INTRODUCTION

Many will concede that a prima facie reading of Revelation 20:4-6 and its context yields the doctrine of an intermediate Messianic kingdom, i.e., a kingdom inaugurated by Christ at His second advent and terminating or merging with the eternal state. In fact, such a doctrine was held by the majority of the early church fathers.\(^1\) In the third century the formidable Alexandrians, Dionysius, Clement, and Origen, declared war on premillennialism.\(^2\) The doctrine was attacked with ad hominem arguments, accused of being Judaistic, and chided for using a literal hermeneutic.\(^3\) With the coming of Augustine and his development of the amillennial interpretation, the doctrine of premillennialism was all but obliterated, and only rarely did anyone venture to put forward a premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20:4-6.

However, the present day has witnessed a reversal in the interpretation of John's millennial vision. Hanns Lilje, T. F. Glassen, Albrecht Oepke, Austin Farrer, C. B. Caird, R. H. Charles, and Mathias Rissi, without necessarily embracing premillennialism, all understand John to be describing an intermediate Messianic kingdom

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2 Ibid., p. 20.
3 Ibid., p. 22.
in Revelation 20:4-6. Yet not all the commentators just mentioned think John was correct in his view of the millennium or consistent with other New Testament writers. For instance, Farrer says:

But why did St. John believe in a millennial standstill, if St. Paul did not? It seems that the doctrine established itself in rabbinic theology towards the end of the first century A.D.; St. Paul would not have learnt it at the feet of Gamaliel, the Seer of Revelation might well learn [sic] it at whose ever feet it was he sat.5

According to John, however, the confirming authority for his doctrine of the intermediate kingdom was not found in Rabbinic theology, but in a vision (cf. Rev. 20:4, και εἶδον) which was given to him by the Master of that kingdom (Rev. 1:1). This does not mean that Rabbinic theology or intertestamental literature is not important for a correct understanding of John’s view of the millennial kingdom. Quite the contrary! One only has to consider how firmly entrenched the doctrine of an intermediate Messianic kingdom had become before John’s writing. The doctrine of an intermediate kingdom was put forth in the second century B.C. in the books of 1 Enoch and Jubilees, in the first century B.C. in the Psalms of Solomon and the Sibyline Oracles, in the early first century A.D. in the Assumption of Moses and in 2 Enoch, and in the late first century A.D. in 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra.6 The Rabbinic authorities who held the doctrine of an intermediate kingdom are

5 Farrer, Revelation, p. 203. According to Farrer the Jewish doctrine had three basic causes. First, Rabbinic theology developed the idea of a cosmic week which was based on Psalm 90:4 and Genesis 2:2. Second, some supposed that Ezekiel 35-48 “offered a continuous prediction of the last things.” Third, it seemed impossible to refer some of the Messianic prophecies to the eternal state. Therefore, the doctrine of an intermediate kingdom was developed in order to harmonize Messianic prophecies with the eternal state (ibid., p. 209). Direct support in the Old Testament for a future intermediate Messianic kingdom is found in Isaiah 24:21-23.
conveniently cataloged by Billerbeck. At least twice before the writing of Revelation the length of the Messianic kingdom was held to be one thousand years! The Book of 2 Enoch, which may be dated between A.D. 1 and 50, maintained that the Messianic kingdom would extend for one thousand years. The well-known Rabbi Eleazar b. Haraconus (ca. A.D. 90) also held to a one-thousand-year reign of the Messiah. One may conclude that the revelation of an intermediate Messianic kingdom would not have been foreign to John nor to his readers.

CONTEXT

The exegesis of Revelation 20:4-6 is determined largely by the interpreter's view of the immediate context of 19:11-20:15. Does this section indicate a chronological progression from beginning to end, or does 20:1-6 recapitulate details in the book given before 19:11? This writer holds that the whole passage moves in a chronological progression.

