

“In Christ All Will Be Made Alive”: Jesus Christ's Death as the Payment that Ransoms Every Human Being from Death

J. Webb Mealy¹

Rethinking Hell Conference, August 17, 2019, 1:30pm Breakout Session

Introduction

This paper is going to attempt the inconceivable: to introduce two new paradigms, one eschatological and one soteriological. We will see that the new soteriological paradigm is entailed by the eschatological paradigm, so I will begin by introducing and explaining the new eschatological paradigm.

After the Thousand Years: A New Model for the Millennium

I am known among Revelation scholars for my 1992 monograph *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20*. John Court called *After the Thousand Years* “a tour de force,” and Gregory Beale, highly regarded among evangelical Revelation scholars, conceded in an article-length review of *After the Thousand Years* that its model of the millennium possessed “a viability that cannot henceforward be ignored by commentators,” and he called it “a methodological contribution without precedent” and a “new paradigm” that deserves to be ranked alongside the major theories of the millennium. I’m going to introduce it to you now.

The central concept behind the new paradigm is actually broadly agreed. It is called recapitulation. The idea is that John is shown multiple visions of the same eschatological realities, each of which contributes its own unique perspective. John sees Christ’s coming in glory, for example, more than ten times, each vision revealing some new and complementary aspect of this history-shattering event. Rev. 19:17–20:3 is one such revelation. John sees Jesus coming in glory, which results in the capture of the beast and the false prophet and his slaying of “the kings of the earth” and their armies, followed by “the rest,” i.e. the rest of rebellious humanity (19:21). Then John sees an angel come and capture the devil, chaining him up and locking him in prison of the underworld for a thousand years, “so that he will not be able to deceive the nations any longer” (20:1-3). The devil has, of course, up to this point, been 100% successful in deceiving all the nations, causing them to worship him through the beast, getting them to attack and kill all believers in Jesus, and in chapter 19 getting them to oppose Jesus and his faithful ones as they come in glory (cf. 16:14; 17:14-16). John sets the term of the devil’s imprisonment in these words: “until the thousand years are ended.” In Greek this is ἅχρι τελεσθῇ τὰ χίλια ἔτη.

John then sees another angle on Christ’s coming in glory—this one also recalling Daniel 7. He sees thrones, and the court sits and decrees resurrection and age-long reign for the faithful—most of them martyrs—and no resurrection for “the rest of the dead,” who will remain in the prison of the underworld of Hades (Rev. 1:18) “until the thousand years are ended.” In Greek this is the

¹ Author of *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20* (JSNTSup, 70; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); *The End of the Unrepentant: A Study of the Biblical Themes of Fire and Being Consumed* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013); “Revelation is One: Revelation 20 and the Quest to Make the Scriptures Agree,” in *Reconsidering the Relationship between Biblical and Systematic Theology in the New Testament* (ed. B.E. Reynolds, B. Lugjyoy, and K. Vanhoozer; WUNT, 2.369; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 131-53.

exact same five-word phrase that John just used two verses ago to describe the term of the devil's imprisonment. The obvious inference is, when the devil gets out of prison, they get out of prison—in their case, by resurrection. After all, Jesus says in Rev. 1:18, "I was dead, but see, I am alive forever and ever! And I have the keys of death and Hades." Where else in Scripture do we get this pattern—of human beings being co-imprisoned with the devil (and presumably his angels) for a very long time starting at the moment of Christ's coming in glory? Two places, actually. The first is Isa. 24:21-23:

21 On that day the LORD will punish
the host of heaven, in heaven,
and the kings of the earth, on the earth.
22 They will be gathered together
as prisoners in a pit;²
they will be shut up in a prison,
and after many days they will be punished.
23 Then the moon will be confounded
and the sun ashamed,
for the LORD of hosts will reign³
on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
and his glory will be before his elders.

In Revelation, when the "LORD of Hosts" comes to reign in glory, he comes with the Lamb, his Son: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). Similarly, Jesus, in his earthly ministry, speaks of coming "in the glory of his Father" (Mk 8:38; Mt. 16:27). And this leads us to the second passage that tells a similar story to Rev. 19:17–20:3: Jesus' words in Matthew 25:

31 When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ... 41 Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

Here we have the Lord Jesus coming in glory with all of his angels⁴ and sending all those found unworthy of a part in the glorious Kingdom Age into the same punishment (in this case styled as "eternal fire") as the devil and his angels. People unfamiliar with Greek assume that "eternal" (αἰώνιος) is equivalent to "everlasting," but it is not. Just like the Hebrew word 'olam in the OT, it can mean lifelong, age-long, ancient, extremely long-lasting, or everlasting, depending on the context. Given that Jesus clearly alludes to Isaiah 24:21-23 in Mt. 25:31 and 41 (as well as associating his coming in glory with God's coming in glory in the Isaiah Apocalypse of Isaiah 24—

² "The pit," Heb. *bōr*, is a familiar synonym for the underworld of Sheol, the realm of the dead (Ps. 30:3; Prov. 1:12; Isa 14:15; Isa. 38:18; Ezek. 31:16).

