:10 says that even “those under the earth” (that’s Hades) must acknowledge Christ’s Lordship. They are currently suffering under Christ’s judgment in Hades. I used to think that tares and wheat were the generation then growing at the end of history. But the parable is quite clear that the tares represent all unbelievers from all time (or as He words it, “the sons of the wicked one”).<sup>6</sup> How does an unbeliever from 2000 years ago or 6000 years ago get separated from the wheat and get told “Depart from Me you cursed into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41)? He’s not part of the living world of that time. The only way that all tares can be separated from all wheat is by the resurrection and final judgment that Matthew 25 talks about. That is the time of separation of the tares and wheat; the goats and the sheep.

And why did God prohibit the tares being removed from the world (in other words being killed) prematurely? Jesus said that the field is the world, not the church. So for tares over the past 6000 years to be removed from the world means to be killed prematurely. Why does Jesus prohibit that?

Because it would prevent all the descendants of those tares from getting converted in the future. As Selbrede words it,

Had the tare, Terah, been gathered while his son, Abraham, was still in his loins, Abraham would have been uprooted as well: he would never have been born. Thus, every unsaved man will either (1) eventually bear elect offspring in a future generation (hence

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6 This is where I depart from Selbrede on his otherwise wonderful essay. Martin G. Selbrede, “Reconstructing Postmillennialism,” in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction: Symposium on Eschatology* volume 15 (Winter 1998), 146-224. He believes tares are false believers and downplays Christ’s words that “the field is the world” (Matt. 13:38). I think his goal is better accomplished by seeing it as I expounded in the sermon.

the emphatic warning to leave the tares alone, or (2) have his posterity cut off (Ps. 37). The relational logic reduces to a syllogism, assuring a fully converted earth by the end of time.<sup>7</sup>

So Christ was talking about the resurrection of tares at the end of history, not the presence of tares in the final generation.

But in terms of timing, Matthew 13:30 is clear: “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.” If the ungodly are resurrected first, that will give the ungodly some false confidence. Why? Because they will vastly outnumber the people then living on the earth and because they will glorified bodies with remarkable powers. This difference in the balance of power will likely cause them to be deceived by Satan into thinking that they really can defeat Christ’s kingdom with their newly resurrected bodies. But before they can do so, God judges them, raises the righteous, and God separates the righteous from the unrighteous nations (just as Matthew 25 declares). So the order in the parable of the tares is the same order that we see here. They all are raised in the same day (and actually John chapter 5:25,28 twice indicates that they will all be raised within the same hour).

So to repeat - verses 7-10 deal with the resurrection of the ungodly first, then verses 11-13 deal with the resurrection of the godly. But it all highlights how incredibly short this last rebellion against a Christianized world will be. It takes place on one day, and if we take John 5 literally, within one hour. It’s a one hour rebellion.

There are some exegetes who think the righteous will be raised before the wicked are, but within minutes of each other, not an hour. If that view is correct, then the resurrected ungodly attack the resurrected godly and/or rush the throne of God before God puts them in their place. I don’t buy that. The very fact that the resurrected nations outnumber and surround the believers shows to me that it is only the still-living believers that they are attacking, not all believers from the beginning of time. Solid exegetes stand on both sides of that question.

## **II. Short exposition of verses 7-10**

Now, you might be lost by now. Some of this can be confusing simply because I am trying to deal with various views. So let me take somewhere between seven and seven and a half minutes to read the text again with a few explanatory statements. You can time me. I think I’ll make it. I’ll try take

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<sup>7</sup> Martin G. Selbrede, “Reconstructing Postmillennialism,” in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction: Symposium on Eschatology* volume 15 (Winter 1998), p. 219.

right around seven minutes for this very simple overview. And we will start with verse 7:

“Now when the thousand years are finished...” I take that as the last day of history, and actually one hour of the last day of history.

“Satan will be released from his prison...” I take that as a literal prison in the heart of the earth where all other demons and all the non-elect have been. It’s the place called “the Abyss” and “Hades” earlier in this book.

The text goes on to say, “and he will come out to deceive the nations that are in the four corners of the land...” Currently (when John was writing this,) Gog and Magog, the chief representatives of those who hate God, were still buried in the land of Israel. The word in the New King James translated as “earth” is γῆς or “land.” And the word for “in” is ἐν. In John’s day they were currently in the land very literally. They were buried there.

The verse goes on to define the nations as at least containing “Gog and Magog.” We have already proven that Gog and Magog had been dead for hundreds of years before John wrote this. No wonder he said that they were currently in the land.

It goes on to say, “to gather them together to the war...” Which war? The war that’s been going on since Satan fell, and that got interrupted when the world got converted. He is now resuming the war. Satan will be determined to do everything in his power to either defeat Jesus or go down trying. Well, he is going to go down, but the resurrected nations do not yet know that.

The next phrase describes the people that had been around him in Hades that he will now try to use: “whose number is like the sand of the sea.” That too was a phrase that would have brought to memory the countless multitude mentioned in Ezekiel 38-39 who hated God’s people with a demonic hatred. But many commentators believe that this innumerable multitude include other nations who were like Gog and Magog.

Verse 9: “They arose up onto the breadth of the earth...” The word “they arose up” according to the apostle Paul logically necessitates that they had previously descended into the heart of the earth, or Hades (Eph. 4:8-9). And doubly so here in Revelation since the same word has been used four times to refer to demons arising up from Hades or the Abyss (Rev. 9:2; 11:7; 13:11; 17:8).

But the prepositions of that phrase are particularly interesting. There is an “up” followed by an “onto”, implying they are under what they come up

onto. So they arose up from the place of the dead and rose up onto the land.