It seems quite reasonable that 19:11-21 describes the second advent of Christ and the corresponding cataclysmic judgment on His enemies. Daniel 7 offers an instructive parallel to this event. The little horn of Daniel 7 parallels the beast of Revelation 13:1-8. Both the little horn of Daniel and the beast of Revelation are said to have a worldwide empire (Dan. 7:7, 23; Rev. 13:8). Both have victory over the saints for "a time and times and half a time" (Dan. 7:25; Rev. 12:14). Both are destroyed by the Messiah at His second advent (Dan. 7:11, 26; Rev. 19:20). Both affirm that immediately following the destruction of the world ruler the kingdom is given to the saints (Dan. 7:22, 27; Rev. 20:4-6). Thus it is apparent that at least up to the reign of the saints Revelation 19:11-20:6 is following the same pattern as Daniel 7. Since the world ruler is yet future, the millennial reign must also be future for the saints do not reign or receive their kingdom until after his

8 B. B. Warfield understands 19:11-21 to be describing the conquest of the gospel during this age, but he offers no conclusive exegetical support for his view ("The Millennium and the Apocalypse," in Biblical Doctrines [New York: Oxford University Press, 1929], p. 647).
9 In reference to the overcoming of the saints, Daniel 7:21 (Theodotion) has: ἔκοι εἰς τῶν ἁγίων και ἄραν πρὸς αὐτοὺς. Revelation 13:7 has a similar description: ποῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων και νικήσαι αὐτοὺς.
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destruction.10 Thus on the basis of Daniel 7 it is more natural to read Revelation 20:4-6 as part of a chronological progression in its larger context (19:11–20:15) than as a recapitulation.

The literary connection between 19:11-21 and 20:4-6 also indicates that 20:4-6 is yet future. Revelation 19:11-21 presents a graphic picture of the Lord coming in glory and power,11 while 20:4-6 presents a similar picture of the saints in glory and power. Since it is taught elsewhere in the Scriptures that the saints will be revealed in glory and power at the coming of the Lord, it is only natural to view 20:4-6 as following the second advent and as therefore yet future.12

It is also evident that Revelation 20:1-3 must be future. It is customary to refer to this passage as the “binding” of Satan, yet the passage is much stronger. Satan is not only bound, but is also completely imprisoned and cut off from the earth. Those who do not believe that the millennial reign is future normally try to prove that Satan is presently bound. Rushdoony and Lenski introduce several passages in an attempt to prove that Revelation 20:1-3 is presently being fulfilled.13 However, on closer inspection these passages either speak about the binding of Satan in reference to individuals or they record his judgment but not its execution. None of the passages speaks about the complete imprisonment of Satan described in Revelation 20:1-3.

On the other hand, several passages in the New Testament seem to indicate that Satan is not yet imprisoned, and still has a great deal of influence in the world. First John 5:19 reveals that “the whole world lies in the evil one.” First Peter 5:8 also speaks of the freedom of Satan: “Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” In 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 Paul speaks of the power of the satanic veil which keeps men from perceiving the gospel. Neither does the witness of history indicate that Satan has been unable to deceive the nations. One

10 Paul also views the world ruler as future. He describes him as the “man of lawlessness” who will be destroyed at the Lord’s coming (2 Thess. 2:1-12).
11 The effect is heightened by the interweaving of several great Messianic predictions: Isaiah 49:2; 63:1-3; Psalm 2:9; and Ezekiel 39:17-20.
only has to observe Nazi Germany or present-day Red China or Russia or even his own culture to convince him of Satan's deceptive work among the nations. Of course, one may assign all this evil to the flesh in unregenerate people. But in the kingdom, when unregenerate persons will be born, the identity of the unregenerate is not known until the release of Satan (Rev. 20:7-10). So man's sinful nature alone seems inadequate to explain the corporate evil in the world. Therefore, it may be concluded that the imprisonment of Satan is yet future. In addition, the remainder of the twentieth chapter (20:7-15) is certainly future.