³ ESV has "reigns." The verb is in the perfect form, but so are the Hebrew verbs translated as "will be confounded" and "ashamed." The three verbs ought to be rendered concordantly.

⁴ The OT expression "the LORD of hosts" (Isa. 24:23) is typically understood to mean that the LORD has attending him "hosts," i.e. armies, of angels. So it is not without significance that Jesus, alluding to Isa. 24:21-23, refers to coming in glory with all of his angels. See, for this imagery, Deut. 33:2; Jude 1:14-15; 1 En. 1:9; Mt. 16:27; 2 Thess. 1:7.

26 in a number of other sayings),⁵ it seems well defensible to understand that the “eternal fire” and “eternal punishment” to which Jesus refers in Mt. 25:41, 46 refer to the co-imprisonment of rebellious angels and humans in the fiery pit of the underworld⁶ for the entire messianic age, and that the parallel phrase “eternal life” refers to the granting of glorious, resurrected life to the faithful for that age (v. 46). Jesus does not go on to teach what happens after that age in this separation of the sheep and goats passage—but John and Isaiah do. Let’s look at John first.

7 And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. 9 And they came up onto⁷ the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, 10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the pool of fire...

The devil is released from the prison of the abyss “when the thousand years are ended,” and immediately sets out to deceive the unrepentant nations, whom John styles “Gog and Magog.”⁸ John sees them as numberless hordes “coming up onto the broad plain of the earth” (v. 9). They too have been released from the prison of the underworld, and, led by the devil, they attempt to besiege the “beloved city,” the New Jerusalem. A deluge of fire consumes them, and the devil is thrown into the pool of fire that is created by the deluge.⁹ The devil and the unrepentant of humanity, freed together from the underworld, have turned right around and headed towards very same murderous violence that required God to end the first age of this present world with the flood, and the last age of this world with Christ’s coming in glory.¹⁰ But they don’t get to do damage to God’s world or God’s people this time. John makes specific allusions to two passages in Isaiah in the context (see Isa. 26:9-11, 20-21; 27:1-5):

9 ...when your judgments are in the earth,
the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.

10 If favor is shown to the wicked,
he does not learn righteousness;
in the land of uprightness he deals corruptly
and does not see the majesty of the LORD.

11 O LORD, your hand is lifted up,
but they do not see it.

⁵ E.g. Isa. 24:17 || Lk. 21:35; Isa. 24:23 || Mt. 16:27; 19:28; Mk 8:38; Lk. 9:26; Isa. 25:6 || Mt. 8:11-12; Lk. 13:27-28; Isa. 26:19 || Jn 5:28; Isa. 27:13 || Mt. 24:31.

⁶ For the concept that the underworld is a place of fire, see Lk. 16:24; Rev. 9:1-2; 1 En. 10:5-7, 13; 90:20-27.

⁷ ESV “they marched up over,” obscuring the cosmological reference. The Greek is ἀνέβησαν ἐπί, literally, “they came up upon.” You can’t “come up upon” a plain unless you are underneath it.

⁸ This is an allusion to Ezekiel 38, which we don’t have time to address in this paper.

⁹ The Greek word λιμνή, familiarly translated as “lake” in Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15; 21:8, does not most often mean a lake. It typically means a pool, especially a pool of water left after a rainstorm or after the flooding of a river (Ps. 107:35; 114:8 LXX). It can also mean a man-made pool (Song 7:4 LXX). So when λιμνή appears in the context of a deluge, it ought immediately to be pictured as a pool created by the deluge. Luke calls the lake of Galilee a λιμνή, but this is less usual (in the other gospels it is called a θάλασσα, a sea). Note also the connection that the idea of a pool creates with the fate of the beast and the false prophet: the total destruction of the beast by fire (Rev. 19:20) refers back to Daniel 7, where fire that comes forth as a river from the presence of God and completely incinerates the fourth beast (Dan. 7:10-11; cf. 7:26).

¹⁰ See Gen. 6:5-7, 11-13; Mt. 24:22 || Mk 13:20.

Let them see your zeal for your people, and be ashamed.
Let the fire for your adversaries consume them. (Rev. 20:9)

...