The place they got raised onto is γῆς, which refers to the land of Israel.

And it says they were raised up onto “the breadth of the land” - which makes sense, since Ezekiel 39 says that the bones of the people of Gog and Magog were scattered over the whole land of Israel. If it is a real resurrection, they are going to get raised near where they got buried, which was everywhere in the land of Israel. So again, a literal approach to the text fits rather well. The focus is not on all nations, but on where Gog and Magog get resurrected.

The next phrase says, “and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city.” Commentators are divided on what this means. The word for “camp” is παρεμβολή, and means either “fortified camp, headquarters, or army.” Well, systematic theology helps us to narrow down those three meanings to one. Since swords have long been absent, the first meaning is unlikely; it’s not like to be a fortified camp. Since they will not ever learn war any more, the last definition of army is also unlikely. So I take the word “camp” to mean the headquarters of Christianity at that time.

And the phrase, “the beloved city” is taken by some as a reference to a future converted Jerusalem or it could simply be a metaphor for Zion, the whole people of God. But I see no reason why we can’t take the text as meaning that they are literally as attacking the headquarters in the capitol city. But in any case, at least the general meaning of God’s people being taken off guard and being in deep trouble is hard to miss. They are only used to peace; they aren’t used to seeing armies; they aren’t prepared to fight with normal weapons. And normal weapons probably won’t work on this host anyway. Trillions of demons and trillions of newly resurrected humans have come to attack the headquarters of Christianity.

But before anything can happen to God’s people, and before any peace can be disturbed, God intervenes. The next phrase says, “And fire came down out of heaven from God and devoured them.”

God’s fiery wrath from heaven is soon followed by the fiery second death, which is separation from God and Christ’s kingdom forever in the lake of fire. “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the Lake of Fire and brimstone, where the Beast and the False prophet also are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

I’ve already described this Lake of Fire in detail in a previous sermon. It is possible that it will be a giant sun, which is literally a lake of fire, cast into

outer darkness away from anything of this visible universe. Or it could simply be something in a third dimension, sort of like heaven appears to be in a third dimension. Note that the Beast and the False Prophet were already there - which may be an argument for a third dimension interpretation - especially since Isaiah 66 indicates that the saints can see into hell on that final day. We talked about why the Beast and the False Prophet got there first in a previous sermon as well. And we talked in depth about the nature of hell and eternal torment in a previous sermon as well. So I won't say more about the passage this morning.

### **III. Concluding thoughts - five applications**

But let me end with five concluding applications. First, this is the definitive passage people have used to show an apostate world at the end of time. But when you see these nations as resurrected nations, it shows the exact opposite. The saints are those who were alive in that final generation and the Gog and Magog nations are those who were long-dead. This means that the last reason to be pessimistic about the future should have been removed from your worldview. View the future with faith and hope. 2 Corinthians 5:19 says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation." John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." This world that was lost by the sin of the first Adam will be completely won back by the Second Adam. We honor God by believing and getting on board with His plan.

Second, even trillions of demons and resurrected humans, all led by Satan are no match for God. He stopped them in a moment of time. It is not the strength of the enemy that should be our focus, but the power and purpose of God.

Third, what is God's purpose for history? Is it to allow humanism to continue to dominate and overpower? No. The Great Commission tells us that His goal is to Christianize the world, to baptize all nations, and to teach all nations to keep everything that Christ has commanded us. And what has Christ commanded us? Let me once again read Matthew 5:17-19.

Matt. 5:17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Heaven and earth will not pass away until that is fulfilled. The Great Commission is a mandate to teach every nation to obey all that. Nothing less does justice to the Great Commission. Or as Paul words it, history will not end until all enemies are subdued under the feet of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15) and every knee bows (Phil. 2:9-11), and every facet of creation except death is transformed by His grace (Col. 1:19-20). Christ in Matthew 5 declared all lawlessness to be at enmity with Him. His goal in history is to conquer all enmity with the gospel.

Fourth, this means that when the church is lawless, it is hindering the final goal of history and Christ demotes that church. That's exactly what Matthew 5:19 says - they are considered the least in the kingdom; saved, yes, but certainly in rebellion to Jesus. But the same verse indicates that when the church keeps and teaches all of the Old Testament law, including the least of the commandments (which is the command to not take a mother bird with its young), then the church will be promoted. And when the church is promoted, it will have a powerful impact upon the world.

And last, since all of history is heading to this telos (that is, to this goal), we hasten the final day of history by the church's holy conduct and godliness, according to 2 Peter 3:12. I have no idea how a predestined day can be hastened, but 2 Peter asserts that ethical conduct and holiness somehow hastens the final day of history. Read 2 Peter 3:12 in light of Matthew 5:17-19 sometime and you will see that heaven and earth cannot pass away until the ethical behavior of all in this world is faithful to Jesus. Thus Peter says without the Gospel transforming all ethics (holy conduct) we cannot hasten that day. But when we can have faith that our labors in the Lord are not in vain, it will energize us to make a difference in this world. Galatians 6 calls us to not grow weary in doing good, knowing that in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

So brothers and sisters, hopefully I have given you more foundation to have hope and faith that your labors in the Lord are not in vain. The size and power of the enemy around us is immaterial. If God overthrows the worse of the worst in a moment of time at the end of history, he can deal with our enemies now. He converted every man, woman, and child in the great city of Ninevah in one day in the book of Jonah - and that was because of the faith of a sourpuss prophet. Imagine what could happen if the whole church of Jesus Christ could be energized by a manly Postmillennial faith. I believe God would be honored. He is not honored when the church acts like the ten spies who talked Israel out of taking on the land of Canaan. He is honored by men and women like Caleb and Joshua. May we have faith like they did.

Amen.