In review, Revelation 19:11-21 (the first division in this passage) must be future for it describes the second advent. The second division, the imprisonment of Satan (20:1-3), is likely future too. The last battle and the final judgment (20:7-15) are also future. Thus between these verses (19:11-20:3 and 20:7-15), which exhibit a clear chronological progression yet future, the millennial reign is found. And the millennial reign is introduced in 20:4 with the same phrase (καὶ εἶδον “and I saw”) which introduces the visions of 19:11-21; 20:1-3; and 20:11-15. The only exception is 20:7-10 which is introduced with the temporal particle ὅταν (“when”). Therefore, not only do the parallels with Daniel 7 and the exegetical connections with 19:11-21 argue for a futuristic interpretation of Revelation 20:4-6, but also its setting in a context which is completely futuristic before and after argue for a yet-future fulfillment. Unless there are compelling exegetical reasons to the contrary, Revelation 20:4-6 must be viewed as chronologically following the second advent and as therefore future.

EXEGESIS

John begins in verse 4 by describing the saints who reign in the millennial kingdom. Charles thinks that the first line, καὶ εἶδον θρόνους, καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ' αὐτούς (“and I saw thrones, and they sat upon them”) is so ungrammatical and unintelligible that it is either a marginal gloss from Daniel 7:22 or else it has been misplaced in the text. However, the use of the third person plural indefinite verb is not unknown to John (cf. 12:6, τρέφωσιν; and 13:16, δόσιν). Furthermore, John has given his readers a similar construction in 4:2-3. First he mentions a throne, followed by the indefinite καθῆμενος, and then in verse 3b he gives a more elaborate

14 Charles, Revelation, 2:182.
description. So the present text is authentic and one must now determine who sits on these thrones.

Some have suggested that the occupants of the thrones are the twenty-four elders. However, those who put forward this interpretation also view the twenty-four elders as representative of the church, or perhaps the church and Israel. Two observations preclude such a view. First, the twenty-four elders are individual beings rather than a representative group (5:5; 7:13-14). Second, Ladd points out the following concerning the vision in 7:9-11:

First we have a great multitude of the saved which no man can number; then the various concentric ranks of heavenly beings round about the throne; first the angels, then the elders, and finally the four living creatures. See also a similar order of the heavenly beings in 19:1-4. The elders are grouped with other angelic beings in distinction to the redeemed.

Since the twenty-four elders are more likely an order of angels they cannot be the occupants of the thrones, for the saints will judge the angels (1 Cor. 6:3).

Beckwith suggests that the martyrs must be in view here. However, this is not likely since the martyrs are not raised until after John has already seen the thrones and their occupants. Bullinger suggests that the occupants are Christ, God, the seven angelic assessors, and the Apostles. Although Christ and God have thrones and reign, it is doubtful that κρίµα εδόθη αὑτοῖς (“judgment was given to them”) could be predicated of them. The angels are precluded by 1 Corinthians 6:3 and by Hebrews 2:5. The Apostles may be likely candidates (Matt. 19:28), but why should the occupancy of the thrones be limited to them? It is more likely that all the saints are in view. In several places John records the promise of a share in Christ’s throne and reign (2:26-27; 3:21; 5:10).

15 Rissi points out that Charles has no trouble accepting 4:2-3 as authentic (The Future of the World, p. 96, n. 60).
Paul also maintains that the saints will judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2). Therefore, in 20:4 John saw the saints of all ages on the thrones. 20

The fact that John saw them seated on thrones suggests that the phrase κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς (“judgment was given to them”) refers to their authority to judge rather than judgment passed in their favor. Regarding the nature of this judicial activity, McClain remarks:

Since this kingdom will begin on earth with the actual situation existing here as the coming of Christ finds it, there will be many crucial matters needing to be settled by such action without delay . . . . Since throughout the millennial kingdom human life will continue with the possibilities of sin and error, though greatly restrained and controlled, it should be obvious that there will be need for such judicial activity then as well as now. 21

After viewing the reigning saints, John saw a second group, the martyrs of the great tribulation. The participle τῶν πεπελεκίσμενων ("those who had been beheaded") is more graphic than the τῶν ἐσφαγµένων ("those who had been slain") of 6:9. It stresses the fact they were put to death by the state rather than merely recording that they were slain. 22 Their “crime” is recorded in the following clauses.