As though to answer this prayer, the LORD says a few verses later,

20 Come, my people, enter your inner rooms,¹¹
and shut your doors behind you;
hide yourselves for a little while
until the fury has passed by.
21 For behold, the LORD is coming out from his place
to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity,
and the earth will disclose the blood shed on it,
and will no more cover its slain.

Interesting, by reference to Isa. 66:22-24, right? Where the corpses are seen burning on the surface of the ground? In this moment of “fury” that will destroy the enemies who are menacing the faithful city, Isaiah goes on in 27:1 to say,

27:1 In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea. (cf. Rev. 20:2)
2 In that day,
“A pleasant vineyard, sing of it!
3 I, the LORD, am its keeper;
every moment I water it.
Lest anyone punish it,
I keep it night and day;
4 I have no wrath.
Will someone bring me thorns and briars to battle?¹²
I will march against them,
I will burn them up together.
5 Instead,¹³ let them lay hold of my protection,
let them make peace with me,
let them make peace with me.”

John points us to these verses in a number of ways in Revelation 20. We even have, right in the middle of these portions of Isaiah 26–27, an affirmation of rescue and resurrection for the faithful and destruction and refusal of resurrection for those who had oppressed them, closely paralleling Rev. 20:4:

13 O LORD our God,
other lords besides you have ruled over us,

¹¹ ESV “chambers.”

¹² I have rendered the verse literally. ESV has “Would that I had thorns and briars to battle!” It is true that this form of a question in Hebrew—just as in the English as I have rendered it—can mean “Please bring me thorns and briars to battle.” But the intent is clearly to warn, “If you are thinking of doing this, beware!” rather than “I want you to do this.”

¹³ ESV “Or.”

but your name alone we bring to remembrance.

14 They are dead, they will not live;
they are shades, they will not arise;
to that end you have visited them with destruction
and wiped out all remembrance of them.

15 But you have increased the nation, O LORD,
you have increased the nation; you are glorified;

...

19 Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise.
You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!
For your dew is a dew of light,
and the earth will give birth to the dead.

Here is a crucial interpretive key to the relationship between John's descriptions of his visions in Revelation and the visions and prophecies of Isaiah. When John sees something in a vision, he often recognizes it as something that God has previously revealed in Scripture, and he crafts his description of his vision so as to signal that an important relationship exists between his and one or more prophets' visions. His allusions are scriptural cross-references that tell us, "If you want to understand what I am seeing here, you should read it alongside what Isaiah saw, because God has revealed the same reality to us both."

This being the case, John would have us understand that Isa. 26:10-11 and 26:20-27:5, which we just read, are revelations of the same event that is revealed in Rev. 20:7-10—the resurrection, judgment, and final fiery end of all of unrepentant humanity along with the devil. The last judgment of the unrepentant comes when, after they have paid an appropriate penalty for their misdeeds in mortal life, they are granted the undeserved gift of resurrection life. Right before Isaiah prays that "fire will consume your adversaries" in Isa. 26:11, he says,

10 If favor is shown to the wicked,
he does not learn righteousness;
in the land of uprightness he deals corruptly
and does not see the majesty of the LORD.

What is the favor that is shown to the wicked? Since John points us to this passage as prophetic background to the fiery end of the resurrected unrepentant, the undeserved favor would appear to be the favor of resurrection. What is the blindness that causes the wicked not to see that they are in danger of being incinerated? It is the blindness of envy, covetousness, and self-deception that overtakes them when they allow themselves to be seduced again by the devil. They think they can take what they want by violence and force, just as they did in their mortal lives. But in the fully-manifested Kingdom of God, *they* are the vulnerable ones. They just don't know it. God says to them a few verses later, as we read above,

4 I have no wrath.
Will someone bring me thorns and briars to battle?¹⁴
I will march against them,

¹⁴ I have rendered the verse literally. ESV has "Would that I had thorns and briers to battle!" It is true that this form of a question in Hebrew—just as in the English as I have rendered it—can mean "Please bring me thorns and briars to battle." But the intent is clearly to warn, "If you are thinking of doing this, beware!" rather than "I want you to do this."

I will burn them up together.
5 Instead,¹⁵ let them lay hold of my protection,
let them make peace with me,
let them make peace with me.

Why does God have no wrath? Because those standing before the community of his beloved have already suffered the penalty for the sins they persisted in as mortals. They “went down to Hades” when Christ came in glory (Mt. 11:23; Lk. 10:15) and spent “many days” (Isa. 24:22), symbolically a thousand years, languishing in the underworld while the faithful enjoyed the messianic banquet and the glories of the Kingdom. They wept and gnashed their teeth at being locked outside of the celebration.¹⁶ God bears no anger or ill will toward these people. He in fact appeals to them to come under his protection, to be reconciled to him. Twice he appeals to them to be at peace with him. But they don’t want it, and their end is fiery destruction.¹⁷

This story of “the end of the unrepentant” differs from the typical eschatology of both the conditional immortality/annihilationist camp and the everlasting conscious torment camp. First, it posits that the punishment for unrepentant sin in mortal life takes place before, rather than after, resurrection—in fact, refusal of resurrection life at the dawning of the fully-manifested Kingdom of God and Christ, plus painful awareness of what they are missing, is the essence of the punishment. But this in turn implies that the later granting of resurrection to those refused resurrection at the dawning of the Kingdom *is an act of grace*. It is not only a means of making people available for judgment and punishment. Finally, those who experience a fiery end when they are resurrected do so *because of their actions as resurrected people*. They show themselves incorrigible and thus God’s protective love demands that they be removed from the community of creation.

In this story of the end, annihilationism makes good theological sense as well as exegetical sense. The consequences of remaining in unrepentant sin in mortal life are revealed to be severe, but not infinite. And the attempt to attack the faithful in the New Jerusalem justly merits instant and irrevocable destruction.

Fresh Light on Difficult Passages

Now let’s look at a number of passages in the New Testament that make new and better sense when we read them in light of this eschatological paradigm. Let’s look first at the last judgment scene in Rev. 20:12-15.

12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

¹⁵ ESV “Or.”

¹⁶ See Mt. 8:11-12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk. 13:28; cf. Ps. 112:10; Isa. 65:13-14.

¹⁷ See a similar dynamic in Mt. 23:37-38.

Famous Revelation commentator R.H. Charles was so sure that something was wrong with these verses that he literally said they were incorrect. His problem was that verse 12 has people being judged *before* they are brought out of the realms of death, and then verse 13 has them brought out and judged all over again! Something's fouled up here! But what if this scene is a recapitulation, a new vision, of Rev. 20:4-10? The unrepentant dead are judged on the basis of what they did in mortal life, "by what was written in the books," v. 12, then they are raised and judged by what they do in resurrection, v. 13. It is, from God's perspective, one judgment with two phases.

But what of this idea that living a life of unrepentant sin leads to a long, but limited, imprisonment in Hades? Here's another passage that doesn't make sense on any other model:

25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. 26 Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.¹⁸

This passage comes right in the middle of a section of teaching by Jesus that explicitly concerns future judgment (Mt. 5:21-30). Neither the everlasting torment model nor the annihilationist model has room for the notion that you will ever get out at all.

Jesus says some will "go down to Hades" at the coming judgment¹⁹—where the standard models would expect them to come up from there in order to be judged. But Jesus teaches that the coming judgment at the transition between this age and the age to come determines not what to do with resurrected people, but whether people are *to be* resurrected. Jesus is explicit in this verse, Lk. 20:35-36:

35 ...those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from among the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, 36 for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. (Lk. 20:35-36)²⁰

Jesus, in referring to those who "are considered worthy," automatically assumes that a judgment takes place *prior to* resurrection and determines who will be resurrected "from among the dead"²¹—just as in Rev. 20:4-5. In both passages some are raised to incorruptible life and others are left unresurrected.

Paul's words in 1 Cor. 15:21-24 are hotly contested, but notice the new sense that they make when read in this eschatological paradigm:

21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own cohort: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

¹⁸ Mt. 5:25-26 ; cf. Lk. 12:57-59.

¹⁹ Mt. 11:23 || Lk. 10:15.

²⁰ Note also this saying: "...when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ₁₄ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Lk. 14:13-14). The resurrection of the just is a future moment.

²¹ In Greek this is *ἡ ἀνάστις ἡ ἐκ νεκρῶν*. The sense is partitive: this is the resurrection that is from among those who are dead, leaving the others dead.

How can all people be made alive “in Christ” without all “belonging to Christ”?²² Well, if resurrection life is a gift given to all, including the unrepentant, then it is given through the resurrection life-power that is in Christ. He, as we have seen in Rev. 1:18, claims the authority and the power to release people—good and bad, faithful and unrepentant—from the prison of death and Hades. Not only that, but in Jn 5:21-29, Jesus claims to have *in himself* both the authority and the life-power, through the Father, to call forth from death every person who dies.

21 As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will...²³ “Truly, truly, I say to you, a moment²⁴ is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself...²⁵ Do not marvel at this, for a moment is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to a resurrection²⁴ of life, and those who have done evil to a resurrection²⁵ of judgment.