First, their obedience is stated positively by the two διὰ (“because of”) constructions. Ἰησοῦ ("Jesus") is probably an objective genitive thus indicating that the martyrs were faithful in proclaiming Jesus. The second διὰ clause could be taken as a hendiadys, but since it is broader than the previous clause it probably points to the martyrs’ obedience to the commandments of God. Therefore, they were put to death because they proclaimed Jesus and because they were obedient to God’s Word.

20 It may be likely, however, that John does not see the totality of the saints of all ages reigning, but rather, only those who have been faithful and who have “overcome” (cf. Rev. 20:26; 3:21). The same idea may be behind the promise of various “crowns” elsewhere in the New Testament (1 Cor. 9:27; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12). One might also compare such passages as 2 Timothy 2:11-13; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; and Matthew 25:26.
22 The axe was “the traditional instrument of capital punishment in republican Rome, which, though under the Empire superseded by the sword (Acts 12:2), still lingered in the memory of the provincials” (Henry Barclay Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968], p. 262).
Next their obedience is stated negatively. There is some debate whether or not the καί οἵτινες ("and they") introduces a new group or further qualifies the martyrs. Lenski thinks a new group is in view because the οἵτινες is preceded by a καί. But the καί may be ascensive in force or merely conjunctive because John is describing a new aspect of their obedience. Bullinger also thinks a new group is introduced because the οἵτινες does not agree in gender with ψυχάς. Yet this phenomena, constructio ad sensum, is not at all uncommon in Revelation.

Two observations indicate that a new group is not in view. First, the same phrase, καί οἵτινες, is used in Revelation 1:7 where it includes members of the previous clause. Second, if a new group is in view, nothing is said about their death, and therefore it is difficult to see how the following έζησαν ("they came to life") can refer to them. Thus a new group is not in view, and instead καί οἵτινες gives a further qualification of the obedience of the martyrs.

The martyrs identified themselves with Jesus by proclaiming Him and obeying Him. They separated themselves from the state by refusing to worship the beast or his image and by refusing to receive his mark. In doing so they paid the penalty of death (13:15). So from the state they received death, but what would they receive from God?

The answer to this question comes quickly and dramatically. These godly martyrs will receive "life" and a kingly rule from God! But what does John mean by "life"? Is John describing (1) the regeneration of the soul, (2) a symbolic resurrection, (3) the soul's entrance into heaven, or (4) a literal physical resurrection? The answer hinges on the meaning of "they came to life" (έζησαν) in verses 4 and 5 as well as the phrase "the first resurrection" (ἡ αναστασις η πρώτη) in verse 5.

Augustine argued that the resurrection in view was the regeneration of the soul. Swete thinks that a symbolic resurrection is meant. The fact symbolized is the triumph of the martyrs' principles.

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23 Lenski, Revelation, p. 584.
24 Bullinger, Apocalypse, p. 615.
26 The χάραγµα ("the mark"), which was the technical term for the Imperial stamp, may indicate nothing more than submission to the state (Swete, Apocalypse, p. 173). Or possibly, as Charles suggests, it may travesty the Jewish custom of wearing the tephillin on the left hand and over the brow (Charles, Revelation, 1:362-63).
27 Augustine The City of God 20.6.
in society. Both of these views may be dismissed from consideration for they use an allegorical technique which produces interpretations that are diverse and limited only by one's fantasy. Also both views go against the usage of ανάστασις (which will be discussed shortly).