In regard to 1 Corinthians 15, one could ask why Paul contents himself with speaking vaguely about “the end” as a later stage after the resurrection of the faithful at Christ’s coming. One or more things may be going on. First, he may want to keep his focus on believers, since that is the central focus of the chapter as a whole; secondly, he may realize as he is dictating that he does not want to imply, by saying all will be made alive, that all are “in Christ” in the sense of being saved to everlasting life. It’s also possible that he may not have clear revelation as to what happens when the “cohort” of the unbelievers is resurrected. So he speaks online in generalities about the final phase. But what is clear in any case is that there is a resurrection at Christ’s coming in glory that is only for those who are his, and being a part of that resurrection brings with it incorruptible life. As Paul says of himself in Phil. 3:10-11, his hope is not merely hope of resurrection as such, but rather

10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the out-resurrection from among the dead.²⁶

Like Jesus in Luke 20:35, Paul here speaks in terms of a resurrection *from among the dead*, a resurrection which leaves those who do not attain to it dead. It is sometimes argued that if Revelation 20:1-6 pictures what happens when Jesus comes in glory, it would be the only biblical passage affirming a thousand-year age between the resurrection of the faithful and the resurrection of everyone else. But that is a straw man. If we content ourselves with looking for passages in the Bible that posit a resurrection exclusively for the faithful when the Kingdom dawns in its full glory,

²² It will not do to say that what Paul means is that just as all who are in Adam die, so all who are in Christ will be made alive. It is easy enough to express that idea in Greek, and what he says is not how you say it. He does not say, ὥσπερ γάρ πάντες ὅσοι εἰσιν ἐν τῷ Ἀδὰμ ἀποθνήσκουσιν οὕτως καὶ πάντες ὅσοι εἰσιν ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ ζωοποιηθήσονται or even ὥσπερ γάρ οἵτινες εἰσιν ἐν τῷ Ἀδὰμ ἀποθνήσκουσιν οὕτως καὶ οἵτινες εἰσιν ἐν Χριστῷ ζωοποιηθήσονται, but rather ὥσπερ γάρ ἐν τῷ Ἀδὰμ πάντες ἀποθνήσκουσιν οὕτως καὶ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζωοποιηθήσονται. This is one of those passages that supposedly cannot mean what it appears to mean, therefore interpreters feel justified in reading it as meaning what it ought (according to their eschatological paradigm) to mean.

²³ ESV “an hour.” In this sort of context, the Greek word ὥρα functions almost exactly like the English word “moment” or “time.” It’s not intending a distributed temporal period. See, for this sense, Mt. 8:13; Mk 5:34; Jn 4:52.

²⁴ ESV unaccountably has “the resurrection” here. There is no article in the Greek.

²⁵ See prev. note.

²⁶ ESV has “the resurrection from the dead,” obscuring the striking word ἐξανάστασις, out-resurrection.

and no resurrection for everyone else, suddenly we have six passages that fit the bill: Isa. 26:13-19; Lk. 14:14; 20:35; 1 Cor. 15:21-24; Phil. 3:10-11; Rev. 20:1-6. Under the paradigm I am introducing, they all sit comfortably together. So, incidentally, do Rev. 19:6-9 and 21:1-4:

6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

For the LORD our God

the Almighty reigns.

7 Let us rejoice and exult

and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,

and his Bride has made herself ready;

8 it was granted her to clothe herself

with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

9 And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

The theme of the marriage of Christ and his faithful absolutely ties these two passages together. And just as Rev. 19:9 alludes to the great banquet of the Kingdom of God in Isa. 24:23–25:10, so Rev. 21:4 clearly alludes to the taking away of death and the wiping away of tears in that Isaiah passage. Christ’s coming in glory brings with it the fully-manifested Kingdom of God and the New Creation. Chapter 21 of Revelation recapitulates, gives another viewpoint on, the coming of Christ in chapter 19. Thus the thousand-year priestly reign of Revelation 20 has the new creation as its setting, and the resurrection of the unrepentant, their seduction by the devil, their attempt to do violence to the faithful, their judgment, and their total incineration, also have the new creation as their setting. Does that sound strange? It would not sound strange to Isaiah, who prophesies,

22 “For as the new heavens and the new earth
that I make

shall remain before me, says the LORD,

so shall your offspring and your name remain.

23 From new moon to new moon,

and from Sabbath to Sabbath,

all flesh shall come to worship before me,

declares the LORD.