On the exegetical side of the question Hughes produces three arguments in favor of understanding έζησαν of verse 4 as a constative aorist. Therefore, he would translate έζησαν as “they lived” (rather than “they came to life”). This would allow him to take the ἡ ανάστασις ἡ πρώτη as a reference to the soul’s rising into heaven at the time of death. He first argues that if έζησαν is ingressive (i.e., “they came to life”) then the following ἐβασίλευσαν must also be ingressive (i.e., “they began to reign”). Of course, ἐβασίλευσαν must be constative, for the martyrs did not “begin to reign for a thousand years.” Yet what rule of logic or grammar dictates that έζησαν cannot be ingressive while ἐβασίλευσαν is constative? Recognized grammarians have not felt this tension. Nigel Turner takes έζησαν as ingressive. A. T. Robertson also understands έζησαν to be ingressive while taking ἐβασίλευσαν as constative. So Hughes’s first argument cannot stand.

His second argument for understanding that έζησαν is a constative rather than an ingressive aorist is that ζάω has an ingressive force in only two places in the New Testament (Rev. 2:8 and Rom. 14:9, both of which refer to the resurrection of Christ). This is not quite correct, however, for Luke 15:32 and Revelation 13:14 are clear examples of the ingressive use of έζησαν, according to Turner. Thus Hughes’s second argument also loses some of its force.

Finally, Hughes understands the ψυχάς of verse 4 to refer to disembodied souls, and maintains that it would be impossible for the soul to “come to life” since the soul never dies. Berkouwer, himself an amillennialist, replies, “Such a critique, however, is not decisive, for there seems to be no soul-body dichotomy in view

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28 Swete, Apocalypse, pp. 263, 266.
here. John sees simply that those who had been beheaded come to life again and sit on thrones."33 Similarly, Schweizer sees no distinction between the noncorporeal and corporeal state intended by John’s use of ψυχας in 6:9 or in 20:4.34 The use of ψυχη to refer to the whole person is well known (Acts 2:41, 43; 3:23). Furthermore, John has previously used ψυχη with a qualifying genitive to refer to the whole person (ψυχας ανθρωπων in 18:13).35 Also the masculine οϊτινες, the nearest antecedent of έζησαν, supports the contention that John is thinking in terms of persons rather than disembodied souls. Thus it does not seem that Hughes’s arguments are strong enough to preclude the natural ingressive understanding of έζησαν.

On the other hand, several weighty reasons can be adduced for the ingressive use of έζησαν. One might add to the previous four uses of ζάω as ingressive36 the έζησαν of Ezekiel 37:10 in the Septuagint, which refers to dry bones coming to life. Ezekiel 37–39 has a structure similar to that of Revelation 20, and Rissi thinks John is intentionally alluding to Ezekiel 37.37 Finally, one more thing should be noted about the ingressive use of ζάω. In both Ezekiel 37 and Luke 15 it is clear that the aorist use of ζάω is equivalent to ἀναζάω ("to come to life again"; cf. Ezek. 37:5,10 and Luke 15:24,32). Of course, this usage of ζάω is to be expected since, as Moulton observes, "The ingressive especially belongs to verbs of state or condition."38 Thus both grammar and usage indicate that έζησαν has an ingressive force and refers to a literal physical resurrection.

Another cogent reason may be given for understanding the έζησαν of verse 4 to refer to a physical resurrection. Alford pointed out long ago that the έζησαν of verse 4 and also of verse 5 must be understood in the same sense.39 If one is spiritual, then the other

35 Cf. ψυχην ανθρωπου in Romans 2:9.
must be spiritual, and vice versa. Now the resurrection of verse 4 must refer to believers while the ζησαν of verse 5 must refer to unbelievers.40 If ζησαν in both verses refers to a physical resurrection, there is no problem. But if ζησαν refers to a spiritual resurrection in both verses, then the exegete is confronted with an insurmountable problem. For this would imply that the unbelieving dead of verse 5 live spiritually in heaven like the martyrs of verse 4 after the thousand years is completed. Hughes tries to escape this dilemma in the following way:

This verse does not say that after the thousand years were finished the rest of the dead lived. In fact, the expression “the rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were finished” is equivalent to saying that “the second death had power on the rest of the dead during the thousand years.” And those on whom the second death has power are never released from its power. So the “rest of the dead” did not live until the thousand years were finished, nor did they live after the thousand years were finished. And they will never live, i.e., they will never be released from the power that the second death has on them. That the word ἐχρι (until) does not of itself imply that a change occurs after the point to which it refers is reached is shown, for example, by citing Romans 5:13a: “For until (ἐχρι) the law sin was in the world.” Sin was in the world up to the point of the coming of the Mosaic expression of the law. Does this imply that sin was no longer in the world after the coming of the Mosaic expression of the law? Absolutely not! For of course sin is still in the world.41

This argument is invalidated by Hughes’s failure to notice that ἐχρι has two basic uses. It may be used as an improper preposition with the genitive, in which case it has several forces. This is its use in Romans 5:13 where it has the meaning of “before.” However, ἐχρι may be used as a conjunction as it is here in Revelation 20:5. When ἐχρι is used as a conjunction with the aorist subjunctive, it always has the force of a future perfect, “until, to the time that.”42 Now ἐχρι occurs three other times in Revelation with the aorist subjunctive (7:3, ἐχρι σφραγισωµεν; 15:8, ἐχρι τελεσθαισιν; and 20:3, ἐχρι τελεσθη τα χιλια ητη). In each of these uses the ἐχρι more

40 Even if one does not believe that all the dead of verse 5 are unbelievers he must concede that some are, and that is enough of a concession for the present argument.
41 Hughes, "Revelation 20:4-6," pp. 301-2.
than implies a change which "occurs after the point to which it refers is reached." Furthermore, exactly the same expressions are used in 20:3 and 20:5, ἄχρι τελεσθή τα χίλια έτη; and 20:3 clearly contemplates a change after the thousand years are completed. So the rule which states that the two uses of ἔζησαν must have identical meanings must also apply to the two uses of the same phrase in 20:3 and 20:5. By seeking to avoid a glaring inconsistency in regard to the two uses of ἔζησαν, Hughes has overlooked the distinctive usages of ἄχρι and fallen into an even greater inconsistency regarding the use of the ἄχρι constructions in 20:3, 5. Therefore, the only interpretation of ἔζησαν which is consistent with grammar, usage, and the context is that it refers to a physical resurrection.

In the context of Revelation 20:4-6 the time of the saints' reigning was shown to be future, beginning with the second advent of the Lord. Since no compelling exegetical reasons against such a view have been encountered, the place of the saints' reign may now be considered. At least four arguments favor the earth as the location of the saints' reign. First, Christ is "regarded as personally present on the earth following His return (19:11-16)"43 and the saints are said to reign with Him (20:4). Second, at the conclusion of the thousand years the saints are still on the earth for this is where Satan comes to attack them (20:9).44 Third, Revelation 5:10 claims that the saints will reign on the earth. Fourth, the Old Testament Messianic prophecies also looked forward to an earthly kingdom.45

If the reign is to be on earth, over whom shall the saints reign? The subjects of the reign must be the believing Gentiles and Jews who passed safely through the tribulation and were alive at the second advent. Three lines of evidence support this conclusion. First, it seems likely that they must reign over someone for "it would be a singularly empty recognition of their services if they were to reign over a world of which they were the sole inhabitants."46 Second, there are no unbelievers left alive for all the unbelievers followed the beast (13:8) into the battle of Armageddon, and were made to drink of the "wine of the wrath of God"

43 Glassen, Revelation, p. 111.
44 However, this may refer not to the resurrected saints but to the believers living in the kingdom who are yet to be glorified.
45 Psalm 2:8, for example, predicts an earthly kingdom for Messiah. The connections with Daniel 7 have already been pointed out.
46 Caird, Revelation, p. 251.
(14:10; 19:15) which brought about their death (19:21). Since the reign cannot be over unbelievers it must be over believers. Third, the saints were promised a reign over the entire world, over both Jew and Gentile (Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 6:2; Rev. 2:26-27).