²⁴ “And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”

This scene, which Jesus looks upon as the scene of the final perdition of the unrepentant,²⁷ is unmistakably set in the new creation, and is posed as a scene of repulsed attack on the New Jerusalem.

Summary of the Presentation Thus Far

So where have we gotten to? We’ve gotten through the outlines of a new eschatological paradigm, which I call new creation millennialism. In truth, it’s not entirely new. Pseudo-Barnabas, writing around the turn of the first century of this era, looked forward at Christ’s coming in glory to a thousand-year age that would, at the same time, serve as a Sabbath age in relation to this creation and as the first age of the ages of the ages in the glorious new creation.²⁸ Victorinus of Pettau, the first commentator on the whole Book of Revelation, believed that the millennium of Revelation 20 would begin when Jesus comes in glory, and he also understood the coming of the new creation and the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 as happening at that moment and not after the thousand years.²⁹ So also did Methodius of Olympus³⁰ and the author of the *Apocalypse of Elijah*.³¹ In the modern period, John Gill, perhaps the most famous and well-respected English-speaking commentator on the Bible in the 18th century, was also a new creation millennialist,³² as were a couple

²⁷ See Mk 9:42–48. In v. 48 he ties the experience of perdition in “Gehenna” to Isa. 66:24. Gehenna, he says in another saying, is the place where God is able to destroy both one’s body and one’s soul (Mt. 10:28; Lk. 12:5).

²⁸ Interestingly, Barnabas seems not to be aware of the Book of Revelation, so his new creation millennialism is probably independent.

²⁹ Victorinus is famous for being the first person to articulate the principle of recapitulation in Revelation, and he astutely recognizes the tie between the wedding announcement in Rev. 19 and the vision of the bride in Rev. 21. Unfortunately for his new creation model of the millennium, Jerome, who considered it his job to stamp out all forms of premillennialism, took Victorinus’s commentary in hand and rewrote it so that it conformed to Augustine’s view of the millennium, so few got to be exposed to the view of Victorinus himself. See F.F. Bruce, “The Earliest Latin Commentary on the Apocalypse,” *EvQ* 10 (1938), 352–66.

³⁰ See *Banq. Virg.* 9:1, 5; *de Creatis* 9.

³¹ See *Apocalypse of Elijah* 5:36–39.

³² John Gill, “Exposition of the Revelation of St. John the Divine,” in *An Exposition of the New Testament*, III (1748). Uriah Smith, father of Seventh Day Adventist interpretation of Revelation, seems to have learned from Gill that Gog and Magog represented the resurrected “rest of the dead,” but he could not imagine that God would allow the “resuscitated wicked” to set foot on the renewed earth, so he plotted their attempted attack (Rev. 20:7–10) before the coming of the new creation: see U. Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation* (rev. edn; Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1944 [1881]), *in loc.* Smith insisted that there was no Scripture whatever on which to ground the idea of an attack in the context of the new creation—apparently overlooking Isa. 66:22–24.

other 19th-century commentators,³³ one 20th-century commentator,³⁴ and one 21st-century commentator³⁵ that I'm aware of. So at the moment new creation millennialism is an outlier, and it is new in relation to the main paradigms most people have heard of, but it is not novel. We all came to the same basic conclusion by reading the same texts in Revelation.

Implications for our Understanding of Atonement: Whose Sins did Jesus Expiate by Dying on the Cross?

John the Baptist's testimony is that Jesus will take away (i.e. expiate) the sin of the whole world:

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (Jn 1:29)

This is an unqualified statement, and becomes the more striking when we consider that “the world” (ό κόσμος) in the Gospel and Epistles of John is often virtually a technical term for corporate humanity in a state of hostile self-alienation from God.³⁶

Paul speaks in equally universal terms when he compares Adam's sin with Christ's gift of atonement:

12 ... sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned... 15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. 16 And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. 17 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. 18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification of³⁷ life for all men. 19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

(Rom. 5:12-19)

It is natural to expect Paul's phrase “the many” in Rom. 5:15 and 19 to consistently refer to “all human beings,” given that “the many” who suffer the consequences of Adam's sin are all human beings across the board, and Paul is taking great care to make a parallelism between Adam and Christ, the new, obedient Adam. But if there were any doubt as to the universality of Christ's gift,

³³ See David N. Lord, *Exposition of the Apocalypse* (New York: Harpers, 1847); Sylvester Bliss, *A Brief Commentary on the Apocalypse* (2nd edn; Boston: J. V. Himes, 1853). Lord is not as radical as Gill and Sweet, not recognizing (as they do) that Gog and Magog (Rev. 20:8) represent the “rest of the dead.” In order both (1) to accommodate mortal nations in millennial period inaugurated by Christ's coming in glory, and (2) to follow John's indications that the New Jerusalem and the new creation take place at Christ's coming in glory, Lord takes the new creation as symbolic of a complete change of the governance of the world rather than as literal cosmological information.