The length of the reign, τά χίλια έτη, is mentioned six times in 20:2-7. The repetition underscores the importance of this age in the divine plan. It is regarded as a great period for it begins the consummation of all history. Paul points out in Romans 8:22 that all creation longs for this epoch, all the saints long for it, and God Himself longs for it. Are the thousand years to be taken literally or symbolically? Augustine was not dogmatic about its meaning when he wrote The City of God, but he suggested that if it were symbolic then it was used to mark the perfection or fullness of time. “For one thousand is the cube of ten.” Augustine thought that if it were symbolic then it was used to mark the perfection or fullness of time. “For one thousand is the cube of ten.”

Yet one is driven to ask why ten to the third degree refers to “highest completeness.” Yet one is driven to ask why ten to the third degree refers to “highest completeness.” Why not ten to the fourth or fifth degree, or better still, ten to the tenth degree? What could be more complete than that, unless perhaps ten to the hundredth degree?

No one has yet demonstrated from ancient literature why the number one thousand should have any symbolic significance. In fact, there is no discernible symbolic significance of ἡκατεις in the Old Testament or of χίλιοι in the New Testament. Furthermore, a concordance study will reveal that both לֶחֶם (“year”) when used with a number and έτος (“year”) when used with a numeral are always literal years. It is futile to argue for a symbolic meaning of τά χίλια έτη in Revelation 20:4-6 on the basis of Psalm 90:4 or 2 Peter 3:8, for the latter are not saying that a thousand years are a day. Rather they point to God’s transcendence in respect to time. Nor can one secure a symbolic sense for τά χίλια έτη merely by repeating the shibboleth that Revelation is a symbolic book, for not everything is symbolic in the book, and one must give reasons why a certain passage is symbolic. Also, it is not likely that John used τά χίλια έτη in a nontemporal way merely to indicate “the sign of the Messianic time.” This interpretation is based on the view that τά χίλια έτη had become a standard expression in Rabbinic theology to indicate the Messianic age. However, there are only two

47 Augustine The City of God 20.7.
48 Lenski, Revelation, p. 577.
49 Rissi, The Future of the World, p. 34.
possible occurrences in earlier literature where the duration of one thousand years is assigned to the Messianic kingdom. Thus the only safe course to follow is Davis’s dictum that all numbers “should always be taken at face value and understood as conveying a mathematical quantity unless there is either textual or contextual evidence to the contrary.” Therefore, the duration of the saints’ reign is a literal thousand years.

The quality of the reign is described by the phrase “with Christ” (μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ). Since the saints will reign by virtue of Christ’s power and guidance they will fulfill their roles perfectly. For the first time in history human government will be perfectly righteous, and there will be universal peace. Some have objected to an earthly reign of glorified saints among nonglorified saints. Ladd points out that a precedent was set by the Lord who “in His resurrection body enjoyed forty days of intercourse with His disciples (Acts 1:3).”

In verse 5 John sees that the unbelieving dead have no part in the millennial kingdom. Since the interpretation of the phrase “the rest of the dead . . .” (οἱ λοιποί τῶν νεκρῶν) has already been discussed the meaning of “the first resurrection” (ἡ ανάστασις ἡ πρώτη) may now be considered. While some try to view this resurrection as a regeneration of the soul or as the soul’s entrance to heaven at death, the usage of ανάστασις precludes such an interpretation. In over forty occurrences the word always refers to the resurrection of the body. The only exception to this usage is Luke 2:34 where the word is used in its etymological sense of “rising.” So the resurrection in view in Revelation 20:5 is a literal resurrection which, according to verse 6, is reserved for believers.