³⁴ Wolfgang Metzger, “Das Zwischenreich,” in *Auf dem Grunde der Apostel und Propheten* (Festschrift Bischof T. Wurm; ed. M. Loeser; Stuttgart: Quell-Verlag der Evangelische Gesellschaft, 1948), 100-18.

³⁵ Eckhard Schnabel, *40 Questions on the End Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011), 55, 225-27, 248-49, 271, 277-81.

³⁶ See Jn 1:10-11; 7:7; 14:17; 15:18-19; 17:14-16; 1 Jn 2:15-16; 3:13; 5:19.

³⁷ ESV: “and life.”

Paul drops “the many” language in v. 18 and simply speaks of “...condemnation for all men” and “justification of life for all men” (εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς κατάκριμα... εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς). One could get the impression that Christ’s gift of his life on behalf of all will result in all being given the undeserved gift of life.

Indeed, Paul had written to the believers in Corinth about nine months previously in exactly those terms:

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Cor. 15:22)³⁸

In Second Corinthians, a letter that Paul wrote perhaps only a month or two before Romans, he writes,

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (2 Cor. 5:14-15)

It would have been very simple for Paul to say that Christ “died for us, that we who live might no longer live for ourselves...” But he does not. He says Christ died for all. In fact, it rather sounds like Paul is making the radical claim that God, in Christ, did not choose to impose mortality upon all humanity without first determining to share in mortality himself and to face death on behalf of every mortal. Thus he goes on to speak of the scope of Christ’s work as encompassing “the world”: “God, in Christ, was reconciling *the world* to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation” (5:18-19). This is some of the most radical theologizing that Paul does, and it shows what was in his mind as he was preparing to write Romans.³⁹

In 1 Timothy, Paul affirms,

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Tim. 2:5-6)

Much effort is made to avoid the apparent universality of this statement. The thinking is, whoever is ransomed is saved from what they would have had to pay. Since many human beings pay the eternal penalty for their sins, Christ cannot have ransomed them. But if Christ, by dying for all without exception, ransoms all from death without exception—believers and unrepentant sinners

³⁸ A great deal of effort has been expended to explain how this means, “For just as all those under the covenantal headship of Adam die, so all those under the covenantal headship of Christ will be made alive.” There are two difficulties with this reading. First, there is no covenantal language anywhere in the prior or subsequent context, making this look like a foreign hermeneutical principle brought in order to keep the text from saying what it appears to be saying. Secondly, no interpreter I have read brings forward any grammatical parallel that works in the way this sentence is being asserted to work, and I myself have exhaustively searched the Greek Bible (NT and LXX) in vain looking for one. The reason the phrase “all shall be made alive” is read restrictively rather than universally in this sentence is theological, not grammatical. And if I am correct that John points us to Isa. 26:10-11 and 27:1-5 as prophecies of the resurrection and final destruction of the unrepentant, then there is no theological problem with reading the text in its *prima facie* sense. We are not forced to read Paul as preaching universalism, which he and other NT writers clearly contradict in many places.

³⁹ According to my reconstruction of Paul’s ministry and writings, wrote 1 Corinthians in the spring of 56, 2 Corinthians (minus 6:14–7:1 and chs. 10–13, which were written in the summer of 56) in the late fall of 56. He then wrote Romans during the winter of 56–57.

alike—by his grace, then it is true that he is the ransom for all. As Jesus says to John when he appears to him in the first chapter of Revelation,

Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. (Rev. 1:17b-18)

Jesus is affirming that he has the authority and the power to release people from the prison of death and Hades, a claim that we saw he also made in John 5. And he is tying this authority and power of his to the fact that he died and has overcome death to live forever and ever. If it were not for the grace of God in Jesus Christ, no mortal person would receive resurrection life.

In the same letter to Timothy in which Paul said that Christ is the ransom for all, he says that

God our Savior... desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2:15)

Many interpreters have the same problem with this statement as with other statements to the effect that God through Christ has an intention or plan to save everyone. And they use the same tactics to avoid its implications. The reasoning remains purely deductive: If God really wanted all people to be saved, they would end up being saved. Not all are saved, hence Paul cannot be saying that God wants all people to be saved, no matter what his words appear to say. But suppose all people *are* going to be saved from the grave? What if even the stubbornly unrepentant are going to be given the undeserved grace of resurrection and, with it, a genuine invitation to make peace with God and an opportunity to take part in the glories of the new creation and the Kingdom of God? Would that not be a very significant, indeed priceless, gift of salvation, no matter what the unrepentant ones did with it?