Aldrich points out, “The resurrection event for believers has various titles in Scripture. It is called ‘the first resurrection’ in Revelation 20:5, ‘the resurrection of life’ in John 5:29, ‘the resurrection of the just’ in Luke 14:14, and ‘a better resurrection’ in Hebrews 11:35.” Since not all who have a part in the “first resurrection” are raised at the same time, the term ἡ ανάστασις ἡ πρώτη refers

50 Supra, pp. 59-60 and nn. 6 and 7.
53 Ladd, Revelation, p. 268.
not to a single event but to the kind of resurrection.\footnote{Meredith G. Kline has argued that “the first resurrection” refers to the death of the Christian and presumably therefore to his entrance into heaven rather than a bodily resurrection (“The First Resurrection,” Westminster Theological Journal 37 [Spring 1975]: 366-75). The primary support for this view is based on the usage of πρῶτος (“first”) in Revelation 21; Hebrews 8-10; 1 Corinthians 15; and Romans 5. From these passages Kline concludes that πρῶτος must refer to the present world order. This argument, however, begs the question. The decisive term is not the adjective “first” but the noun “resurrection” which it modifies. It is noteworthy that Kline emphatically avoids any discussion of the New Testament usage of “resurrection,” which, as mentioned above, refers to bodily resurrection. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, himself an amillennialist, says at the outset of his discussion of the first resurrection, “In Scripture, resurrection has no proper meaning if it is not understood as bodily resurrection” (“The First Resurrection: Another Interpretation,” Westminster Theological Journal 39 [Spring 1977]: 315). For a more detailed criticism of Kline’s view, see J. Ramsey Michael, “The First Resurrection: A Response,” Westminster Theological Journal 39 (Fall 1976): 100-109, and Kline’s response (“The First Resurrection: A Reaffirmation,” Westminster Theological Journal 39 [Fall 1976]: 110-19).} The participants of the “first resurrection” are all the saints who enter the millennium. The “first resurrection,” therefore, precedes the “resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29) by one thousand years. Some have objected that since there seems to be no temporal distinction in John 5:29 between the two resurrections they must occur at the same time. However, just as later revelation demonstrated that there must be a temporal gap between Isaiah 61:2a and 2b (cf. Luke 4:16-21), Revelation 20:4-6 has demonstrated that there must be a temporal gap between the “resurrection of life” and the “resurrection of judgment” in John 5:29.

The stark contrast, afforded by the juxtaposition of the resurrected and reigning saints over against the “rest of the dead” calls forth the fifth of seven beatitudes in the book (20:6). The blessedness and holiness of the saints rarely seems brighter than when it is seen against the dark background of the final fate of the unbelieving. Swete points out that the ground of their blessing is threefold. First, the second death has no authority over them, and this is a great blessing, for the second death is identified in 20:14 as entrance into the lake of fire. And Revelation 14:11 vividly underscores the eternality of this death by pointing out that “the smoke of their torment goes up forever.” Second, they are priests of God and of Christ. The genitives θεοῦ and Χριστοῦ are either objective (i.e., they serve God and Christ) or possessive (i.e., they belong to God and Christ). The linking together of Christ and God in the phrase “of God and Christ” is in keeping “with the general
And the third ground of their blessing is that they reign with Christ for a thousand years. The future \( \text{ βασιλεύσωσιν } \) ("they will reign") confirms the fact that this beatitude is also an interpretation of the vision of verses 4 and 5. In the vision of verse 4 the reign of the saints is seen as though it had already taken place and so is described with the aorist \( \text{ έβασίλευσαν } \), but the interpretation given by verse 6 places the reign in the future. This fact constitutes one of the strongest arguments for viewing Revelation 20:4-6 as future, and therefore as yet unfulfilled.

**CONCLUSION**

Both the general context and the exegetical details of Revelation 20:4-6 demonstrate that John predicted an earthly kingdom of Messiah which He will inaugurate at His second advent, and which will continue in its earthly form for one thousand literal years.