Paul says later in this letter,

For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. (1 Tim. 4:10)

I won't belabor the point, but Paul seems clearly to be saying that God is savior of all, while granting that God is Savior in a stronger sense in relation to believers.

Let's look at what some other NT writers have to say about the intended scope of Christ's death. The author of Hebrews says this:

But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.⁴⁰ (Heb. 2:9)

It is true that the author goes on to speak of how Jesus became like his brothers and sisters, sharing the human experience and human temptation all the way to the point of death. In other words, Christ humbled himself to stand on level ground with those whom he redeemed. But one would never think to restrict the sense of "everyone" simply because the author goes on to focus on Christ's relationship the redeemed. It is the implicit *theological* problem with Christ dying for every person—namely the assumption that this seems logically to entail universal salvation to everlasting life—that forces an awkward restrictive sense onto the word.

⁴⁰ "Everyone" translates *πᾶς* in the singular. This grammatical form is not susceptible to suggestions that it refers to people from all categories of humanity.

John says of Jesus,

He is the propitiation [or the expiation] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 Jn 2:2)

Once again the logic of who is and is not ultimately saved tells interpreters that John cannot be saying Jesus is the propitiation (or expiation) for the whole world—despite the fact that John specifically adds the whole world to “our sins,” making it inescapable that “the whole world” includes everyone and not just believers.

Peter says,

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. (2 Pet. 2:1)

Peter affirms that even heretics headed for destruction were “bought,” i.e. ransomed, by Christ. Similarly, the author of Hebrews says, in discussing the fact that Christ only had to die once to expiate sins,

If we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified? (Heb. 10:26-29)

It appears he is saying that Christ has provided a sacrifice for sins that sanctifies even those who come to understand the truth but turn back to unrepentant sinning. He warns that the status of acceptance with God, which Jesus Christ’s self-offering provided, does not cover willful and persistent sin after reception of the truth and sprinkling with the sanctifying blood of Christ. The author’s allusion to Isaiah 26 suggests that there is an eschatological side to this warning:

For when your judgments are in the earth,
the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.
If favor is shown to the wicked,
he does not learn righteousness,
in the land of uprightness he deals corruptly
and does not see the majesty of the LORD.
O LORD, your hand is lifted up,
but they do not see it.
Let them see your zeal for your people, and be ashamed.
Let the fire for your adversaries consume them. (Isa. 26:9b-11)

Eschatologically speaking, Isaiah is affirming that all “the inhabitants of the earth” are going to learn the truth about God’s righteousness at the coming judgment. The NT writers certainly agree that every human being will someday realize the full truth when Jesus comes as judge of the living and the dead. “Every knee will bend and every tongue confess” the righteousness of God and the rightful lordship of Jesus, God’s Messiah (Rom. 14:10-11; Phil. 2:10-11; cf. Isa. 45:23). But Isaiah sees that the wicked, when they are shown grace subsequent to God’s judgment, will demonstrate that they have not truly learned righteousness. Their core motivation has not changed; they are

destined to attempt the very behaviors that brought God's judgment down on the "inhabitants of the world" in the first place. But turning back to sin after being granted grace at the eschatological judgment *will not simply result in further extensions of grace*. This time, fire will come from God and incinerate them before they can do any harm to God's faithful ones. Saved out of the first death by the grace of God in Christ Jesus, released from the prison of Death and Hades, they violate the probation granted them by grace, and they end up in the consuming fire of the second death. Christ truly died for all, and all are truly saved, but only those who at the deepest level allow themselves to be reconciled to God and their fellow human beings through Christ make it safe to everlasting life from this salvation.

Conclusion

My title was "In Christ All Will Be Made Alive": Jesus Christ's Death as the Payment that Ransoms Every Human Being from Death. I have demonstrated in the first part of this paper that a careful co-reading of Revelation 20 and Isaiah 26 and 27 leads to the understanding that resurrection of the dead, even in the case of those ultimately destined to be permanently removed from the creation, is given to them as a gift. And I have demonstrated in the second part of the paper that there are many (six or more) passages in the NT that affirm the universal scope of the expiation made by Jesus Christ when he died "for the sins of the world" (Jn 1:29; 1 Jn 2:2). Jesus Christ is indeed the Savior who rescues every human being from death by dying for everyone. What they do with that infinitely precious gift determines whether they will experience unending and incorruptible life.